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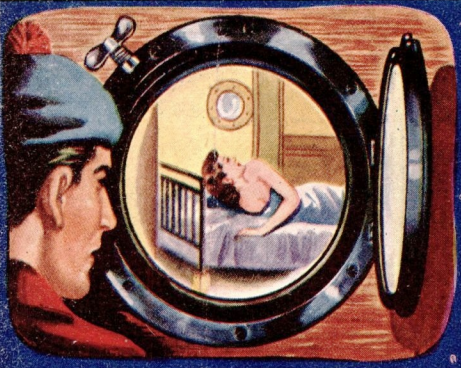
by Hugh Pentecost



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TRIPLE DETECTIVE

THREE NOVELS • EXPERTLY ABRIDGED

Vol. 5, No. 3 A THRILLING PUBLICATION Fall, 1950

WHERE THE SNOW WAS RED

Psychiatrist John Smith turns detective when Emily Sutter gives a party at which death is a guest—confronting the town of Brookside, Vermont, with a baffling mystery riddle that creates panic, fear and suspicion!

HUGH PENTECOST 11

THE DEADLY VOYAGE

The crew told Inspector Maigret that the "curse of the evil eye" brought death on that ill-fated journey, but he discounted superstition and kept right on searching for a logical and human motive to explain the crime!

GEORGES SIMENON 58

MURDER IS NEVER LATE

The irrepressible Lemmy Caution, ex-Marine, turns Paris topsy-turvy in his frantic search for top secrets when he battles subversive bruisers and some too-watchful private eyes in the course of a spy investigation!

PETER CHEYNEY 106

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Published quarterly and copyright, 1950, by BEST PUBLICATIONS, Inc., 29 Worthington St., Springfield 3, Mass. Editorial and executive offices, 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y. N. L. Pines, President. Subscription (12 issues), $3.00; single copies, $.25; foreign postage extra. Entered as second-class matter March 7th, 1949, at the Post Office at Springfield, Mass., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Manuscripts must be accompanied by self-addressed, stamped envelopes, and are submitted at the author's risk. In corresponding with this publication, please include your postal zone number, if any. Names of all characters used in stories and semi-fiction articles are fictitious. If the name of any living person or existing institution is used, it is a coincidence. PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.

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A Panel of Mystery Fans, Authors and the Editor

SIMON TEMPLAR, better known to the police and the man in the street as "The Saint," landed in England when the news of Brian Quell's murder was brought to public light. He read the brief notice of the killing in an evening paper which he bought in New Haven, but it added scarcely anything to what he already knew, and of course contained none of the weird, fragmentary tale the man had babbled to him before passing on.

Brian Quell died in Paris, and died intoxicated, which would probably have been his own choice if he had been consulted, for the whole of his unprofitable existence had been wrapped up in the pleasures of the Gay City. Arriving there some ten years before as an art student, he had long since given up any artistic pretensions that were not included in the scope of studio parties, and had slipped into the stream of life on the Left Bank that is like an insidious drug, an irresistible spell to such a temperament as his.

Simon Templar was on hand at his death by accident rather than design. He happened to be staying at the same obscure little hotel near the Gare du Montparnasse, preparing for what was left of a night's rest, when he heard the shot that was Quell's undoing.

"A Mos' Unfrien'ly Thing!"

Putting out his light, the Saint stepped from his first-floor window into the darkened air well and made his way toward the only other window besides his own which was not firmly shuttered against any breath of fresh air which, as all the world knows, is fatal to the sleeping Frenchman.

As Simon reached the dark opening, he heard a gasping curse, and then a hoarse voice gurgled the most amazing speech that he had ever heard from the lips of a dying man.

"A mos' unfrien'ly thing!"

Without hesitation Simon Templar climbed into the room, found his way to the door and turned on the lights. Brian Quell was sprawled in the middle of the floor, propping himself up unsteadily on one elbow. There was a pool of blood on the carpet beside him, and his grubby shirt was stained red across the chest. He stared at Simon hazily.

"A mos' *un*frien'ly thing!" he repeated.

Which is how the strange and gripping novel, "The Saint and Mr. Teal" by Leslie Charteris, gets under way in the next issue of TRIPLE DETECTIVE. Most of you are doubtless well acquainted with the Saint through his numerous appearances in POPULAR DETECTIVE, one of our companion magazines, or have met him in book form, or seen some of the many movies depicting his exploits, and so will have the opportunity of renewing an entertaining friendship when you meet him again in the next TRIPLE DETECTIVE.

The two other fine detective novels you will get in the same package are "Death Looks Down" by Amelia Reynolds Long, and "Slay Ride" by Frank Kane. But a bit more about them later. Back now to "The Saint and Mr. Teal," and more presently, the dying Mr. Quell.

Befuddled Death

A glance told the Saint that Brian Quell had only a few minutes to live, but the astonishing thing was that Quell didn't know he was hurt. The shock of the bullet had not sobered him at all.

(Continued on page 8)

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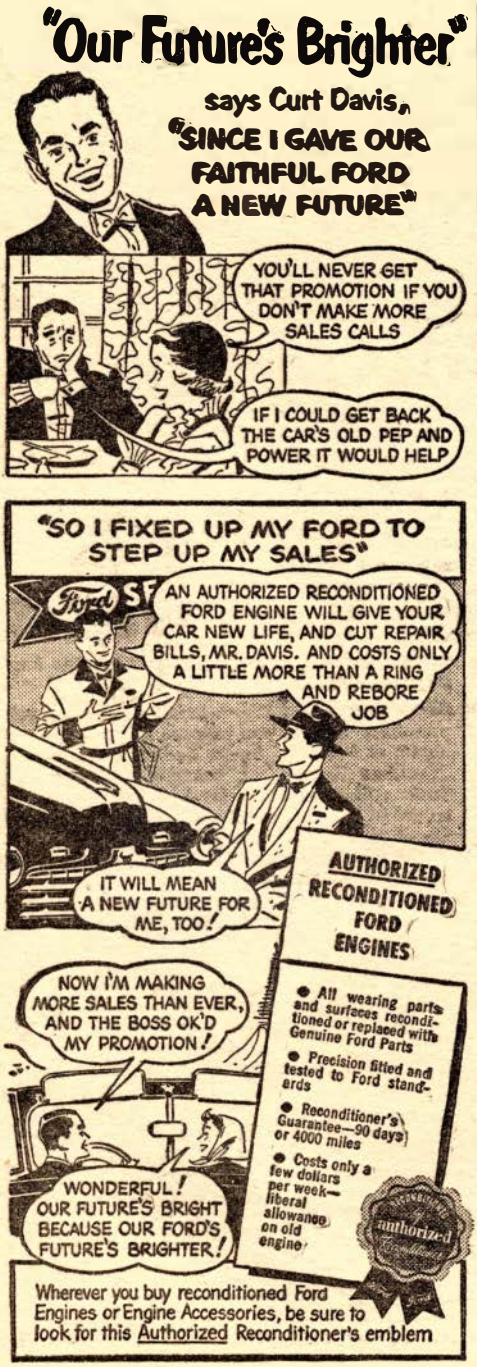

THE READERS' JURY

(Continued from page 6)

The liquor that reeked on his breath was playing the part of an anesthetic, and the fumes in his brain had fuddled his senses beyond all power of comprehending such an issue.

"Do you know who it was?" Simon Templar asked gently.

Quell shook his head. "I dunno. Never saw him before in my life. Called himself Jones. Silly sorta name, isn't it? Jones. An' he told me Binks can make gold!"

"Can you tell me where you met him, or what he looked like?"

"I dunno. Been all over the place. Everywhere you could get a drink. Man with a silly sorta face." The dying man wagged his head solemnly. "An' he did a mos' unfrien'ly thing. Tried to shoot me!" Quell giggled feebly. "An' he saysh Binks can make gold. Thash funny, isn't it?"

Simon looked around the room, saw nothing of importance. Obviously the killer had stayed long enough to obliterate all evidence of his visit. Simon's gaze fell on the telephone by the door and thought of calling the police, though the last thing on earth he wanted was an interview with even the most unsuspecting police officer. That consideration would not have weighed with him for an instant, however, if he had not known that all the doctors in France could have done nothing for this man who was dying in his arms and did not know it.

"Why did Jones try to shoot you?" he asked, and Brian Quell grinned at him vacuously.

"Becaush he said Binksh could—"

The repetition choked off in the man's throat. His eyes wavered over Simon's face stupidly, then they dilated with the first and last stunned realization of the truth, only for one horrible dumb second before the end. . . .

Across the Channel

It was back across the Channel in England, the scene of more light-hearted misdemeanors by the Saint than

(Continued on page 157)

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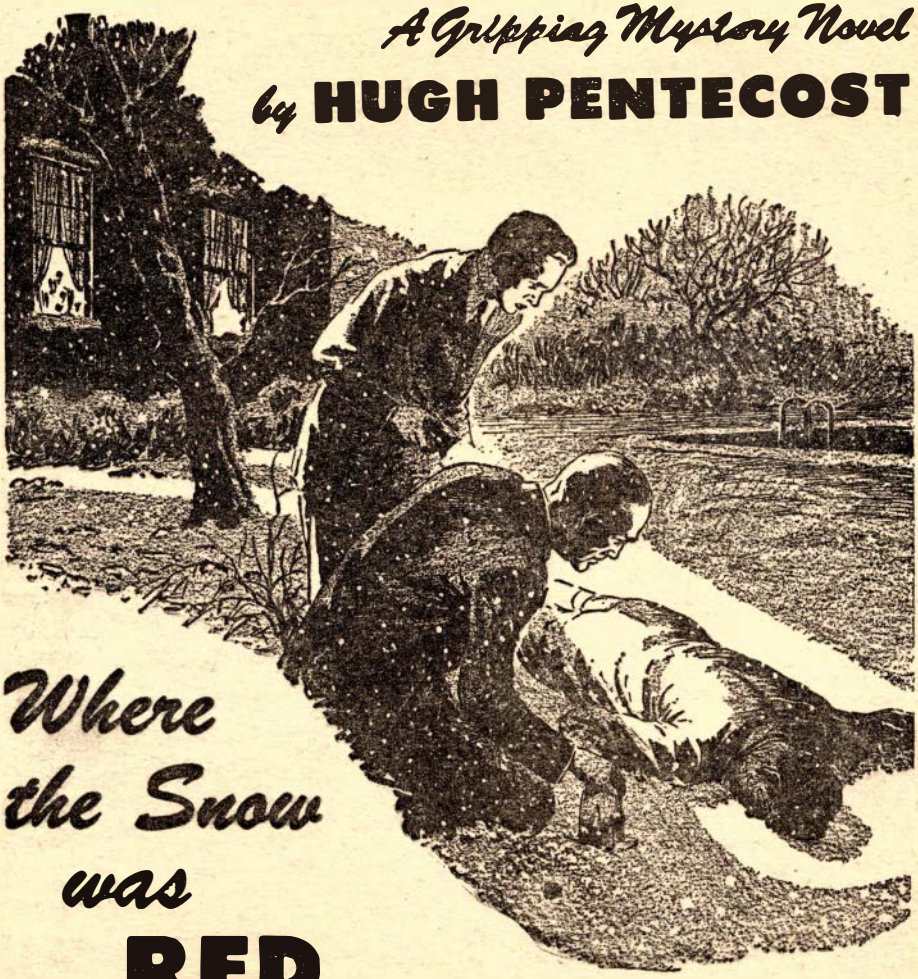

Where the Snow was RED

I

PREPARATIONS for the party began when Miss Tina Robinson, who presided over the telegraph office in Brookside, Vermont, made public the telegram for Susan Vail. Her husband, Terrence, was coming home after six months' absence, on a State Department mission to China. He would arrive in Brookside on the Friday afternoon train.

It was two miles from the telegraph office to the Vails' luxuriously

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Psychiatrist John Smith turns detective when a baffling riddle of crime changes Brookside town into a hotbed of panic and suspicion!

Death Was a Guest at the Party Which

remodeled farmhouse, and Miss Robinson chose to deliver the message, which afforded her the opportunity to stop at a dozen places. She was fully conscious of the effect her news would have. She could have foretold the angry glint in Alonzo Holbrook's eyes as he tugged at his gray beard and said in his acid way:

"About time!"

She smiled inwardly when Liz Holbrook said, "How nice for Susan!" and anticipated the pallor in young Roger Lindsey's face, when she stopped him as he was walking, and told him. She knew, before she reached the Sutters' place, exactly what Emily would have to say.

"We'll have to give a party!"

Dan Sutter, the faint aroma of stale whisky clinging to him, drew his mouth down in a sardonic smile.

"The conquering hero returns," he said. "It would be rather nice for Susan if she got her telegram before sundown."

MISS ROBINSON left the Sutters', feathers awry, but still eager. She was saving the choicest morsel to the last. Her keenest anticipation was to see what Susan Vail's reaction would be to the message. She wondered, too, who would tell Terrence Vail of the *goings-on* in his absence.

Terrence had made the old Moffet place over into something pretty special, Miss Robinson conceded, as she turned her ancient Ford in at the driveway. But with Terrence's money, why not? He'd furnished it with antiques, put in gas and hot water, insulated it and installed an oil heater. Then he'd brought Susan there to live in it. Susan was about as out-of-place, according to Miss Robinson's New England conscience, as it would have been to have peacocks strutting around the lawn.

Miss Robinson walked up the stone flagging to the front door. The path had been shoveled clear of snow by Elihu Stone, who did the chores for the Vails. At the front door Miss Robinson pounded vigorously with the brass knocker. The door was opened. Miss Robinson drew in her breath in a short, choking gasp. Susan Vail stood there—in *pajamas!*

Pajamas, at four in the afternoon! She'd heard tell that Susan actually received callers dressed like that—even men callers!

"Well, Miss Robinson?" Susan had a husky voice that matched her dark hair, ivory skin, and dark violet eyes. The voice seemed always to contain a hint of mockery. Susan was the one person who could make Miss Robinson feel uncomfortable.

"I have a telegram for you, Mrs. Vail."

"Thank you," Susan said, and held out her hand for the yellow envelope. Miss Robinson handed over the message. She waited. "Is there something else, Miss Robinson?" Susan asked.

"Well, aren't you going to open it?"

"My dear Miss Robinson, it hardly seems necessary," Susan said. "Mr. Lindsey told me forty-five minutes ago that you were on your way. He knew what was in the message because you had repeated it to him. Wouldn't you find it easier if you arranged a set of smoke signals, or a method for beating on a large drum to circulate the news?"

"Well, I declare!" Miss Robinson said as the door was closed abruptly in her face. "Of all the *impertinence!*"

Inside, in the Vails' pine-paneled library, Roger Lindsey stood with his back to the fieldstone fireplace. He was a tall, lean young man with blue eyes and a shock of blond, curly hair.

"Well, she finally got here," Susan Vail said, as she came into the room carrying the unopened telegram. She sat down on the couch facing the fireplace.

"It had to happen sooner or later," Roger said, in a low voice.

"Don't be so dramatic about it!" Susan said impatiently, and poured herself a fresh drink from a shaker of martinis on the coffee table.

"It's not something I can just take in stride," Roger said. "I've betrayed him as a friend. I've betrayed him as a business associate."

"Nonsense!" Susan drank the cocktail, and put the glass down on the tray. "Things fall back into place, that's all. Terrence will play at being a husband again for a while. You will make your peace with the little Holbrook girl and

Emily Gave!

Dan Sutter made a point of pawing at Susan Vail whenever he could [Chap. 11]

finish your novel."

Roger said: "Liz Holbrook's done with me. You know that, Susan."

"Listen to me, Roger," Susan said. "How old are you? Twenty-five? You got yourself involved in something adult and it's scared you. But you'll find you're still alive if you'll try pinching yourself. You don't understand people—which is too bad for someone who wants to be a writer. The Holbrook girl has enjoyed her suffering. She'll take you back, after the proper amount of protest—and, incidentally, have you just where she wants you for the rest of your life."

Roger reached for his highball glass on the mantelpiece. "Susan, if you got a divorce from Terrence, I'd marry you the instant you were free."

She threw back her head in a short laugh. "Stop acting like a character out of Charlotte Bronté. I hate nobility, Roger. You insist on taking a pleasant interlude in your life so seriously. Or wasn't it pleasant?"

"Susan, don't talk that way! You must know how I feel. He subsidized me to come here and finish my novel. When he went away he asked me to look out for you." The corner of his mouth gave a little twitch. "I haven't finished the novel and I've betrayed him with you. There's only one thing I can do, Susan, and that's make a clean breast of it to him, let the chips fall where they may."

Susan Vail poured herself another drink. "Let's get one thing straight right now, Roger," she said. "All you're doing is thinking of yourself in a fine, dramatic situation. But I'm involved in this, too. I've got *my* life to readjust. You're not going to say anything to Terrence, and if you can't resist playing dramatic scenes, reserve them for your shaving mirror."

ROGER opened his mouth to speak, then closed it. It was as though each word was a deep stab wound. Susan was lost to him; Liz was lost to him; his career was lost to him. What did you do when the whole world caved in under your feet?

"Of course I'll leave Brookside," he said. "It would be intolerable for me to stay here with Terrence back."

"That seems absurd," Susan said coolly. "Terrence is your publisher. He believes in you. He can help you to start the novel rolling again. But it's your life, Roger. You can do what you please with it."

"You can't just end it, Susan, like—like closing a book!" he said.

"Why not?" she asked, looking at him steadily over the rim of her cocktail glass. . . .

Roger Lindsey trudged toward town, his chin buried in the fur collar of his sheepskin-lined coat. So deep was he in his thoughts that he noticed little until he arrived at the village green. The street lights were on now, and he saw the last minute bustle at the general store before closing.

He needed cigarettes, but he was reluctant to go in for them. The whole town, he felt certain, was talking about him. Well, he had to face it. He started toward the store, just as Liz Holbrook emerged, carrying an armful of bundles. He would have turned away, but she saw him.

"Hello, Roger," she said. He imagined reproach, anger in her voice. They were not there, but he heard them.

"Liz!" he said.

Perhaps it was the cold that raised the high color in her cheeks. A gust of wind had powdered her dark hair with snow. "A typical Wellesley girl," Dan Sutter had once said in describing her. He hadn't meant it to be complimentary, but Roger had thought it charming. He had liked her wide, honest eyes, and the proud way she carried her head.

She *was* simple and direct, she liked simple things, and she dreamed simple dreams. Roger had loved her for that, and envisioned her as caring for his home and his children, listening intelligently, but without any compulsion for brilliant criticism, to his work. She would make the perfect wife, he had thought—until his first visit to "look out for Susan."

"It looks like more snow tonight," Liz said. "The wind's from the southwest."

"You've heard the news?" Roger asked. There could only be one piece of news.

"About Terrence, you mean?"

"Yes."

There was nothing Liz could say about that to Roger which wouldn't be double-edged.

"I'm sorry, Roger, but I've got to

run. Father will be screaming for his dinner."

"Liz—just a minute," he said. She waited, and he could see how hard she was trying to keep casual and easy. "Liz, can I come and see you soon? I—I've got to talk to you. I've got to try somehow to—to—"

"You know you're always welcome, Roger," she said. "Father and I would be delighted to see you, any time."

Roger could imagine just how glad Alonzo Holbrook would be.

He had to hold her here now, and, somehow, explain to her. It couldn't wait. And then he heard the store door slam. Old Elihu Stone, moisture dripping from the ends of his incredible handlebar mustache, and Rufus Gilson had come out together. Liz started to trudge along the road.

"Drop in any time, Roger," she said, over her shoulder.

He stood there, miserable, watching her go. Watching her retreating figure, Rufe Gilson was slowly stuffing the bowl of his pipe.

ONE thing had ridden with red-haired Rufe for a long time—his adoration of Liz Holbrook. He had watched her grow up. Raised on his father's farm, he had lived with the dream that some day he might arrive at a point economically and personally when she would not be out of reach.

Recently, thanks to a course at Cornell Agricultural and a G.I. loan, that time was beginning to seem not too far distant. He was rapidly building up the run-down farm and was a candidate for selectman in the fall elections. Then Roger Lindsey had come to live in Brookside and Rufe's dream had gone up in smoke. Liz was so obviously in love with Roger that there was no point in making any sort of fight.

Then he had seen disaster overtake her. He knew the terrible jolt to her pride when Roger was suddenly swept away by Susan Vail. But there was nothing he could do. He couldn't even talk about it, unless she invited it—and she never did. He took her to the movies a few times and to a square dance at the town hall Thanksgiving week-end. He sensed a kind of gratitude from her for pretending that everything was normal. This made it all the more impossible for him to try to break through with what was in his own heart.

"I guess times have changed," Elihu Stone said, watching Liz. "When I was young I never let a girl carry her books home from school—and I'd never let her git far with an armful of bundles like them there. Must be a good mile to her house. I guess things is different nowadays."

The tension in Rufe Gilson's face relaxed. "You old crow bait!" he said.

He went over to the mud-colored jeep pulled up at the curb, swung in behind the wheel. The jeep spun around like a top in front of the store and headed along the road. Liz moved over to let it pass, but of course it didn't.

"Hop in," Rufe called to her.

"It's all right, Rufe, I don't want to take you out of your way," Liz said.

"Not out of my way," he lied cheerfully. "Got to see Ralph Benson about some painting he promised to do for me. Here, toss the bundles in back."

"You don't toss eggs," Liz said, putting the packages down gently on the floor of the jeep and then climbing in beside Rufe.

He put the jeep in gear and they bounced away along the rutted road.

"Good and snappy tonight," Rufe said.

"I like the winter," Liz said. "There's something so real and austere about it." Then she smiled. "And Father works! In the summertime he's always being interrupted by summer people who want to look at his paintings, and he can't refuse because they *might* buy. But they almost never do."

"You know what Elihu says about Vermont," Rufe chuckled. "Only two seasons in the year up here—August and Winter!"

"It's not as bad as that," Liz said, laughing.

He was glad to hear the laughter. "Great character, Elihu," Rufe said. "He's learned the art of living. Never does anything that doesn't 'pleasure' him. Of course he has to work, but he manages to make a sort of game out of that."

"I don't see how anyone can be happy unless he gets pleasure from the work he does," Liz said.

THE laughter was gone, and Rufe guessed she was thinking about Roger, and the fact that his novel had

died on the vine in the last six months.

"That's what I admire about Alonzo, about your father," Rufe said. "Nothing keeps him from working every hour of daylight. He's as jealous of his time as —as a man in love."

"Father's different than most," she said. "He spent so many years as a commercial artist. Now that he has the chance to paint what he wants he has the feeling there's so little time left."

"He's got a good active twenty years," Rufe said.

"He'd argue with you about that being a long time. He says the first forty years of his life were wasted and that the last ten have been devoted to learning. Now, when most men are tired and thinking of retiring, if they can, he's just beginning."

"That's why he'll live to be a hundred," Rufe said. "It's when you've lost interest that you begin to shrivel up and die." Rufe glanced at her and grinned. "But tell me one thing, Liz. Why does he wear that awful beard? He looks like a cross between Monte Woolley and a grizzly bear."

"He says he looked at himself in the mirror for forty years as a cheap commercial artist," Liz said. "He says he had to change that or he'd probably find himself drawing cereal ads out of habit. But I think the real reason is he can't take time to shave. Once the sun's up he has to be working."

Rufe pulled the jeep up before the Holbrooks' cottage.

"Help you with the packages?" he asked.

"I can manage, thanks, Rufe. Won't you come in and have a drink?"

"Thanks, I've got to get back to the farm," Rufe said. "Bim's a good kid, but I have to check up on the chores after him."

"I thought you were going to see Ralph Benson?" Liz said, smiling.

"Lady," Rufe said, dropping into Elihu's twang, "if I choose to lie to pleasure myself, that's my business!"

"Good night, then, Rufe, and many thanks for the lift."

"Any time, any place, lady," Rufe said. "'By."

II

ALONZO HOLBROOK took the packages from his daughter and carried them into the kitchen. He was a towering man, nearly four inches over six feet, and the rest of him built to scale.

"That idiot of a Sutter woman phoned while you were out," Alonzo said, as Liz was taking off her galoshes. "It seems Terrence Vail is coming home. Did you know?"

"Yes," Liz said.

"They're going to give a *party!*" Alonzo said. He said, "party," as though it described some devil-invented torture. "They asked if you'd help. I told Emily Sutter—I told her that—"

"Oh, Father!" Liz said.

"I told her you'd help light the biggest blasted bonfire ever built on the village green to celebrate, but I'd be hanged if I'd let you help organize a party where she and Tina Robinson and the rest of the village magpies could sit around and make hash out of you."

"Father," Liz said wearily, "don't you see I *have* to help? I can't withdraw from things."

Alonzo tugged at his beard. "Don't they have any feelings? Don't they have any sensitivity? Are they human, or what are they?" He stuffed tobacco into one of his inevitably clogged pipes. "That Sutter woman didn't dare ask it outright, but she's just dying to know how you're reacting to the news. Well, I told her how *I* reacted. I told her I didn't give a jump in the lake whether Terrence came home or not. It's already too late."

"Oh, Father!"

"Well, that's the way I feel!" Alonzo said. "I wonder what that jerk of a Lindsey will do now?"

Liz busied herself with an iron skillet and the pork chops she'd brought from the store.

"I saw Roger in the village," she said casually. "He asked if he might come to see me."

"And I trust you told him where he could go!" Alonzo said.

"I told him he could come."

"Liz! Are you crazy? Haven't you got any pride?"

"Roger's in trouble, Father. Everyone's turned against him. I—well, he can't help what happened to him, and I'm his friend."

"Liz, so help me," Alonzo said, "if Roger Lindsey shows that puling face of his in this house I'll break his blasted neck. And I'm not fooling."

"You'll do no such thing, Father, be-

cause I asked him to come," Liz said.

Alonzo took his daughter's shoulders in his big hands. "Liz, do you love that heel?"

"I think I do, Father," Liz said. "I don't think love changes just because you've been hurt." She pushed gently away from him. "Watch those pork chops for a minute, will you?"

"Where are you going?"

"To call Emily Sutter and tell her I'll be glad to help with the party," Liz said.

"Blast and blazes and perdition!" Alonzo shouted. . . .

Emily Sutter hung up the telephone. "Well, that's *one* unpleasantness taken care of," she said.

Bim, her fifteen-year-old son, looked up from the ship's model he'd been working on. Bim was awkward and gangling. Physically he was built along the lines of his father, but his face had been molded after Emily's. He was a Bowen.

"Who was it, Mom?" he asked.

"Liz Holbrook," Emily said. "She's promised to get the favors—you know, the paper hats and horns and things."

"It sounds like a kid's party," Bim said, and bent his fair head over the model again.

Emily sat down by the fire and picked up a paper scrap and a pencil. Emily was a list maker, and this was her list for the party. There were names on it; an itemization of food, liquor, and cigarettes; where to borrow extra plates and glasses; an item which read, "See Judge Craven about an orchestra," and another, underlined several times, *"talk to Dr. S."*

EMILY frowned. Bim's remark recalled the wonderful children's parties they'd had here when she was Bim's age and this had been her father's house. Everyone had thought Major Bowen was rich. The house was large and rambling, with private quarters for four servants. There was a swimming pool, and a stable for riding horses, big flower gardens, and a vegetable garden that would have fed the town.

It wasn't till the Major died and left the house to his only child, Emily, that it was discovered there wasn't much more to the estate than the house itself.

The person receiving the greatest shock was Dan Sutter, who had married

Focusing the flashlight on the cellar stairs, the doctor saw legs in boots, and heard a hoarse whisper (Chap. IX)

the major's daughter confident that he would never have to do a lick of work again in his life. But the shock did not alter Dan's plans. He didn't work.

Gradually the house fell into disrepair because they couldn't afford to pay for repairs and Dan simply wasn't "handy" with tools. The drains in the swimming pool went wrong, and it wasn't usable any longer. Inside, the house grew barer each year, as one by one the antiques were sold and replaced by cheap substitutes or not replaced at all. A few paintings, one by Alonzo Holbrook, had kept them going another couple of years.

Incidentally, the sale of these paintings had started a feud between Dan and Alonzo. Major Bowen had paid seven hundred and fifty dollars to Alonzo for his landscape, but when they came to sell it they were only able to raise a hundred and fifty. Dan hinted that Alonzo had robbed the major.

"What do you want me to do—die, so the picture will increase in value?" Alonzo had demanded.

With the furniture and pictures gone, there was nothing for it but to earn some money. Emily and Bim, not Dan, turned to. Emily took in sewing, while Bim did chores for Rufe Gilson after school. This was not enough. Major Bowen's daughter was forced to humble her pride and take in boarders—people who came up for the golf and fishing in the summer, the hunting in the fall, and the skiing in the winter.

Emily sighed and reconcentrated on her list.

"There's got to be some way to approach Judge Craven about the orchestra without being too brazen," she said.

"You mean the money?" Bim said.

Emily nodded. "Everything else—the food and liquor and things—will be contributed. But if we have music, you can't hire the Cunningham boys unless they get their price."

"The Judge will come through," Bim said. "He's friendly and he likes parties, and living all alone he doesn't get the chance to have them. It must be bad to be old and all alone."

"Judge Craven isn't old," Emily said. "He just about fifty. I know because his family used to come here when I was a girl."

"I wouldn't mind asking him, Mom, if it would help," Bim said. "About the Cunningham boys, I mean."

"That would be wonderful, Bim," Emily said. "Coming from you, it won't seem as if—" Her voice trailed off. She had been asking for favors for so long, covering up for Dan for so long. "There's one other thing," she resumed. "Dr. Smith."

"What about him?" Bim asked.

"Well, the party's going to be here," Emily said, "and he doesn't know anyone, and he came here for a rest—and he's sort of queer and I—"

DR. JOHN SMITH was Emily's current boarder. He had been recommended to the Sutters by a former boarder who had come up for the hunting in the fall. Dr. Smith had written Emily a nice note asking if he could come for two weeks. He just wanted to rest. They needed the money badly, and Dan had insisted she quote a higher price than usual. Dr. Smith had agreed without a murmur and had arrived four days ago. He was an undistinguished-looking little gray man, one who just melted into the background as though he'd always been part of it.

"If you want to talk to the doctor," Bim said, "he's coming in from his walk now, Mom. But I don't think he's queer. I like him."

"Oh, dear," Emily said.

The front door opened and Dr. John Smith came into the foyer. He stamped the snow off his overshoes and removed them. Then he hung his overcoat and hat in the hall closet. He started for the stairway, but Emily called to him.

"Oh, Dr. Smith! I wonder if I could speak with you for a moment?"

"Why, of course, Mrs. Sutter." He came into the living room. Seeing Bim, he nodded and smiled. "Hello, Bim. You make that ship model?"

"No I'm repairing it for Maclyn Miles. He said he'd give me five dollars for re-rigging it and painting it."

"And well worth it," Dr. Smith said. "It's delicate work."

Emily fidgeted nervously with her lists. Dr. Smith's eyes made her nervous. She had the idea he was seeing right through into her thoughts. And as if to prove it, he said:

"About the party you're giving here Saturday night, Mrs. Sutter. If I'll be in the way, I have a friend in Rutland I might persuade to put me up for the night."

"You know about the party, Dr. Smith?"

He nodded. "I just spent a pleasant hour swapping yarns with Elihu Stone. He told me." The doctor smiled. "I don't mind admitting I hoped you might ask me to the party. I've heard a great deal about Terrence Vail. I'd like to meet him. But I know it's a rather special gathering of old friends, and if I'd be in the way—"

"But, Doctor, we'd love to have you!" Emily said, pleased. If he went away for a day, that would be eight dollars less revenue for the week. "I was afraid the party might disturb you, knowing you were here for a rest."

"I love parties," the doctor said. "And from what Elihu tells me, this one may be unusually interesting. . . ."

On Friday afternoon, at train time, Elihu Stone sat on a baggage truck, chewing on a straw and talking to his new-found friend, Dr. John Smith. There were more people at the depot than Dr. John Smith had realized lived in Brookside.

Almost the whole town was there with the exception of Alonzo Holbrook and Liz. Alonzo wouldn't have left his studio in daylight to welcome the Angel Gabriel, and Liz had gone to Rutland to get the favors for the party. Bim and Emily Sutter were there, and Elihu told the Doctor that Dan was around the corner at the old Station Hotel "drinkin' himself into shape." There were also Rufe Gilson, and Maclyn Miles, the State's Attorney and the town's one lawyer, and Miss Tina Robinson.

Pacing the far end of the platform, away from the crowd, was Roger Lindsey. Also apart from the crowd was Susan Vail, slim and elegant in a sable coat, talking to a distinguished-looking middle-aged man in tweeds.

The Doctor asked about him. Elihu took the straw out of his mouth.

"That's the judge. Judge Craven."

"A native product?" the doctor asked.

"Nope. Judge of the State Supreme Court out in Ohio. Retired a few years ago and come here to live. Curious cuss."

"How so?"

Elihu's eyes twinkled. "I put it to you, Doc. Is a man friendly when he don't never tell you anything about himself? He talks as nice as you please to everyone, but he don't tell you nothin'. And he don't ask you nothin'!"

THE approaching wail of the train whistle created a stir of excitement. Roger Lindsey stopped his pacing. Children began racing up and down, shrieking gleefully, as presently puffs of gray smoke from the engine appeared around the bend in the tracks, and then the engine itself. The whistle was loud with its melancholy warning as the train slacked off and finally ground to a halt at the platform. People crowded forward.

Dr. Smith spotted the two pigskin suitcases with the foreign labels on them which the brakeman lifted down to the platform. Then Terrence Vail, the hero of the occasion, appeared. The doctor was impressed. Terrence was tall and dark and almost too handsome. He dressed and moved like a Hollywood actor. There was a flamboyance about him that somehow managed to stay within the bounds of good taste.

The crowd closed in on him, and the little gray man unashamedly climbed up on the baggage truck to have a better view. He saw the two rather casual kisses Terrence gave his wife, the warm hand-shakes from the citizens. He noticed that neither Rufe Gilson nor Roger Lindsey pressed forward to shake Terrence's hand. Then he saw Terrence seek Roger out, throw his arm around him warmly, and he noticed Roger's whiteness of face.

As the train pulled out, Judge Horace Craven motioned for silence.

"My dear Terrence, I was designated to deliver a speech of welcome."

"Hear—hear!" somebody shouted.

The judge's voice was rich and cultivated. "I had a speech prepared," he said, "but the pleasure of seeing you has completely driven it from my mind. So I'll just say we're all darn glad to have you back!"

There was happy applause and more hand-shaking. After that there was some pan-beating and cheering as Terrence and Susan made their way to the convertible. The bags were thrown in the back, Terrence slid in behind the wheel, and the Vails drove away. They were not followed. They were to have the moment of home-coming alone.

When at last they stood in the pine-paneled study, Susan said, in her mocking voice: "Well, darling, haven't you a more ardent type of greeting for me than those two chaste kisses at the station?"

Terrence looked at her, his dark eyes bright. "As a matter of fact I have," he said.

He drew back his right hand and struck her across the mouth, a slap of such stinging force that she staggered back. "Ardent enough?" Terrence asked, softly. . . .

FOR the party that night, the Sutter house was lighted from cellar to garret. Emily had done a great deal of decorating with crepe paper and Japanese lanterns, relics of a garden party given years ago by Major Bowen. The space between the house and the stables where the old vegetable garden had been was set aside for a parking place, and Bim had hung a lantern on the willow tree so that no one would accidentally drive into the empty swimming pool.

People came early, all the people in town, rich and poor. Whatever cross currents might exist were to be forgotten for the evening. The talented Cunningham boys had been given their price. Liquor was plentiful. Even Judge Craven joined in the square dances. Dr. Smith, who didn't drink or dance, seemed, nonetheless to be enjoying himself hugely.

The guest of honor, however, seemed a trifle subdued and determined to shake his mood by drinking. The Holbrooks arrived early and Liz danced with Roger Lindsey as though nothing at all were wrong between them. Alonzo was disturbed by Roger's attention to Liz. He set out at once to rival Terrence in the speed and volume of his drinking at the improvised bar.

Dan Sutter supplied the most jarring note. He was very drunk. He made an open point of pawing at Susan Vail whenever he could, particularly when Emily was watching. Bim, who had been enjoying himself during the early part of the evening, became conscious of his father's behavior, and withdrew from the dancing.

He watched, angry and ashamed. Finally, on coming out of the kitchen, where he had gone to get himself a drink of water, he came upon Dan and Susan in the hallway, locked in a tight embrace. Unable to stand it any longer, he rushed out of the house and across the parking place to the stable.

The harness room there had been made over into a carpenter shop for Bim, and there was an old cot in it. He lay down on the cot, shaking with sobs. At last, exhausted, he fell asleep

How long he had been asleep he didn't know when he woke up, shivering with cold. He heard music, so the party was still on. Bim didn't want to go into the house, but there was no way to get warm in the stable. He would go and sit in the kitchen by the stove, he told himself.

It had begun to snow again. It was windless, and the snow came down in large feathery flakes. It covered the ruts in the driveway and the tire marks in the parking place. It had obliterated Bim's trail on his outward journey from the house. He started, hurrying, toward the kitchen door. And then he saw the strange mound in the snow by the swimming pool—a mound that didn't belong there. It looked, disquietingly, as if someone had gone to sleep there and was being buried under the snow's white blanket.

Bim hesitated, then walked slowly toward the mound. He saw two outflung arms, and a body, face-down. Bim turned and ran.

In the hall outside the noisy dancing floor, Bim looked into the mild, questioning eyes of Dr. Smith.

"Gee, sir, I—I'm glad I found you." His teeth clicked when he spoke.

"So am I, Bim," the doctor said. "You look scared out of your wits. What is it?"

"There's s-someone outside who's v-very sick, I think. They—they l-look d-dead, sir!"

III

DR. SMITH was not given to premonitions. However, all evening he had been aware of a kind of electrical charge in the atmosphere and, knowing what he did from his conversations with Elihu Stone, he had been prepared for some short-circuit to the festivities. He followed Bim toward the swimming-pool, wondering if the boy's discovery had any relation to those cross currents.

Bim had picked up a flashlight in the kitchen. He leveled it toward the pool.

"Over there, sir," he said. "You c-can see their arms stretched out."

Then the doctor saw the outlines of a figure, like a crucifix, in the snow and

being slowly buried. The snow rose to the calves of his legs when he reached the body, knelt, and lifted one of the outflung hands. Even before his fingers began searching for a pulse beat he knew he would find none.

"They—they're d-dead, sir?"

"Yes, Bim," the doctor said quietly, and stood up. "Now I want you to do exactly what I tell you. Go find Rufus Gilson. Tell him there's been an accident and that I want him out here. But don't tell anyone else about this, son. Not even your mother. Just let the party go on until we find out what's happened."

"Yes, sir."

Left alone Dr. Smith didn't move. He knew, without uncovering the face, who it was. He simply stood, staring and thinking, until he heard the back door slam. Then he turned and cupped his hands around his mouth. "Don't make new tracks, Mr. Gilson," he called. "Walk the way Bim and I came."

Rufe altered his course and kept on the run, followed by Bim.

"What is it, Dr. Smith?"

"Death, Mr. Gilson," Dr. Smith said.

Rufe stood staring down at the half-hidden body.

"Who is it?" he asked.

"I'm afraid it's the guest of honor," Dr. Smith said.

Rufe Gilson's gray eyes contracted. "Terrence! But what happened, Doctor? Heart attack?"

"I think not," Dr. Smith said, "although I haven't made a thorough examination. I didn't want to touch things until you'd seen them just exactly as Bim and I found them. That's why I had you walk in our tracks, Gilson. There are no other marks in the snow, which means he's been lying here a good while."

"But it seems only a few minutes ago I was talking to him!" Rufe said.

"I'm trying to tell you, Gilson, that I think he's been murdered." Then, as Rufe stared, the doctor went on: "The back of his head is partially exposed."

He took a handkerchief from his pocket and dusted the powdery whiteness from Terrence Vail's head. Terrence's skull had been smashed. He must have been struck a dozen times by something that had jellied flesh and splintered bone.

"There's no use trying to pretend," Dr. Smith declared. "It couldn't have happened in a fall. He was struck with something heavy, savagely and repeatedly."

"But why?" Rufe said. "Why?" Then he shook his head. "Look here, Doctor, I'm a selectman of this town, but I never had any more serious crime than a chicken-stealing to handle. I'm not certain what I do first!"

"Isn't Maclyn Miles the State's Attorney?" Dr. Smith asked.

"You're right," Rufe said. "This is his job. I'll get him."

He turned toward the house. . . .

MACLYN MILES was in his early thirties, dark, energetic, ambitious for a political career. Dr. Smith imagined that Miles' first thoughts as he stood in the snow, looking down at what was left of Terrence Vail, were: "If I solve this it will be a feather in my cap. If I fail, people will remember it when they go to the polls."

But whatever his personal reactions, Miles was aware of what had to be done. The State Police must be notified. The local doctor, who would have to make a report on the cause of death, was up in the hills on a baby case and couldn't be reached by phone. Someone must be sent to get him.

"We should cover him with something," Rufe Gilson muttered.

"There's an old carriage robe out in the stable," Bim told them. "Shall I g-get it?"

Maclyn Miles' attention focused on the boy. "How did you happen to find Terrence here, Bim?"

Bim swallowed hard. "I was in the stable, Maclyn," the boy said. "I—I went out there because I g-got—got tired of the party. So I lay down on the c-cot and went to sleep. When I woke up I was cold. I didn't want to go back to the house but I had to g-get warm. It had started to snow and I s-saw something over here that d-didn't belong here. A k-kind of mound."

"And you didn't see any tracks in the snow?"

"When I came out with Bim," Dr. Smith cut in, "there was nothing visible but his tracks, and they were already filling in. We were careful to walk in them so as not to make any new trail."

"Why, Doctor?" Miles asked.

The little gray man shrugged. "Hunch," he said.

"You had a hunch there'd been a murder?"

"I had a hunch the explosion had taken place, Mr. Miles."

"What explosion?"

"Didn't you sense it in the air? It's been brewing for four days. Surely I don't have to tell you that."

"Run along and get the robe from the stables, Bim," Miles said.

Miles watched the boy go. "Since there weren't any other tracks but Bim's," he said, "do you suppose he might have—"

"You can't be serious, Maclyn!" Rufe Gilson protested.

"Have you considered," Dr. Smith asked in his mild voice, "that there may be something besides the murderer's footprints hidden under the snow?"

"Meaning?" Miles asked.

"The weapon, Mr. Miles. Turn your flashlight on that wound. Do you notice the light picks up two or three little glittering specks?"

Miles focused the flashlight, saw what the doctor had already seen.

"The bones are crushed," Miles said. "Isn't there—isn't there phosphorus in bones?"

"Yes, but that isn't phosphorus. I've noticed that in some of the rock around here there is a good deal of mica. It splinters off the stone easily. I suggest those are specks of mica, which would indicate Vail's head was beaten in with a rock. I don't imagine the murderer would have carried the rock away with him, so it must be somewhere in the snow—no further away than he could throw it, perhaps right beside the body."

"Those are specks of mica," Rufe said, straightening up. "I'll bet on it."

"When you find the rock," the doctor said, "I doubt if there'll be any fingerprints, but it would be a surprise if there weren't blood or bits of flesh and hair stuck to it. That will settle how it was done."

"But not who or why," Miles said.

Bim came trudging back carrying the old carriage robe. Rufe and Miles laid it over Terrence Vail's body.

"Let's look for that rock," Miles said.

IT was found not ten feet away. Despite the fact that it was wet from snow, there was unquestionable evidence, as Dr. Smith had predicted, that it had been used to kill Terrence Vail. And so the time Rufe Gilson had been dreading was at hand. They had to go into the house, stop the music, and announce to friends and neighbors that their guest had been murdered. Also that probably one of them wa. a murderer.

Inside the house he asked the Cunningham boys to stop their music. They did, with a flourish of drums. "I have an announcement to make!" Rufe said to the guests bluntly. "Someone has killed Terrence! It—it's murder! Maclyn Miles is in charge. He's sent for the State Police and for Dr. Swayne. I'm sorry to have to tell you that none of you can leave here until Maclyn's given you permission."

The silence was painful. Everyone was looking at Susan Vail. She had been dancing with Dan Sutter, and his arm was still around her. Slowly she moved out of Sutter's possessive grasp. Slowly she turned to Roger Lindsey.

"Roger!" she exclaimed. Then, incredulously: "Roger!"

Lindsey's face was the color of wood ashes.

"Susan! What are you saying? You know perfectly well—" He was stopped by Liz Holbrook's hand on his arm.

The room suddenly burst into sound, everyone talking at once. Several of the men started for the door. They were intercepted by a businesslike Maclyn Miles.

"I don't want anyone outside!" he shouted. "I don't want any new tracks in the snow until the troopers get here. You'll all have to stay in this room, until I tell you differently!"

For once Emily Sutter's propensity for making lists served an important purpose. Among other lists she had made was one of the guests for the evening. Rufe had known this, and he and Maclyn asked her to check to see if anyone had gone home.

Emily couldn't seem to focus on the problem, and Rufe suddenly realized it was because she had been trying vainly to locate Bim.

"Bim's outside with Dr. Smith, Emily," he said. "He's a little shaken up, but all right."

"Bim found the body," Maclyn told her. "Now where is that guest list, Emily?"

She found it in the handbag she was carrying. Maclyn took it.

"All present or accounted for," he told Rufe, after checking. They were just outside the big room.

"If we knew what time it started to snow we'd limit our job," Maclyn said. "We know no one went outside after that. No footprints. We've got to find out who saw Terrence go out—and who went out with him or after him."

Rufe looked through the open door into the living room.

"Maybe you can get both questions answered easily," he said. "I'll lay odds Elihu can tell you what time it started to snow. And if Tina Robinson can't draw you a diagram of the comings and goings, I'll eat a hat."

Miles turned to Emily Sutter.

"Could we use the major's old study to talk to people privately, Emily?"

"Well—if that seems best, Maclyn."

Major Bowen's study was a small room, lined with books. There was an open fireplace, and a cushioned window seat. The seat made a catch-all for an amazing collection of useless objects. Over the fireplace was a sword which the major had worn in the Spanish-American War. There was a little what-not in one corner, in which the major had collected items of interest to no one but himself—a hunting knife with a lock of black hair around it, a miniature of a foxhound with sentimental eyes, done in ivory, and a large white tooth on a gold chain.

There were also books, long untouched, mildewed in spots. The major had learned about life from Kipling, about history from G. A. Henty, and about science from Jules Verne and H. G. Wells. But his greatest passion had been mystery stories. There were hundreds of them on the shelves. Maclyn sniffed the musty odor as he switched on the light.

"Get Elihu and Tina Robinson in here, will you, Rufe?"

RUFE went back to the living room. He beckoned to Elihu, who shuffled across to him, tugging at his piratical mustache.

"Somethin' I can do, Rufe?" he asked.

"Maclyn wants to talk to you, Elihu. He's in the major's study. Wants to ask you if you know what time it started to snow."

"Started comin' down at six minutes after one in the A.M."

"Go tell him," Rufe said, and Elihu, muttering, went off toward the study.

Rufe, in the doorway, spotted Miss Tina Robinson in the center of a group of ladies. He hated to break into the group to fetch her. There'd be a hundred questions asked he couldn't answer. While he stood there, hoping to catch Miss Tina's eye, someone put a hand on his arm. It was Liz. She was pale.

"Hi," he said, and tried to smile.

Her fingers tightened on his arm. "Rufe, you can't let them do this, you know."

"Do what, honey?"

"Pin this on Roger—just because of what Susan said. You won't let Maclyn jump at the easy way, will you, Rufe?"

"Maclyn isn't anxious to make mistakes," he told her. "He's got a career to think of. In addition, he's honest."

He wanted to say something more reassuring to her, but Judge Horace Craven joined them.

"Naturally I'd like to help in any way I can, Rufus," the judge said, "but of

[*Turn page*]

course Smith's your man. Great break of luck, his being here."

"Smith?"

"Dr. Smith," the judge said. "Outstanding in his field."

"Just a minute," Rufe said. "I don't think I know what you're talking about, Judge. Dr. Smith was very helpful in Dr. Swayne's absence. He seems level-headed, intelligent. But we're past the doctor stage. What we need is a first-rate detective."

The judge raised one bushy eyebrow. "You mean you don't know who Dr. Smith *is?*"

"Maybe you'd better tell me," Rufe said.

"Dr. John Smith," the judge said impressively, "is the outstanding criminal psychiatrist in the United States. If he'll help you, you've got the smartest man in the country for this kind of case."

Rufe seemed stunned. "Neither Maclyn nor I knew," he said.

"It's my advice that you ask him to take an active part in this at once," the judge said. "I've known about him for years. Top-flight man." He flicked the ash from his cigar. "Of course, if there's anything I can do, Rufe, just call on me." And he sauntered away.

Rufe returned to the study just as Elihu was leaving. He had only time to tell Maclyn Miles what he had learned about Dr. Smith when Bim came in with the announcement that the troopers had arrived.

That meant the interview with Miss Tina would have to wait.

The State Police in Vermont are by and large a highway patrol. They are not organized to handle the direct investigation of a murder. The procedure is for the local authorities—selectmen and State's Attorney of the county—to handle things. The State's Attorney may hire a detective—at not more than four dollars a day—to help solve the crime. These troopers would help Maclyn and Rufe, but they would not take over from them.

The first order of business was to move Terrence's body into the house, despite the fact Dr. Swayne was still on his baby case. There was no doubt about the cause of death. The next, now that there was extra help, was to get a statement from each guest.

The troopers were assigned to this task while Maclyn and Rufe returned to the study, having asked Dr. Smith to join them.

Maclyn closed the study door. "You know, Doctor," he said, "Rufe and I have just been kicking ourselves for not realizing who you are. But now Judge Craven has told us. And we need your help."

THE doctor turned his back to the fire, teetered slowly back and forth on his heels.

"You know all these people," he said. "You're perfectly well qualified to handle this. It's just a matter of careful and persistent checking and rechecking."

"It's not as simple as that," Maclyn said. "I'll be honest with you, Doctor. I'd like to solve this case all by myself. It would be a feather in my cap. It's just because I *do* know all these people, and because half of them remember me and Rufe in short pants, that we need assistance. Since you're here we have to ask for your help, or face the severest kind of criticism."

"I could go away," Dr. Smith said. "I'd only planned to stay a few days longer. I could be called home."

"We need you, Doctor," Rufe said. "As Maclyn says, we know all these people *too* well. We're tangled up with a lot of them."

"I always feel like such an incredible busybody when this happens," the Doctor murmured. Then he squared his shoulders. "All right, Mr. Miles, I'll help. But I want you to understand I'm not a detective or a magician. My help will consist of listening, asking a few questions here and there, and then forming an opinion which you can take or leave."

"That's good enough for us," Maclyn said. "Incidentally, the State pays four dollars a day."

Dr. Smith laughed. "Not a way to get rich. But seriously, the reason I'm interested in this is that there are no physical clues that help much. The answer is going to come out of people; out of their histories; out of their hearts and minds. You go ahead with this thing in your own way and just let me tag along."

"Good," Maclyn said. "We were just about to talk to Tina Robinson. We had a feeling she'd have kept tabs on the the evening. If there's any lead to the comings and goings, she may have it."

IV

RUFE went out and returned with Miss Tina Robinson.

"I guess you know what our problem is, Miss Tina," Maclyn said. "Terrence went outside, probably about twelve-thirty if Elihu is right about when it started to snow. Either he went alone and was followed out by someone, or he went out *with* someone. We had a feeling you might have noticed. Do you have any memory of who left the main room —say, after midnight?"

"Yes, sir, I do," Miss Tina said briskly. "And I'll begin with Maclyn E. Miles!"

To Maclyn Miles' credit his face didn't change expression. "Yes, Miss Tina, and who else?" he said, quietly.

"Plenty," Miss Tina snapped, annoyed at not being able to elaborate. "There was Dan Sutter, and Alonzo Holbrook, and that young Lindsey, and half a dozen others."

"Did you notice when I left, Miss Robinson?"

The voice came from behind Miss Tina and she spun around and spotted Dr. Smith on the window seat.

"Oh, you!" she said. "No, I didn't see you go out, but you wasn't hanging around *her* like the rest of 'em!"

"I just wanted to get it straight," Dr. Smith said. "You're talking about people who left the room with Mrs. Vail, aren't you, Miss Robinson?"

"Naturally!"

"But you didn't notice Terrence when he left?" Maclyn asked. "Or if someone went with him?"

"I couldn't say—*truthfully!*" Miss Tina drew herself up. "But I don't mind sayin' Maclyn Miles, there's men in this town shouldn't sleep nights. Playin' around with a married woman while her husband ain't here to defend his home."

"You can deliver us a lecture on that some other time, Miss Tina," Maclyn said, in a flat, tired voice. "Right now we're trying to find out if you saw Terrence, and if you saw anyone go with him or follow him."

"Well, I haven't got any information on *that* subject," Miss Tina said.

"Then that'll be all for now."

After Miss Tina had gone, with her nose in the air, Maclyn Miles sat silent for a moment. Then one of the troopers came into the room.

"No dice, Maclyn," he said. "Everybody's got theories but nobody actually saw Vail go out or noticed who followed him. You'd think somebody would have noticed!"

"Not with the spotlight on Susan!" Maclyn commented.

The trooper hadn't closed the door, and a huge figure ducked under the low beam and came into the room. Alonzo Holbrook was in a fuming rage.

"Look here, Maclyn," he bellowed, "how long do you expect to keep people here? Unless you've got something direct on your mind, let 'em go home and pick this up later."

Maclyn ran his hand over his eyes. His brisk efficiency seemed to have deserted him. "Maybe you're right, Alonzo. Maybe we're all too tired to make much sense." He turned to the trooper. "Tell them they can go home, George. Of course nobody's to leave town."

"Okay, Maclyn."

Rufe, standing close to Alonzo, asked in a low voice: "How's Liz?"

"How do you expect her to be?" Alonzo shouted. "She's great! Just great. She's Joan of Arc defending the underdog, isn't she?" He spied Dr. Smith in the corner. "So they've got you mixed up in this!"

"I'm afraid so," the doctor said.

"I suppose," Alonzo sneered, "you'd like to know whether I had an unhappy childhood or if I can remember any traumas when I was two that unbalanced my adjustment to life."

"All I'd really like to know," Dr. Smith said gently, "is whether or not you killed Terrence Vail. That *is* the question, isn't it?"

"Would I say yes if I had?" Alonzo demanded and stormed out.

MOST people left hurriedly as soon as they were released. Finally only Susan Vail, Judge Craven, the Sutters and Dr. Smith were left. Roger Lindsey had disappeared with the first, and Rufe had driven Liz and Alonzo home in his jeep.

Emily was helping Susan Vail on with her fur coat.

"I'll go home with you, Susan," she was saying. "You won't want to spend the night alone."

"I'm quite all right, Emily," Susan said. "I prefer to be alone."

"I'll drive you home, my dear," the judge said.

"Thanks, Judge Craven, but my car is outside. I prefer to go home alone. Really."

Emily looked appealingly at Dr. Smith. "Wouldn't it be wiser—?"

"My dear Emily," Dan Sutter drawled, "why don't you mind your own sweet business?"

His remark created an embarrassed silence that allowed Susan to make her exit, alone.

"Extraordinary courage and fortitude," Judge Craven remarked.

"Extraordinary," Dr. Smith agreed in a tone so dry that the judge turned to look at him.

"Where are the weeping women?" Dr. Smith murmured. "Where are the mourners?"

Dan Sutter laughed. "You catch on quickly, Doctor."

As soon as the judge had taken his leave, Dan began struggling into his overcoat and overshoes.

"Dan, where are you going?" Emily asked. "It's almost four in the morning!"

"Shall we say that I feel like a little fresh air after all this?" Dan said, buttoning his coat.

Dr. Smith spoke in a low voice. "Somewhere in this town is a murderer, Mr. Sutter. He's wondering if anyone suspects him, if anyone saw him. He doesn't mean to be caught, Mr. Sutter."

"So?" Dan said.

"So I suggest it would be extremely dangerous for you to try to play detective for any private reasons of your own."

Dan's grin broadened. "I give you the same advice I gave Emily, Doctor, in spades! Mind your own business! . . .

THE next morning, breakfast at the Sutter house was served at seven-thirty. Dan Sutter's place at the head of the table was set for him, but Dan didn't appear. Dr. Smith commented on the excellence of the food, on many things, with slight responses. Finally he put down his coffee cup with a decisive click.

"Look, my friends," he said, "it isn't going to be possible *not* to talk about what happened here last night. Suppose we stop trying, admit there has been a murder, and talk about it freely." He faced Emily. "You know, Mrs. Sutter, I haven't a clear picture of Terrence Vail—what he was like, how he happened to come here to live. I'm sure you could tell me, and it would be helpful."

Emily slowly stirred her coffee.

"I don't think anyone in Brookside knew Terrence intimately," she said. "He came here first about ten years ago. It was for the skiing or the golf—I forget which. He saw the old Moffet place and bought it. He did things like that—on the spur of the moment."

"Mrs. Vail was with him?"

"Oh, no. They met later, and were married suddenly—like buying the house, like everything else he did."

"When did Mrs. Vail come here?"

"Only about seven months ago." Emily said. "He turned up one day, gave a party, and introduced us all to Susan. We hadn't known he was married. I don't think even Roger Lindsey knew."

"Why do you say *even* Roger Lindsey?"

"Oh, because Terrence had brought Roger here and set him up in a cottage in the village. If anyone knew anything about Terrence away from here it would be Roger."

"Terrence and Roger were close friends?"

"Not in the ordinary sense," Emily said. "Among other things, Terrence was in the publishing business. He was financing Roger. Roger told everyone so. He talked about Terrence as though Terrence were a god. He couldn't say enough that was good about Terrence."

"And you thought he was sincere about that?"

"Oh, there's no doubt of it, Doctor. Roger owed his big chance to Terrence and he was deeply grateful."

"We're getting away from Terrence, Mrs. Sutter."

Emily continued to stir her coffee, without drinking it.

"It's hard for me to tell you much, Dr. Smith, when it comes down to facts. The outstanding thing about him was his impulsiveness. I mean—well, he was talking to Dan and Judge Craven at the post office one day and the judge mentioned that the library was in need of repairs. Terrence went inside and wrote a check with the scratchy post-office pen. One day someone mentioned to him that the school needed a playground. He told them to build it and

send the bills, including those for equipment, to him. That's the way he did things, Dr. Smith."

"It's interesting," the doctor said, "that you call that impulsiveness. Most people would call it generosity."

Emily blushed. "Did I?" she said. "Of course he was terribly generous. Once, when we were in a bad jam, Dan went to him, and—well, he helped us out."

"Perhaps what you had in mind, Mrs. Sutter, is that true generosity involves sacrifice. I gather these gifts of Terrence's to the town, the help given individuals, didn't involve sacrifice. He could give without feeling any pinch."

"That's what Dan said when I—when I—" She stopped, the flush deepening.

"When you didn't want to go to Terrence for help?"

"Yes," she said, her eyes averted.

"Mrs. Sutter, did you like Terrence?"

"He was always pleasant, charming, courteous," Emily said, "but there was a—a kind of curtain you couldn't see through. You got the feeling you weren't supposed to see through it and that if you did—well, Terrence wouldn't forgive you."

"What did you think he was hiding?" the doctor asked.

But the question was not answered. There was the noise of the front door opening and being slammed shut. Emily and Bim were suddenly rigid in their places. Dan Sutter was only just now coming home.

They heard him fumbling clumsily with his coat and overshoes in the front hall. Bim started to rise from the table, but Emily put her hand on his arm. The boy sank back into his chair and Dr. Smith saw fear in his eyes.

"Emily!" Dan called from the hallway. His voice sounded thick and unnatural. "Emily! Where the devil are you?"

"In the dining room, Dan."

They heard his steps, heavy, stumbling. "Well, why aren't you—" He was in the doorway, weaving back and forth, very drunk. "Oh, it's the great criminologist!"

"Good morning, Sutter," Dr. Smith said.

" 'God's in his heaven and all's right with the world,' " Dan chanted. "There's a body in the morgue, but the great criminologist has his breakfast, calm as you please! There's a murderer at large, and you sit here eating bread and jam. I'm disappointed. Where's the flourish? Where is the excitement of watching the great man at work?"

"You do the work for me, Sutter," the doctor said, with a ghost of a smile. "I don't have to ask you questions to get you to tell me about yourself. You spread it for me like a well-marked map."

Dan's eyes blinked. "And—and what can you read from the map, Doctor?"

"That you're very drunk and had better get some sleep. You'll probably be called on to do a little clear recollecting before the day's out."

Dan drew his shirt sleeve across his forehead. "I g-guess you're right," he said. "Emily—bring bottle up to my room."

ABOUT fifteen minutes after Dan Sutter had gone to bed with the bottle Emily produced for him, Rufe Gilson and Maclyn Miles arrived to pick up Dr. Smith.

"It's tough to have to descend on her so quickly," Maclyn said, "but we've got to talk to Susan. She'll have to elaborate on that halfway accusation of Roger."

The three men headed for the Vail place. When they arrived there was a black sedan parked in the driveway. Maclyn Miles frowned.

"Judge Craven," he said.

"Early call," Rufe observed.

"Ten to one he's offered his legal services to Susan," Maclyn said. "He isn't licensed to practice law in this State, but no one can stop his giving advice—as a friend. Just let a retired lawyer smell a crime—"

"You sound as if you didn't like the judge," Dr. Smith said.

"The judge is okay," Maclyn said. "I don't like anyone this morning." He parked his car. "Well, here's for it."

It was the judge who answered their knock at the front door.

"Susan's been expecting you," he said. "I've told her she should have legal advice. She says she has nothing to hide and she's perfectly willing to tell you anything she can."

"Then let's get to it," Maclyn said. "Where is she?"

"She's just finishing her breakfast," the judge said. "I—I wonder, Maclyn, would you object to my being present? Susan's upset. She doesn't realize the

seriousness of this to herself. I might be able to help her."

"Sure, sure," Maclyn said. "Ask her to come in the den."

The doctor and Rufe followed him into the paneled room. There were cigarette butts in the ashtrays, and the makings for drinks from the night before were still on the coffee table. The silver ice bucket was filled with water. There were two glasses with the dregs of martinis in them.

When Susan came in she was wearing a woolen skirt and a claret-colored sweater. Her face was whiter than usual, the scarlet mouth more unreal.

"Good morning, Maclyn," she said, in a high, brittle voice. She nodded to Rufe and to Dr. Smith, then waited.

"It's too bad to have to break in on you so early, Susan," Maclyn said, "but we have to begin here."

Susan shrugged and sat down on the couch. "Well?" she said.

Maclyn moved over to stand with his back to the fireplace. He had taken a pencil and notebook from his pocket. He sounded formal when he spoke.

"As you know, Susan, we have really no evidence to help us. The result is that we need to find a motive. We need to know who had a reason for killing Terrence."

SUSAN raised the tips of her fingers to her cheek.

"*I* had reasons, Maclyn. I hated him."

The angry glitter in her eyes made small hairs rise on the back of Rufe's neck. He could see the shock her words had produced on everyone—except Dr. Smith who stood by the window, looking down at the snowbound valley.

"Did you kill him?" Maclyn asked.

"No," Susan said, "and I feel cheated."

"Susan!" Judge Craven was horrified.

"Horace, if all you can do is stand there and bleat, I wish you'd go!" Susan said.

The judge faced Maclyn. "I don't think any statement Susan makes now, Miles, will stand up five minutes in court. She's clearly in a traumatic condition. I suggest you put this off."

Dr. Smith turned away from the window. "If you'll pardon me for mixing a metaphor, Judge Craven," he said, in his mild voice, "I'd say the trauma was on the other foot. Mrs. Vail is clearly trying to tell the truth. I suggest you tuck in your moral shirttail and listen, because she may not be in this frank mood again."

Color rose in the judge's cheeks. "Are you, as a physician, Dr. Smith, trying to tell me that you don't think Susan's condition is hysterical?"

"You should know, sir, as a judge, that the truth often has an hysterical sound," the doctor said. "I find nothing remarkable in a woman stating that she hates her husband. Our lustiest hates develop in our most intimate relationships."

"Thank *you*," Susan said, giving the doctor a mock bow. "And now that the day's lecture on human behavior is over, do you want me to go on, Maclyn?"

"Please," Maclyn said, eyes lowered to his notebook.

V

NATURALLY, Miss Tina Robinson couldn't just *sit* after she sent Liz Holbrook's telegram. It was to the Honorable James D. McEnroe in the State capital. McEnroe was a former Attorney General and considered to be the sharpest lawyer in the state. He and Alonzo had struck up a friendship years before and now Liz turned to him to ask if he would defend Roger Lindsey if he was needed.

The wire told nothing of the hour-long struggle between Alonzo and Liz on this point. It told nothing of the violence of Alonzo's reaction when Roger had appeared at the house with an indirect plea for help and sympathy. In spite of the storm, Liz had gone quietly about the business of having her own way, and secretly Alonzo admired her for this. But he couldn't paint with Roger Lindsey in the house, and when Alonzo couldn't paint he was a hurricane on the loose.

Miss Tina looked for Elihu to tell him the news, but Elihu was irritatingly missing. She was irresistibly drawn to the Sutters'.

"I know you must be just at your wits' ends, Emily," she said when Emily opened the door. "All that party to clean up from. I thought I'd drop around to help you."

"It's all done, Tina," Emily said, her voice hushed. "Dan's asleep, so maybe we'd better go into the kitchen."

Miss Tina accepted the suggestion

readily, and remarked that nothing in the world would taste so good as a cup of Emily's coffee. Settled at the kitchen table, she got around to the real point of her visit.

"The Holbrooks have asked James McEnroe to defend Roger Lindsey after he's arrested."

"Then they—they think Roger did it?" Emily asked.

"Why else hire the best lawyer in the state?" Miss Tina demanded. "Though why the Holbrooks should concern themselves after the way Roger's treated Liz is beyond me." She leaned forward, her eyes bright. "Did Dr. Smith say anything this morning? Do you know when they're going to arrest Roger?"

"He didn't act as though they knew yet who had done it," Emily said.

There was a thumping sound overhead. Emily raised her eyes. Evidently Dan was not yet asleep.

"Well, I've thought and thought," Miss Tina said, "and I just can't make myself believe that any of the *regular* Brookside people would kill Terrence. And you heard what Susan said last night when—"

There was a heavy thud from upstairs. Emily pushed back her chair. "If you'll excuse me, Tina, I'll see if Dan wants something."

Miss Tina was disappointed by Emily's reception of her news. Of course Emily was tired and had her own worries. Miss Tina began deciding where she'd go next. She was just gathering up her things when she heard Emily call. She went out into the hallway.

Emily was at the top of the stairs, clinging to the newel post.

"Tina!" she said. "Will you phone Dr. Swayne and ask him to come at once. It's an emergency! Dan's got some kind of convulsions. Tina, please hurry! I'm afraid!"

* * * * *

There was a tense quiet in Terrence Vail's den as the four men waited for Susan Vail to tell her story.

"Have you never wondered, Maclyn, why I never left this town during the six long months Terrence was away?" she asked, breaking the silence.

Maclyn shook his head.

"Perhaps you thought I liked it here, being squired by a neurotic would-be writer, and half a dozen local swains with straw in their hair? Did you think I enjoyed that, Maclyn?"

"You didn't have to stay," he said.

"That may seem obvious to you, Maclyn, but it wasn't so. I couldn't leave here! This house has been my prison, and if I chose to have fun with the local gentry, it was no less a prison."

MACLYN shrugged and studied his notebook. "I'm afraid that sounds a little melodramatic to me," he said evenly. "Please get to the story."

"All right. I'll get to it—in all its charming detail. I met Terrence eight months ago in New York. I was an actress, you know, but I was out of work and broke. Terrence had money—lots of it. He had a way with him. I'll admit that. He took me places. He gave me a wonderful time. He made love to me. Finally he asked me to marry him." She jammed out her cigarette in the ashtray as if the memory were enraging. "I'm sure none of you highly moral characters will understand when I tell you that I am a woman who did not and does not want to be married! I want to be free."

"Go on," Maclyn said.

"I was in a spot," Susan said. "I didn't want to lose Terrence just then, so I told him I'd marry him in a month. I figured I wouldn't need him in a month. But I had my troubles. He was so possessive I had a hard time seeing my other friends." She drew a deep breath. "One night Terrence had to go to Washington. I went to a party. I hate to shock you, Maclyn, but it was a marijuana party. Well, someone was killed. It was an accident, of course, but it was murder. And everyone present was guilty of violating the narcotics law. It wasn't a nice position to be in."

"Go on," Maclyn repeated, grimly.

She reached for a fresh cigarette and her hands were shaking.

"Somehow I got out of there before the police came," she said. "When I got back to my apartment Terrence was there. His business trip had ended sooner than he'd expected. When you've been smoking marijuana, Maclyn, you talk! I did, and Terrence learned a few things. He learned that he wasn't the only man in my life—and his colossal conceit wouldn't stand that. I thought he was being honest when he offered me a way out. We would drive somewhere,

right then, and be married. That would be my alibi. He would say we'd been together all evening. And so—I married him!" She laughed mirthlessly. "One hour later he nearly killed me! One hour later I knew him for the vicious sadist he was! One hour later I knew I was going to have to pay for the rest of my life for having damaged his pride! If I'd known then what it would be like I'd have confessed to the narcotics violation, even to murder if it would have kept me away from him. I didn't know —and he had me. I was questioned by the police—and I gave my perjured alibi. That was the end of me, Maclyn—the end of me! Until today!"

She paused and when she went on it was in a quieter voice.

"Terrence made it clear that he was embarked on a program of revenge. I would do exactly what he said, always, or an account of the perjured alibi would be in the hands of the authorities in nothing flat. He brought me here—and left me! I was not to leave Brookside, not even for a night! There was someone to check on me—I didn't know who. And that, my friends, was Terrence Vail! You asked who might wish him dead. Does that tell you about me—and does it give you a notion that there might be others, many others?"

The sound of the match Rufe Gilson struck to light his pipe was like a small explosion. Then Maclyn's voice cut into the silence.

"Last night you implied, Susan, that you suspected Roger Lindsey. Will you go into that, please?"

SUSAN shifted on the couch. "I'm sorry about that," she said. "I didn't mean to implicate Roger."

"But you *did* suspect him?"

"Look at it from my point of view, Maclyn," she said. "Like me, Roger is stuck in this place. He *says* it's to write a novel, though he hasn't written any of it. He's here because Terrence wanted him here. I've wondered, often, if this was his prison, too. Last night, I thought Roger had blown his top and done it, that's all."

Maclyn frowned. "You suggested that Terrence had someone set here to watch you, to report if you left Brookside while he was away. Have you any idea who that might have been?"

Susan shrugged. "How should I know? It might have been Tina Robinson. It might be Elihu. It might even have been Roger!"

"Or it might have been no one," Dr. Smith said quietly. "Mr. Vail must have known you couldn't gamble on that, Mrs. Vail."

The color drained from Susan's face and Rufe saw a strangling rage begin to percolate in her. But before she could reply, the door to the den opened. Into the room came Bim Sutter.

"Maclyn!" His voice had a croaking sound.

"What is it, Bim?" Maclyn said. "We're busy."

"My father!" Bim said. He began to shake all over. "He's dead—and Dr. Swayne says it's murder!"

Rufe Gilson listened to Dr. Swayne's report. Dan Sutter had been poisoned. The assumption was that he had had a doctored drink somewhere, had managed to get home, and had been seized with fatal convulsions after he had gone to bed.

But when and how had the poison been taken? The bottle Emily had taken up to the bedroom had, she said, been knocked over during Dan's final struggle for life. She had cleaned up the mess, and her passion for neatness had caused her to wash out the empty bottle. She always saved and used them for homemade catsup.

Dan Sutter had gone out after the party the night before and had not returned until breakfast time. Whom had he seen who might have given him a drink?

A fact now came to light that Brookside harbored a "blind pig." Elihu reluctantly came out with this information.

"I ain't a stool pigeon," he said, "but this here is serious! I know it'll git Art Somers in trouble, but he's got the only place Dan could of *bought* a drink at that time o' night."

Somers was the local barber. "You think Art Somers might have poisoned Dan?" Maclyn asked.

"No!" Elihu said. "But there was more'n one person needed a drink last night. Dad blast it, I was there myself! And when I left there was another customer there."

"Who?" Maclyn asked.

"This Lindsey feller. Looked kinda seasick—like he needed a drink bad.

Can't say as I blame him, on account of him and the Vails was all kind of mixed up."

"Lindsey was alone?"

"I didn't see no one with him."

"So you don't know whether Dan Sutter turned up there?"

"I told you," Elihu said, "there was jest young Lindsey there when I left. . . ."

ALONZO HOLBROOK glowered at the painting on his easel. The murmur of voices in the next room was driving him insane, he told himself. He kicked open the studio door and stormed into the living room where Liz and Roger sat on the sofa.

"Why don't you go home?" Alonzo demanded of Roger. "Haven't you done enough to Liz?"

"This is my home, too, Father," Liz said. "If you order Roger out, I go with him."

"Please—I don't want you to quarrel over me," Roger said. "It's just that I—"

"It's just that you don't know how to stand on your own two feet," Alonzo stormed. "Hasn't Liz done all she can for you? Hasn't she used her influence to get a lawyer? What has she got to do now? Wash you and hold your hand? Have I got to stop my work while you sit here and snivel?"

Liz stood up.

"I apologize for my father, Roger. I'll go back to your house with you. We can wait there for word from Mr. McEnroe."

"You will *not* go with him!" Alonzo fumed.

"How do you propose to stop me, Father?" Liz asked quietly. "Roger, get your things and we'll walk back to your house."

As they approached Roger's cottage they saw Maclyn Miles on the doorstep, and with him were Rufus and Dr. Smith.

Rufe Gilson watched Liz and Roger come up the trodden snow to the door, and he felt sick. The way Liz clung to Roger said clearly, "This is my man and I mean to stand by him, no matter what. Push him down and you've got to push me down with him." Roger was plainly frightened, and this made Rufe angry. If he was innocent there wasn't any-

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thing to fear. There was something degrading about this obvious dependence on Liz. Rufe wanted somehow to make Liz see how wrong her choice was, how misplaced her loyalty. He couldn't His attempt at a smile even denied her the reassurance she needed.

"We want to talk to you, Lindsey," Maclyn said, in his official voice.

"I didn't suppose you'd come for breakfast," Roger said, with a surprising show of spirit. "If you'll let me past I'll unlock the door."

The house was low-ceilinged with heavy, hand-hewn beams. Roger led the way into the living room, where Maclyn, Dr. Smith, and Rufe took off their coats and hats and laid them on a chair. Rufe watched the doctor curiously. The little gray man sat down in the chair behind Roger's desk, swiveling it so that he could look out the window at the street.

"I know why you're here," Roger said. "After what Susan said at the party last night it's natural you should be. I have nothing to hide. Terrence was my friend and benefactor. I had no reason to kill him, and I didn't."

Maclyn flipped his notebook open.

"Where did you go after you left the Sutters' last night?" he asked.

Roger moistened his lips. "Why—why I came home."

"I see," Maclyn said. "How long did you stay here?"

"How long?"

"Rufe says you were at his house shortly after five this morning."

"That's true," Roger said. "I wanted to talk to Rufe. So I went to see him."

"Where did you go before that?"

The pupils of Roger's eyes seemed to expand. "I—I tell you I came home!"

"Look, Lindsey, evasion isn't going to do any good. We *know* you went to Art Somers' place for a drink."

Roger nodded. "I—I felt pretty shaky. I didn't want to be alone somehow. I—"

"Who was there besides Art, and Elihu Stone?"

"No one. Elihu opened the door for me when I knocked. But he left at once. Then I had a drink or two—"

"Who came in while you were having a drink or two?"

ROGER glanced helplessly at Liz.

"Is this necessary, Maclyn?" he asked. "I mean—"

"Answer the question," Maclyn said.

"Well, Mr. Holbrook and Dan Sutter came in together."

Maclyn jumped as if he'd been stuck by a pin. *"Who* came in?" he demanded.

"I'm sorry, Liz," Roger said. "I don't know why they're asking these questions, but your father did come in with Dan Sutter. He didn't stay long when he saw I was there." Roger looked defiantly at Maclyn, then at Rufe. "Mr. Holbrook doesn't like me. He had a drink with Dan, gave me a sour look, and left."

"You didn't talk to Mr. Holbrook and Dan when they came in?"

"I said hello. Dan waved. Mr. Holbrook just turned his back on me. Then they went into the pantry and had their drink. I stayed where I was—in Art's kitchen. Presently Alonzo left, and Dan came over to where I was sitting. I didn't particularly want to talk but there was no way out. He brought a bottle over to the table and sat down."

"Did you drink from that bottle?"

Roger looked puzzled. "I'm not sure," he said, frowning. "Yes, I guess I did. I remember Dan sweetening my drink from it."

"I see. And what did you talk about?"

"We—we talked about Terrence, naturally." Roger moistened his lips. "He did quite a bit of needling. He—well, he kept prying into what my relationship with Susan had been, and hinting that maybe I'd killed Terrence so I could marry Susan and have her to myself. But he was laughing all the time he said it, Maclyn. He was just riding me."

"Maybe he wasn't kidding," Maclyn said. "Maybe he knew something."

"There wasn't anything to know," Roger said. "Why not ask him yourself?"

Rufe felt his muscles tense as Maclyn pounced.

"You know well enough I can't ask him—because he's dead!"

VI

IF Roger's surprise was faked Rufe thought he belonged in Hollywood. But it was Liz who broke the silence.

"Maclyn, what are you saying! *Dan is dead?"*

"He died about an hour ago," Maclyn said. "He died of poison someone had put in a drink."

Liz's chin went up. "And you think it was Roger!"

"I think it was Roger," Maclyn said grimly.

"You're crazy!" Roger said, and appealed despairingly to Liz. "You don't believe this, do you, Liz?"

"No—no, of course not!" Liz assured him.

Maclyn turned to her. "What do you suggest, then, Liz? That your father poisoned Dan's drink?"

"Take it easy, Maclyn!" Rufe said.

Maclyn hurled his notebook down on the couch.

"Maybe I should just forget the whole thing!" he shouted. "That your idea, Rufe?"

The front door slammed. Into the room strode Alonzo Holbrook. He went straight to Liz, ignoring the others.

"You've heard about Dan?" he asked.

"Yes, Father," Liz said.

Alonzo swung around to Maclyn. "I had a drink last night with Sutter at Art Somers' place. I suppose you've found that out?"

Maclyn nodded.

"And that makes me a suspect?" Alonzo said.

"I guess it does," Maclyn said, wearily.

"Then *do* something!" Alonzo bellowed.

"All right," Maclyn said, "I'll begin by asking you how you happened to be with Dan. You weren't friends, Alonzo. How come you were so chummy at four in the morning? How come you didn't go home with Liz?"

"I did go home with Liz," Alonzo said. "Rufe drove us. But I couldn't sleep. I figured there'd be a gathering at Art's place. So I walked back into town. Just as I was going up to Art's door Dan showed up. We went in. First person I saw was Lindsey. I was in no mood to talk to him. Period. End of story!"

"And then you went home?"

"What do you think I did—took in a spot of the Russian Ballet?" Alonzo tugged at his beard. "I don't want to seem hard or callous. But Dan Sutter's death is a break for you, Maclyn! It provides you with a clue you didn't have before."

"A clue?"

"The poison!" Alonzo said impatiently. "It had to be bought, man! Not here, or anywhere a local person would be known. So check back. Find out when Lindsey was away and where he went. Check on *all* your suspects, if you've got more than one! When you find a sale that matches up with the time, you bring the druggist here and have him identify your man. It'll settle this. Well, that's my piece, and I've spoken it!"

"What Alonzo says makes sense," Maclyn said. "Have you been away from Brookside recently, Lindsey?"

"I think," Roger said, "in view of your attitude, Maclyn, I won't answer any more questions until my lawyer has advised me."

"What lawyer?"

"Liz has wired James McEnroe to ask him to take my case. I think I'll wait till he gets here before I answer any more questions."

Maclyn was jolted. If McEnroe was going to handle Roger's defense, assuming he was charged, the case was going to have to be airtight.

"So we wait for the Honorable Mr. McEnroe to give us permission to go on with the investigation?" he snorted.

Roger turned away. Dr. Smith's mild gray eyes were touched with pity, and he seemed about to say something. Before he could speak, however, there was a knocking at the front door.

"I'll see who it is," Rufe said.

He opened the front door and found Miss Tina Robinson standing there.

"Liz Holbrook here?" Miss Tina asked. "I got a message for her. And I'm goin' to hand it to her in person!"

LIZ, hearing her name, came into the hall, followed by Alonzo. Miss Tina brandished a yellow telegraph form.

"For you, Liz. He ain't comin'. The Honorable James McEnroe. He ain't takin' the case. My! I wonder what Roger Lindsey'll do now?"

"Be good enough to give me the telegram, Miss Tina," Liz said.

"Come only ten minutes ago," Miss Tina said. "I come straight across with it. Knew you was here."

"It's too bad you weren't so watchful last night, Miss Tina," Liz said, angrier than Rufe had ever seen her. "If you had been Roger might not be in this trouble."

She took the telegram and ripped it open. It read:

UNABLE TO TAKE LINDSEY CASE AT PRESENT. INVOLVED IN TRIAL HERE PROBABLY TWO WEEKS. IF LEGAL ADVICE

NEEDED SUGGEST JUDGE CRAVEN THERE IN BROOKSIDE. TOP FLIGHT CRIMINAL LAWYER WHEN ACTIVE. IF AUTHORITIES WILL LET LINDSEY COME HERE I MIGHT SEE HIM.

JAMES MCENROE

Liz put the message back in the envelope. Miss Tina eyed her brightly.

"Well, watchful or not, Liz, I guess there's no doubt about it, is there?"

"Of course there's doubt," Liz said. "He didn't do it. Please excuse me, Miss Tina."

"From what I hear there's no doubt," Miss Tina said, not budging out of Liz's way. "Now they know the poison come from right here in this house!"

Miss Tina's genius for theatrical timing had never shown to better advantage.

"You say 'they' know the poison came from here?" Maclyn snapped. He had come into the hall. "Who is 'they' and how do 'they' know it?"

"Why, Lucy Peterson found out," Miss Tina said. "Lucy does Mr. Lindsey's cleaning. This morning when she heard about Dan Sutter she remembered the poison, and—"

"What poison?" Maclyn cut in.

"The poison Mr. Lindsey kept in the blue bottle amongst his handkerchiefs in the bureau in his bedroom. Lucy always thought 'twas funny he kept the poison there instead of the bathroom cabinet like any *normal* person. So when she heard about Dan she went to look for that bottle and"—Miss Tina's eyes swept the assemblage with triumph—"it was gone! Well, Lucy happened to remember that Dr. Swayne's name was on that bottle, so she went straight to him. *He* said maybe she'd hit on something. *He* said—"

"Listen to me!" Roger interrupted violently. "There was a bottle of stuff in my room. Most of you remember I had an infection in my arm last fall—ringworm. Dr. Swayne prescribed something to put on it. I kept it in the bedroom—if that's a crime!—because I put it on my arm the last thing before I went to bed. I haven't used it for weeks."

"Well, it ain't there now," Miss Tina said. "And Lucy says it was there two days ago."

Maclyn said: "Rufe, get Lucy Peterson over here. I'll call Swayne. We'll get to the bottom of this."

When Lucy Peterson, a tall, gaunt countrywoman arrived, she confirmed Miss Tina's story.

"So you went to Dr. Swayne when you found the bottle was missing?" Maclyn asked. "Just what did Dr. Swayne say?" Maclyn had tried to reach the doctor without success.

"He said arsenic killed Dan Sutter and there was arsenic in the bottle of stuff he'd prescribed for Mr. Lindsey."

ANOTHER strand in the web for Roger Lindsey. Rufe looked at Roger expecting he might give up. Instead he showed only anger.

"This has gone far enough!" he said to Maclyn. "Maybe there was arsenic in the medicine. I don't know what was in the prescription. But I know it wasn't used to poison Dan. The ringworm cleared up, so I threw the bottle away a couple of days ago!"

"Where did you throw it?" Maclyn demanded.

"In the trash basket!" Roger almost shouted. "Where else?"

"Where's the basket now?"

"It's been emptied, of course! Onto the trash pile back of the house."

"Let's go look," Maclyn said.

"It won't do you no good to look for it," said Lucy. "The garbage man took away the whole pile yesterday afternoon. They burn everything on the town dump."

There was a moment of complete silence. Everyone knew that Roger would not be able to prove his statement. However, they would not be able to disprove it. Had Roger foreseen that?

Maclyn picked up his hat and coat. "I'm going to see Doc Swayne," he announced. "We'll find out about this poison thing. I'm not placing you under arrest, Lindsey, but you're to stay where I can find you."

"You'll find me," Roger said, "at Judge Craven's. I'm through talking without legal advice."

The front door slammed behind him. A moment later Maclyn also left.

"I guess there's no need for you to stay any longer, Lucy," Rufe said.

The moment the door had closed behind Lucy Peterson, Liz faced Dr. Smith. Alonzo had gone.

"Roger's telling the truth!" Liz said.

"I'll go part way with you on that," the doctor said. "I think *he* thinks he has."

"*Thinks* he has?" Liz was confused.

"My dear Liz, truth is elusive," the doctor said. "So let's see what Roger just has told us, and assume that what he has told us is true. He has said he had no motive for killing Terrence, that Terrence was his friend and benefactor. He has said he didn't poison Dan Sutter. He has said the poison bottle missing from his room was medicine for ringworm, was thrown away, and has in all probability been burned up on the public dump. On the other hand we know that he has betrayed both his friend and benefactor, and the girl he loves." The doctor glanced at Rufe and Liz. "Have I left anything out?"

"I think not," Rufe said.

"But has Roger left anything out?" the doctor asked.

"Why should he leave anything out?" Liz wanted to know. "Why should he hide anything from us?"

"Not from us, Liz," the Doctor said. "From *himself!*"

"That's psychological talk, Doctor, and it's over my head," Rufe said.

"It's just plain common sense," the doctor said. "Here's a young man with a passion for honesty. It's a peculiar concept of honesty, but his own! When he hears that Terrence is coming home he's determined to 'tell all'! He's going to say, 'See how honest I am? I tell you that I have betrayed you.'" The doctor made a wry face. "I suggest he was in a torment, waiting for the moment to demonstrate his honesty to Terrence. Because of that I suggest he spent the whole evening of the party saying to himself: 'Shall I take him aside now and tell him? Where is he now? Is he alone?'"

"And you think when Terrence went out he followed him and—"

"Not so fast, Rufe. All I'm suggesting is that he must have spent the evening in an agony of indecision, watching Terrence, wondering if the opportunity would present itself. And then"—the doctor spoke with emphasis—"Terrence went out!"

Rufe clamped his teeth over the stem of his pipe.

"He saw Terrence go, *if* he was watching him so closely. It was the chance he'd been waiting for. But if he's telling the truth, he didn't take it."

"Precisely," the doctor said. "And why not, Rufe?"

"Probably lost his nerve."

The doctor shook his head. "I don't think so."

"If Terrence wasn't alone—" Liz said, in a small voice.

"Exactly, Liz!" the doctor said. "If there was someone with Terrence it wasn't the right moment for confession!"

"Then Roger must have seen who went out with Terrence! And the person who went out with Terrence must have been—"

"Yes!" the doctor said.

For a time longer he talked, but of the personal problems of Rufe and Liz.

"It's your turn now, son," he finally said quietly, and walked out of the room. . . .

MACLYN MILES lit a cigarette and squinted at Dr. Smith through the cloud of pale smoke. They were sitting in Dr. Swayne's waiting room while Dr. Swayne was in his consulting room attending to a patient.

"Well, Doctor?" Maclyn said. There was no hostility in his voice.

"Only this. When you're asking Dr. Swayne about the medicine, remember that arsenic was only a part of its contents. And some of the medicine had of course already been used. How big was the bottle? Would there be enough arsenic even in a full bottle to constitute a fatal dose?"

"Look, Doctor, I appreciate your passion for detail. But our job is to build a case, not to destroy one."

"Any case, Mr. Miles? Are we out to hang someone, regardless of his guilt?"

"I resent that," Maclyn said. "What's more, I don't go for this other point of yours at all! How could Lindsey forget that he saw someone go out with Terrence? Perhaps he has a reason for not telling us. But forget? I can't swallow that."

"If you were in my business, Miles, you'd know that people forget a great deal more than they remember."

"But this happened only last night!" Maclyn said, in an exasperated voice. "Maybe he's protecting someone, but I'm blessed if he's forgotten."

"He *is* protecting someone, if I'm right," the doctor said. "He's protecting

himself. Maclyn, Lindsey is a neurotic. He tells us that Terrence was his friend, his benefactor, that he owed him everything. Yet he betrayed Terrence, made love to his wife, and apparently hasn't written a line of the novel he was paid to write. Does he love Terrence? Of course not, or he couldn't do these things to him. He hated Terrence. He hated him so violently that his feeling of guilt is so enormous he can't let someone else pay for the crimes. That's why he forgets what he saw. He *can't* help you punish the criminal because his own guilt is so great."

"I'd love to see you try to sell that theory to a judge and jury," Maclyn said. "I wonder if the Attorney General wouldn't consider four dollars a day a little high for that kind of detective work?"

"Which is why," the doctor said, drily, "I'm contributing that extremely generous fee to the local Community Chest."

DR. SWAYNE came out of his consulting room, expressed pleasure at meeting Dr. Smith.

"I've read about you in the journals, sir," he said. "I'm afraid we old-timers have it hard enough keeping up with the new developments in practical medicine without getting to know much about these new ideas you psychiatric fellows put forward. But I have to admit a lot of it is 'horse sense.' "

"Thanks," Dr. Smith said. "I'm in need of a testimonial. Miles has a low opinion of me at the moment."

"Maybe he isn't going to like me either," Dr. Swayne said. He took a piece of paper out of his pocket. "I don't know if you can read a prescription, Miles, but here's what was in that medicine of Lindsey's. There was arsenic in it all right. Maybe enough to kill a man if he drank it down. But so help me, it would have made the foulest tasting drink this side of castor oil!"

Maclyn frowned. "But it might have killed Dan if it had been put in his drink?"

"Most likely it would," Swayne said. "If you figured Dan committed suicide, I'd say okay. But if you're saying someone else put the stuff in Dan's drink and he drank it without knowing it, I'd say no." He glanced at Dr. Smith. "I understand, sir, you saw Dan when he arrived home. Did he act queer?"

"He acted drunk," Dr. Smith said.

Maclyn's mouth was a thin, straight line. "You're trying to tell me that Lindsey couldn't have poisoned Dan?"

"I'm just telling you *nobody* could have poisoned Dan with that medicine," Swayne said, "without Dan's knowing his drink'd been tampered with. I don't think the medicine was used."

"And if it wasn't the medicine," Dr. Smith said mildly, "you have no reason to suspect Lindsey any more than anyone else."

Maclyn swore fervently.

Maclyn and Dr. Smith went out onto the sidewalk. "I had a hunch about that medicine," Dr. Smith said, "but I hadn't thought of anything so simple as the taste barring its use."

"Dan would have drunk canned heat if he couldn't get anything else," Maclyn retorted, a little stubbornly.

"But he could get something else."

"All right," Maclyn said. "All *right!* But Lindsey could have used something else. He sat with Dan. He drank with him."

"So did Alonzo Holbrook," Dr. Smith said. "And Alonzo said he met Dan as he was going into Somers' place. That was anywhere from three-quarters of an hour to an hour after Dan left his house. Where was Dan during that time? Whom did he see? No one's come forward to volunteer that information. That's odd in itself, don't you think?"

Maclyn faced the doctor.

"Look," he said. "I don't take any stock in this forgetting theory of yours, understand?"

"I understand," the doctor said, his eyes twinkling.

"And if someone did leave the party with Terrence I don't see why no one else noticed."

"Maybe nobody else cared," the doctor said.

"Okay. So I *will* admit this. If someone did go out with Terrence, Lindsey'd have been the most likely to notice. There's a chance he did see someone and hasn't told us because—because he was afraid to."

"Fear is certainly involved," the doctor admitted.

"Let's go over to Judge Craven's and talk to him," Maclyn said. "We can put him at ease about the medicine. When he sees we're not riding that horse, maybe he'll loosen up."

VII

JUDGE CRAVEN occupied a stone house, evidently recently built, solid and compact, though ivy vines climbed over the walls as in an age-old place. The door opened and Judge Craven greeted them.

"Maclyn!" he said. "Come in, come in." He stood aside to admit them to an oak-paneled entrance hall. "Is there anything new, Maclyn?"

"Not much," Maclyn said. "We came over here to talk to your client."

"Susan's not here," the judge said.

"I'm not talking about Susan," Maclyn said. "It's Lindsey we want to talk with."

"Lindsey?"

"He's here, isn't he?" Maclyn said.

"Why, no!" Craven said. "What's Lindsey got to do with me? I scarcely know him."

"He tried to retain James McEnroe," Maclyn said. "McEnroe wired he couldn't come and recommended you. Roger set out about an hour ago to see you. Have you been here during the last hour?"

"Yes, of course. Lindsey hasn't been here."

"Can I use your phone?" Maclyn asked.

"Just inside the study door."

"Miles suspects the boy," Dr. Smith said to the judge, "and made it pretty hot for him. He thought he needed a lawyer, and he started out to see you. Evidently he changed his mind."

Maclyn's voice, sharp and angry, came to them from the next room. "Hello. Rufe? Has Lindsey come back there? No. He hasn't shown up at Judge Craven's. How about Liz? He may have gone to her house. . . . Oh, she's there with you? Look, Rufe, call Alonzo and see if Roger's there."

Maclyn came out of the study. His dark eyes glittered.

"Well, how do you like this for apples, Doctor?"

"The boy stopped somewhere," Dr. Smith said. "He'll turn up."

"Why didn't he come here? It was urgent!"

"Miles, there may have been other things much more urgent than seeing a lawyer. Like making his peace with Susan Vail, for example."

Maclyn went back to the phone, made two more calls, then rejoined the others.

"Well, how much evidence do you want, Dr. Smith? He hasn't been to Susan's. He hasn't been at the store or the Inn."

"Maybe he went for a walk," Dr. Smith said. "He had a lot to think about."

"He took a powder!" Maclyn said. "He's gone! Skipped!"

"But where could he go?" the judge asked. "He has no car."

"Thumbed a ride," Maclyn said.

"Nobody in town would take him away," the judge said.

"You think only local people drive on the State Highway?" Maclyn demanded.

The phone rang and Maclyn ducked into the study to answer. When he came back he said, "That was Rufe. Lindsey isn't at Alonzo's. He's gone. Let's not kid ourselves."

"Well, we're not going to find him here," the doctor said. "I suggest we really look for him, Miles."

Maclyn put through a call to State Police headquarters in Amory. He told his story.

"You fellows know Lindsey by sight," he said. "What? Well, get a report as fast as you can." He turned away from the phone. "We've had an incredible piece of luck," he said. "There's been a road block at either end of the valley all morning—some kind of survey by the Department of Motor Vehicles. If Lindsey went through in a car at either end, we'll soon know."

"And if he didn't?" Dr. Smith asked.

"Then he's trying to make it over the hills."

"You mean there's only one road leading out of the valley?" the doctor asked.

"Only one main road. There are a couple of dirt roads that go up over the hills but they're impassable this time of year."

IN FIFTEEN minutes they knew Roger Lindsey had not gone through either road block.

"We'll have to hunt for him on foot," Maclyn said, "and that means swearing in a posse and getting them out as quickly as we can."

"Look here, Miles," Dr. Smith said, "this begins to have all the earmarks of a lynching. You still haven't any real

evidence against the boy."

"What more evidence do you want than his flight? Don't you agree we've got to go after him, Judge?"

The judge studied the end of his cigar. "Yes, I think you do, Maclyn," he said, "but Dr. Smith is right in a way. Lindsey may have been frightened into a foolish move, but it doesn't prove his guilt."

"As far as I'm concerned it's open and shut," Maclyn said. "Incidentally, Doctor, I don't think the State will need your services any longer. From now on it's simply routine."

Dr. Smith sensed the delight Maclyn felt. He'd wanted all along to solve this by himself and now he believed the case had broken his way.

"So I am among the unemployed," he said drily. He turned up the collar of his coat. "I'll be going."

Dr. Smith walked along the road toward town, his chin buried in the upturned collar of his gray overcoat. He was thinking how quickly people jump at conclusions—and also at the opportunity for violence. He had an unpleasant vision of Roger Lindsey, floundering desperately through the deep snow with a posse, likely armed, after him.

The warning of an automobile horn brought him back to where he was and he stepped off to the side of the road to let the car pass. It was then that he noticed that he was opposite the entrance to the Vail's house. The doctor imagined Susan Vail, packing, eager to get away from this place she had thought of as a prison.

He turned and walked up the path to the Vails' house. Though he was no longer officially in the case, he could not efface himself from it entirely.

A maid in a black dress and white apron and cap, opened the door.

"Will you tell Mrs. Vail Dr. Smith would like to speak with her?"

"I—I don't know if she'll see anyone," the girl said.

"I was here earlier this morning," Dr. Smith said. "I guess you hadn't come to work then."

"Oh, I stay here at the house," the girl told him. "I was gettin' Mrs. Vail's breakfast. Judge Craven said he'd answer the door. I guess he aimed to keep people from botherin' Mrs. Vail, but when he saw it was Maclyn Miles and all, he let you in, and I—"

"Will you tell Mrs. Vail I'm here?" the doctor interrupted.

"I'll tell her, but she's packin' to get away as soon as Maclyn—Mr. Miles—will let her, and I don't know if she'll—"

"May I come in while you tell her?" the doctor asked. "It's quite cold out here."

"What am I thinking of?" the girl said. "I guess we're all kind of upset and excited. You come right in, Dr. Smith." She led him across the hall to the den. "I'm sorry the place was in such a mess when you were here this morning—cocktail tray and everything all around. But I'd cleaned up after Mr. and Mrs. Vail went to the party last night and I didn't know anyone had been in here after they—that is *she*—got home, and what with all the excitement I—"

"Just a minute," Dr. Smith said. "What's your name?"

"Clara, sir. Clara Potter."

"And you say after Mr. and Mrs. Vail left for the party, Clara, you cleaned up this room? You took away the cocktail things?"

"Yes, sir, and I didn't think there was anything in here this morning, but I guess it was natural Mrs. Vail should want a drink, so—"

"Do you mind, Clara? Would you tell Mrs. Vail I'm here?"

HE stood looking at the polished surface of the coffee table in front of the couch. He remembered how it had looked that morning; the tray, the silver ice bucket filled with water, the gin and vermouth bottles and the two martini glasses, each with the dregs of a cocktail in it.

Susan came in, still wearing the wool skirt and the claret-colored sweater.

"What's happened?" she asked. "Where's Maclyn?"

"You've heard about Dan, I suppose. Well, now Roger Lindsey has apparently skipped town and Maclyn and a posse are trying to find him."

"Then Roger did do it?" she asked.

"He's the Number One suspect," Dr. Smith said. "It's nice of you to take time to see me, Mrs. Vail. The judge tells me you're packing preparatory to leaving town?"

"Is that against the rules?" she asked. She sat down on the couch and lit a cigarette. "I don't imagine I have to draw you a diagram of how I feel about

this town. What can I do for you, Dr. Smith?"

"You can tell me," he said quietly, "what Dan Sutter wanted when he came here last night."

She took the cigarette slowly out of her mouth. "How did you know?" she asked.

"It was a shot in the dark," he admitted. "You see, we've been trying to guess where Dan spent an hour between the time he left his house and when we next heard of him at Art Somers' place."

"That was dirty pool, Doctor," she said.

"It was dirty pool for you not to have told us when you heard Dan was dead."

"Don't you think I've had enough trouble?" she demanded angrily. "The man had been pawing me all night! When he turned up here my impulse was to send him away. But I—well, I didn't want to be alone. I told him he could come in for one drink. I'd just made myself a pitcher of martinis. I got another glass for him."

"What did he want, Mrs. Vail?"

"Would you like a lecture on the bees and the flowers, Dr. Smith?"

"Your husband had just been murdered," the doctor said.

"Are you insulting me or Dan?" she asked. "Dan was such an insufferable egotist, Doctor, that all Terrence's death meant to him was that I was alone. Well, for your private information, Doctor, Dan was out of luck!"

"Very much out of luck," the doctor said. "Someone fed him a poisoned drink and he died."

Her eyes narrowed. "So that's really what you want to know," she said. "Whether I poisoned him? Well, I didn't. But I don't expect you to believe me."

"My dear Mrs. Vail, I *am* inclined to believe you. I have just learned from your maid that the cocktail glasses I saw here this morning were not left over from the evening before. If there'd been poison in one of those glasses I don't think you'd have left them here."

"But since you didn't know about the glasses until you got here you must have had some other reason for coming."

He smiled faintly. "I represent a minority of one," he said, "who is unconvinced that there is enough evidence against Roger Lindsey to assume his guilt. I go further than that. I don't think he's skipped town, and therefore I'm extremely anxious about him."

"Anxious? Why?"

"Someone murdered your husband and Dan Sutter. I hope that if Miles' posse finds Roger they find him alive."

"But why on earth should anyone want to murder Roger? He's a harmless dope!"

"He may have remembered something," the doctor said, and his voice grew urgent. "I watched you at the party last night, Mrs. Vail. You were pretending to ignore your husband, but you were watching to see how he liked it, showing him that your imprisonment here hadn't been too great a hardship. When he went out, for some air, or a smoke, or simply to get away from the show you were putting on you must have seen him."

"I did."

The doctor moistened his lips.

"Who went with him, Mrs. Vail?"

She looked at him, frowning. Finally she said, "I honestly cannot say that anyone went with him."

"You mean you don't remember?"

Her eyes narrowed. "I can see him leaving," she said. "He was watching me—with Dan. He put his drink down on the mantel and threw his cigarette into the fireplace. Then he walked out without looking at me again. I—I'm almost certain he went out alone."

"Did you notice Lindsey at the time? Was he in the main room when Terrence went out?"

"He was," she said promptly. "Glooming. He was watching Rufe Gilson dance with the Holbrook girl."

The doctor sighed. "I could be wrong," he said. "And yet I'd swear Roger would have followed your husband out if he'd been alone. . . ."

SOME twenty men had been sworn in as deputies, and two posses were formed. Elihu Stone headed one group, Rufe and four other men made up the other. Rufe and his party took the north side of the main street, looking for some sign of Roger's having crossed the golf course to the highway or toward the hills to the west of the valley. They went into each back yard looking for foot-

prints, and asked questions, with completely negative results. No one had seen Roger, nor when they reached the golf course could they see a single track in the expanses of fresh snow.

The men fanned out to cover the golf course. Rufe took his part, but it was mechanical. They weren't going to find Roger Lindsey in the woods or hills. he told himself. Maclyn had jumped to the obvious, as usual, and they were wasting time.

At length, one of the men of his party rejoined him.

"No sense hunting here any longer, Rufe," he said. "It's a washout. He must have took off through the marshland. We might as well join up with Maclyn and Elihu and see what they found."

Rufe looked at his watch. They had been out here for more than an hour. It was after three and the sun had disappeared behind leaden clouds. It looked as if they were in for more snow.

"Let's go," he said.

They walked back to town and headed for the church and the marshland behind it. There was a hopeless look on Maclyn's face as they joined forces with his party.

"There isn't a sparrow track out this way," he said.

"Nothing on the golf course side either," Rufe said.

Maclyn stamped his feet in the snow. "What do you make of it? He had to go somewhere!"

Elihu, a gun tucked under his arm, decorated the snow with tobacco juice. "He didn't go out of here on foot and he didn't go out of here in a car," he said. "That don't leave much to figure on."

"It doesn't leave anything!" Maclyn said.

"There's the Indian rope trick," Elihu said drily, "or an invisible helicopter."

"Or someone is hiding him," Rufe added.

"Who would help him?" Maclyn asked.

"What makes you think someone is helping him?"

"But you just said—"

"I said someone was hiding him. Maclyn, I've got a hunch Dr. Smith was right. We've been too quick on the trigger. I've got a hunch the murderer is hiding Roger."

"The devil with your hunches," Maclyn said. "What do we do?"

"Only one thing you *can* do," Elihu said. "Search every dad-blasted house in town. . . ."

DR. SMITH walked slowly away from the Vails' house. He had found one of the missing pieces to the puzzle—he had accounted for an hour of Dan Sutter's time the night before. What he had hoped for most had, however, eluded him. He had arrived at the same conclusion Rufe and Maclyn were just reaching—that Roger Lindsey was in mortal danger. He would have approved the idea of a house-to-house search, but without having much hope it would help Roger. They would have to have the answer much more quickly than could be accomplished by that.

There was only one way to get it. By persistence. There was still others connected with the affair, who might, on questioning, drop a clue; someone who might have wanted to talk to Terrence alone; someone who had touched the pattern of the crime at other points. Dr. Smith turned up the collar of his coat and jammed his hands deep into the pockets.

He had walked about a mile when he reached his destination. He walked up the path to the door and knocked. Liz Holbrook opened the door.

"Dr. Smith! Come in! Is there any news?"

"I've heard nothing," he said. He took off his coat and galoshes. "Liz, is your father here?"

"He's in the studio."

"Do you suppose you could persuade him to give up painting for the day?" the doctor asked.

"I'll try," Liz said.

VIII

THERE was a bright fire burning in the living room. Dr. Smith spread his hands before it as Liz went out. He heard the deep rumble of Alonzo's voice, then Alonzo came clumping in, wiping his hands on a paint-stained cloth.

"Doctor," he said, without preliminaries, "I owe you an apology. I did a lot of fancy sneering at your psychological stuff, but it seems you were able to do something in five minutes there in Lindsey's cottage that I've been trying

six months to do—bring Liz to her senses."

The doctor smiled inquiringly.

"Oh, she told me about the heart-to-heart talk she had with you," said Alonzo. "And you were right, Doctor, dead right, as she sees now. As you told her, real love is based on trust, not treachery, and what she believed was love for a neurotic boy was nothing more or less than a sense of her own guilt at how she had treated Rufe. What she felt for Lindsey was not love, but hate—for herself. However!" He took the doctor's hand in a powerful grip. "Anything I have is yours, including a bottle of eighteen-year-old Bourbon. Will you have a drink with me?"

"I'll take a rain check, if you don't mind," the doctor said. "Though I'd like to get blind drunk and forget this whole thing. But until they find Lindsey—"

"I'll be blasted if I understand why he ran away," Alonzo said.

"'Did she fall or was she pushed?'" the doctor murmured. "I'm afraid I think she was pushed, Mr. Holbrook."

Alonzo scowled as he filled and lighted his pipe. "Liz has told me your theory about his not remembering that he saw someone go out with Terrence. You think he did remember, and that person has—well, removed the danger?"

The doctor leaned back in his chair. "You're an imaginative, creative person, Mr. Holbrook. Would you care to listen to an invention of mine and give it your critical comment?"

"Shoot," Alonzo said.

Dr. Smith stared into the fire, the tips of his fingers pressed together.

"There is a man whom we shall call Alonzo Holbrook," he said. "The most precious thing in the world to him is his daughter. This daughter gets herself into a confused state over two young men, and from Alonzo's point of view makes the wrong choice. He's right, in a way, because the young man promptly deserts the daughter to have an affair with a married woman. Nothing Alonzo can do will persuade the daughter to forget the young man. Alonzo hates him for hurting his daughter. So when the married woman's husband returns, after a lengthy business trip, one course of action is clearly indicated. The married woman and the young man must be separated. Alonzo seizes the opportunity at a party to talk to the husband. They walk out to get a breath of fresh air—"

"Dr. Smith!" Liz protested.

"Shut up, baby!" Alonzo said, curiously tense.

"Alonzo tells the man that his wife is no good, and to get her out of town in a hurry. The husband tells Alonzo to go peddle his papers. Perhaps he says something about Alonzo's daughter, which so enrages Alonzo that he picks up a stone and bashes the husband over the head with it."

"This is absurd," Liz said. "I—"

"I told you to shut up, baby," Alonzo said.

"Alonzo regrets what he has done," the doctor went on. "But he thinks, why should I go to the electric chair for this if I don't have to? The husband is responsible for the whole mess. It has started to snow. Alonzo thinks, if no one comes out here for half an hour the evidence will be buried. He goes back to the house and waits. It's nearly an hour before the husband is found and by then there isn't a shred of evidence against Alonzo—or so he thinks."

ALONZO peered at him keenly.

"You mean there *was* evidence?" he asked.

"He was seen!" the doctor said calmly. "By Dan Sutter. I think Dan managed to take him aside and insist that they meet later. Alonzo agrees. He has to."

"That's good!" Alonzo said. "I wondered how you were going to account for Alonzo's having the poison. He had time to come home and get it!"

"I thought it was ingenious," the doctor said. "He gets the poison then meets Dan at Somers' place. They drink together and he slips the poison into Dan's drink. He seems to be safe again."

"But he isn't?" Alonzo asked.

"No," Dr. Smith said. "He hears my theory that Roger saw someone go out with Terrence and that he's forgotten it. Alonzo doesn't believe in my 'psychological stuff,' but he does know Roger would be loath to implicate him because of Liz. Roger already had attempted to conceal the fact that Alonzo was at Somers' place. He would probably conceal the fact that he saw Alonzo go out with Terrence—until the heat got too much for him and he had to tell to save himself. Well, Maclyn is making the heat hot, and Alonzo realizes that soon

Roger will break down. He might as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb. So he waits for Roger to leave his house, and —well, that accounts for Roger's disappearance."

"And he is now safely buried in my cellar," Alonzo said.

"Something like that." Dr. Smith raised his eyes to Alonzo's face. "How do you like it?"

"It's terrific," Alonzo said. "There's only one trouble with it—there isn't a word of truth in it."

"Where did I slip up?" the doctor asked.

Alonzo lighted his pipe again. "One," he said. "Alonzo would never have bothered to pick up a rock to sock Terrence. He would have broken him in half with these!" He held out his huge, hairy hands. "Two! You'd still have to prove the possession of poison. Three! He wasn't there when you expounded your theory about Roger's forgetting. He'd come home some time before that. I didn't hear it from Liz myself till *after* Roger had disappeared. Four! How would he spirit Roger away? And finally, why would he bother? Even if Roger saw Alonzo, or anyone else, leave the room with Terrence, you'd still have to *prove* that someone committed the murder." Alonzo chuckled. "You've got Alonzo figured wrong, Doctor! And now will you sample that Bourbon?"

IN the center of the village of Brookside Maclyn and his deputies were going slowly and methodically from house to house searching for Roger Lindsey. They explained, patiently, that the search didn't mean that the householder was under suspicion, but there was the chance Roger might have managed to get in and hide himself. That was the easiest way around a difficult situation.

When Miss Tina Robinson answered the knock at her door and saw Elihu standing there, the shotgun under his arm, she expressed her feelings without restraint.

"You put down that gun, Elihu Stone! What do you mean by standing there, pointing a gun at me?"

Elihu bared his tobacco-stained teeth in a grin. "I ain't pointin' it and it ain't loaded," he said. "But I got to go through the house. Us Boy Scouts figure this Lindsey is hidden somewhere in town. We got to check everywhere."

"Well, if you have to, you have to," Miss Tina said. "But you can leave that gun outside, and you can stomp some of the snow off your feet before you spread it all over my carpets."

"Don't worry, Tina," Elihu said. "I promise not to mess up that sexy black underwear you keep hid upstairs, or—"

"Elihu Stone, if you don't watch out you'll have me real provoked!" Miss Tina said.

Across the green in the Sutters' house Maclyn, heading the search party there, found Emily in the sitting room.

"I'd give anything not to have to break in on you, Emily," he said unhappily.

"It's all right, Maclyn," she replied, without lifting her red-rimmed eyes. "Search any place you want."

"Thank you, Emily. And if there's anything I can do for you—"

"Just end this, Maclyn! So we can find a way to start to live again!"

In the Holbrook home, Alonzo threw another log on the fire.

"I think I know why you sprang that invention of yours on me, Doctor," he said. "You were just trying out a theory, and I think you got it right. The point is to find the person who'll fit every detail of it."

"Do you have ideas?" Dr. Smith asked.

Alonzo tugged at his beard. "I'm not used to thinking along these lines, Doctor," he said. "But one thing sticks in my craw. That's the contradiction."

"Contradiction?"

"In the murderer's character. It looks as if Terrence was killed on the spur of the moment, by someone in a sudden fit of rage who picked up a stone and brained him. That doesn't look planned. But Dan's poisoning was planned—it was calculated and cold-blooded. And if someone's trapped Roger and done away with him, that was calculated, too. That's what I mean by contradiction. One minute he's impulsive, and the next minute he's a long-range planner."

"That isn't necessarily a contradiction," the doctor said. "Let's say I'm angry at you about something. I come here to see you but you're out. I go into your studio. The sight of your pictures enrages me and in a fit of temper I take a kick at one of them and—"

"And I murder you," Alonzo said.

The doctor chuckled. "I didn't come here to kick a hole in the picture. I know it's valuable. I begin to think now how I can cover up what I've done. I try to figure out how to patch up the canvas. I might even try to paint over the damaged spot. The impulsive, untrolled action works like a cold shower and starts me thinking and planning." The doctor hesitated. "I'd better get back to the village. I want to find that boy!"

As he left, the clock in the Holbrooks' hall showed it was five-thirty. Outside it was already pitch-black. He had walked about five hundred yards in the crusted snow when it seemed to him that he heard the crunch of footsteps behind him. He stopped and looked around. He could see nothing and he could hear nothing. Probably an echo trick. He lowered his chin into his collar and started on.

Then he heard them again, clear, hurried, as though the person were walking on rougher ground than the road. The doctor stopped, and this time there were two or three clearly audible steps and the plop of sliding snow. Then silence. He spotted the sound as coming from the side of the road to his left and a little behind. There were woods on that side, dark and impenetrable.

"Hello!" Dr. Smith called. There was no reply.

It was a good three-quarters of a mile to the Vail house which was the next one on the road. Part of that, he recalled, ran through a dugway with high banks on either side. He debated whether to go back to the Holbrooks'. Then, with quiet determination, he started walking toward the village once more. Instantly he was aware of the movement behind him in the brush. He quickened his pace. So did the pursuer. He stopped short.

"Look," he said, in a reasonable voice, "why not come out and talk it over?"

DEAD silence. The doctor took a step or two toward the underbrush. There wasn't a sound. He stopped and listened for breathing. The dugway was just ahead. Once he got into it if his pursuer planned an attack it was the perfect place. He couldn't run off the road on either side, and the attack would come from the top of the embankment. He should have borrowed a flashlight from Alonzo. He would have felt less cornered if he could have seen a few feet in front of him.

"Well, let it come," he told himself. "Let's get it over with."

He started forward briskly. Instantly the sliding and scurrying in the underbrush began again.

As he entered the dugway Dr. Smith was aware that whoever was in the underbrush couldn't be more than ten yards behind him, and was moving up the embankment to the left. He edged over to the far side of the road. At the center of the dugway he stopped, and faced the left-hand embankment.

"Well, come on!" he called out.

The movement above had also stopped and for a moment the whole world seemed as quiet as a tomb. Then a throbbing noise broke in on the doctor's consciousness. A car was coming! Instantly there was a wild scurrying from the top of the embankment. The pursuer was taking it on the run. A yellow shaft of light from the car swept the embankment, and Dr. Smith, peering eagerly upward saw only the trembling of a scrub pine from whose branches the snow had been knocked.

The headlights were full on the doctor now and the car came to a quick, jolting stop.

"Dr. Smith!" It was Rufe in his jeep.

"Have you found him?" the doctor asked.

"Not a trace," Rufe said. "I was coming out to tell Liz. Maclyn's given half of us time off for dinner. The rest of them are still searching houses."

The doctor looked back at the embankment. "If your timing had been just a shade better, Rufe, we might have had the murderer." And he related his experience.

"We'd better have a look at the trail," Rufe said. "We can follow him, Doctor. He's only just ahead of us."

He pulled the jeep over to the side of the road and switched off the engine. For a moment both men were silent, listening. The sound of another car reached them, coming from the direction of Alonzo's. It killed any chance they had of hearing the sounds of retreat.

"He'll break to the road as soon as

it's safe," Rufe said. "That'll be the end of the trail, unless there's another car after this."

He stood in the middle of the road and flagged down the approaching headlights. It was a pickup truck, driven by a farmer Rufe knew.

"Haven't passed anybody for a couple of miles," he told Rufe.

"Keep your eyes peeled on the way into town," Rufe said. "Call me at Alonzo Holbrook's if you see anyone walking to the village."

"Sure thing, Rufe."

The truck drove on. Rufe got a flashlight out of the jeep.

"Let's have a look up top," he said.

He and Dr. Smith climbed the steep embankment to the pine tree. The light from the flash showed the pursuer's trail clearly enough, and it was evident that he was backtracking toward Alonzo's.

"When did you first hear him?" Rufe asked.

"Soon after I'd left the Holbrooks'," the doctor said. "I can't tell you exactly, because I might not have paid much attention to it at first."

"The trail will show us where he started from," Rufe said. "You game to follow it?"

"My dear Rufe, nothing on earth could stop me!" the doctor said.

THE trail ran parallel with a stone wall that bordered the road. Suddenly Rufe stopped. From just beyond a rise of ground they heard the sound of an ax being used to chop wood. Rufe switched off the flash. He motioned to the doctor to move quietly, and they crept to the top of the rise.

There, in a clearing, was the Holbrooks' house. The trail they'd been following led straight to the clearing. In the center of it was a lantern resting on a block of wood, and by its light Alonzo was splitting kindling. Standing to one side was the bundled figure of a man, leaning on a blackthorn walking stick. Judge Craven.

"Hey, Alonzo!" Rufe called. "It's Rufe."

He and the Doctor walked down into the yard. Rufe could feel his heart beats accelerating. The trail ended here in the yard.

"Dr. Smith!" Alonzo said. "What's wrong?"

Rufe was looking down at Alonzo's boots and trouser legs. They were bone dry. Not so the judge's! He was wearing galoshes, but his trousers showed signs of dampness, as did the bottom edge of his overcoat.

"How long have you been out here?" Rufe asked.

"Couple of minutes," Alonzo said. "What's going on?"

"And you, Judge Craven?"

"I was out for a walk," the judge said calmly. "I saw Alonzo's lantern here in the yard and came in from the road. What's wrong with you two? You act as though something had happened."

"When I left your house, Mr. Holbrook," the doctor said, "I was followed. I think whoever followed me intended to attack me in the dugway. Rufe came along in his jeep in time to forestall it. But we followed his trail, and it leads right into your yard, Alonzo."

"How much of a start did he have on you?" Alonzo asked.

Rufe glanced at the doctor. "I suppose it was a good five minutes—while you told me the story, Doctor, and I talked to Ed Brush in his truck."

"I've only been out here a couple of minutes," Alonzo said. He pointed to three or four sticks of kindling.

Rufe turned to the judge. "Look here, sir, I'm not much of a hand at beating around the brush. You've obviously been walking in deep snow. Ed Brush said he hadn't passed anybody for a couple of miles. You didn't come from the village, because I came that way."

"You're quite right to ask questions, Rufe," the judge said, unruffled. "The timber road comes out just about twenty yards below here, as you know. I saw

the lights of that truck as I was coming through the woods. When I got out on the main road here I saw Alonzo's lantern, called to him, and came in to pass the time of day."

It could fit, Rufe told himself.

"As you came out onto the main road you didn't see anyone?" Rufe asked.

"Not a soul."

"Our man really plays in luck," Dr. Smith said. "Last night, after he had killed Terrence, the snow came to his rescue. Tonight luck's handed him some split-second timing. Minutes, even seconds, one way or the other and he'd have run head-on into Mr. Holbrook or the judge. That kind of luck can't last forever."

Rufe looked searchingly at the doctor. He couldn't tell whether the little gray man had accepted the judge's story without question or whether he was trying to imply that they should drop the idea now since they had no proof.

"I'll drive you back to town, Doctor, after I've spoken to Liz," Rufe said.

"And I'll go along with you, if you don't mind," the judge said. "I—I've lost my taste for walking."

IX

GOING past Roger's house with its unlighted windows, Rufe and his companions stopped in front of the Sutters'. It was an awkward moment, for the undertaker and his crew were just carrying Dan Sutter's casketed body in the front door. Maclyn Miles came out to the jeep.

"Dr. Smith, I—I guess I owe you an apology," he said.

"Nonsense, Miles. You were doing your economic duty." The doctor could not resist that one and was ashamed of himself. "How can I help?"

"I'm stymied," Maclyn admitted. "I've rechecked on the road blocks. Lindsey didn't go through."

"Lindsey didn't go out by car," the doctor said. "He's still somewhere here."

"You must have a theory about this, Dr. Smith? I'd crawl on my hands and knees for any kind of a lead."

The doctor was silent a moment. "There are a lot of pieces that should go together to form a theory, but they won't jell," he said finally. "When that happens, it means some of the things we've accepted as facts are not facts. For example, we assumed that Terrence was murdered, impulsively, by someone in a sudden rage who then killed Dan because Dan knew, and Dan, being an opportunist, was trying to blackmail him. We assumed he has spirited Lindsey away because Lindsey, too, saw or heard something. Well, let's discard all that and assume that all three murders were planned in advance—and were planned for a connected reason."

"That would be mass extermination by some kind of a lunatic!" Maclyn exploded.

"Some kind of a lunatic," the doctor agreed, "but with a logic to his lunacy. Has it occurred to you, Miles, that Terrence Vail, Dan Sutter, and Roger Lindsey all had one thing in common?"

Maclyn stared. "If I tried all day I couldn't think of three more dissimilar men."

"Miles, there *was* one common denominator in their histories. They had each raised extraordinary grief and distress in the life of some woman. Terrence, if Susan is to be believed, was a subtle sadist. Sutter has wrecked Emily's life. Lindsey openly humiliated his fiancée by having an affair with someone else. You'll admit that those are points of similarity?"

"Holy smoke!" Rufe said. "But if that's the motive, the killer is *really* off the beam!"

"Judge, jury and executioner," Dr. Smith said slowly. "A woman, avenging her whole sex. A man, turned monster

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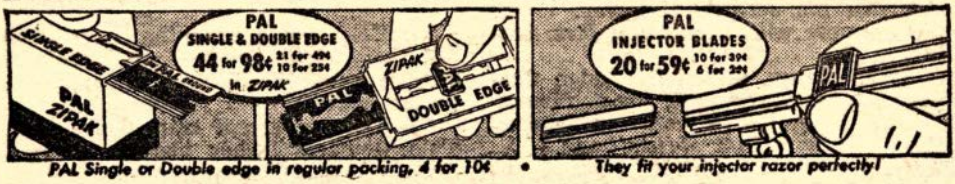

inside an imaginary suit of white armor. St. George, infected by the dragon's bite and turning dragon himself!"

"So what do we do?" Maclyn asked.

"You only asked for a theory," the doctor said. "I can't prove it. . . . Well, gentlemen, if you'll excuse me, I must see Mrs. Sutter. She'll probably want me out of her hair. This won't be a good time to deal with boarders."

"Dr. Smith!" It was the judge. "I'd be delighted to have you dine with me, and I've plenty of room to put you up, if you want to move from Mrs. Sutter's."

"That's very generous," the doctor said. "Let me talk to Mrs. Sutter."

HE went into the house. The living room door was open and he caught sight of Bim Sutter, huddled in one corner of the room, his face pathetically white and drawn. Emily was talking to the undertaker's men. Presently they came out, then Emily saw the doctor. She joined him.

"Dr. Smith, I've been so worried about you," she said. "You had no lunch!"

He looked surprised. "Do you know, Mrs. Sutter, I hadn't even thought of it."

"It won't take me long to get you some supper," she said. "Since—since we won't be able to use the living room, I've left Father's study open and there's a fire going. If you'd care to wait in there—"

"Really, Mrs. Sutter, you mustn't think of it," the doctor said. "Judge Craven has invited me for supper, and also to stay with him."

"Oh!" Emily said in a distressed voice. "Of course I know it must be—unpleasant for you here. But I'd hoped, that as long as you stayed in town—"

He realized she was thinking of the money. Every penny would be important to her now. "Of course I'll stay," he said. "It may be a comfort to you to have someone in the house."

"I'd be so glad if you would stay," she said.

"Then it's settled. However, I will have supper with the Judge, Mrs. Sutter. . . ."

After dinner, served by Judge Craven's housekeeper with great formality, the judge poured coffee, and measured brandy with a steady hand.

"You know, Dr. Smith," he said, "it was I who suggested to Rufe and Maclyn that they get your help on this case."

"I'm afraid I've let you down," the doctor said.

The judge smiled. "I don't underestimate you, Doctor. I know that once you fix on a theory you will examine every detail of it. Therefore it seems best to me that I should tell you some facts."

"You know something you haven't told?" The doctor's voice was casual.

"I know something about myself I haven't told," the judge said. He lifted the brandy inhaler, warming it in the palms of his hands. "I know, too, that if that theory of yours concerning an avenger becomes a conviction you will be after case histories of your suspects. I—I think I will save you the trouble of searching my past, Doctor."

"You think I suspect you, Judge Craven?"

"I think you will if I conceal the truth and you come on it later," the judge said. "So let me say at once that I did not retire from the Ohio bench voluntarily. I am going to tell you the reason, Doctor, and place my future happiness at your mercy."

He turned his unlit cigar round and round in his fingers.

"I never married," he said. "The law is a hard taskmaster. During my school years there wasn't much time for a social life, and after I'd begun my practice, I somehow never found anyone who fitted my ideal of a life partner." He looked at the doctor. "It wasn't until I was appointed to the bench that I—I found such a person. But she was married—married to a man who was a political power in my state. He—he was no good, Doctor. He was a cruel, sadistic, self-centered man. You heard Susan's story this morning. The situation was not incomparable, except that the woman"—the judge's voice shook—"was everything I had ever wanted; kind, generous, lovely to look at. And she loved me! Yes, Doctor, *me. Me!*"

THERE was a snapping sound. The ivory cigar holder had broken in two between the judge's fingers. The doctor waited.

"But there was a trap, Dr. Smith. This woman's father had been saved from a long jail sentence by her hus-

band. It was because of that she'd married him, and he held it over her head —just as Terrence was holding something over Susan's head.

"I thought I couldn't live without her. And because she was trapped I—I abandoned all my notions of honor, and —well, we were joined together in love." His voice grew hard. "So, as we should have known it must, our pathetic groping for some small happiness was discovered by the husband. He had opposed my appointment to the bench because he wanted his own man in the place. I faced the choice of a public scandal which would result in my removal from the bench, or the chance to resign for 'reasons of ill health.' And so, to protect my love and her father, I retired, Doctor, and came here to live."

"Why have you told me this?" Dr. Smith asked, after a long pause.

The judge gave the little gray man an odd glance.

"Your theory, Doctor," he said. "'St. George, infected by the dragon's bite and turning dragon himself'? Do you think I have watched what Terrence was doing to Susan, what Dan was doing to Emily, what that young squirt was doing to Liz Holbrook, and not asked myself, 'why should they go unpunished?'" In the judge's voice was a deep anger. "If you learned my story, wouldn't you wonder about me? Wouldn't you say—particularly after your experience in the dugway tonight and the freak circumstances which pointed to me—'There is my logical lunatic!' Wouldn't you, Doctor?"

"I might," the doctor said slowly. "Yet I'm still wondering why you've told me the story at all."

"Because you might have found it out."

"I wonder," the Doctor said. "From what you say only two other people knew the truth. Would the woman who loves you have revealed the secret? Would the husband who hates you have revealed it? It seems unlikely since he would lose his power over you."

"But, Dr. Smith—"

"So you had another reason for telling me something I could have learned no other way. Perhaps you were preparing to confess to murder."

"I have killed no one," Judge Craven said, "Though I would not mind dying for having exterminated this particular kind of vermin."

"Perhaps," the doctor said, "because of the violent hatreds in you you feel the need for further punishment. But I am not your judge. Even so dignified a person as a retired judge is miscast in the rôle of God." He rose to leave. "Good night, Judge Craven. . . ."

There were lights in the Sutter house; a soft light behind the drawn shades of the living room; one upstairs in Bim's room; one in the late Major Bowen's study.

The doctor let himself in the front door. He took off his coat, hat and galoshes, and then tiptoed down the hall, not to disturb Emily's vigil by the casket. He went into the study and closed the door. He poked up the fire and threw on a fresh log. It was his intention to stay here until he had thoroughly reviewed the circumstances of the two murders and Lindsey's disappearance, going over each detail, no matter how trivial. Particularly was he disturbed by the incident in the dugway. He sat down and tried to concentrate.

Dr. Smith had a trained mind, but for some reason he could not control it. Try as he would he could not get rid of the feeling that he should be doing something; that he knew the answer and that it called for action. He felt angry with himself for his inability to focus on the problem.

He began walking restlessly around the room. The late Major Bowen, he thought, must have been one of those perpetual adolescents. The sword over the mantel, the hunting knife with the lock of hair from the head of the Indian girl he declared had once saved his life around it, the ivory miniature—all sentimental reminders of a sort of Rover Boy heroism.

The library, with its incredibly juvenile flavor. Henty—"With Kitchener at Khartoum," "With Clive in India"; Jules Verne's "Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea"; endless detective stories. The doctor's eye ranged along a shelf—Father Brown, Gaboriau, Arsene Lupin, The Mysterious Dr. Fu Manchu, and in a specially reserved niche, Sherlock Holmes—all of it: *"Study in Scarlet," "The Sign of Four," "The Adventures," "The Memoirs," "The Hound of the Baskervilles," "The*

Valley of Fear," "His Last Bow," and *"The Case Book."*

The doctor raised his hand in grave salute to the shelf of books.

"Would that I had your magical deductive gifts, Mr. Holmes," he murmured. "You're badly needed here in Brookside."

And then the doctor seemed to freeze, his mind still raised in salute. He stood that way for a time, then slowly lowered his arm, his eyes still on the books. His lips were drawn together in a tight line.

Suddenly he walked to the door of the study, opened it noiselessly, and tiptoed down the hall. He put on his coat and hat and pocketed a flashlight on the hall table. Then he picked up his galoshes, went out onto the porch, and put them on.

He straightened, looked up and down the street, and walked down the path. He went on and turned up the path to the front door of Roger Lindsey's deserted house. He reached for the door knob and turned it carefully. The door wasn't locked.

He went into the house, closing the door behind him. The place was equipped with an oil burner and was pleasantly warm. Dr. Smith took the flashlight out of his pocket and walked to the kitchen. He flashed the light about. The room was spick and span. The light focused on the cellar door. The doctor went over to the door, and stood there a moment, as though reluctant to open it. Finally he did, and felt along the wall for the light switch.

The doctor went down the stairs, still reluctant. At the bottom he looked around him. There was the furnace, a water pump, the usual pipes and drains, a collection of cartons and crates in one corner. The doctor turned slowly to the other side. There were some garden tools stacked against the wall, a green metal wheelbarrow—and the body of a man lying face-down on the floor, several burlap bags covering him.

The doctor walked over to the body and knelt down beside it. It was Roger, of course. He knew that without looking at the face. He knelt there, his hand resting gently on the dead man's shoulder. Facts were falling into place in his mind like the tumblers in a vault lock.

Then suddenly he heard a sound—the sound of a creaking stair board. He rose cautiously and turned, focusing the flashlight on the cellar stair. He saw legs —legs in boots and corduroy trousers. They hesitated, then came on down until the whole figure was visible. The face was as white as a flat, dull wall paint. The eyes were round and full of fear as they met the doctor's. The voice was a hoarse, frightened whisper.

"I—I'm glad you found him," Bim Sutter said. "Y-you see, I did it, sir."

THE doctor lowered his flashlight so that the beam was no longer directed into the boy's face.

"Let's go upstairs," he said. "You first, Bim."

"Yes, sir." Bim turned and started up, pulling himself along by the stair rail.

"D-do we go straight to j-jail, sir?"

"First we talk, son," Dr. Smith said. "The living room is pretty comfortable. Let's go there."

"Yes, sir."

The living room was just as the doctor had last seen it.

"You sit down there on the couch, Bim."

The boy sat down, one leg tucked up under him. He bent forward slightly, his arms folded around his midsection as though he were trying to hold himself together.

"H-how d-did you come to find him, sir?" he asked. "I heard you l-leave the house and when I s-saw you coming here I knew you'd guessed."

"And you followed me?"

"Yes, sir."

The doctor stood with his back to the cold ashes on the hearth. "Now look, son. Before we go to Maclyn you'd better tell me exactly how it happened."

"Yes, sir."

"Did you mean that you were only responsible for—for Roger?"

"Oh, no, sir. I did it all!"

The doctor's mouth felt dry.

"Then begin at the very beginning, son."

X

EYES lowered to the toe of his shoe, the boy hugged himself. Then he began to talk, rapidly.

"Mr. Vail was first, sir. I went out to the barn like I said but when I came back I saw Mr. Vail by the swimming pool smoking a cigarette and I went over to talk to him. You see, sir, I had

to tell him to take Mrs. Vail away because the way she was acting with my father was just killing my mother. He said he wouldn't, so I picked up the stone and hit him."

"Then what did you do, son?"

"I—I went back to the barn," Bim said, "and went to sleep, like I told you. And when I woke up it had snowed and I came in the house and got you. You remember?"

"Yes, I remember," the doctor said.

"That's—that's all there was to it with Mr. Vail," Bim said.

"I see." The doctor's fingers were slowly revolving his heavy gold watch chain. "Then there was your father, Bim. How did you manage that?"

The boy began to shake. "Y-you k-know how he was, sir. Y-you were there when he c-came home at b-breakfast time. You know the way he treated my mother. I—I just couldn't stand it any more. So when I left the r-room I put the p-poison in the b-bottle I knew Mother would take up to his room. And —and that was all there was to that."

"So now we come to Roger. What happened with Roger?"

"I was scared, sir, after that," Bim said. "I m-mean—after Father! I *had* to k-know what was going on. Y-you were all here—you, sir, and Maclyn, and Rufe, and Liz and R-Roger. So I—I came through the back yards and into the k-kitchen. I opened the s-swinging door a little so I c-could hear."

"You must have been relieved, son," the doctor said, "because nobody was even thinking about you."

"Y-yes, sir. I—I g-guess I thought nothing was going to happen to me. But then Roger suddenly came in the back door."

"Roger?"

"Y-yes, sir. He must have gone out. He came around to the b-back door to get some cigarettes. I was scared to death when he came in."

"Why, Bim? You knew, if you were listening, he'd gone out."

"Oh, yes, sir. But I didn't expect him to c-come back."

"Where was he going when he went out the front door, Bim?"

Bim's eyes widened. "I—I don't know, sir."

"Go ahead, Bim."

"W-well, sir, he c-caught me listening and he asked me w-what I was doing, and I g-guess I was scared and I s-said I was just curious. And then—and then he told me he'd seen me k-kill Mr. Vail. So I—so you see I had to—to—"

"How did you do it, Bim?"

"Well, sir, there w-was some t-tea on the stove and I asked him to have a c-cup of tea, so he sat down and I—I brought him the tea. And he d-drank it."

"And then what, Bim?"

"Why t-then he—he sort of fell over and—and died. You see I'd p-put some poison in the t-tea."

"Go on, Bim."

Tears welled up into the boy's eyes.

"It was t-terrible, sir. I—I c-couldn't leave him there. So—so when he was d-dead, I d-dragged him to the cellar stairs."

"That was right after you'd killed him, Bim?"

"Yes, sir."

"It must have been hard for you to get him down the stairs."

"It w-was awful, sir." The pale cheeks were glistening with tears now. "I had to d-drag him, and his f-feet k-kept b-bumping on the steps. Bumping and bumping. It was c-cold down there, sir, s-so I c-covered him up with burlap bags. I didn't w-want him to be cold!"

"My dear boy!" the doctor said. Then, after a long silence he said: "And that's all, Bim?"

THE boy shook his head.

"No?" The doctor was startled.

"There was f-following you, sir. I followed you all day. I followed you to the Vails', I followed you to Mr Holbrook's. And I was the one that followed you when you left there, when you k-kept calling out. Then Rufe came in the jeep and I had to run. I ran back into Mr. Holbrook's yard. But before I could get away, he came out, with the lantern and I ducked behind the woodpile. Then the judge came. And then you and Rufe came."

"And you were planning to attack me in the dugway, Bim?"

"Oh, no, sir. I just had to know what you were doing, because I thought if anyone was going to c-catch me it would be you, and I—well, I had to know, sir. It's terrible, not knowing what's going to happen."

The doctor shivered. He felt as though a cold blast of air had struck him. Then his eyes turned to the front window and

he noticed a slight fluttering of the curtains. He walked over to the window and pushed the curtains aside. The window was shut. He looked at it, frowning. Then he walked thoughtfully back to Bim.

"That's the whole story, sir," Bim said.

"Yes, Bim. Yes." The doctor looked back at the window. The curtains were limp and motionless now. "Now, Bim, before we go to Maclyn there are one or two points I'd like to clear up."

"Yes, sir."

"You saw Mr. Vail by the swimming pool, smoking. You went up to him and asked him to take Mrs. Vail home because she was making your mother unhappy."

"That's right, sir."

"He refused, so you picked up a stone and hit him with it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did he try to protect himself?"

"He j-just happened to b-be looking the other way, sir."

"I see." The doctor paused. "Now about your father, Bim? You say you put the poison in the bottle before your mother took it upstairs to him?"

"Yes, sir."

"Bim, where did you get that poison?"

"In a d-drug store in R-Rutland, sir."

"Which store, Bim?"

"It was just a d-drug store, sir. On the main street."

"I see. And what was the poison, Bim? What did you ask for when you bought it?"

"Why—why p-poison, sir!"

"Not for any particular kind?"

The shaking was violent now. "I—I s-said I had a sick dog I w-wanted to kill."

"When was this, Bim?"

The doctor moved forward and sat down on the couch. He put his arm around Bim's shoulder.

"It won't do, son," he said gently. "It was a wonderful try, a gallant try, but it just won't do!"

The boy raised his eyes to the doctor's, then suddenly buried his face on the doctor's shoulder as the deep, retching sobs attacked him. The doctor held him close for a long time, until the weeping had quieted. Then he turned his head to the door of the dark hallway.

"Don't you want to come in now, Mrs. Sutter?" he asked.

Emily Sutter, her tragic face seeming illuminated, swept into the room, and dropped on her knees beside the couch.

"Bim, my darling, my darling!" she cried, in a strangled voice. "You would have done this for me! Bim! Bim!" Then mother and son were locked in each other's arms.

At last Emily faced the doctor.

"Do I have to go now, Dr. Smith?" she asked. "Can I stay with him a little while?"

"I don't think there's any great hurry, Mrs. Sutter, now that it's over."

She looked at her son, then back at the little gray man.

"What's to become of him, Doctor? My God, what's to become of him?"

* * * * *

The doctor raised the highball glass containing a generous slug of Alonzo Holbrook's eighteen-year-old Bourbon.

"Here's to you two," he said, nodding to Rufe and Liz who sat together on the couch in Alonzo's living room.

"Amen!" Alonzo said.

Maclyn Miles raised his own glass without speaking. He was thinking of Bim, asleep in Alonzo's guest room upstairs. A strong sedative administered by Dr. Swayne had made it possible for the boy to blot out the horrors of the last thirty-six hours, at least for a while.

"Would you mind putting me straight on this thing, Doctor?" Alonzo asked.

The doctor felt the whisky warm and relax him.

"It's a fairly simple story," he said. "The human mind can stand just so much pressure, then something snaps. That's what happened to Emily Sutter when she went outside with Terrence Vail the night of the party, to plead with him to take Susan away from Brookside. If he refused, she planned to kill him."

"Planned!" Alonzo said. "You mean it wasn't done in a sudden fit of rage?"

The doctor shook his head. "She planned it—if Terrence refused. When she went out with him she was carrying that stone filled with specks of mica. When Terrence refused to take Susan away, she swung that stone against his head with force enough to kill him."

ALONZO was lost for words. "Great, jumping—!"

"Bim recognized that stone as one

he'd given his mother for a doorstop. When Dan left the house that night after you'd released everyone, Maclyn, Emily guessed he was on his way to see Susan. It suddenly occurred to her that Susan could leave tomorrow, and Dan might follow her. So when Dan came home, drunk and obnoxious, Emily made up her mind to kill him. She had the poison—had had it for a long time. It had belonged to her father—where or how he got it Emily doesn't know. But she decided to use it. She put some of it in the bottle Dan demanded. After he was dead she washed out the bottle and we all accepted that as normal—Emily's famous neatness!

"Emily didn't know Bim had seen her poison the bottle. So after his father's body had been taken away to the undertaker's he followed his mother when she slipped over to Roger's house and let herself into the kitchen. He watched her through the window. It was Emily who listened at the door, not Bim. That was why he couldn't tell me why Roger left the house. Emily, cunning now in her criminal career, had brewed some tea. That was in character for the kindly, thoughtful Emily. She had no other purpose at first, I think.

"Then Roger, who had started for the judge's, realized he had no cigarettes! He didn't want to come back in the front way and possibly become involved in further questioning, so he walked around to the back door. That's why no one saw him! He never left the place. It was such a simple explanation none of us ever thought of it."

Maclyn murmured an expletive.

"Roger caught Emily listening," the doctor continued. "He was surprised, but unsuspicious. He still didn't remember that he'd seen Emily go out with Terrence the night before!"

"So you still cling to that theory?" Maclyn asked.

"Yes and no," the doctor said, with a weary smile. "He didn't remember, but I was wrong about the reasons. I'm a great psychiatrist, you know, Miles." His irony was heavy. "I was looking for the complicated explanation—guilts, anxieties, and so forth, to explain that loss of memory. The answer was much simpler."

"What, for Pete sake?"

"Emily was the hostess," the doctor said. "She was in and out all night—so often that no one paid any attention to her comings and goings. She was the postman."

"The *what?*" Maclyn demanded.

"My friends," the doctor said, still in the vein of irony, "I'm going to have to make a shocking confession to you later—but please, let me finish the story first." He took a sip of his drink. "You see, Emily couldn't be sure Roger hadn't remembered. Maybe something in his behavior made her conclude he had. She took the motherly tack with him: Have some tea, Roger. She reassured him that she knew he hadn't killed Dan.

"Naturally he felt fine about that. He decided he would have the tea. He needed her kind of sympathy. Unfortunately it wasn't real and the tea contained the remains of the poison. It worked quickly, not slowly as we first supposed. Roger died, sitting there at the kitchen table. Then calmly, Emily went about the business of cleaning up the place, and—"

"And dragged him down in the cellar?" Maclyn said.

"No, she had a better idea, Maclyn.

[*Turn page*]

She left him slumped over the table, tea cup in front of him, and the empty poison bottle! We were meant to find him that way, assume suicide—end of case!"

RUFE, holding fast to Liz's hand, spoke for the first time. "Then Bim did drag Roger down into the cellar?"

"That boy!" the doctor said, shaking his head. "He saw what had happened, saw it all, and didn't understand it. He didn't realize that Emily had so arranged it that she might escape all punishment. Because, let's face it, Maclyn, we might have swallowed the bait."

"Thanks for the 'we,'" Maclyn said "All Bim could think of was that the crime should be hidden. He waited outside in an agony of terror for fear someone would come out in the kitchen and discover Roger. But no one did, and after what must have seemed a lifetime to him everyone had finally left the house. He went in, dragged the body downstairs and"—there was a catch in the doctor's voice—"covered it up with the burlap bags to keep it warm!"

"Did Bim wash the teacup?" Maclyn asked.

"Yes, Bim washed the teacup," the doctor said. "He washed the teacup and took the poison bottle away with him. He threw it into the marble quarry back of Rufe's farm."

"Poor kid—poor frightened kid!" Liz said.

"Well that—that's about it," the doctor said.

"That's a long way from all of it," Maclyn said. "What did you mean a while back by saying Emily was the 'postman'? And you haven't told us where you got the idea of going to Roger's own house to look for him."

The doctor raised his glass to the light. "To you, Mr. Holmes," he murmured, "and to you, Father Brown, and you, Monsieur Dupin!"

"What the devil are you blabbing about?" Alonzo demanded.

"My friends," the doctor said, the irony in his tone again, "I'm a very clever man, with a very subtle mind. I know all there is to know about the intricacies of human character. I have been sweating and sweating for hours, trying to see my way through the dark passages of a murderer's mind. I knew all about anxiety. All about traumatic loss of memory. And I was stuck. Brother, was I stuck!" He laughed, softly. "So then I was wandering about in the late Major Bowen's study, filled with all its childish souvenirs, its adventure stories, its detective stories and I was looking at a shelf of Sherlock Holmes. I thought, somewhat wistfully, that it would help to have some of his magical powers.

"And then I thought of the fascinating gimmicks used so persuasively by the masters. For example, the Father Brown story about the man nobody saw because he was a postman and nobody sees postmen and policemen and so on. And suddenly, I froze there! There was a postman in this story—Emily! The hostess, whose comings and goings would never be noticed because it was natural for her to come and go!

"Both Roger and Susan saw her go out with Terrence, but neither remembered it. In a way they *hadn't* seen her. And there was an obvious place which you hadn't searched, Maclyn—Roger's own house. You knew he'd gone away from there. But he might have come back or been brought there. In any event you hadn't looked! And—and so I looked!" He grinned at Maclyn. "Storybook solution, Maclyn, but sound as a dollar!"

"What will they do to Emily?" Liz asked.

"A good lawyer will sell a jury on an insanity plea," Maclyn said.

"And Bim?" There was real concern in Liz's voice.

The doctor leaned back in his chair. "I suspect you two will be living at Rufe's farm," he said. "Bim has a job there. He thinks the world of Rufe. It's not usual to begin a marriage with a fifteen-year-old son—but it would give the boy a real chance."

"Of course!" Liz said. "What do you think, Rufe?"

"I love you," he said, "for always having the right answers, even if it takes you a little long to arrive at them."

●

Next Issue's Three Top-Flight Mystery Novels: THE SAINT AND MR. TEAL by Leslie Charteris—DEATH LOOKS DOWN by Amelia Reynolds Long—and SLAY RIDE by Frank Kane!

Murder Spends the Weekend

By DON HOBART

Beside the sedan three motionless figures were sprawled

The Great Diamond of Abacadabra invites—death!

IT WAS cold in the guest room of the big old house. The chill wind rattled the windows and rustled the branches of the big trees outside. Carl Johnson shivered as he sat on the edge of the big bed and wondered if he would be murdered before morning.

He was a husky dark haired young man who didn't look like he was easily frightened, but ever since he had arrived

at Martin Gregg's house late that afternoon he had been decidedly uneasy. In Johnson's estimation his Uncle Martin was rich, old and perhaps a bit cracked.

The old man's greeting when his nephew arrived at the house located in lonely splendor ten miles from the nearest town had been strange and rather sinister.

"It is good to see you, Carl," Gregg said as the two men shook hands. "Though I'm afraid you will find you are in for an unusual weekend. You see I have three other guests here whom you will meet at dinner. Charming people—except that one of them is a potential killer who may murder me, and perhaps you, before morning."

"You're joking, aren't you, Uncle Martin?" Johnson said with a smile.

"Unfortunately I am not joking." There was a frown on Gregg's thin face and he ran one slender hand through his thick white hair. "I am quite certain one of my guests is a killer."

"Which one?" Johnson asked.

"I don't know," Gregg said. "That is why I wired you urgently requesting that you come here and visit me this weekend, Carl. It is your job to unmask the killer and prevent him from ushering me into the next world. If you are successful, I will give you fifty thousand dollars when the weekend is over. If you fail and I should be murdered—" The old man shrugged his shoulders. "I suppose it won't matter. Since you are my only living close relative I have left everything to you in my will anyway."

"I'm not so keen about inheriting your money right away, Uncle," Johnson said. "I'd rather see you remain alive for quite a few more years. But why should one of your guests have any reason for murdering you?"

"Because of the Great Diamond of Abacadabra," Gregg said.

"And what is that?" Johnson asked.

"A mythical jewel of great price," said Gregg. "I've told my other three guests that it is hidden somewhere in this house, and that it is worth a half million dollars. They don't know you are my nephew. I told them I was expecting a young man named Carl Johnson, a private detective—"

"Private detective," interrupted Johnson. "I'll say—so private that this is that first I have even heard of it myself. You know darn well that I'm an actor, and come to think of it I have never even played a detective on the stage.

THE retired business man gave a gesture of impatience.

"Of course I know it," Martin Gregg said impatiently. "But my guests don't, and I want you to promise that you won't reveal your identity to them as my nephew until I give you my permission to do so."

"All right," Johnson said resignedly. "I have a feeling that you are trying awfully hard to get us both killed. But this appears to be your idea of fun, Uncle Martin, so go to it."

That had been an hour ago. A blank faced butler that Johnson had never seen before had shown the nephew to his room. Since then Johnson had been sitting there on the side of the bed waiting to be called downstairs to dinner. Gregg had requested his nephew to remain in his room until the meal was ready.

There was no knock, no sound out in the hall of the second floor of the old house, but suddenly the closed door of Johnson's room opened and a tall thin man stood there.

"Don't be too reckless, Johnson," he said, closing the door behind him. "You would have been safer if you had kept this locked."

"Who are you?" Johnson asked.

"John Shay is the name," said the thin man. "One of Martin Gregg's guests. I suppose Gregg thinks he is smart, ordering us all to remain in our rooms until dinner time so he would have a chance to get rid of the body."

"What body?" Johnson demanded in surprise.

"Of the murdered man, of course," Shay said. "You mean to say that Gregg hired you as a detective, and didn't tell you anything about the murder that took place here this morning?"

"No, he didn't." Johnson got to his feet. "This is all news to me. Who was killed and how?"

"I don't know the dead man's name," Shay said. "He was a stranger to me, but last night there were four guests in this house. Grant Durley, Helen Holden, the stranger and myself. Of course your arrival makes it four guests again." The thin man frowned. "At least for awhile."

"You still haven't told me about the murder," Johnson said.

"Oh, yes," said Shay. "Well, this morning I came downstairs before the others—not even Ward, the butler, or the cook was around. I decided that it was my chance to search for the diamond Gregg had said was hidden somewhere in the house. He had practically dared all of us to try and find it."

"The Great Diamond of Abacadabra," Johnson said. "Mr. Gregg told me about that. Go on."

"There is a big cedar chest in the room on the lower floor that Gregg uses for his den," Shay continued. "I looked in this, and there was the stranger lying on his back in the chest, dead—a knife in his heart. I put the lid back on the chest and left the body there."

"What did this stranger look like?" Johnson asked. "And if he was one of the guests, why don't you know his name?"

"He was a small gray haired man," Shay said. "He arrived late last night and Gregg had him taken right up to one of the guest rooms without introducing him to the rest of us. We never were told his name."

"And you think the body had remained in the chest all day?" asked Johnson.

"Frankly I don't know," said Shay. "Gregg has kept the door of his den locked ever since this morning. No one has said anything about a murder or even mentioned the stranger."

From the lower floor there came the crashing of a Chinese gong, the sound carrying all through the house.

"That's the signal that dinner is ready," Shay said. "I guess we better go on down, Johnson."

The thin man stepped to the door and held it open for Johnson to proceed him out into the hall. As Johnson stepped through the door Shay thrust something hard that felt like a gun barrel against his back.

"All right," Shay said coldly. "Hand over the diamond."

"I haven't got it," Johnson said.

His left heel came down hard on the toe of Shay's right shoe. The thin man uttered a yelp of pain and moved back. Johnson swung around and smashed a hard right fist against Shay's jaw. Shay went down, dropping the pocket flashlight that was little larger than a fountain pen and which he had been trying to bluff Johnson into thinking was a gun barrel.

"If the rest of the guests are like you, this should be quite a weekend," Johnson said as Shay sat up rubbing his jaw. "I forgot to ask what business you were in before you decided to be a hold-up man."

"Real estate." Shay got to his feet. "And I should have stuck to it instead of trying to get tough with a private detective. My error, Johnson."

JOHNSON merely smiled faintly and hurried along the hall toward the stairs. He didn't trust John Shay in the slightest degree, but he wasn't going to reveal that. He had a feeling that the less the other guests in this house knew about him, the safer he might be.

In the dining room Martin Gregg introduced Johnson to the other two guests. Grant Durley was a heavy-set, middle-aged man who seemed a pleasant sort of individual, but it was Helen Holden who fascinated Johnson. Young, dark haired and pretty, he thought she was one of the most attractive girls he had ever met.

Apparently Helen found it a relief to discover there was one man present who was close to her own age, for she let Johnson see that she was interested in him right from the start. Shay had followed Johnson down the stairs and joined the others at the table.

"You know, Martin," Grant Durley told his host as the meal progressed. "I've been in the jewelry manufacturing business for over twenty years and I never heard of any such stone as the Great Diamond of Abacadabra. I'm beginning to suspect there is no such thing."

"I hope you are wrong, Mr. Durley," Helen said. "The diamond sounds so fascinating." She looked at the old man seated at the head of the table. "Perhaps Mr. Gregg will show us the stone before we leave here."

"There is a diamond hidden on this estate," Gregg said. "And if any of you succeed in finding it the stone is yours to keep and do whatever you like with it."

"Why it sounds like some sort of a new game," Helen said. "A real treasure hunt." She smiled at Johnson. "Since you are a detective, finding the

diamond should be quite simple for you, Mr. Johnson."

"Very," said Johnson dryly.

The conversation at the table became casual. When the meal was finished Gregg told his guests that he was going to retire to his den. They were at liberty to search the house and grounds for the diamond—but he assured them he did not have it on him nor was it in his den.

Johnson found himself puzzled. When he had talked to his uncle Gregg had said the Great Diamond of Abacadabra was merely a mythical stone, yet now the old man sounded like there really was a stone hidden somewhere around the place.

"Mind if I talk to you for a few minutes alone, Martin?" Grant Durley asked Gregg, following the owner of the house along the hall. "I need your advice in a business matter."

"Of course, Durley," said Gregg opening the door of his den. "Come on in here."

The two men stepped into the den and closed the door. Johnson and Helen were talking, finding that they liked the same things and both lived in New York not far from each other. John Shay quietly disappeared somewhere in the house.

Johnson had been sitting in the living room talking to the girl for about twenty minutes when they heard voices out in the hall.

"Of course I don't mind taking a ride with you in my car, Durley," Martin said loudly. "I wish my nephew were here to go along with us, though. He is a much better driver than I am and knows the roads around here at night."

Johnson stepped quickly to the door of the living room, and looked out. The two men were coming along the hall toward the front door and Durley was holding Gregg's left arm as they walked side by side. "Why not let me drive, Mr. Gregg?" Johnson said. "I'm quite good at it. After all you did hire me to tag along with you when you went anywhere."

"We don't need you, Johnson," Durley said. "I assure you Mr. Gregg is quite safe with me."

"Sorry." Johnson thrust his right hand into the side pocket of his suit coat and the way he held it made it look like he might be clutching a gun. "I go along or Mr. Gregg doesn't leave this house."

"That seems an excellent idea," Gregg said dryly.

"Oh, all right," said Durley. "Let's go then."

"I'd love to go for a ride," Helen said as she stood in the doorway of the living room listening. "May I go along, Mr. Gregg?"

"Of course, Helen." Gregg smiled. "I'm sure we would all be delighted to have you with us."

"Naturally," said Durley, a sarcastic note in his voice. "Where is Shay? And perhaps the cook and butler would also enjoy a little outing. Let's take them all with us."

"Never mind," said Gregg. "Just the four of us will do quite nicely for this trip. Shall we go?"

THEY went out to the garage and climbed into Gregg's old 1936 sedan. Johnson took the wheel at Gregg's command. Gregg seated himself in the back seat with Helen beside him, much to Johnson's disappointment. Durley sat in front beside Carl Johnson.

"I think this has gone far enough," Gregg said as the car rolled along the driveway and out onto the road that ran along in front of the estate. The old man drew an automatic and covered Durley with the gun. "I invited Durley, Helen and Shay here for the weekend because I wanted to test you, Carl."

"Test me?" Johnson said. "But why, Uncle Martin."

"We'll come to that part of it later," Gregg said. "I made up the story of the Great Diamond of Abacadabra just to create a mystery and as bait for my guests. But there is a small diamond worth a couple of thousand dollars hidden in the house. I also have fifty thousand dollars in cash as I have informed all of my guests save you, Carl."

"Yes, and in telling us about that money, you have been just begging for trouble, Martin," Durley said. "That's why I have been so anxious to get you out of the house tonight. Men have been killed and robbed for less than fifty thousand in cash before this."

"True," said Gregg. "That money might tempt someone to murder me far more than the mythical diamond I have talked so much about."

The old sedan had reached the top of a steep hill and started down. Suddenly

Johnson uttered a startled cry.

"The steering wheel is loose!" he shouted. "I can't control the car. We'll crash into the fence and the rocks at the side of the road down at the foot of the hill!"

"I'm getting out of here!" Durley shouted as he sat in the front seat of the car beside Johnson. "I'm not going to be killed!"

He opened the door on his side of the sedan and flung himself out. He landed on the road and sprawled there as the car rolled on down the hill.

"Of course if you really want to stop the car all you have to do is turn off the motor and put on the brakes, Carl," Martin Gregg said calmly. "You seem to be guiding the car very well despite the loose steering wheel."

"There's nothing wrong with the wheel," Johnson said. "But we are going to have an accident when we reach the foot of the hill. A car has been following us ever since we left the house, and I want to catch a killer. You and Helen will have to help me do it, Uncle Martin, and here's how." He talked swiftly as the car rolled down the hill, weaving from side to side as though completely out of control.

At the foot of the hill the sedan hit the fence with a loud crash and came to a stop. A few moments later three motionless figures were sprawled out on the ground close to the sedan.

Three or four minutes passed and then the shadowy form of a man approached the group. "All of them out cold," he muttered. "Perhaps dead or dying. I've no time to bother about that. I've got to grab the money and get away."

He went over to where Martin Gregg was lying on his back. Nearby Helen Holden and Carl Johnson were also stretched out on the ground. Johnson lifted his head and recognized the man who was searching through Gregg's pockets. The man uttered an exclamation and drew out a fat roll of bills.

"The fifty thousand dollars," the man muttered. "Too bad I killed that messenger from the bank who brought the money to the house this noon. Never would have bothered if I hadn't thought the cash was still on him, and Gregg hadn't received it yet."

"You made a lot of mistakes, Durley," said Johnson sitting up and covering the man with Gregg's automatic. "Killing the man from the bank and hiding the body in the chest in uncle's den was one. Thinking we were unconscious or dead from the car accident we faked was two, and thinking you could really get away with the money is three."

"One, two, three and out," Gregg said. "You did what I hoped you would do, Carl. You caught a killer. I told you if you did you would get fifty thousand dollars, so the money is yours. Actually it is the exact sum I was going to leave you in my will—but I thought you might enjoy it more now than waiting until I die."

Helen had also risen and she stood smiling at the two men.

"So Carl really was the diamond you were testing, Mr. Gregg," she said. "You know I liked him a lot even before he was rich!"

MURDER STALKS A COLLEGE LIBRARY IN—

DEATH LOOKS DOWN

By AMELIA REYNOLDS LONG

ONE OF NEXT ISSUE'S THREE FEATURED MYSTERY NOVELS!

THE DEADLY VOYAGE

The inspector kicked the knife spinning with a movement of his heel (Chap. I)

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The crew told Maigret that the "curse of the evil eye" brought death on that ill-fated journey—but he discounted superstition and kept right on looking for a logical and human crime motive!

AN INSPECTOR MAIGRET NOVEL

BY GEORGES SIMENON

I

HE'S the best lad in the place, and the mother, who has no one but him, may die of it. I am certain, as everyone is here, that he is innocent. But the sailors I've talked to say that he will be condemned, because Civil Courts have never understood anything about sea affairs. Do all you can, as if it were for me. I read in the papers that you have become a big noise in the Police Judiciaire, *and . . .*"

It was a morning in June. The windows were all open in the fiat on the Boulevard Richard-Lenoir, and Madame Maigret was finishing packing some big basket-trunks while Maigret, collarless, was reading the letter half-aloud.

"Who's it from?"

"Jorissen. We were at school together. He became a teacher at Quimper. Tell me, are you very keen on spending our week's holiday in Alsace?"

She looked at him without understanding. For twenty years they had invariably spent their holidays with relations in the same village.

"Suppose we went to sea instead?" He reread

half-aloud some passages from the letter.

"You are in a better position than I am for getting accurate information. Briefly, Pierre Le Clinche, a young man of twenty who was a pupil of mine, sailed three months ago on the *Océan*, a Fécamp trawler which fishes cod in Newfoundland. The boat came back to port the day before yesterday. A few hours later, the captain's body was found in the dock, and all the evidence points to murder. Now Pierre Le Clinche has been arrested. . . ."

"Fécamp would be no worse for a holiday than anywhere else," sighed Maigret, without enthusiasm.

But Madame Maigret was at home in Alsace. The idea of living in a hotel in the company of other Parisians scared her. "What shall I do all day?"

In the end she took some sewing and crochet-work.

THEY arrived at the *Hôtel de la Plage* at five o'clock, and Madame Maigret immediately began rearranging their room. Then they dined.

And now Maigret was pushing open the frosted glass door of a harbor café, *Au Rendez-Vous des Terre-Neuvas.*

The trawler *Océan* was moored to the quay near a line of trucks. Acetylene lamps hung from the rigging, and people were unloading the cod, which was piled up in the trucks after being weighed.

There were ten of them working there, men and women, dirty, ragged, saturated with salt. And in front of the weighing-machine, a clear young man, with a note book in his hand, was checking the weights. A rank smell seeped into the bar.

Maigret sat down on a bench in an empty corner. The bar was full of sailors, some standing, others sitting, with their glasses on the marble tables.

The proprietor came up.

"I've another room across there for visitors. Here *they* make such a noise." He gave a wink. "After three months at sea one can understand, eh?"

"They're the crew of the *Océan*?"

"Most of them. The other boats haven't come back yet. You mustn't mind them. There are some who haven't been sober for three days. You're a painter, I bet. They come every now and again and sketch. Look! One of them did my head there, above the cash-desk."

But the inspector gave so little encouragement that he went off, quite put out.

"Who has a copper coin?" cried a sailor who was hardly as tall or as broad as a boy of sixteen. He had irregular features. Some of his teeth were missing. Drink had made his eyes shine, and he had a three days' growth of beard on his cheeks.

Someone gave him a copper. He bent it with his fingers, then put it between his teeth and snapped it in two.

"Whose turn next?"

He was showing off. He felt that he had caught the general attention, and was ready to do anything to hold it.

A bloated-looking engineer seized a coin, but he interrupted him:

"Wait! Here's something else you must do."

He picked up an empty glass, took a big bite out of it and chewed up the bits.

"Ha! ha! You might be able to do that some day. . . . More drinks, Léon!"

His glance roved round the room and stopped at Maigret. He came forward, but he was so drunk that he had to support himself on the table.

"Come for me?" he said with a swagger.

"Steady, P'tit Louis!"

"Still the business of the pocket-book? Listen, you guys! You wouldn't believe me when I told you those stories about the Rue de Lappe. Well, here's a big noise from the police going out of his way just because of this baby. Will you let me have another drink?"

Now all eyes were on Maigret.

"Sit down here, P'tit Louis! Don't be a fool!"

But it was too much for P'tit Louis.

"You offer me a drink! No! It's not possible! What do you think, boys? The inspector is offering me a drink! A double dram, Léon!"

"You were on the *Océan*?"

P'tit Louis' face grew dark. He withdrew a little, defiantly, along the bench.

"So what?"

"Nothing. . . . Your health! How long have you been on the binge?"

"For three days. Since we came ashore. I gave Léon my money—over

nine hundred francs. I hope there's some left! . . . How much have I still got, Léon, you old cheat!"

"Certainly not enough to go on paying for drinks all round until morning. About fifty francs. Inspector, tomorrow he won't have a sou left, and he will have to sail on any old boat as a bunker-hand. . . . Not that I press them to drink."

"Shut up!"

The others talked in low tones, and kept looking at the inspector's table.

"They're all from the *Océan*?"

"Except the big chap in the cap, who is a pilot, and the red-haired one, who is a ship's carpenter."

"Tell me what happened."

"I've nothing to say."

"Listen, P'tit Louis! Don't forget the pocket-book business when you are doing your glass-eating act in the Bastille."

"I won't get more than three months for it, and I'm surely needing a rest."

"You worked in the engine-room?"

"Of course. I was second stoker."

"You saw the captain often?"

"Perhaps twice altogether."

"And the radio operator?"

"Don't know!"

"Léon, fill up the glasses."

P'tit Louis gave a contemptuous laugh.

"A doctor . . . police . . ." someone cried (Chap. VII)

"I could drink until I burst and still I would say only what I wanted to."

A SAILOR who couldn't have been twenty edged up and pulled at P'tit Louis' sleeve. They began talking in Breton.

"What's he saying?"

"That it's time I went to bed."

"Is he your friend?"

P'tit Louis shrugged, and as the other tried to take his glass he emptied it defiantly at one gulp.

The Breton had thick eyebrows and wavy hair.

"Sit down," said Maigret.

But the sailor went off without answering, and sat down at another table, where he continued to stare fixedly at the two men.

The atmosphere was heavy and salt-laden. You could hear the voices of the summer visitors, playing dominoes in the next room, where it was cleaner and airier.

"Much cod?" asked Maigret, who followed up an idea with the relentlessness of an electric drill.

"It arrived half-rotten."

"Why?"

"Not salted enough. Or too much!"

"You're off again?"

"*Parbleu!* Sailing-ships make only one trip, from February to September. But trawlers have time to go twice to the Banks."

P'tit Louis shrugged wearily.

"I'd sooner go to Fresnes."

"The captain?"

"I've nothing to say."

He picked up the butt of a cigar and lit it. Suddenly he rushed into the street, where they saw him vomiting. The Breton joined him.

"Poor devil!" sighed the proprietor. "The day before yesterday he had nearly a thousand francs in his pocket. Today it's a near thing if he doesn't owe me money. Oysters and lobster! Without reckoning that he pays for drinks for everyone."

"You knew the radio operator on the *Océan?*"

"He lodged here. He used to feed at that table, then he would go and write in the other room to have more peace."

"Who did he write to?"

"It wasn't only letters. Poetry or novels, as you might say. He was an educated, well-mannered boy. Now that I know you're from the police I can tell you they've made a great mistake."

"It doesn't alter the fact that the captain was killed!"

The proprietor sat down in front of Maigret. P'tit Louis came in, made for the counter and ordered a drink. And his companion went on urging him to keep quiet.

"You mustn't pay any attention. Once they're ashore they're always like this, drinking, shouting, fighting, breaking windows. On board ship they work like demons. Yes, even P'tit Louis. The chief engineer of the *Océan* told me he does the work of two men. At sea a boiler feed-pipe exploded. It was dangerous to repair. P'tit Louis took it on. Once they stop drinking—"

Léon looked mistrustfully at his customers.

"This time they've maybe got other reasons for putting away their liquor. They won't tell you anything because you're not from the sea. But I hear them talking. I'm an old pilot. There are things—"

"Things?"

"It's difficult to explain. You know there aren't enough fishers in Fécamp for all the trawlers. They get them from Brittany. These chaps are superstitious." He lowered his voice until it was scarcely audible. "This time it was the evil eye. It began in port. A sailor climbed up a derrick to wave to his wife. He was holding on to a rope and it broke, and there he was on the deck with his leg mashed. They had to take him ashore. And a cabin-boy didn't want to go, and howled and wept! Three days later there was a wireless message to say that he'd been swept overboard. A kid of fifteen—a little thin fair-haired kid with a name like a girl's. Jean-Marie. . . . Give us some Calvados, Julie. The bottle on the right. The one with the glass stopper."

"The evil eye went on working?"

"I don't know. You'd think they were all afraid to speak. All the same, if the radio operator was arrested it was because the police had heard that he and the captain hadn't spoken a word the whole trip. They were like cat and dog!"

"And then what? . . ."

"Things—that meant nothing. The captain made them take the boat to where no cod had ever been seen. And he roared at them because the head-

fisher refused to obey! He took out his revolver. They were mad about it! They didn't take a ton in a whole month. Then suddenly the fishing became good. All the same, the cod had to be sold at half-price because it was badly salted. Even coming into port they made two false maneuvers, and sank a boat. The captain sent everyone on shore that evening, without leaving anyone on guard, and stayed on board himself all alone. It must have been about nine o'clock. They were all here getting tight. The radio operator had gone up to his room. Then he went out. He was seen going toward the boat.

"A fisher who was getting ready to go out at the lower end of the harbor, heard the sound of something falling into the water. He ran up with a customs man he met on the way. They lit lanterns. There was a body in the dock, caught on the chain of the *Océan's* anchor. It was the captain. They got him out dead.

"They applied artificial respiration. They couldn't make it out, because he'd only been ten minutes in the water.

"The doctor explained. He'd been strangled beforehand. And they found the operator in his cabin, which is behind the funnel. The police came here to search his room, and found his papers burnt. What do you make of it? . . . Two Calvados, Julie! . . . Your health!"

P'TIT LOUIS, who was getting more and more worked up, seized a chair between his teeth and raised it horizontally with a defiant look at Maigret.

"The captain was from these parts?" asked the inspector.

"Yes! A queer chap! Scarcely bigger or broader than P'tit Louis. And always polite and pleasant. And as neat as a new pin! I don't think he was ever seen in the café. He wasn't married. But he lodged with the widow of a customs official, in Rue d'Etretat. They used to say he'd end up by marrying her. He'd been going to Newfoundland for fifteen years, always for the same firm: *La Morue Française*. Captain Fallut, that was his name. They're in a jam about sending the *Océan* back to the Bank. No captain! And half the crew not wanting to sign on again."

"Why?"

"It's the evil eye, as I've told you. They're considering laying up the boat until next year. Apart from the fact that the police have asked the crew to hold themselves at their disposal."

"Is the radio operator in prison?"

"Yes, and I don't mind telling you my wife cried about it—and I myself. And yet he wasn't a particularly good customer. He hardly drank anything."

They were interrupted by a sudden uproar. P'tit Louis had fallen on the Breton. They were rolling on the floor. The others were getting out of the way.

It was Maigret who separated them by literally hauling them up, one with each hand.

"Well, do you want to bite each other's noses off?"

The Breton drew a knife from his pocket, and the inspector saw it just in time to kick it spinning with a movement of his heel. His boot hit the Breton on the chin, which began to bleed. And P'tit Louis threw himself on his companion and began to cry and beg his pardon.

Léon came up to Maigret, watch in hand.

"It's closing time. Otherwise we'll have the police here. Every evening it's the same. Impossible to get them out."

"Do they sleep on board the *Océan?*"

"Yes. Except when they stay in the gutter."

The men went out in threes and fours. Only P'tit Louis and the Breton made no move.

"I say," Léon said to Maigret. "Perhaps it wouldn't be a bad idea to *cherchez la femme*, as they say in novels. I've heard whispers."

"Had Pierre Le Clinche a mistress?"

"Him? Oh, no. He was engaged to a girl in his own part of the country, and every day he used to send a six-page letter to her. . . ."

"Then who?"

"I don't know. Perhaps it's more complicated than one thinks."

Maigret went out, his coat collar turned up, for the air was chilly.

In the entrance hall of the *Hôtel de la Plage*, where he was stopping, he saw a girl sitting in a basket-chair. A man rose from another chair and smiled with a trace of embarrassment.

It was Jorissen, the teacher from Quimper. Maigret hadn't seen him for fifteen years, and the teacher wasn't quite sure how to address him.

"Excuse—excuse me. I—we've just

arrived, Mademoiselle Léonnec and I. I looked in all the hotels. They said that you'd be back. This is Pierre Le Clinche's fiancée. She absolutely insisted—"

A tall, rather pale girl, a little timid. But when Maigret shook hands with her, he realized that behind her provincial awkwardness and coquetry there was a will.

She said nothing. She was too impressed. So was Jorissen, the simple teacher who found his old comrade one of the big noises of the *Police Judiciaire*.

"Madam Maigret was just pointed out to me in the drawing-room. I didn't dare speak to her."

The girl was neither pretty nor plain, but her simplicity was rather touching.

"You know he's innocent, don't you?" she managed to say without looking at anyone.

The porter was waiting to get back to his bed. He had already unbuttoned his waistcoat.

"We'll see about that tomorrow," said Maigret. "You've got rooms?"

"The room next to yours, Maig—inspector," the teacher from Quimper stammered in confusion. "And Mademoiselle Léonnec is on the floor above. I'm afraid I'll have to go back tomorrow on account of examinations. Do you think—?"

"We'll see!" Maigret repeated.

II

THEY walked side by side without looking at each other, first along the beach, which was deserted at that hour, then along the quays. And gradually Marie Léonnec managed to talk in an almost natural voice.

"You'll find that you'll like him! You couldn't do anything else. And then you'll understand that—"

Maigret stole curious and admiring glances at her. Jorissen had gone back to Quimper, leaving the girl alone at Fécamp.

"She has a will of her own!" he had said.

The evening before, she had been as negative as a girl brought up in the calm of a little town can be. But in less than an hour after Jorissen's departure they were leaving the *Hôtel de la Plage*, she and Maigret.

Maigret wore his most forbidding look. But she wasn't impressed, and smiled confidently.

"His only fault," she went on, "is that he is extremely sensitive. His father was a fisher. His mother mended nets for a long time so that he could be educated. Now he supports her. He is educated. He has a fine future."

"Are your parents well off?" Maigret asked bluntly.

"They are the biggest makers of nets and metal cables in Quimper. That's why Pierre didn't even want to speak to my father. For a whole year we met secretly. It was I who told my family. Pierre swore he would only marry me when he was earning at least two thousand francs a month."

"Has he written to you since he was arrested?"

"Only one letter. A short one! And he used to write pages and pages every day! He said it would be better for me and my parents to announce that everything had been broken off."

They passed the *Océan*, which was still being unloaded. At high tide her black hull dominated the wharf. On the fo'c's'l deck three men, bare to the waist, were washing themselves. Among them Maigret recognized P'tit Louis.

One of the sailors nudged his companion and pointed at Maigret and the girl. In her gray tailored suit she could have been a student or a teacher.

"It shows that my parents must have confidence in him too," she said, "for them to have let me come! And yet my father would prefer to see me married to a commercial traveler."

Half an hour later they both went to the prison.

IT was a grumpy Maigret who stood with hunched shoulders, his pipe gripped between his teeth, in a corner of the cell. He had told the authorities that he was not working on the case in any official capacity, but was following it out of curiosity.

Several had described the radio operator to him, and the mental image he had made corresponded to the lad before him. A tall, thin young man in a crumpled but correct suit, his face at once serious and timid. Clusters of freckles under his eyes, and hair cropped short.

He jumped up when the door opened, but held back from the girl as she came

toward him. She had literally to throw herself into his arms while he cast distracted looks all around.

"Marie! Who's that? How—"

His spectacles were rather moist and his lip trembled. He was in a highly nervous state. "You shouldn't have come."

He had no collar and no shoelaces, but had a reddish beard of several days' growth. All this troubled him. He fingered his bare neck and prominent Adam's apple with embarrassment.

"Does my mother—?"

"She hasn't come! But she doesn't believe you're guilty."

They looked at each other and didn't know what to say, tried to find words. Then Marie Léonnec pointed to Maigret.

"This is a friend of Jorissen's. He's an inspector in the *Police Judiciaire*, and he's said he'll help us."

Le Clinche started to hold out his hand but didn't dare.

"Thank you. I—"

The girl wanted to cry. She had counted on a moving interview that would convince Maigret. She looked at her fiancé with a touch of impatience.

"You must say everything you can that will help in your defense."

Pierre Le Clinche sighed, awkward and bored.

"I've only a few questions to ask you," put in the inspector. "All the crew is agreed in saying that during the course of the trip your relations with the captain were cold, to say the least. Now, when you went off you were on rather good terms. What caused the change?"

The operator opened his mouth, said nothing, and fixed a desolate eye on the floor.

"Was it a matter of routine? The first two days you ate with the second officer and the chief engineer. After that you preferred to eat with the men."

"Yes. I know."

"Why?"

And Marie Léonnec cried impatiently:

"Do talk, Pierre! You must tell us the truth."

"I don't know."

He seemed without any feelings or incentive, almost without hope.

"Did you have any arguments with Captain Fallut?"

"No."

"Yet you lived for nearly three months on the same boat without saying a word

"We stood there in the darkness, not daring to speak. . . ." (Chap. X)

to him. There are rumors that at certain times Fallut gave the impression that he'd gone mad."

"I don't know."

Marie Léonnec tried to keep from sobbing under the nervous strain.

"When the *Océan* came into port, you went ashore with the others. In your hotel room you burned some papers."

"Yes. That was of no importance."

"You have a habit of keeping a diary. Wasn't it the diary of this trip that you burned?"

He stood there hanging his head like a schoolboy who hasn't learned the lesson.

"Yes."

"Why?"

"I don't know."

"And you don't know why you went back on board? But not straight away! You were seen hiding behind a truck fifty yards from the boat. . . ."

The girl looked at the inspector, then at her fiancé. This was beginning to be beyond her.

"Yes."

"The captain came down the gangplank and set foot on the quay. It was at that moment that he was attacked."

He still said nothing.

"Damn it, man, can't you answer?"

"Yes, answer, Pierre! It's to get you free." Tears welled in her eyes.

"Yes."

"Yes what?"

"I was there!"

"Well, then, did you see?"

"Not very well. There was a pile of barrels, and some trucks. There was a struggle between two men, then one of them ran off and a body fell into the water."

"What did the man who ran away look like?"

"I don't know."

"Was he in sailor's clothes?"

"No."

"Well, then, how was he dressed?"

"I only noticed his yellow shoes when he was passing a light."

"What did you do next?"

"I went on board."

"Why? And why didn't you get help for the captain? Did you know he was dead?"

A heavy silence. Marie Léonnec clasped her hands in anguish.

"Speak, Pierre! Speak, I beg you!"

"Yes—No—I swear I don't know!"

There were steps in the corridor. The jailer had come to say that the examining magistrate was waiting for Le Clinche.

HIS fiancée wanted to kiss him. He hung back. Finally he took her slowly in his arms with an absent-minded expression. And he did not kiss her lips, but the delicate little curls on her temples.

"Pierre!"

"You shouldn't have come!" he said, and followed the jailer with a weary step.

Maigret and Marie Léonnec got outside without saying anything. Then she sighed.

"I don't understand. I—"

Then, straightening: "But he's innocent, I'm sure! We don't understand. For three days he's been in prison, with everybody accusing him. And he's a timid man!"

Maigret was touched by the way she did her best, although she was discouraged.

"You'll do something, won't you?"

"On condition that you go back home to Quimper."

"No: Not that! Let me—"

"Well, go down to the beach and sit with my wife and try and do something. She'll probably have some embroidery for you."

"What are you going to do? Do you think that the yellow shoes—?"

People looked back at them because Marie Léonnec was so animated it looked as if they were quarreling.

"I'll do everything that's in my power. . . . Listen! This street leads straight to the *Hôtel de la Plage*. Tell my wife that I'll perhaps be a bit late for lunch."

And he turned and went down the quay.

His irritated look was gone. He was almost smiling.

He had feared an emotional scene in the cell, with vehement protestations, tears and kisses. But it had been simpler, and at the same time more heartrending and significant. The man's personality pleased him, just because there was something distant and concentrated about it.

In front of a shop he met P'tit Louis with a pair of rubber boots in his hand.

"Where are you going?"

"To sell them! Like to buy them? They make much better ones in Canada. I bet you won't find the like of this in France. Two hundred francs."

P'tit Louis was a little uncomfortable, waiting to be allowed to go on his way.

"Has it ever occurred to you that Captain Fallut was a bit touched?"

"You don't see much in the bunkers, you know."

"But you hear things. Well?"

"Of course there were some funny stories! It's difficult to explain. Especially on shore! A boat is either lucky or unlucky. The *Océan* was unlucky."

"Bad seamanship?"

"What do you expect me to say? Things that don't make sense? There was a feeling we wouldn't come back. I say, is it true that I'm not going to be bothered about that pocket-book any more?"

"We'll see."

The Harbor was almost empty. In summer all the ships were away in Newfoundland except the fishing-boats that caught fresh fish along the coast. There was only the gaunt profile of the *Océan* in the dock, and from there the strong smell of cod filled the air.

Near the trucks was a man in leather gaiters and a braided cap.

"Is that the owner?" Maigret asked a customs man who was passing.

"Yes—that's the director of the *Morue Française.*"

The inspector introduced himself. The director gave him a suspicious look without interrupting his work of overseeing the unloading.

"What do you think about the murder of your captain?"

"What do I think? I think that here's eight hundred tons of damaged cod. And if it goes on like this, the boat won't make a second trip. And it's not the police who meet the deficit!"

"You had complete trust in Fallut?"

"Yes!"

"You think it was the operator?"

"Operator or not, it's a wasted year. Not to mention the state the nets were in. Nets that cost two million francs! Torn as if they'd amused themselves fishing from the rocks. And a crew that talks about the evil eye. . . . Hi! down there! Did I say, yes or no, that this truck was to be loaded before anything else?"

And he began running along the boat.

Maigret stayed a few minutes watching the unloading. Then he went off among the fishers in their blouses of rust-colored sailcloth.

Before long he heard a voice behind him:

"Sst! Sst! . . . Inspector! Inspector!"

It was Léon, the proprietor of the *Rendez-Vous des Terre-Neuvas,* who was trying to catch up with him as fast as his little legs would carry him.

"Come and have something on the house. . . ." He wore a mysterious look. On the way he explained.

"Things are quieting down! Those who haven't gone home to Brittany or their own villages have spent nearly all their money. This morning I'd only some mackerel fishers."

They entered the café, which was empty, except for the barmaid.

"What'll you have? A small *apéritif?* It's nearly time for one. As I told you, I don't press people to drink. I don't charge them for more than what they owe me. Go and see whether I'm wanted in the kitchen, Julie!" He gave the inspector a knowing wink. "Your health! . . . I saw you a long way off. So, as I'd something to tell you—"

With an enigmatic but delighted look, he drew out of his pocket a piece of cardboard the shape of a photograph.

"*Voilà!* What do you say to that?"

IT WAS the photograph of a woman. But the head was scribbled all over with red ink. A furious attempt had been made to eradicate the face completely. The pen had scratched holes in the paper.

Below the head, however, the bust was left untouched. The bosom was opulent, the dress made of some shiny satin, tight and low-cut.

"Where did you find this?"

More winks. "I don't mind telling you, as we're alone. Le Clinche's locker shuts rather badly. So he had the habit of slipping his fiancée's letters under his tablecloth."

"And you used to read them?"

"Oh, they were uninteresting. When they made a search they didn't think of looking under the cover. The idea occurred to me, and this is what I found. But it's not the fiancée. She's not that build. So there is another woman in the background."

Maigret looked intently at the portrait. The line of the shoulders was alluring. The woman must be rather older than Marie Léonnec. There was something extremely sensual about the bust.

A bit vulgar too! The dress looked like a cheap copy of some fancy model.

"Is there any red ink in the place?"

"No! Nothing but green ink."

"Le Clinche never used red ink?"

"Never. He had his own ink for his fountain-pen. Special ink, blue-black."

Maigret rose and made for the door.

A few minutes later he was on board the *Océan* rummaging in the operator's cabin, then in the captain's, which was dirty and disorderly. There was no red ink on board, and the fishers had never seen any.

As he left the ship Maigret got a dirty look from the owner, who was still vituperating against the world.

"Is there any red ink in your offices?"

"Red ink? What for? We don't keep a school." But, as if he remembered something, he added brusquely: "Fallut used red ink when he was at home in the Rue d'Etretat. . . . Mind the truck down there! . . . It just needs an accident. Well, what do you want with your red ink? . . ."

"Nothing! Thank you."

P'tit Louis was coming back without his boots but with a pair of spectacles on his nose, a cadet's cap on his head, and old down-at-heel shoes on his feet.

III

MAIGRET left Madame Bernard on the doorstep of her little house in the Rue d'Etretat. She was a well-preserved woman in her fifties, and she had just talked for a solid half-hour about her first husband, her widowhood, the captain who had been her boarder, the rumors that had gone round about their relationship, and finally about the unknown who was certainly a "loose-living woman."

The inspector had been shown around the house, which was well-kept but full of objects in bad taste. Captain Fallut's room was still as it had been arranged in preparation for his return.

Few personal possessions: some clothes in a trunk, some books—mostly adventure novels—and photographs of boats.

It all gave the impression of a placid, mediocre existence.

"We had an understanding, and everybody knew we'd end up by getting married. I supplied the house, the furniture, and the linen. We should have been quite comfortable, especially in three years when he'd have had his pension."

From the windows one could see the grocer's opposite, and the pavement where children were playing.

"The last winter he met that woman and everything was upset. At his age, too! Is it possible to get so infatuated about a creature like that? And he made such a mystery out of it. He must have gone to Le Havre or somewhere to see her, because they were never seen together. He bought thinner underwear, and even silk socks! But it was none of my business."

A whole side of the dead man's life was cleared up by Madame Bernard. The little man, well on in years, who came back to port after a fishing trip and spent the winter living like a good bourgeois with Madame Bernard, who looked after him and waited for him to marry her.

He ate with her in the dining-room under the portrait of the first husband with the blond mustache. Then he would go to his room and read an adventure story.

And suddenly this peaceful existence was disturbed. Another woman appeared. Captain Fallut began to frequent Le Havre, even bought silk socks and hid from his landlady.

He was free, yet he never once showed himself at Fécamp with the stranger.

Was it *la grande passion*, life's great adventure arriving rather late? Or merely a sordid affair?

Maigret arrived at the beach and saw his wife sitting on a red-striped deck-chair, and beside her Marie Léonnec sewing. The beach was white in the sun. A lazy sea. And on the other side of the jetty the *Océan* lay in the dock, with her cargo of cod being unloaded, and her sullen crew talking in phrases of hidden meaning.

He kissed Madame Maigret on the forehead and bowed to the girl, answering her inquiring eyes with a "Nothing special."

They went slowly back to the hotel, Maigret carrying the two folded deck-chairs. Just as they were sitting down

at table a policeman in uniform came up looking for the inspector.

"I was told to show you this. It came in an hour ago. . . ."

And he held out a yellow envelope which had been opened and had no address. Inside was a sheet of paper with cramped, precise handwriting:

No one is to be accused of my death, and do not seek to understand my action.

These are my last wishes. I leave all that I possess to the widow Bernard who has always been good to me, and I charge her to send my gold chronometer to my nephew and to see that I am buried in the cemetery at Fécamp beside my mother.

"It's signed Octave Fallut," Maigret said softly. "How did this letter come to the police station?"

"It was in the letter-box. The signature seems to be genuine. The superintendent immediately informed the public prosecutor."

"But he was strangled, and it is impossible to strangle yourself!" growled Maigret.

THE table d'hôte was clamoring to be eaten. There were red radishes on a dish.

"Wait while I copy this letter. Because I expect you ought to take it back? Yes, it ought to be kept in the dossier."

A little later, Maigret looked impatiently around the dining-room where he would have to waste an hour waiting for the various dishes. Marie Léonnec hadn't taken her eyes off his face, but she had not dared to interrupt his sulky meditation. Madame Maigret, confronted with pale veal cutlets, sighed:

"We would have been better off in Alsace."

Maigret rose before dessert, in a hurry to see the ship, the harbor, and the sailors again. On the way he muttered:

"Fallut knew he was going to die! But did he know he was going to be killed? Did he want to save his murderer, or did he just want to commit suicide? Who put the yellow envelope into the letter-box? It was neither stamped nor addressed."

When Maigret got near the ship, the director of the *Morue Française* called out with aggressive irony:

"Well, it seems that Fallut strangled himself! Who found that out?"

"I'd rather you'd tell me which of the officers of the *Océan* are still on board?"

"None of them! The second officer has gone off on a bust to Paris. The chief engineer is at his home at Yport and won't be back until the unloading is finished."

Maigret went back again into the captain's cabin. A narrow cabin. A bed with a dirty counterpane. A cupboard in the bulkhead. A blue enamel coffee-pot on a table covered with oilcloth. Boots with wooden soles in the corner.

It was gloomy and pitchy, saturated with the acrid smell that reigned over the entire ship. Striped blue jerseys were drying on the bridge. Maigret recrossed the gangway.

"Have you found anything?"

The inspector shrugged, and asked a customs man how one could get to Yport.

Yport was a village at the foot of the cliffs, six kilometers from Fécamp. A few fishermen's cottages, a few farms. Some villas, mostly let furnished during the summer season, and a single hotel.

On the beach bathers, children, and mammas with knitting or embroidery.

"Monsieur Laberge's house, please?"

"The chief engineer of the *Océan* or the farmer?"

"The chief engineer."

He was shown a little house surrounded by a small garden. And as he approached the green-painted gate, the sound of a dispute came to him from inside the house. Two voices, a man's and a woman's. But he knocked.

Steps approached. The door opened and a tall thin man appeared, suspicious and surly.

"What is it?"

A woman in an apron quickly began to tidy her hair.

"I'm from the *Police Judiciaire*, and I should like to ask you some questions."

"Come in."

A little boy was crying, and his father pushed him into the room.

"You can leave us!" said Laberge to his wife. Her eyes were red too. The quarrel must have broken out during the meal, for the plates were only half-empty.

"What do you want to know?"

"How long since you were in Fécamp?"

"This morning. I went there on my bike—it's not very amusing to hear the wife nagging at you the whole day. You spend months at sea, then when you get home—"

His anger had not subsided. His breath reeked of alcohol.

"They're all the same. Jealousy and suspicion. They think your one idea is tarts. Listen!"

The child was crying in the next room, and they heard the woman's voice raised:

"Stop it, will you!"

The words must have been accompanied by slaps, for the sobs broke out louder than ever.

"Oh! It's a fine life."

"Did Captain Fallut ever involve you in any kind of trouble?"

The man looked queerly at Maigret and moved uneasily.

"What makes you think that?"

"Have you been sailing long with him?"

"Five years."

"And on board you took your meals together."

"Except this time! He took it into his head to eat alone in his cabin. But I'd prefer not to talk about that foul trip!"

"Where were you when the crime was committed?"

"At the café with the others."

"And you believe that the operator had a reason for attacking the captain?"

Laberge suddenly got angry.

"What are you getting at with your questions? I wasn't asked to be a police spy! I'm fed up! With everything! I wonder whether I'll sign on for the next trip!"

"Evidently the last one wasn't very brilliant!"

Another sharp look at Maigret.

"What do you mean?"

"That everything went wrong. A cabin-boy got killed. There were more accidents than usual. The fishing wasn't good, and the cod was damaged when it arrived at Fécamp."

"Is it my fault?"

"I'm just asking whether you took part in any incident which might explain the death of the captain. He was a temperate man, leading an orderly life."

The engineer sneered.

"I tell you I know nothing, and I'm fed to the teeth with the whole thing. What do *you* want now? . . ."

His wife had just come into the room and gone over to the stove where a pan was giving off a smell of burning.

SHE must have been about thirty-five, neither pretty nor ugly.

"One moment," she said humbly. "It's the dog's meat."

"Hurry up!" And to Maigret: "Would you like me to give you a good tip? Leave all this alone! Fallut's all right where he is. And the less said about it the better. I know nothing about it, and if you went on questioning me all night I wouldn't have another word to say. Did you come by train? If you don't take the one that goes in ten minutes you won't get another before eight o'clock in the evening."

He had opened the door.

"Who is your wife jealous of?" the inspector asked softly, when he was on the doorstep.

Laberge clenched his teeth.

"Do you know this person?"

Maigret held out the portrait whose head had disappeared under the red-ink scribbles. But he held his thumb on the head. Only the satin corsage was visible.

Laberge could hardly refrain from snatching the piece of cardboard.

"You recognize her?"

"How do you expect me to recognize her?"

Maigret put the portrait back in his pocket.

"You're coming to Fécamp tomorrow."

"You want me?"

"No. Thank you for the information you were so good as to give me."

"I haven't given you any information."

Maigret had not gone ten steps when the door was kicked shut and the voices inside the house took up the quarrel again more fiercely than ever.

The chief engineer had told the truth: there wasn't another train back to Fécamp before eight in the evening, and Maigret was hopelessly stranded. He established himself on the hotel terrace.

It had the commonplace atmosphere of holiday resorts: red sun-umbrellas, white dresses, flannel trousers, and a curious group round a fishing-boat which was being dragged up the beach by means of a windlass. White cliffs to left and right. In front the sea, pale green

with a white fringe and the regular murmur of wavelets on the shore.

"Beer!"

The sun was hot. A family was eating ices at the next table. A young man was taking snapshots, and from somewhere came the shrill voices of girls.

Maigret let his thoughts stray, revolving around Captain Fallut.

"Many thanks!"

These words were impressed in his mind because of the way they were said, drily, with bitter irony, by a woman behind him.

"But, as I've told you, Adèle—"

"Go to blazes!"

"You're not going to begin again?"

"I'll do what I like."

It certainly was a day of quarrels! That morning Maigret had come across a very prickly fellow, the director of the *Morue Française*. At Yport there had been the domestic scene in the Laberge's home. And here was an unknown couple exchanging sharp words.

"You'd better think it over."

"Go to blazes! . . . Waiter, this lemonade is tepid! Get me another!"

"You must decide," the man went on.

Her accent was vulgar and she talked louder than was necessary.

"Go there all by myself? Leave me alone."

"You know it's pretty mean, what you are doing."

"What about you?"

"Me? You dare. . . . If we weren't here, I don't think I'd be able to restrain myself."

She laughed. Far too loudly.

"Oh, go on, ducky!"

"Please be quiet!"

"And why should I be quiet?"

"Because!"

"I must say that's an intelligent answer."

"Adèle, I warn you that—"

She jumped up as if she'd had enough. Maigret had his back to her, but he saw her shadow lengthening on the flagstones of the terrace. She walked off toward the sea.

With the light behind her she was just a silhouette against a reddening sky. Maigret noticed that she was well dressed, that she was not in beach costume but wore high heels.

This made walking difficult on the sand. But she kept on, angry and obstinate.

"What do I owe you, waiter?"

"But I haven't brought madame's lemonade yet."

"Doesn't matter. How much is it?"

Maigret turned to look at the man, who showed a certain embarrassment, for he knew that the people about had heard everything.

He was tall, with a flashy kind of elegance. His eyes were tired and his whole face betrayed mental exhaustion. He stood up, then, assuming an air of indifference, walked toward the young woman who was now following the sinuous line of the sea.

"Another unhappy couple, apparently!" said someone at a table where three women were crocheting.

"They might wash their dirty linen elsewhere! Such a bad example for children!"

The two met at the edge of the water. The attitudes made it easy to guess what was going on.

The man implored and threatened, the woman proved obdurate. Once he took hold of her wrist and it looked as if it were going to degenerate into a fight. But he turned his back on her. He walked with long strides toward a nearby road where he started up a little gray car.

"Waiter, another half-pint!"

MAIGRET had just noticed that the young woman had left her handbag on the table. It was imitation crocodile, full to bursting, quite new.

A shadow advanced along the ground.

He raised his head and saw the face of the owner of the bag as she reached the terrace.

He got a slight shock. His nostrils quivered.

Of course he might be mistaken. It was an impression rather than a certainty. But he could have sworn that before him stood the original of the portrait without a head.

The woman sat down again.

"Well, waiter! Where's my lemonade?"

"I thought . . . The gentleman said—"

"I ordered a lemonade!"

It was the rather fleshy line of the neck, the bosom, full but firm, voluptuously resilient. The same way of dressing and the same taste in glossy silks in loud colors.

Maigret dropped the portrait so that

his neighbor couldn't help seeing it.

And she did see it. She looked at the inspector as if she were trying to place him. But if she was worried she did not show it.

The purr of a car came from far off and grew louder. The gray car approached the terrace, stopped and started again as if the driver could not make up his mind definitely to go away.

"Gaston!"

She stood up and made signs to her friend. She seized her bag, and a moment later she was in the car.

The three women at the next table followed her with disapproving eyes. The young man with the kodak turned around.

The gray car was already disappearing with its engine throbbing.

"Waiter!" The inspector's large fingers drummed a rapid tattoo on the table. "Give me a road map. And get me the Fécamps police station on the telephone. . . . Have you ever seen those people before?"

"The ones who were quarreling? Nearly every day this week. I think they come from Le Havre."

All the families had gone from the beach, which was now bathed in the stillness of a summer evening. A black boat gravitated imperceptibly toward the horizon, went into the sun and came out at the other side as if through a paper hoop.

IV

"I MYSELF," said the Fécamp Superintendent of Police, "must confess I haven't any illusions. It's seldom that one clears up these sea affairs. Just suppose you try to find out the real truth about one of these common squabbles that break out every day in port. When my men arrive on the scene they're hard at it. But when they see the uniforms they all turn on them. Question them; they all lie. They complicate matters to such an extent that finally one just gives up."

There were four of them smoking in the office. It was evening. The superintendent of the Le Havre *Brigade Mobile*, officially in charge of the case, was accompanied by a young inspector. Maigret was there in a private capacity.

"But it seems quite simple to me!" ventured the young inspector. "Robbery wasn't the motive. Therefore it was a case of revenge. Who was Captain Fallut most severe with in the course of the trip?"

But the superintendent from Le Havre shrugged.

"No, my boy, no. There's something else. First of all, this woman you've unearthed, Maigret. I can't quite place her rôle. The boat was away three months. She wasn't even there when they sailed. The operator is engaged to be married. Captain Fallut, from all accounts, didn't seem the sort of man to do anything foolish. And yet he drew up his will just before he was murdered."

"It would also be interesting to know who took the trouble to bring the will here," sighed Maigret. "There's a little journalist, the one who always wears a beige mackintosh, who declares in the *Eclair de Rouen* that the *Océan* was sent by her owners on a mission other than cod-fishing."

"They say that every time!" the Fécamp superintendent growled.

There was a long silence. Then Maigret suddenly arose.

"If you were to ask me what was characteristic about this affair," he said, "I should say that it stands under the sign of Mars. Everybody belonging to that boat is quarrelsome, irritable, short-tempered. At the *Rendez-Vous des Terre-Neuvas* the crew gets drunk and fights. When I take the operator's fiancée to him, he gives her a chilly welcome. He practically told her to mind her own business! At Yport, the chief engineer gives his wife hell and treats me like a dog. Finally I find two other people who seem to come under the same influence. The woman called Adèle and her companion have a quarrel on the beach and only make it up so that they can get away."

"What conclusions do you come to, then?" inquired the Le Havre superintendent.

"Me? No conclusions at all! Well, good evening, gentlemen. My wife is waiting for me at the hotel. You'll let me know, Superintendent, if they find the Yport woman and the man in the gray car?"

"Of course! Good night."

Maigret lounged along the quays, his hands in his pockets, his pipe between his teeth. The empty dock made a vast

black rectangle reflecting the lights of the *Océan*, which was still being unloaded.

"Under the sign of Mars!" he growled to himself.

No one paid any attention to him when he went on board. He walked along the bridge and saw a light in the fo'c's'l deck hatchway. He stooped down and was greeted by a warm breath of air, the smell of a barrack-room, a refectory, and a fish shop combined.

He went down the iron ladder and found himself face to face with three men who were eating out of mess-tins held between their knees. For light they had an oil-lamp hung from a swivel. In the middle of the fo'c's'l was a cast-iron stove encrusted with slag.

Along the bulkheads were four tiers of bunks, some filled with straw, others empty. Boots and sou'westers were hanging about.

The only one who rose was P'tit Louis. The other two were the Breton and a Negro with bare feet.

"Bon appetit!" growled Maigret.

There were answering growls.

"Where are your pals?"

"In their homes," said P'tit Louis. "It's only when you've nowhere to go to, and not a cent in your pocket, that you stay here when the boat's in dock."

YOU had to get gradually accustomed to the semi-darkness, and the smell. And you could imagine the same place when forty men lived there, throwing themselves into their bunks with their boots on, snoring, chewing, smoking!

"Did the captain come here sometimes?"

"Never!"

And then the panting of machinery, the smell of coal and soot, the burning metal bulkheads, the battering blows of the sea.

"Come with me, P'tit Louis."

Maigret caught the sailor making signs behind his back to show off before the others. But up above, on the shadowy bridge, all his swank had gone.

"What is it?"

"Listen. Suppose the captain had died during the trip. Is there anyone who could have brought the ship into port?"

"Perhaps there isn't. The second officer can't take the bearings. It's true they say that with the wireless the operator can always tell the position. . . ."

"Did you see him often, the operator?"

"Never! You don't think we wander about then as we're doing now? You stay in your corner for days on end."

"And the chief engineer?"

"We used to see *him* every day, so to speak."

"What was he like?"

P'tit Louis became evasive.

"What is it you're trying to get at? You ought to be there when everything goes wrong—a cabin-boy overboard, a boiler feed-pipe burst, the captain insisting on taking the boat where there's not a single fish, a man with gangrene. . . . You'd swear yourself black in the face. And for the least thing you'd let fly with your fist at anybody's mug! And when they say the captain is balmy—"

"Was he?"

"I didn't ask him. But the three of them, up there, were never without their revolvers. Watching each other, frightened of each other. The captain hardly ever came out of his cabin, where he'd taken the map, the compass, the sextant, and all the rest."

"And this went on for three months?"

"Yes!"

"Thanks. You can go."

P'tit Louis stayed a moment by the hatchway watching the inspector puffing at his pipe. They were still bringing cod out of the yawning hold by the light of acetylene lamps. But the detective wanted to forget the trucks, dock-laborers, quays, jetties, and light-houses.

With half-closed eyes he pictured the open sea, the even ground-swell through which the ship plowed its way, hour after hour, day after day, week after week.

Men at the engines. Men in the fore. And, aft in the poop, a handful of human beings. The captain, his second officer, the chief engineer, and the radio operator.

A little binnacle-lamp to light the compass. Maps spread out.

Three months!

When they got back, Captain Falluti had made a will in which he declared his intention of putting an end to his days.

An hour after the ship put into port, he was strangled and thrown into the dock.

And Madame Bernard, his landlady, was desolate because this made their admirably planned union forever impossible! The chief engineer made scenes

with his wife! A certain Adèle gave an unknown man the devil, but made off with him the moment Maigret put her portrait scored with red ink under her nose! The operator, Le Clinche, in prison, was like a bear with a sore head!

The ship moved slightly, just a light motion. One of the men on the fo'c's'l deck was playing an accordion.

Maigret turned his head and saw on the quay two female silhouettes. He rushed forward and crossed the gangway.

"What are you doing here?"

He blushed because he had spoken harshly, conscious that he had been infected by this frenzy which had seized all the protagonists of the drama.

"We just wanted to see the ship," said Madame Maigret.

"It's my fault!" Marie Léonnec interrupted. "It was I who insisted."

The *Rendez-Vous des Terre-Neuvas* was almost the only place still showing lights. On the jetty one could just make out some summer visitors conscientiously taking their evening stroll.

"You have discovered something?" asked Le Clinche's fiancée.

"Not yet. At least, not much."

"I daren't ask you a favor."

"Go on!"

"I should like to see Pierre's cabin. Will you allow me?"

He took her there. Madame Maigret refused to cross the gangway.

It was a regular metal box. Wireless apparatus. A sheet-iron table, a bench, and a bunk. On the bulkhead a portrait of Marie Léonnec in Breton costume. Old shoes on the floor and a pair of trousers on the bunk.

The girl took in this atmosphere.

"It's not as I imagined. His shoes haven't once been cleaned. Look! He always drank out of this glass without washing it."

A FUNNY girl! A mixture of timidity, weakness, good education, energy and audacity. She hesitated.

"And the captain's cabin?"

Maigret gave a faint smile, for he realized that she hoped to make some discovery. He led her to it. He had found a lantern on the bridge.

"How can they live in this smell?" she sighed.

She looked attentively around. She was rather embarrassed as she asked:

"Why has the bed been raised up?"

The observation was apt. All the crew slept in bunks which were a part of the boat. Only the captain had an iron bedstead. And under each foot a block of wood had been placed.

"Don't you find it strange? You'd think—"

"Go on."

"You'd think—but you'll laugh at me! —that the bed had been raised so someone could hide under it."

He saw the girl's pale face strained with excitement. And before he could stop her she lay down on the floor, in spite of all the dirt, and slid under the bed.

"There *is* room!" she said.

"All right. Come out."

"One moment, please. Pass me the lamp a moment, Inspector!"

He couldn't think what she was doing. He began to get impatient.

"Well?"

"Wait!"

She got up suddenly, her gray suit all dirty, her eyes fevered.

"Pull out the bed. You'll see—"

Her voice was broken. Her hands trembled. Maigret pulled the bed savagely away from the bunkhead and looked.

"I don't see anything."

He turned around and found that she was crying.

"What did you see? What are you crying for?"

"Here! Read!"

He had to get down and hold the lamp up against the bulkhead. Then he made out some names written on the wood with a pin or a nail.

Gaston . . . Octave . . . Pierre . . . Hen—"

The last name was unfinished. Yet it had not been done in a hurry. Some of the letters must have taken over an hour! There were the sort of strokes and flourishes one makes when one has nothing better to do.

The comic note was struck by two stag's antlers which had been drawn over the name "Octave."

The girl was still weeping silently.

"Curious!" growled Maigret. "I should like to know whether—"

She rose vehemently.

"Of course! That's what it was! There was a woman here! She hid. But

it didn't keep men from finding her. . . . Wasn't Captain Fallut's name Octave?"

The inspector had rarely been so embarrassed.

"Don't draw any hasty conclusions!" he said.

"But the whole story's there! Four men who—"

"In police matters you must always wait before you jump to conclusions. You told me just yesterday that Le Clinche is incapable of killing anyone."

"Yes!" she sobbed. "That's true! But his name's Pierre!"

"Every tenth sailor is called Pierre, and there were fifty men on board. There is also a Gaston and a Henry."

"Are you going to show this to the magistrate?"

"Keep calm! We have discovered nothing at all yet, except that the bed has been raised for some reason or another, and that someone has written those names on the bulkhead."

"There was a woman."

"Why a woman?"

"But—"

"Come along! Madame Maigret is waiting for us."

She wiped her tears obediently.

"I shouldn't have come. . . . And I thought . . . But it's not possible that Pierre . . . Listen! I must see him as soon as possible. I'll talk to him alone. You'll do what's necessary, won't you?"

BEFORE she set foot on the gangway she cast a look charged with hatred on the black ship, now that she knew a woman had hidden on board.

Madame Maigret looked at her curiously.

"Come now, don't cry! You know it will all turn out all right."

She could not speak. She was choking. And Madame Maigret, who didn't understand, looked inquiringly at her husband.

"Take her back to the hotel. Try to calm her."

"Has anything happened?"

"Nothing definite. I'll probably be a bit late."

He watched them as they went off. Marie Léonnec's companion had to drag her along like a child.

Maigret almost went back on board. But he was thirsty. There was still a light at the *Rendez-Vous des Terre-Neuvas*.

At one table four sailors were playing cards. Near the bar, a young admirer had an arm around the barmaid's waist. The proprietor was following the game and giving advice.

"Hello!" was his greeting to Maigret. "It's you."

And he didn't seem particularly happy to see him again. He couldn't hide a slight embarrassment.

"Go on, Julie. Serve the inspector. What can I offer you?"

"Nothing at all. If you'll allow me, I'll order a drink like anyone else."

Was the day going to end under the sign of Mars? One of the sailors growled something in Norman patois, and Maigret managed to translate roughly:

"Well, well! Still snooping round . . ."

The inspector looked him in the eyes. He stammered:

"I'll bid a club!"

"You should have bid spades!" said Léon for something to say.

V

THE telephone bell rang. Léon answered it, and immediately called Maigret.

"Hello!" said a bored voice at the other end of the wire. "Inspector Maigret? This is the clerk at the Police Station. I've just rung your hotel and they said I would perhaps find you at the *Rendez-Vous des Terre-Neuvas*. Sorry to bother you, Inspector. I can't get the chief. I've got two queer cards here who have just come in, and it seems they've got some important statement to make. A man and a woman. . . ."

"With a gray car?"

"Yes. Are those the ones you were looking for?"

Ten minutes later, Maigret arrived at the police station. The offices were deserted, except for the inquiry office, which was divided in two by a rail. Seated on a bench, his elbows on his knees, his chin between his hands, a man was waiting. And a woman was walking up and down, stamping on the floor with her high heels.

When the inspector came in she marched up to him, and the man rose with a sigh of relief, muttering:

"Well, you've kept us long enough!"

It was the Yport couple, even more ill-tempered than during the scene Maigret had witnessed.

He took them into the superintendent's office, sat down in his swivel-chair and lit a pipe, watching them.

"You can sit down."

"Thank you!" said the woman, who was decidedly the more nervous of the two.

He now saw her face to face by the strong light of an electric lamp. A fine figure of a woman, with an attractive body, sound teeth, a provocative smile, and an animated eye.

In other words, a fine bitch, flighty, greedy, equally ready to make a scene or to burst into a great vulgar laugh.

Her blouse was pink silk, caught with a gold brooch the size of a hundred-centime piece.

"First, I insist on telling you—"

"Excuse me!" interrupted Maigret. "Will you sit down as I asked you and answer my questions."

Her mouth took on an ugly expression.

"Listen! You forget I'm here of my own free will."

Her companion made a face. He was just the sort of man usually found with that sort of woman. He was dressed correctly, but in bad taste. He had big rings on his fingers and a pearl in his tie. But his ensemble wasn't right.

He was the sort of man seen in cafés and restaurants at all hours drinking champagne with women, and putting up at third-rate hotels.

"You first! Your name, domicile, and profession."

He attempted to get up.

"Stay where you are! Your name?"

"Gaston Buzier. My business is selling and letting villas. I mostly live at Le Havre at the *Anneau d'Argent* hotel."

"Are you an established estate agent?"

"No, but—"

"Are you employed in any agency?"

"Well—"

"In a word, you're a shyster. How were you employed previously?"

"I was representative of a make of bicycles. I've also gone around getting orders for sewing-machines."

"How many convictions?"

"Don't answer, Gaston!" interrupted the woman. "It's we who came to—"

"Shut up! Two convictions. One, with delay of execution, on account of a rubber check. Another for two months for not having given the owner the full amount I'd received on a villa."

HE, anyway, was used to facing the police. He remained at his ease, with a touch of malice in his expression.

"Your turn!" said Maigret, turning to the woman.

"Adèle Noirhomme. Born in Belleville."

"Registered?"

"They put me on the register at Strasbourg five years ago, because a woman had it in for me for vamping her husband. But since then."

"You've managed to escape police control. Fine! Will you tell me in what capacity you sailed on the *Océan?*"

"I must first explain!" answered the man. "The fact that we've come here shows that we've nothing to reproach ourselves for. At Yport Adèle told me you had her photograph and were sure to arrest us. At Etretat I saw gendarmes on the lookout and I knew we were going to be nabbed. So I preferred to come here of my own accord."

"Madame, I asked you what you were doing on the trawler."

"That's quite simple. I was following my lover!"

"Captain Fallut?"

"Yes. I'd been with him since November. We met at a café at Le Havre. He fell in love. Right from the beginning I thought he was mad because he never asked for anything. He took a nicely furnished room for me, and I thought that, if I set about it the right way, he'd end up by marrying me. Sailors aren't rolling in money, but they're regular and there's always the pension."

"You never came to Fécamp with him?"

"No! He forbade me. He came over here. He was jealous. The sort of chap that can't have had much experience, because at fifty he was as timid with women as a schoolboy."

"Excuse me! You were already the mistress of Gaston Buzier?"

"Of course. But I introduced Gaston to Fallut as my brother."

"I understand. Both of you were living on the captain's money."

"I was working," Buzier protested.

"I know! Every Saturday afternoon! Who thought of taking you on board?"

"Fallut! The idea of leaving me alone during the entire trip was worrying him. He was scared stiff, because the regulations are strict and he was a stickler for regulations. He made me go into his cab-

in the night before they sailed. The idea of a change amused me, but if I'd known how it was going to turn out I'd have dropped it like a hot coal!"

"Didn't Buzier protest?"

"He was a bit doubtful. But he didn't want to go against the old boy's ideas. The captain had promised to retire after the trip and marry me. A fine life he had in store for me! Shut up all day in a cabin smelling fish! And when anyone came in I had to hide under the bed! We'd hardly put out to sea when Fallut regretted having taken me. I've never seen a man with such moods as he had. Ten times a day he'd come to see whether the door was properly locked. If I spoke, he made me shut up. He was sulky and irritable. He even used to look as if he were tempted to throw me overboard."

Her voice became shrill and she waved her arms.

"Not to mention that he got more and more jealous! He questioned me about my past. For three days he didn't speak to me, just watched me like an enemy. Then suddenly his passion would get hold of him again. There were times when I was afraid of him."

"Which of the crew members saw you on board?"

"On the fourth night. I wanted to go on the bridge for a breath of air. Fallut went to make sure there was no one about. He allowed me to take about five steps up and down. He had to go down to the deck for a moment, and it was then the operator came and talked to me. He was shy, but in a fever. The next day he managed to get into my cabin."

"Did Fallut see him?"

"I don't think so."

"You became Le Clinche's mistress?"

She made no answer. Gaston Buzier sneered.

"Go on, tell him!" he snapped.

"I'm free to do what I like! It's not as if you had kept off women while I was away. What about the little thing at the *Villa des Fleurs?*"

Maigret remained impassive as a graven image.

"I asked you whether you became the radio operator's mistress."

"And I say go to blazes!"

SHE was being provocative. She knew she was desirable, reckoning on her full lips, her inviting body.

"The chief engineer saw you, too?"

"What has he been telling you?"

"Nothing! I will sum up. The captain kept you hidden in his cabin. Pierre Le Clinche and the chief engineer came secretly to see you. Did Fallut find out?"

"No!"

"All the same, he must have had his suspicions, leaving you when it was strictly necessary."

Maigret saw the ship, the stokers isolated in their hold, the men packed together in the fo'c's'l, the operator's cabin and the captain's aft, with the raised bed.

The trip had lasted three months!

And all this time three men had been prowling around the cabin where the woman was shut up.

"A silly thing I did!" she exclaimed. "One should always mistrust those timid men who talk of marriage."

"If you'd listened to me—" interrupted Gaston Buzier.

"You shut up! If I'd listened to you, I know what kind of house I'd be in. I don't want to speak ill of Fallut now that he's dead, but he was touchy all the same. He got ideas. He would have thought himself dishonored because he'd broken the regulations. And it went from bad to worse. After a week he never opened his mouth except to ask whether anyone had been in the cabin! He was particularly jealous of Le Clinche and he used to say: 'That would please you, eh! A young man!' And he'd sneer until I felt ill."

"How many times was Le Clinche with you?" Maigret asked slowly.

"Oh, well, who cares? Once. On the fourth day. Afterwards it wasn't possible. Fallut watched me too closely."

"And the engineer?"

"Never! He tried. He'd come and look through the port-hole. Always with a dead pale face. You can't imagine what a life that was—I was like a beast in a cage. When there was a bit of a swell I used to be sick and Fallut didn't even bother to attend to me. For weeks he wouldn't touch me, then he would kiss me as if he wanted to bite me, and embrace me as if he'd like to stifle me."

Gaston Buzier had lit a cigarette and was smoking with an ironical expression.

"You'll notice, Inspector, that I don't come into it. All this time I was working. . . ."

"Will you please stop it?" she said impatiently.

"What happened when you got back? Had Fallut announced his intention of killing himself?"

"He? Certainly not! When we got into port he hadn't spoken a word to me for a fortnight. I don't believe he'd spoken to anyone. He spent hours staring straight in front of him. I'd decided to leave him anyway. I was fed up. I'd rather starve and have my freedom. I heard that we were coming into port. He came into the cabin and said, 'You'll wait until I come and fetch you.'"

"Go on!"

"That's ll I know. Gaston told me the rest. He was on the quay!"

"You tell me," Maigret said to him.

"I saw the sailors going into the café. I was waiting for Adèle. Then the captain came off alone. There were some stationary trucks. He took a few steps and a man fell on him. I don't know exactly what happened, but there was the noise of a body falling into the water."

"Would you recognize the man?"

"No! It was very dark and the trucks hid nearly everything."

"What direction did he take?"

"I think he went along the quay."

"And you didn't see the operator?"

"I don't know. I'd never seen him."

Maigret turned to the woman.

"How did you get out of the cabin?"

"Le Clinche opened the cabin door. He said, 'Get out quick.'"

"Is that all?"

"I heard people running on the quay, and saw a boat coming up the dock with a lamp. But he said again: 'Get out.' He pushed me onto the gangway. Everyone was looking in another direction. They didn't notice me. I was pretty sure something was going on, but I preferred to get away. Gaston was waiting a little farther along."

"And what did you do after that?"

"We had some rum in a pub. We slept at the Railway Hotel. The next day all the papers were talking about Fallut's death. Then we got away to Le Havre, just as a precaution. We didn't want to get mixed up in that business."

"But that didn't prevent her from wanting to hang around here," snapped her lover. "I don't know whether it was for the operator or—"

"You shut up! That's quite enough. Naturally I was interested in the business. As a matter of fact, we came three times to Fècamp. And so as not to be noticed, we slept at Yport."

"You didn't see the chief engineer again?"

"One day at Yport. Though the look he gave me frightened me. He followed me for some time."

"Why were you quarreling with your lover just now?"

She shrugged. "He's convinced I'm in love with Le Clinche, that it's for me the operator did the murder. He's been making scenes and I saw enough of that on that cursed boat."

"When I showed you your photo on the terrace—"

"That was a dirty trick! I realized you were from the police! I thought Le Clinche must have talked. I told Gaston to get us out of it. It was only when we'd gone that it occurred to us that you'd get us in the end. Not to mention that we'd only two hundred francs in our pockets. . . . What are you going to do with me? You can't put me in prison?"

"You think the operator did the murder?"

"How should I know?"

"Do you possess a pair of yellow shoes?" Maigret asked Gaston Buzier.

"I—yes. Why?"

"Are you sure you wouldn't be able to recognize the murderer of the captain?"

"I only saw a silhouette in the dark."

"Well! Pierre Le Clinche was there too, hiding among the trucks, and he says that the murderer was wearing yellow shoes."

BUZIER sprang up, his eyes hard. "You're sure he said that?" He choked and stuttered with rage. He was transformed. He looked challengingly around the room. "Take me to him. I insist! We'll see who's lying! Yellow shoes! So it's me, eh? He takes my woman, he takes her off the boat, and he has the gall to say—"

He couldn't get breath.

"You hear that, Adèle?" he panted. "That's what they're like, your lovers!"

Tears of rage gushed from his eyes.

"So it was me! That's rich. And of course, as I'd two convictions, you knew I'd killed Captain Fallut. Because I was jealous of him, perhaps? And then what? Haven't I killed the operator as well?"

He passed a hand through his hair with a feverish gesture, rumpling it up. It made him look thinner, deepened the shadows under his eyes and made his skin look duller.

"What are you waiting for? Why don't you arrest me?"

"Shut up!" muttered Adèle.

But she was getting desperate, too, although it didn't prevent her from shooting keen glances at her companion.

Did she have her doubts? Or was she only bluffing?

"If you must arrest me, do it at once! But I demand that you let me meet the gentleman face to face. Then we'll see!"

Maigret pressed an electric bell, and the superintendent's secretary put in a worried face.

"You'll lock up this lady and gentleman until the magistrate decides what is to be done."

"Swine!" cried Adèle. "Catch me telling the truth again. And everything that I said I just made up, so there. And I won't sign any statement. Carry on with your scheme. So that's what it was!" Then, turning to her lover, she went on: "Don't worry, Gaston! It'll be all right. In the end we'll come out on top! Only, of course, once a woman's had her name on the register, she's only fit for locking up. But wasn't it me, perhaps, who killed the captain?"

Maigret went out without listening to any more. Outside he breathed down gulps of sea air and knocked the ashes out of his pipe. Before he'd gone ten steps he heard Adèle's voice in the police station hurling all the foulest words in her vocabulary at the policemen.

It was two in the morning. The night was calm and unreal. The tide was high and the masts of the fishing-boats swayed above the roofs of the houses.

Over all was a rhythmic murmur, wave after wave breaking on the shore.

There were glaring lights around the *Océan*. Day and night the unloading went on and porters pushed the full trucks, bending their backs under the weight.

The *Rendez-Vous des Terre-Neuvas* was closed. At the *Hôtel de la Plage* the porter opened the door to the inspector.

Maigret did not at first see the woman in a cane-chair. It was Marie Léonnec. She was asleep.

"I think she's waiting for you," whispered the porter.

She was pale, almost anemic. Her lips were colorless and dark circles around her eyes betrayed her fatigue. She slept with her mouth a little open, as if she couldn't get enough air.

Maigret touched her gently on the shoulder. She jumped up, pulled herself together and looked at him confusedly.

"I was asleep . . . Oh!"

"Why didn't you go to bed? Didn't my wife take you to your room?"

"Yes, but I crept down again. I wanted to know! Tell me."

She wasn't as pretty as usual. Sleep had made her skin damp. And a mosquito bite had left a red spot in the middle of her forehead. Her dress, which she must have made herself out of some durable serge, was crumpled.

"Have you discovered anything new? No? . . . Listen! I've been doing a lot of thinking. I don't know how to say it to you. Before I see Pierre tomorrow, I'd like you to talk to him, to tell him I know all about this woman and that I'm not angry with him. I'm sure, you see, that he's not guilty. Only, if I speak to him first, he'll be embarrassed. You saw him this morning. He's letting it prey on his mind. After all, it's quite natural, if there was a woman on board, for him to—"

But it was beyond her! She broke into sobs. She couldn't stop crying.

"Above all, this mustn't get into the papers in case my parents get to know. They wouldn't understand. They—"

She gulped. "You *must* find the murderer! It seems to me that if *I* could only question people . . . Excuse me! I don't know what I'm saying. You know better than I do. Only you don't know Pierre. I'm two years older than he is. He's like a child. And, if he's accused, he's capable of shutting up, from sheer pride, and saying nothing."

SLOWLY Maigret put his hand on her shoulder and stifled a deep sigh. Adèle's voice was still buzzing in his ears. He thought of her, provocatively animal, magnificently sensual.

And this girl, nicely brought up, tried to stifle her sobs, to smile confidently.

But what *she* would never know was that black cabin around which three men had prowled, for days, for weeks, in the middle of the sea, while the men at the engines, the men in the fo'c's'l dimly

sensed drama, watched the sea, discussed bearings, became uneasy and talked of madness and the evil eye.

"I'll see Le Clinche tomorrow," Maigret said.

"But shall I?"

"Probably. You must go and lie down!"

And a little later, Madame Maigret, half-asleep, murmured:

"She's very nice. Do you know, she has all her trousseau ready? All hand-embroidered. Have you any news? You smell of scent."

A little of Adèle's strong perfume must have clung to him. A perfume as common as the blue wine you get at a *bistro*. For months it had mingled on the trawler with the rank smell of cod, whilst three men prowled around a cabin, obstinate and surly as dogs.

"Sleep well!" he said as he drew the cover up to her chin.

And he imprinted a deep solemn kiss on his sleeping wife's forehead.

VI

THE scene was the usual setting for such meetings in the little prison office. Superintendent Girard of Le Havre occupied the only chair. Maigret leaned against the black marble mantelpiece. On the walls were diagrams, official announcements, and a portrait of the President of the Republic.

Standing in the glare of the light was Gaston Buzier in his yellow shoes.

"Bring in the radio-operator!"

The door opened. Pierre Le Clinche came forward frowning like a man who is suffering and awaits fresh trails. He saw Buzier, but he did not take any notice of him.

Adèle's lover, however, scrutinized him from head to foot, his lip curling. Le Clinche looked rumpled, and his face was gray. He neither tried to carry off nor to conceal his dejection. He was as miserable as a sick beast.

"Do you recognize the man in front of you?"

He looked at Buzier and seemed to search his memory.

"No! Who is he?"

"Look him over carefully."

La Clinche obeyed, and raised his head.

"Well?"

"I see what you mean. The yellow shoes."

"Exactly!" exploded Gaston Buzier, who had stood silent with a cantankerous expression on his face. "Repeat that it was me who bumped off your captain!"

All eyes were fixed on the operator, who made a weary gesture with his hand.

"Perhaps it wasn't those shoes."

Buzier was already exultant. "So you're climbing down?"

"You don't identify Fallut's murderer?"

"No."

"You are aware that you are in the presence of the lover of a certain Adèle whom you know. He has confessed he was in the neighborhood of the trawler at the time of the crime. And he was wearing yellow shoes."

Buzier was trembling with rage and impatience.

"Yes, let him talk! But let him try to tell the truth, or I swear—"

"You be quiet! Well, Le Clinche?"

He passed his hand across his forehead.

"I don't know! He can go and hang himself!"

"Did you see a man with yellow shoes attack Fallut?"

"I've forgotten. . . ."

"That's what you asserted the first time you were interrogated, not so long ago. Do you stick to this statement?"

"Well, no, I don't! I saw a man with yellow shoes—that's all. I don't know whether he was the murderer."

As the interrogation proceeded, Gaston Buzier, also the worse for wear after a night at the police station, recovered his self-assurance.

"You see, he doesn't dare repeat the lies he told you."

"Answer me, Le Clinche. Up to now, we are certain that there were two people near the trawler at the time of the murder. You and Buzier. You say you didn't kill him, After accusing Buzier you seem to be withdrawing your accusation. Then might there have been a third person? In that case, you couldn't have failed to see him! Who was it?"

Silence. Pierre Le Clinche stared at the floor.

Maigret had taken no part in the interrogation, confining himself to observing the two men.

"I will repeat my question: "Was there a third person on the quay?"

"I don't know," sighed the accused brokenly.

"Well, tell me why you asserted that the murderer was wearing yellow shoes. Wasn't it to avert suspicion from the real murderer, whom you know?"

The young man pressed his forehead between his two hands.

"I can't go on!" he sobbed.

"Answer!"

"No! Do what you like!"

"Bring in the next witness."

The door opened again, and Adèle came forward with an exaggerated self-assurance. She gave a quick glance around to try and make out what had been happening.

She seemed amazed to see the operator so overcome.

"No, Le Clinche, I expect you recognize the woman Captain Fallut kept concealed in his cabin throughout the entire journey, and whose lover you were."

Adèle's lips were half-opened in an encouraging smile.

"That's her."

"Briefly, there were three of you on the ship hanging around her—the captain, the chief engineer, and you. You possessed her at least once. The chief engineer didn't succeed. Did the captain know you had deceived him?"

"He never mentioned it to me."

"He was jealous, wasn't he? It was because of this jealousy that for three months he didn't say a single word to you?"

"No."

"There was another reason?"

Le Clinche grew red and too quickly he stammered:

"Perhaps it was because of that—I don't know."

"What other cause for hatred or mistrust was there between you?"

"There was none. You were right. He was jealous."

"And what sentiment were you guided by on becoming Adèle's lover?"

Silence.

"You love her?"

"No!" he said curtly.

"Thank you!" shrilled the woman. "You are polite, I must say! But that didn't prevent you from running around me up to the last day. Probably someone else was impatiently waiting for you on shore."

GASTON BUZIER affected to whistle, his fingers stuck in the armholes of his waistcoat.

"Tell me again, Le Clinche, whether, when you went back on board after witnessing the death of the captain, Adèle was really locked up in his cabin."

"Locked up, yes."

"So she couldn't have killed him?"

"No. I swear—"

Le Clinche was unnerved. But Superintendent Girard went on ponderously:

"Buzier states that you didn't do the murder. You, after accusing him, took it back. Another hypothesis is that the two of you were accomplices."

"Thank you!" Buzier exploded with terrific scorn. "When I get mixed up in a crime it won't be in the company of a—a—"

"That's enough! Both of you might have done the murder out of jealousy."

Buzier sneered. "Me jealous? Of what?"

"Have you any further statement to make, you, Le Clinche?"

"No."

"Buzier?"

"I insist that I am innocent and I demand to be set free."

"And you?"

Adèle was making up her lips.

"Me?"—a dab of lipstick—"I"—a look in her mirror—"have nothing to say. All men are mugs. You heard this boy here, for whom I could maybe have done something pretty silly? You needn't look at me like that, Gaston. . . . Now, if you want my opinion, it is that in all this affair on the boat there are things we know nothing about. Just because there was a woman on board you thought that explained everything. But suppose it was something else?"

"Such as?"

"I don't know. I'm not the police."

She arranged her hair under her red straw toque. Maigret noticed that Le Clinche turned away his head.

Girard anounced:

"Le Clinche will go back to his cell. You two will wait outside. In a quarter of an hour I shall let you know whether you are free or not."

The detectives were left alone, both rather worried.

"Are you going to propose to the examining magistrate that he should let them go?" asked Maigret.

"Yes! They may be mixed up in the

affair. At the same time, there are other elements that have escaped us."

"Parbleu!"

"Hello! Give me the Le Havre Law Courts. . . . Hello! Yes, the Court!"

While Superintendent Girard was talking to the magistrate, there was a disturbance in the corridor. Maigret rushed out and saw Le Clinche lying on the floor struggling with three men in uniform. His bloodshot eyes were starting out of his head, his mouth dribbled. But, held down, he could not move.

"What happened?"

"We hadn't bothered to put handcuffs on him as he'd always been so quiet. Then, coming down the corridor, he tried to take my revolver. He got hold of it. I managed to prevent him from pulling the trigger."

Le Clinche lay, staring fixedly. His teeth bit into his lips, mixing blood with saliva. Tears were rolling down his wan cheeks.

"Should I get a doctor?"

"No!" Maigret commanded. "Leave him!"

And when they had gone, leaving him lying on the stone floor, he said:

"Get up! Come on! And quietly! Or else you'll feel my fist in your face, silly fool that you are!"

The operator obeyed, docile and timid. His whole body was throbbing with fever and he had got dirty when he fell down.

Superintendent Girard came up.

"They're free," he said. "All three of them, but they are not to leave Fécamp. . . . What's been happening?"

"This fool tried to kill himself! If you'll allow me, I'll see to him. . . ."

Together they walked along the quay. Le Clinche had dashed some cold water on his face, which still had red patches on it. His eyes were feverish, his lips too highly colored.

He was wearing a ready-made three-buttoned gray suit. His tie was askew.

Maigret, his hands in his pockets, walked doggedly along, growling, seemingly to himself:

"I've no time to lecture you. But your fiancée's a brave little thing, who hurried here from Quimper and has been moving heaven and earth. It's no use driving her to despair."

"She knows?"

"You don't need to tell her about that woman."

Maigret watched him closely. They came to the end of the quays, the bright colors of the fish-boats blazed in the sun, the pavements were crowded.

Sometimes Le Clinche seemed to be taking an interest in life again. He would look around hopefully, and then his eyes would grow hard and scornful.

They had to pass the *Océan*, where they were just finishing the unloading. There were three trucks left in front of the ship. Casually, Maigret murmured, indicating certain points:

"You were there . . . Gaston Buzier here. And it was here that a third man strangled the captain."

HIS companion took a deep breath and looked away.

"Only it was dark and you couldn't distinguish anyone. The third man was neither the chief engineer nor the second officer, because they were both with the crew in the *Rendez-Vous des Terre-Neuvas.*"

The Breton sailor, who was on the bridge, saw the operator and went and leaned over the hatchway. Three other sailors emerged and looked at Le Clinche.

"Come!" said Maigret. "Marie Léonnec is waiting for us."

"I can't."

"Why can't you?"

"What difference can it make to you if I do away with myself? Particularly if it's going to be better for everyone!"

"Is that secret so burdensome, Le Clinche?"

Le Clinche was silent.

"And you can't possibly tell me anything, can you? . . . Do you still want Adèle?"

"I detest her!"

"I didn't say that! I said, want her. We're men, Le Clinche. Did you have many adventures before you knew Marie Léonnec?"

"No."

"And never that desire for a woman that makes you fairly weep?"

"Never." He turned away his head.

"Then it was on board that it happened. There was only one woman in that bleak setting. Perfumed flesh in that trawler that smelled of fish? You forgot about your fiancée?"

"It's not the same thing."

Maigret looked him in the face and was amazed at the change that had just taken place. His companion's brow had

suddenly become purposeful, his look fixed, his lips bitter. And yet the dreamy expression remained.

"Marie Léonnec is pretty," Maigret went on, following up his idea. "And much more distinguished than Adèle. What's more, she loves you. She's ready to make any sacrifice to—"

"Oh, stop it!" groaned the operator. "You know perfectly well that—that—"

"That Marie Léonnec is a nice girl, will make a model wife and a good mother, but there'll always be something lacking, won't there? Something you knew on board, hidden in the captain's cabin, in Adèle's arms. Something brutal. Adventure—and the desire to do something desperate, to kill or to die."

Le Clinche listened in amazement.

"How do you—?"

"How do I know? Because everyone experiences that adventure at least once in his life. You weep! You die! Then, a fortnight after, when you see Marie Léonnec, you wonder how you can have been excited by an Adèle."

The young man gazed at the mirroring waters of the harbor, the distorted reflections of the boat-hulls, red, white, or green.

"The trip's over. Adèle's gone. Marie Léonnec is here."

There was a moment of calm.

"A man died because there was passion on board," Maigret went on.

"Stop it—stop it!" Le Clinche repeated in a dry voice. "No! You see it's not possible."

His eyes were haggard. He turned back to look at the trawler, which, nearly empty now, stood monstrous and high in the water.

"You must let me go!"

"The captain was in distress, too, during the whole trip, wasn't he?"

"What do you mean?"

"And the chief engineer?"

"No."

"There were only you two, then. It was fear, wasn't it, Le Clinche?"

"I don't know. . . . Leave me alone, for heaven's sake!"

"Adèle was in the cabin. There were three men hanging around. And yet the captain wouldn't yield to his desire, spent days and days without speaking to his mistress. And you watched her through the port-hole, but after a single meeting you never touched her again."

"Stop it!"

"The men in the hold, the men on duty, spoke of the evil eye, and the trip went from bad to worse—bad seamanship, an accident, the cabin-boy overboard, two men injured, the cod gone wrong, and the entrance into port bungled."

They turned a corner of the quay, and the beach lay before them. In a pool of sunlight was Madame Maigret, sitting beside Marie Léonnec in a white hat.

Le Clinche stopped dead, his forehead damp.

"Come on! Your fiancée has seen you."

It was true. She rose. For a moment she remained motionless, as if her feelings were too strong for her. Then she rushed along the esplanade.

VII

THE four of them found themselves together on the beach when the hotel gong sounded for lunch. Pierre Le Clinche looked at them with a certain embarrassment.

"Come along!" said Maigret.

He took his wife's arm across the esplanade. The young couple followed silently. Or rather Marie did the talking, in a low voice but in a firm manner.

"Do you know what she's saying to him?" the inspector asked his wife.

"Yes! She repeated it to me a dozen times this morning. She's telling him that she doesn't mind, *whatever may have happened.* She's not mentioning the woman. She's pretending she doesn't know, but she told me she would emphasize the words *whatever may have happened.* Poor little thing! She'd go to the ends of the earth for him."

The lunch went quietly. Maigret avoided looking at Le Clinche, but the operator's behavior worried him no less than it did Marie Léonnec.

Le Clinche remained mournful and dejected. He ate and drank and answered questions, but his thoughts were elsewhere. And several times, when he heard steps behind him, he started as if he thought he were in danger.

The windows of the dining room were wide open and looked onto a sea spangled with sunshine. It was warm. Every now and then Le Clinche would turn around with a nervous movement, as if

to interrogate the horizon.

Madame Maigret made conversation, uttering any commonplace so that the silence might not become oppressive.

The scene was not set for a tragedy—a family hotel, the comforting rattle of plates and glasses, on the table a half-bottle of claret and a bottle of mineral water. Two or three times the operator made the same gesture as he had made that morning, a rapid movement of his hand across his forehead. A feeble, weary gesture.

The room was emptying. The four of them were standing on the terrace.

"Shall we sit down a little?" Madame Maigret proposed.

Their beach-chairs were still on the sand. The Maigrets sat down. The young people stood for a moment, rather embarrassed.

"Shall we go for a walk?" Marie Léonnec risked the suggestion with a vague smile in Madame Maigret's direction.

Left alone with his wife, the inspector lit a pipe and growled:

"I look for all the world like a prospective father-in-law!"

"It's a delicate situation," his wife remarked, following them with her eyes. "Look at them. They're embarrassed. I may be wrong, but I think Marie has more character than her fiancé."

It certainly was a pitiful sight to see that skinny figure walking listlessly along, taking no notice of his surroundings and, as one could guess from far off, saying nothing at all.

And yet one could see that Marie was making great efforts, chatting away, trying to appear gay.

There were other groups on the beach. But Le Clinche was the only man without white trousers.

"How old is he?" asked Madame Maigret.

And her husband, lying back in his deck-chair, his eyes half-closed, answered:

"Nineteen. He's only a boy. But I'm very much afraid that from now on he's a doomed man. . . ."

"Why? Isn't he innocent?"

"He probably didn't do the murder. No! I'd swear to that. But I'm afraid that he's lost. Look at him. Just look!"

"Nonsense! Once they're alone and have kissed—"

"Perhaps." Maigret was pessimistic.

"She's prepared to be a nice little wife."

"Why do you think that—?"

"That it won't come off? Just an impression."

"And you find that this boy—?"

"Is a victim, and has always been a victim! He was born poor! He suffered from his poverty! He slaved as best he could, desperately, like someone swimming against the current! He managed to get engaged to a charming girl in a social position superior to his. Look at them. They're discussing things. They want to be optimistic. They're trying to believe in their future."

Maigret talked quietly in a low tone while his eyes followed the two outlined against the sparkling sea.

"Who is officially in charge of the case?" his wife asked.

"Girard, a superintendent at Le Havre. An intelligent man. . . ."

"Does he think he's guilty?"

"No! There's no proof, not even any serious presumptive evidence."

"What do *you* think?"

Maigret turned as if to look at the trawler which was hidden behind a block of houses.

"I think it was a fatal trip, for two men at least. Fatal enough for Captain Fallut, when he came back, not to be able to go on living, and for the operator, not to be able to take up the normal thread of his life again."

"Because of a woman?"

He did not answer directly, but went on:

"And all the others, those who took no part in the tragedy, even the stokers, were branded by it, without their knowing. They came back surly, uneasy. Two men and a woman for three months revolving around a deck-cabin. Just a few black bulkheads pierced by port-holes. That was all."

"I've seldom seen you so affected by a case. You talk of three people. What could they have done, out at sea?"

"What could they have done? Something that was sufficient to kill Captain Fallut! And is still sufficient to upset those two, who look as if they were searching on the beach for the fragments of their dreams."

They were coming back, not knowing whether politeness required them to rejoin the Maigrets or discretion advised them to keep away.

Marie Léonnec cast a discouraged look at Madame Maigret. They could guess that all her attempts had been hurled against a wall of despair or inertia.

MADAME MAIGRET liked to have afternoon tea. So at four o'clock they all sat down on the hotel terrace under the striped parasols. Chocolate steamed in two cups. Maigret had ordered beer, Le Clinche brandy-and-water.

They were talking about Jorissen, the Quimper teacher who had summoned Maigret on behalf of the operator and brought Marie Léonnec to Fécamp. Banal phrases were being exchanged.

"He's the best man in the world."

They were embroidering on this theme because they had to say something. Suddenly Maigret blinked his eyes, which had been fastened on a couple coming along the esplanade.

It was Adèle and Gaston Buzier, he lounging along, she animated and provocative.

"If only they don't notice us!" thought the inspector.

And, in that moment, Adèle's glance met his. She said something to her companion, who attempted to dissuade her.

Too late! She examined the tables on the terrace, chose the one nearest the Maigrets, and sat down where she had Marie Léonnec right opposite her. Her lover followed her with a shrug, touched his straw hat as he passed the inspector, and sat down astride a chair.

"What'll you have?"

"Not chocolate, anyway! A kummel!"

Was that a declaration of war? When she mentioned chocolate she fixed her eyes on Marie Léonnec's cup, and Maigret saw the girl start.

She had never seen Adèle. But she understood. She looked at Le Clinche, who turned away his head.

Madame Maigret's foot tapped her husband's twice.

"Should the four of us go on to the Casino?"

But nobody answered her. Adèle's voice came from the next table.

"What heat!" she sighed. "Take my jacket, Gaston."

And she took off the jacket, revealing bare arms and a voluptuous figure in pink satin. Her eyes did not leave Marie Léonnec for a single moment.

"D'you like gray? Don't you think they ought to forbid people to wear such depressing colors at the seaside?"

Marie Léonnec was in gray. Adèle wanted to attack her as quickly as possible.

"Well, waiter? Are you coming today?"

Her voice was shrill. It sounded as if she were intentionally exaggerating her vulgarity.

Gaston Buzier smelt danger. He said something to her in a low voice. But she answered loudly:

"Well? Isn't the terrace free?"

Madame Maigret was the only one who had her back turned.

"One person's as good as another! Only there are some people who come crawling at your feet when you can't bear the sight of them, and who don't even know you when they're in company!"

And she laughed disagreeably. She stared at the girl, who turned crimson.

"How much is that, waiter?" asked Buzier, anxious to put an end to it.

"We've plenty of time! The same again, waiter! And bring me some peanuts."

Maigret was worried. He undoubtedly wanted to put an end to this scene, which threatened to turn out badly. But on the other hand he had the operator all palpitating under his eyes. Le Clinche had not turned toward the woman, but he could not help seeing her, however vaguely.

His eyes were fixed, a leaden gray. And one hand, lying on the table, closed very, very slowly, like the tentacles of a sea-animal.

Would he get up and flee? Would he throw himself on her as she went on talking?

No, it was something quite different and a hundred times more moving. It was not only his hand that closed up, it was the whole man. He shrank and folded in on himself.

He did not move. Did he even breathe? Not a tremor. But his motionlessness grew to nightmare intensity.

"This reminds me of another lover of mine, a married man with three children."

Marie Léonnec, breathing quickly, swallowed her chocolate in a single gulp out of sheer embarrassment.

"He was the world's most passionate man. Sometimes I would refuse to see

him, and then he would sob on the landing and all the other lodgers would laugh their heads off. 'My little Adèle, my adorable darling.' The whole works, you know! Well, one Sunday I met him out walking with his wife and kids. I heard his wife asking: 'Who's that woman?' And he said, as solemn as a judge: 'Some woman of the street, I expect! You can tell by the ridiculous way she's dressed.' "

And she laughed. She was playing to the gallery and watching the effect of her behavior on their faces.

"All the same, there are people who haven't much nerve."

Her companion again tried to silence her by saying something in a low voice.

"I pay for my drinks, don't I? I'm not doing anyone any harm! So they can't say anything to me. What about those peanuts, waiter? And bring me another kummel."

"Should we go?" said Madame Maigret?"

IT was too late. Adèle had got going. And they knew that if they went she would stop at nothing to make a scene.

Marie Léonnec stared, her ears crimson, her eyes bright, her lips parted in anguish.

Le Clinche had closed his eyes, and remained blind, his face set. His hand still inert on the table.

Hitherto Maigret had had no chance of observing him in detail. His face was at once very young and very old, as is often the case with adolescents who have had a hard childhood.

He was taller than the average, but his shoulders weren't yet a man's shoulders. His skin was sprinkled with clusters of freckles. He had not shaved that day, and the fair hair gleamed on his chin and his cheeks.

He was not handsome. He could not have laughed much in his life. Instead, he had often burnt the midnight oil, read a great deal, written a great deal, in rooms without any fire, in his cabin jolted by the waves, by the light of miserable lamps.

"But what really makes me sick is when people pretend to be respectable when they're no better than us." Adèle was getting impatient. She was ready to say anything to attain her ends. "Young girls, for instance, who pretend butter wouldn't melt in their mouths and who run after a man the way no tart would dare to."

Maigret saw Le Clinche's head slightly bent forward. His eyes were still closed. But tears spurted from his closed lids and zigzagged down his cheeks.

It was not the first time the inspector had seen a man weep. But it was the first time he had ever been affected to such an extent, perhaps because of the silence, the immobility of the whole body.

Those fiuid pearls were the only sign of life in the operator; the rest of him was dead.

Marie Léonnec had seen nothing. Adèle was just starting off again.

Then the hand lying on the table unclenched itself imperceptibly. The other was in the pocket. The eyelids opened a mere fraction of an inch, just enough to let a glimmer of a look filter through. And that look sought out Marie Léonnec.

Just as the inspector rose, a shot rang out and there was a general uproar and a scraping of chairs.

LE CLINCHE'S body drooped imperceptibly to the left, and his mouth opened in a faint rattle.

Marie Léonnec was slow in understanding because she had not seen the weapon. She threw herself on him and turned to the inspector in desperation.

"Inspector! What is it?"

Only Maigret had guessed. Le Clinche had a revolver in his pocket, obtained heaven only knew where, because he had not had one when he had come out of prison that morning.

And he had fired from his pocket! It was the butt that he had been clutching during those long minutes when Adéle was talking, while he closed his eyes, waiting and perhaps hesitating.

The bullet must have got him in the stomach or the side. One could see his burnt waistcoat, torn to ribbons as far as his hip.

"A doctor!" someone cried. "Police."

A doctor, who had been on the beach, came up in his bathing-suit.

They caught Le Clinche just as he fell, and carried him into the dining room. Marie followed them like a woman demented.

Maigret had no time to bother with Adèle or her lover. But as he was going into the café he saw her, livid, emptying a large glass against which her teeth

were chattering. She had the bottle in her hand and she filled the glass again.

The inspector did not look further, but somehow the image of that pallid face above the pink bodice, and particularly the teeth chattering against the glass, remained in his mind.

He could not see Gaston Buzier. They were shutting the dining room door.

"Please don't stay here," the proprietor was requesting his guests. "Keep calm! The doctor wants as little noise as possible."

Maigret pushed through the door and found the doctor on his knees. Madame Maigret was holding back the girl, who was making frantic efforts to throw herself on the injured man.

"Can you get those ladies out of here?" whispered the doctor. "I'll have to undress him. I'll need two people to help me. They ought to phone for an ambulance straight away."

"Is it bad?" asked Maigret.

"I can't say until the wound's been probed. But you can see for yourself."

Yes, Maigret could see for himself, a dreadful mess, flesh and rags of clothes all mixed up.

Madame Maigret went out, taking Marie Léonnec with her. A young man in flannel trousers came up and said timidly:

"Would you allow me to help you? I'm a medical student."

An oblique ray of the sun, violently red, struck a window and was so blinding that Maigret let down the Venetian blind.

"Will you raise his legs?"

He remembered what he had said to his wife that afternoon, comfortably installed in a deck-chair, following with his eyes that ungainly silhouette beside the smaller and livelier one of Marie Léonnec as they meandered along the shore.

"A doomed man."

Captain Fallut had died the moment he got back. Pierre Le Clinche had struggled long and fiercely. Perhaps he had still been struggling with his eyes shut, one hand in his pocket, while Adèle went on talking, talking and playing to the gallery.

VIII

IT WAS shortly before midnight when Maigret came out of the hospital. He had waited to see the stretcher wheeled out of the operating-theater bearing a muffled white form.

The surgeon was washing his hands. A nurse was setting the instruments in order.

"We'll try and save him!" he answered the inspector. "The intestine is perforated. What one might call a dirty wound! We've cleared it all up."

And he pointed to tubs full of blood, cotton-wool, and disinfectants.

They were in excellent spirits, doctor, assistants, and nurses. When it had been brought in, the case had been as bad as it possibly could be, the stomach gaping open, with fragments of clothing encrusted in the flesh.

Now a clean body was wheeled out on the stretcher. And the stomach was carefully sewn up.

Perhaps Le Clinche would recover consciousness, perhaps not.

"There's a chance he'll pull through?"

"Why not? I saw worse cases in the war."

Maigret had immediately telephoned to the *Hôtel de la Plage* to reassure Marie. Now the hospital door closed behind him on its well-oiled hinges. It was night, the street with its little bourgeois houses deserted.

He had not taken ten steps when a figure emerged from the shadow of a wall and Adèle's face was revealed in the light of a street-lamp.

"Is he dead?" she snapped at him.

She must have been waiting for hours. Her face was drawn.

"Not yet!" Maigret answered.

"Is he going to die?"

"Perhaps. . . . Perhaps not."

"You believe I meant to do it?"

"I don't believe anything."

"Because it's not true. . . ."

The inspector walked on. She followed him, walking quickly to keep up with him.

"You'll admit that at bottom it was his fault."

Maigret pretended not to hear, but she persisted stubbornly.

"You know what I mean. On board, he all but asked me to marry him. But once he was on shore—"

She wouldn't be put off. "If you think I'm a bad woman you don't know me. Only there are times . . . Listen to me, Inspector. I know a bullet got him in the stomach. They've performed a laparotomy, haven't they?"

She had frequented hospitals, heard doctors talking, and had been accustomed to gunshot.

"Was the operation successful? It seems that it depends on what you had for your last meal."

This was no violent show of emotion, just a harsh obstinacy that nothing could rebuff.

"Won't you answer me? And yet *you* knew why I carried on like that. Gaston's a rotter, I never loved him. But this one—"

"There's a possibility that he'll live!" Maigret declared, looking the woman in the eyes. "But, unless the mystery of the *Océan* is cleared up, it won't make much difference to him."

He waited for a word, a shudder. She lowered her head.

"Of course you think I know, and I swear . . . No! You didn't know Captain Fallut. So you can't understand. He certainly was in love with me. And perhaps, at his age, a passion like that may have made him go a bit queer. But he was methodical in everything, self-controlled, and he loved order. I still wonder how he could have made up his mind to hide me on board. But I do know we were hardly out to sea before he regretted it and began to detest me."

"But the operator hadn't seen you yet?"

"No! That wasn't until the fourth night, as I told you."

"Are you sure Fallut turned queer before then?"

"Not so much perhaps! But later there were days when I wondered whether he really hadn't gone mad."

"And you haven't the slightest idea what might have caused this behavior?"

"No! Sometimes I thought there was a secret between him and the operator. I even thought they might be carrying contraband. Oh! Nothing will ever persuade me to go on board a fishing-boat again!"

"Where is Gaston Buzier?"

"At the hotel. He knows it's no time to be bothering me and that for two pins I'd leave him."

"Are you going back to him?"

She shrugged a gesture which implied: "Why not?"

As she left Maigret, she murmured with a strained smile:

"Thank you, Inspector. You've been very good to me. I—"

She did not dare finish. But it was an invitation and a promise.

"All right!" he growled as he hurried off.

And he pushed open the door of the *Rendez-Vous des Terre-Neuvas.*

HE could hear a confused noise from inside the café, as if about a dozen men were talking at once. But as soon as the door was open, there was a complete silence. And yet there were more than ten people in the room who must have been shouting to each other from table to table.

The proprietor came up to Maigret and shook hands.

"Is it true that Le Clinche has shot himself?"

His customers were suddenly busy with their drinks. P'tit Louis was there, the Negro, the Breton, the chief engineer, as well as some others the inspector was beginning to know by sight.

"It's true!" said Maigret.

The chief engineer stirred uneasily on the bench, which was upholstered in oilcloth.

"A fine trip!" growled a voice from one corner in a strong Norman accent.

And those seemed to express the general opinion, for heads were nodded, a fist smote a marble table, and a voice echoed: "Yes, an ill-fated trip!"

Léon coughed to remind his clients to be discreet, and pointed at a sailor in a red blouse with a black arm-band who was drinking alone.

Maigret sat down near the bar and ordered a brandy-and-soda.

Léon suggested to the largest group: "Would you like a game of dominoes?"

It was one way of occupying their hands. The black dominoes were shuffled on the marble table. The proprietor sat down beside the inspector.

"I made them shut up," he whispered, "because that chap in the left-hand corner near the window is the kid's father."

"What kid?"

"The cabin-boy—Jean-Marie. The one who went overboard the third day out."

The man knew they were talking about him. He signed the barmaid to fill up his glass and he drank it in one gulp, with a shudder of disgust. He was already drunk. His bulging light-blue eyes were glassy. A wad of tobacco stuck out of his left cheek.

"Does he do Newfoundland, too?"

"He used to. But now that he has seven children he fishes herring in winter because the trips are shorter. One month to begin with, then getting shorter as the fish come south."

"And in summer?"

"He fishes on his own, setting nets and lobster-pots. . . ."

The man was on the same bench as Maigret, at the other end. He was short, broad-shouldered; the real Nordic seafaring type, thick-set, plump, with no neck, pink skin, and fair hair. Like most fishers, his hands were covered with the scars of carbuncles.

"Does he always drink as much?"

"They all drink. But it's specially since his kid died that he gets drunk. It gave him a turn to see the *Océan* again."

Now the man was looking at them with an offended expression.

"What do you want with me?" he mumbled at Maigret.

"Nothing at all."

"Perhaps I haven't the right to drink?"

"Of course you have."

"Tell me I haven't the right to drink," he repeated with drunken obstinacy.

Léon signed to Maigret not to answer, but went up to his customer.

"Come on now, no scenes, Canut. It's not you the inspector's talking about, but this boy who's put a bullet in himself."

"Serves him right! Is he dead?"

"No! Perhaps they'll be able to save him."

"Pity! I wish they were all dead!"

All faces were turned toward Canut. And he felt a need to shout louder:

"Yes, the whole lot of you!"

Leon looked appealingly at everyone and made a hopeless gesture in Maigret's direction.

"Go on! Off to bed. Your wife's waiting for you."

The drunken man sneered. P'tit Louis took the opportunity to call Julie.

"How much is that?"

"Are you paying for both rounds?"

"Yes. Charge it to my account. I'll be getting my advance tomorrow before we sail."

He rose automatically, imitated by the Breton, who followed his every step. He touched his cap. He did it again in Maigret's direction.

"Coward!" growled the drunk as they went past him. "They're all cowards."

The Breton clenched his fists and nearly answered back, but P'tit Louis dragged him away.

"Go on to bed," said Léon again. "We're closing."

"I'll go when everyone else goes. I'm as good as anyone else, ain't I?"

He looked at Maigret as if he wanted to provoke an argument. "Look at that big man there. What's he up to?"

Léon was on hot coals. The last customers were waiting, convinced that something was going to happen.

"Oh, well! I might as well go. How much?"

He fumbled under his blouse and brought out a leather pouch, threw some greasy notes on the table, rose to his feet, wobbled to the door, which he had difficulty in opening.

He muttered something indistinctly, insults or threats.

OUTSIDE he pressed his face against the pane to give Maigret a last look. His nose was flattened on the misty glass.

"He had only the one son," said Léon, with a sigh. "All the other kids are girls."

"What are they saying down here?" Maigret asked.

"About the operator? They don't know. So they invent. Stories about falling asleep standing. It's still the evil eye."

Maigret felt a keen look fixed on him. It was the chief engineer, who was sitting at the table opposite.

"Has your wife got over her jealousy?" he asked him.

"Seeing that we're off tomorrow, I'd like to see her trying to keep me at Yport!"

"The *Océan* sails tomorrow?"

"Yes, sails with the tide! Did you think the owners were going to let her rot in harbor?"

"They've found a captain?"

"A retired man who hasn't sailed for eight years! And he commanded a three-mast brig! It's going to be fun."

"What about an operator?"

"They got a kid from a technical college."

"Is the second officer back?"

"He'll be here by morning."

"And the crew?"

"It's always the same thing. They collect anyone hanging around the port. They'll always do."

"Have they got a cabin-boy?"

The other gave him a sharp look.

"Yes," he said drily.

"And you're glad to be going?"

No answer. The chief engineer ordered another grog. And Léon said in an undertone:

"They've just got news of the *Pacific*, which was due back this week. It's a ship of the same class as the *Océan*. In less than three weeks it had struck a rock and gone down. The whole crew lost. I've got the wife of the second officer up there. She came from Rouen to meet her husband. She spends her whole time on the jetty. She knows nothing yet. The Company is awaiting confirmation before they publish the news."

"A run of ill-luck!" growled the chief engineer.

"In short," said Maigret slowly, "nobody knows why the operator tried to kill himself?"

His words met with an obstinate silence. Did these men carry even to this point the freemasonry of sea-faring people who don't like to see landsmen interfering in their affairs?

He rose, paid, and went heavily to the door. Ten pairs of scornful eyes followed him. Even Léon, in spite of all his goodwill, formed a united front with his customers.

The tide was out. Of the trawler, only the funnel and the derricks were to be seen. The trucks had disappeared. The quay was deserted.

A fishing-boat, its white light balanced on the top of the mast, was making slowly for the jetty, and one could hear two men's voices talking.

Maigret filled a last pipe, looked at the town, the Benedictine towers, with the gloomy walls of the hospital below. The sea was calm. One only heard the faint murmur of the spring tide lapping at the shore and the piles of the jetty.

The inspector was right at the edge of the quay. Thick hawsers, which held the *Océan*, were coiled around metal bollards. Men were closing down the hatchways of the holds where they had stored the salt. A man even younger than Le Clinche, was watching the sailors at work, leaning against the operator's cabin. He must be the successor to the man who had just put a bullet through his stomach. He was puffing nervously at a cigarette.

He was obviously excited. Perhaps he was dreaming of adventure.

Maigret couldn't tear himself away. He was kept there by the feeling that the mystery was near, within his reach, that there was only one more effort to be made.

He turned suddenly, because he felt the presence of someone behind him. He saw a red blouse, a black arm-band.

The man had not seen him, or else was paying no attention. He walked right up to the edge of the quay, and it was a miracle that, in his condition, he did not fall into space.

The inspector had the impression that the drunkard was going to throw himself onto the deck of the trawler.

But no! He was talking to himself, sneering and shaking his fist.

Then he spat once, twice, three times at the ship, to express his disgust.

After which, no doubt having relieved his feelings, he went away, not toward the fisher quarters, but toward the lower town where there might still be a light in some wretched little *bistro*.

IX

MAIGRET walked toward the *Hôtel de la Plage*, but, as he got nearer, his steps became slower and finally stopped in the middle of the quay.

Before him was the hotel, his room, his bed, everything that was peaceful and reassuring.

Behind . . . He turned. He looked back at the funnel of the trawler from which smoke was coming gently, for the furnaces had been lit. Fécamp was asleep. There was a great pool of moonlight in the middle of the dock. A breeze had arisen from the water, almost icy, like the breath of the sea.

Maigret again strode over the coiled hawsers and found himself at the edge of the quay. His eyes were narrowed, his mouth threatening, his fists in the depths of his pockets.

This was the solitary, discontented Maigret, doggedly persistent.

The tide was low, the deck of the trawler far below the level of the dock. But a plank had been thrown from the quay to the bridge.

The sound of the surf was becoming

more distinct. The tide must have turned, and the foamy water was gradually encroaching on the beach.

Maigret went onto the plank. He let himself down on the quarter-deck opposite the steering-wheel, where Captain Fallut's huge sea-mittens dangled from the compass.

Jorissen, his liking for Le Clinche, Marie Léonnec's importunity, were no longer his concern. This was a purely personal matter now.

Maigret had reconstructed the figure of Captain Fallut. He had made the acquaintance of the operator, of Adèle and the chief engineer. He had done his best to get the feel of the general life on board the trawler. Yet something eluded him. He had the impression that he understood everything but the very essence of the drama.

Fécamp was asleep. On board, the sailors were in their bunks. By turning half round the inspector could see the poop. In front of him he could see the whole bridge, the fo'c's'l and, quite near, the radio-room.

The water slapped the sides of the ship, which was imperceptibly getting up steam. And now the ship seemed much more alive than on the previous days.

Was P'tit Louis sleeping below beside heaps of coal?

On the right was a lighthouse. At the end of one jetty was a green light; a red one at the end of the other. The sea was a great black hole which gave out a strong smell.

Maigret took everything in, trying to feel the setting, to bring it to life.

It was on such a night as this—colder, because spring had scarcely begun. The trawler was in the same place, a thread of smoke coming from the funnel, a few men sleeping below.

Pierre Le Clinche at Quimper had dined with his fiancée in the family circle. Marie Léonnec had seen him to the door to give him a kiss.

Then he had sped through the night in a third-class compartment. He would be back in three months. He would see her again. Then another trip, and they would get married.

At the same time Captain Fallut was coming out of the little house in the Rue d'Etretat where Madame Bernard was sleeping. He was probably nervous and worried, tortured in advance by remorse. Wasn't there a tacit understanding that some day he would marry his landlady?

But all winter he had been going to Le Havre to see a woman! A woman he didn't dare show in Fécamp! A woman who was young, pretty, and desirable, but whose vulgarity was disturbing.

A good, orderly, meticulous man. A model of probity, whom the owners cited as an example and whose ship's papers were masterpieces of detail! And now, all alone, he was going through the sleeping streets to meet her train. Did he still hesitate?

But three months! Wasn't she far too fond of life to remain faithful to him?

She was different from Madame Bernhard! She did not spend her time arranging her house, polishing her brasses and her floors, and building up plans for the future. No! She was a woman whose image in his mind made him breathe faster.

There she was! She laughed with a shrill laugh, just as provocative as her flesh! It would be fun to go on a ship, to be hidden on board, to have a real adventure.

Shouldn't he warn her that being shut up in a cabin during a three months' trip might be deadly? He did not dare! Once she was there, he was incapable of talking sense.

"You're going to smuggle me on board secretly, tonight?"

In the cafés and at the *Rendez-Vous des Terre-Neuvas* the fishers were going on a binge with the advance they had been paid that afternoon.

And Captain Fallut, small and natty, grew paler as he approached his ship. Wasn't there still time? But Adèle was hanging on his arm. He could feel her, warm and trembling, against his flank.

MAIGRET tried to imagine the two of them.

"Is that your ship? What a queer smell it has! Have we got to cross this plank?"

They went across. Captain Fallut anxiously told her to keep quiet.

"Is that the wheel you steer by?"

"Sh!"

They went down the iron ladder into the captain's cabin and shut the door.

"Yes!" Maigret growled. "There they were, the two of them. It was their first night on board."

He would have liked to tear aside the curtain of the night and disclose the wan light of dawn, see the sailors staggering along to join the ship.

The chief engineer arrived from Yport by the first morning train. The second officer came from Paris, Le Clinche from Quimper.

The men moved about the deck, argued about bunks in the fo'c's'l, laughed, changed their clothes, and reappeared encased in stiff oilskins.

Then there was the new cabin-boy, Jean-Marie, who had come holding his father's hand. They jostled him around, teasing him about his boots, which were too big for him, and the tears that came so readily to his eyes.

The captain was still in his cabin. At last the door opened. He closed it carefully behind him. He looked dried up and pale, with a drawn face.

"You're the operator? Good! I'll give you your instructions immediately. In the meantime, take a look at the radio."

The owner was on the quay. Wives and mothers were still bringing parcels for the departing men.

Fallut trembled at the thought of the cabin whose door must not be opened at any price, for Adèle was lying across the bed, asleep.

Everyone felt a slight early morning nausea, and one by one they dropped into the *Rendez-Vous des Terre-Neuvas* and gulped down coffee laced with rum.

"Au revoir! If we get back."

There was a loud siren blast, then two more. The women and children, after a last embrace, ran toward the jetty. The owners shook hands with Fallut.

The hawsers were cast loose. The trawler slipped away from the quay. Then Jean-Marie, the cabin-boy, overcome by fear, burst into sobs and tried to jump ashore. Fallut had stood where Maigret stood now.

"Stand by! A hundred and fifty degrees! Half speed ahead!"

Would Adèle hate being upset by the first swell?

All Fallut's nerves were on edge with this mad thing he had done. It had not seemed so bad on shore.

"Two points to port!"

And then there were cries and the people on the jetty surged forward! A sailor who had climbed up the derrick to wave good-by had fallen onto the deck!

"Stop! Hard-astern. Stop!"

Nothing stirred from the direction of the cabin. Was there still time to put the woman back on shore?

Boats approached. The ship came to a standstill between the jetties. The injured man was taken off in a dory.

The superstitious women on shore were overcome by the accident. And the cabin-boy had to be held back from throwing himself into the water!

"Stand by! . . . Half speed! . . . Full speed ahead!"

Le Clinche was taking possession of his domain, trying the gear, ear-phones on his head. And in the midst of his duties he wrote:

My darling sweetheart,

Eight o'clock in the morning! We are just off. Already the town is out of sight. . . .

Maigret lit another pipe and rose. He had all his characters in their appointed places on the ship which he surveyed.

The first breakfast in the narrow cabin reserved for officers; Fallut, the second officer, the chief engineer, and the operator. And the captain announced that he would take his meals alone in his cabin.

It was unheard of! A fantastic idea! Everyone tried vainly to think what could be the reason.

And Maigret went on muttering:

"It was the cabin-boy's duty to carry up the captain's food. And the captain would either have to open the door a small way or to hide Adèle under the bed which he had raised up."

There were two of them to eat a single portion! The first time, the woman laughed! And Fallut probably gave nearly the whole of his share to her.

He was too serious. She laughed at him. She coaxed him. He yielded and smiled.

Had they already begun to talk of the evil eye in the fo'c's'l? Weren't there comments on the captain's decision to eat alone? And besides, they had never known a captain who went about with the key of his cabin in his pocket!

The two propellers revolved. The vibrations had started which would shake the ship for the next three months.

DOWN below, men like P'tit Louis were feeding the furnace with coal eight or ten hours a day, or sleepily ex-

amining the oil-pressure.

Three days . . . That was the general opinion. It had needed three days to produce an atmosphere of uneasiness. And from that time the men had wondered whether Fallut had gone mad.

Why? Was it jealousy? But Adèle had declared that she hadn't seen Le Clinche until the fourth day.

Up to then, he had been too busy with his apparatus. And, the ear-phones on his head, he wrote pages and pages as if the post would carry them immediately to his fiancée.

Three days. They would hardly have had time to make each other's acquaintance. Perhaps the chief engineer had pressed his face against the port-hole and seen the young woman? But he had said nothing!

The atmosphere on board ship is created gradually, as men get nearer to each other by sharing their adventures. They hadn't even begun fishing! For that they would have to wait until they were on the Great Bank in Newfoundland, on the other side of the Atlantic, which they wouldn't reach for at least ten days.

Maigret was standing on the bridge, and if a man had wakened he might have wondered what he was doing there, enormous, solitary, looking slowly around him.

What was he doing? He was trying to understand! All the people were in their places, with their own particular mentalities and their own particular preoccupations.

But there was nothing but a blank. The inspector could only review the evidence.

"It was by about the third day that Captain Fallut and the operator had come to regard each other as enemies. They both kept revolvers in their pockets. They seemed to be afraid of each other."

And Le Clinche had not yet become Adèle's lover!

"From then onward, the captain acted like a madman."

They were out in the Atlantic now, off the route of steamers. They occasionally met other trawlers, English or German, on their way to their fishing-grounds.

Was Adèle getting impatient and complaining about her life of confinement?

"Like a madman."

Everyone was agreed on that! And it would seem as if Adèle weren't sufficient to produce such a state of mind in a man as balanced as Fallut, a man who all his life had worshiped orderliness.

She hadn't been unfaithful to him! He had let her have two or three airings on the bridge at night, taking all manner of precautions.

Then why was he like a madman?

The evidence continued:

"He gave orders to anchor the boat where no cod had ever been caught within living memory."

And he wasn't a nervous or a fiery or hasty man! He was a meticulous *petit bourgeois* who had once dreamed of uniting himself with his landlady, Madame Bernard, and ending his days in the house in the Rue d'Etretat with its lace curtains.

"Accidents went on happening. When they finally reached the Bank and found some fish, it was salted in such a way that it was considerably damaged by the time they got back."

Fallut was no beginner. He was due to retire! No one had ever had anything against him before.

He always ate in his cabin.

"He sulked," Adèle had said. "He'd let days and weeks go past without saying a word to me. Then suddenly it would get hold of him again."

A wave of sensuality! She was there, in his room! Sharing his bed! And yet he managed to leave her alone for weeks, until the temptation became too strong.

Would he have acted like that if he had been troubled only by jealousy?

The chief engineer prowled, fascinated, around the cabin, but hadn't the nerve to pick the lock.

Then the return of the *Océan* to France with a cargo of damaged cod. It must have been on the way back that the captain drew up that will in which he declared that no one must be accused of his death.

He wanted to kill himself! Nobody but he was capable of taking the bearings, and he was sufficiently imbued with the sailor's code to bring his ship back into port first.

WOULD he have killed himself because he had broken the regulations by taking a woman with him? Would he have killed himself because the oversalted fish would have to be sold

at a few francs below the current price?

Would he have killed himself because his crew thought he had gone mad? He, the coolest and most meticulous captain in Fécamp? Whose ship's papers were cited as a model?

The ship came alongside. All the men jumped off and made for the *Rendez-Vous des Terre-Neuvas*.

They were all branded with the seal of the mystery! They were all silent about certain things! They were all uneasy!

Because the captain had behaved in an inexplicable manner?

Fallut came ashore alone. He would have to wait until the quays were deserted to take off Adèle.

Two men were hiding—the operator and Gaston Buzier, the woman's lover. But that did not prevent a third man from leaping on the captain, strangling him and pushing him into the dock.

And that had happened in the very place where the *Océan* was now floating in the black water. The body had caught on the chain of the anchor.

Maigret smoked, his brow set.

At his first interrogation, Le Clinche lied and talked about a man with yellow shoes who had killed Fallut. The man with the yellow shoes was Buzier. Confronted with him, Le Clinche withdrew his statement. Why did he lie, unless to save the third person, the murderer? And why wouldn't Le Clinche reveal the man's name?

Far from it! He let himself be imprisoned in his place! He scarcely defended himself when there was every chance he would be found guilty! He was like a man eaten up with remorse. He did not dare look his fiancée or Maigret in the eyes.

And before he returned to the trawler he went to the *Rendez-Vous des Terre-Neuvas* and, upstairs in his room, he burned his papers.

When he got out of prison he was quite joyless, even when Marie Léonnec was there, urging him to be optimistic. And he found a way of getting a revolver.

He was afraid. For a long time he had remained with his eyes closed and his finger on the trigger.

As the night wore on the air became cooler and the breeze more charged with the musty smell of seaweed and iodine.

The trawler had risen a few feet. The bridge was now on a level with the quay, and the suction of the tide caused the gangway to creak.

Maigret had forgotten his fatigue. The worst hour had passed. Day was near.

He drew up a list:

Captain Fallut, who had been taken off the anchor-chain, dead.

Adèle and Gaston Buzier, who were always quarreling, fed up with each other and yet with no one else to turn to.

Le Clinche, who had been wheeled out on a stretcher, swathed in white, from the operating-theater.

Marie Léonnec.

And those men who, even when they were drunk at the *Rendez-Vous des Terre-Neuvas* remembered something terrible.

"The third day!" said Maigret aloud. "That's where we'll have to look! Something happened more terrifying than jealousy. And yet something which was a direct result of the presence of Adèle on board."

The effort was painful. There was a tension in all his faculties. The ship swayed imperceptibly. There was a light in the fo'c's'l where the sailors were getting up.

Then his throat tightened. He looked at the quarterdeck and then at the quay where lately a man had stooped down and shaken his fist.

Perhaps it was the cold. A shudder passed over him.

The third day. The cabin-boy, Jean-Marie, who hadn't wanted to go, and had been washed overboard by a wave—in the night.

Maigret stared around the decks as if trying to find the exact place where the catastrophe had occurred.

"There were only two witnesses, Captain Fallut and the operator, Le Clinche. The next day, or the day after, Le Clinche became Adèle's lover."

Maigret didn't wait an instant longer. Someone was moving in the fo'c's'l. Without being seen, he crossed the plank which connected the ship with the land. And, lugubriously, his nose blue with the cold, he went back to the *Hôtel de la Plage*.

It wasn't yet day, but it was no longer night, for on the sea the crests of the waves loomed up, crudely white. And the seagulls made light splashes on the sky.

A train whistled in the station. An

old woman went off toward the rocks, her basket on her back, a hooked stick in her hand, to catch crabs.

X

WHEN Maigret came down from his room at about eight in the morning he felt light in the head and heavy in the chest, as if he had been drinking too much.

"Isn't it going as it should?" his wife asked him.

He shrugged and she did not press him.

On the hotel terrace, facing a treacherous green sea breaking into white horses, he came upon Marie Léonnec. A man was sitting at her table. She rose precipitately and stammered:

"Allow me to introduce you to my father, who has just arrived."

The wind was fresh, the sky overcast. The seagulls were skimming low over the water.

"I am most honored, Inspector. Most honored and most happy."

Maigret looked at him mournfully. He was short, and would have been no more ridiculous than anyone else had it not been for a nose as big as two or three ordinary ones, pitted like a strawberry.

It wasn't his fault! But that made no difference that one saw nothing but the nose, which made it impossible to take seriously anything he might say.

"You'll have a drink with us?"

"No, thank you. I've just had breakfast."

Maigret observed him and his daughter who, apart from the nose, was very like him. He could see pretty well what she would be like in about ten years when the charm of youth had gone.

"I want to go straight to the point, Inspector. That's my motto. I've traveled all night for this. When Jorissen told me that he would accompany my daughter, I gave my permission. So no one can say I'm not broadminded."

If only Maigret hadn't been in a hurry to go somewhere else! And there was that nose!

"Nevertheless, my duty as a father compels me to find out what's what. That's why I ask you, out of your goodness of heart, to tell me whether you think that the young man is innocent."

Marie looked away. She must have felt confusedly that this interference of her father wasn't going to settle anything.

Alone, running to the rescue of her fiancé, she had a certain charm. At least she was touching. But with her family it was different. It was too suggestive of the shop at Quimper, the discussions before her departure, the gossiping neighbors.

"You're asking me whether he killed Captain Fallut?"

"Yes."

Maigret looked straight in front of him with his most distant expression.

"Well"—he could see the girl's hands trembling—"he didn't kill him. You'll excuse me. I have most urgent business. I expect I'll have the pleasure of seeing you again soon."

He fled!

On the quay he kept away from the *Océan*. But he could not help noticing that some men had just arrived with their kitbags on their shoulders, and were taking a look around the ship. A cart was unloading sacks of potatoes. The owner was there with his patent-leather boots and his pencil behind his ear.

There was a lot of noise coming from the *Rendez-Vous des Terre-Neuvas* and the door was open. Maigret could just make out P'tit Louis holding forth to a group of new hands.

He hastened his steps as he saw the proprietor making signs to him. Five minutes later, he was at the door of the hospital.

The assistant was quite young. Under his overall his suit was in the latest fashion, his tie was exquisite.

"The radio operator? I took his pulse and his temperature this morning. He's doing as well as is to be expected."

"His mind's clear?"

"Oh, yes, I think so. He's said nothing to me, but he keeps following me with his eyes."

"Can I talk to him about serious matters?"

The assistant made a vague gesture. "I don't see why not. Once the operation's successfully over and the temperature's normal . . . Would you like to see him?"

Pierre Le Clinche was alone in a little room kept at a moist heat. He watched Maigret come up, and his eyes

were clear and untroubled.

"You see, he couldn't be doing better. But there's a possibility that he'll limp, because one of the tendons on the thigh has been severed. And he'll have to take certain precautions. Would you prefer to be alone with him?"

It was slightly embarrassing. The day before a bundle of rags that had been brought in, bleeding and filthy. One would have sworn there wasn't a breath of life left in him. And now Maigret found a white bed, a face that was slightly drawn, pale, but more peaceful than he had ever seen it. It was almost serenity that one read in those eyes.

He marched up and down the room, pressed his forehead a moment against the double window from which one could see the harbor and the trawler with the men working in red jerseys.

"Do you feel strong enough to have a talk?" he growled suddenly, turning toward the bed.

Le Clinche made a faint sigh of assent.

"You know that I'm not officially connected with this case? My friend Jorissen asked me to prove your innocence. Well, that's done! You didn't kill Captain Fallut."

Maigret heaved a great sigh. Then he went straight to the point.

"Tell me the truth about what happened on the third day, that's to say, about the death of Jean-Marie."

He avoided looking the sick man in the face. And as the silence seemed as if it would last forever, he murmured:

"It was evening. There were only you and Captain Fallut on the bridge. Were you together?"

"No!"

"Was the captain walking near the poop?"

"Yes. I had just come out of my cabin. He didn't see me. I watched him, because I thought there was something queer about his conduct."

"You didn't know yet there was a woman on board?"

"No! I thought he must have some contraband articles in his room."

His voice was weary. And yet it rose as he exclaimed: "It is the most frightful thing I have ever known, Inspector. But who has been talking? Tell me!"

He closed his eyes as he had closed them when he was waiting to fire a bullet into his stomach from his pocket.

"Nobody. The captain was walking up and down, nervously, I imagine. But there was someone at the helm, I suppose?"

"A steersman! But he couldn't see us in the darkness."

"Then the cabin-boy turned up?"

He was interrupted by Le Clinche half-raising himself with his hands clutching at the ropes which hung from the ceiling to facilitate his movements.

"Where is Marie?"

"At the hotel. Her father has just come."

"To take her away! That's good! Above all she mustn't come here! . . ."

He was working himself up to a fever. His voice was duller, his utterance jerky. His eyes grew brighter.

"I don't know who's been talking—But now I must tell you everything!"

He was so wildly excited it almost seemed as if he were in a delirium.

"You didn't know the kid. Skinny. And dressed in clothes cut down from one of his father's old suits. . . . The first day he was frightened and he cried. Afterwards he made up for it by dirty tricks. It was only to be expected at his age. But you know what I mean by a dirty-minded kid. He was one. Twice I caught him reading letters I had written to my fiancée. And he just said impudently: 'Is that your skirt?'

"That evening—I expect the captain was walking up and down because he was too nervous to sleep. The sea was pretty choppy. Every now and then a big wave would come over the side and wet the deckplates.

"I was perhaps ten yards away. I only heard a few words. But I could see the kid swanking and laughing, the captain with his head sunk in his jersey and his hands in his pocket.

"Jean-Marie had a shrill voice. I remember catching the words: 'And if I told everyone that—'

"I understood afterwards. He had discovered that the captain had a woman hidden in his cabin. He was proud about it. . . . He thought he was smart.

"The captain made a movement as if he'd hit him. The kid, who was quick, dodged the blow and shouted something which must have been another threat that he'd talk.

"Fallut's hand struck a stay. It must have hurt him and made him mad with rage.

"It was like the fable of the lion and the gnat. He forgot his dignity and began chasing the kid, who ran away, laughing at first. But gradually he got panicky.

"Fallut was crazy with anxiety. I saw him make a grab at Jean-Marie's shoulders but, instead of laying hold of him, he pushed him forward.

"That's all. Accidents will happen. His head struck a capstan. I heard something frightful—a sort of dull thud. *It was his skull.*"

LE CLINCHE passed his hands across his face. He was livid. Sweat was pouring from his forehead.

"At this point a wave swept the deck. So that the figure was already soaked when the captain bent over. At the same moment he saw me. I took a few steps forward, in time to see the body of the boy crumple up, then stiffen in a way I shall never forget.

"He was dead! And we stood staring at each other without realizing this frightful thing.

"No one had seen or heard anything. Fallut didn't dare touch the child. I examined his chest, his hands, and his cracked skull. There was no blood. No wound. Only the skull was bashed in.

"We must have spent about a quarter of an hour there, not knowing what to do, miserable, our shoulders frozen, with the spray occasionally dashing in our faces. You would have thought that something had cracked in the captain too.

"When he spoke, it was in a cold, incisive voice: 'The crew mustn't know the truth! For the sake of discipline!'

"He lifted up the boy. There was only one thing to do. Wait! I remember that with his thumb he made the sign of the cross on his forehead.

"Twice the sea hurled the body against the hull. We didn't dare look at each other. We didn't dare speak."

A nurse came in. The two men turned such absent-minded eyes on her that she stammered out in embarrassment:

"I just came to take his temperature."

"In a minute!"

As the door closed the inspector murmured:

"It was then he spoke to you of his mistress?"

"He was never the same again. I don't think he was really mad. But there was something wrong. He touched me on the shoulder.

" 'All because of a woman, young man!' he murmured.

"I was cold and yet feverish. I couldn't help looking at the sea where the body had been thrown over.

"You've heard what the captain was like? A dry, little man with an energetic expression. He talked rapidly in short unfinished sentences.

" 'There you are! Fifty-five years old. Nearly retired. A solid reputation. Saved a bit. Now I'm finished! Because of a kid who . . . Or rather because of a woman.'

"And so, in a dull and angry voice, he told me everything. A woman from Le Havre. A woman who was pretty worthless, he realized, but he couldn't get over her.

"He had taken her on board. She was there—asleep."

The operator moved restlessly.

"I don't remember everything he told me. For he felt he had to talk about her—with a mixture of passion and hatred.

" 'A captain has no right to start a scandal capable of ruining his authority.'

"I can still hear those words. It was the first time I'd sailed on a ship, and now I thought of the sea as a monster.

"Fallut cited examples. In such and such a year a captain had taken his mistress on his ship. There had been such rows on board that three men hadn't come back.

"It was blowing hard. Spray kept dashing over us. Sometimes a wave would lick around our feet, which slipped about on the greasy metal deck.

"No, he wasn't mad! But it wasn't the same Fallut.

" 'We'll get this trip over! Then we'll see.'

"I didn't understand what he meant. It seemed to me fantastic to be so attached to the idea of duty.

" 'They mustn't know. A captain must do no wrong.'

"Thoughts were going around and around in my head, and finally I was living in a nightmare. This woman in the cabin a man like the captain couldn't get over, whose very name made him breathe fast. I had had no experience of such transports.

"And when he said her flesh, or her body, I blushed without knowing why."

Maigret questioned him slowly: "No one on board except you two knew the truth about the death of Jean-Marie?"

"No one!"

"And it was the captain who, in accordance with tradition, recited the prayers for the dead?"

"At dawn. The weather had broken. We ran into an icy mist."

"The crew said nothing?"

"There were some queer looks and whispers. But Fallut got angry merely if a man's expression didn't please him. He spied on the men as if he was trying to guess whether any suspicions could have arisen."

"And you?"

Le Clinche stretched out his arm to reach a glass of water which stood on the bedside table, and drank greedily.

"You prowled around the cabin, didn't you? You wanted to see this woman who'd put the captain in such a state? Was that on the following night?"

"Yes. I met her for a moment. Then the next night . . . I had noticed that the key to the radio-room and the captain's cabin were the same. The captain was on watch. I crept in like a thief."

"You became her lover? . . ."

The operator's face hardened.

"I swear you won't understand! The whole atmosphere had no connection whatsoever with everyday realities. That kid—and the whole business of the previous night. . . . And yet it was always the same image that came to my mind—that of a woman whose body, whose flesh could so change a man."

"Did she encourage you?"

"She was lying on the bed, half-naked."

He turned away his head.

"How long did you remain in the cabin?"

"Perhaps two hours. I don't know. When I came out there was a buzzing in my ears and the captain was at the door. He said nothing. He watched me go past. I nearly threw myself on my knees and cried out that it wasn't my fault and begged his forgiveness. But his face was frozen. I walked back to my post.

"I was afraid. From then on I kept my revolver loaded in my pocket, because I was convinced he was going to kill me.

"He never spoke a word to me except on matters of routine. Most of the time he sent me written instructions.

"I wish I could explain it better. I just can't. Each day was worse than the last. I had the impression that everyone knew about the tragedy.

"The chief engineer began haunting the cabin, too, and the captain would spend hours shut up inside.

"The men kept giving us anxious, inquiring looks. They guessed that something was up. Hundreds of times I heard them talking of the evil eye. And I had only one desire."

"Naturally!" growled Maigret.

There was a silence, and Le Clinche fixed reproachful eyes on the inspector.

"There was filthy weather for the next ten days. I was sick. But I kept thinking of her. She had scent on. She—I can't tell you! It made me ill! Yes! It was the kind of desire that made you ill, made you cry with rage! Especially when I saw the captain going into the cabin! Because now I imagined things. She had called me her 'big boy,' in a special kind of voice, rather husky! And I used to repeat those words to torture myself. I stopped writing to Marie. I indulged in impossible dreams of going off with this woman as soon as we got back to Fécamp."

"And the captain?"

"He became still more icy, more cutting. Perhaps, after all, it was insanity in his case. I don't know. He ordered them to fish in a certain place, and all the old sailors swore that no fish had ever been seen in these latitudes. He wouldn't allow them to say a word! He was afraid of me. I don't know whether he knew I was armed. He was armed too. When we met, his hand would go to his pocket. I tried hundreds of times to see Adèle again. But he was always there! With shadows around his eyes and his lips drawn back! And the smell of cod. The men were salting the cod in the hold. There was one accident after another.

"The chief engineer, too. And we were no longer talking to one another. We were like three madmen. There were nights when I thought I would have killed someone to get back to her. Nights while I repeated to myself, in her voice:

"'My big boy! Big stupid!'

"And it was so long! Days followed nights, and then more days! With nothing but the gray water around us, cold fogs, and cod everywhere. The nauseating taste of brine in one's throat.

"And nothing but that one time! I believe if I could have only been with her one other time I should have been cured! But it was impossible. He was always there, and the shadows around his eyes grew blacker.

"And that perpetual rolling, that life without a horizon. Then we saw cliffs again.

"Can you imagine that going on for three months? Well! Instead of being cured I was even more ill. It is only now I realize it was an illness.

"I detested the captain, who was always in my way. I had a horror of this old man shutting himself up with a woman like Adèle. I was afraid of getting back to port. I was afraid of losing her forever.

"In the end I thought of him as a sort of demon! Yes, a kind of malevolent spirit who kept the woman for himself."

HE was silent for a brooding moment. "The boat was badly handled as we came into port. Then the men leaped ashore with relief and made a rush for the pubs. I knew, of course, that the captain was only waiting for nightfall to let Adèle out.

"I went to my room at Leon's. There were some old letters and photos of my fiancée there. I don't know why, but overcome with fury I burned them all.

"I came out. I wanted her! I tell you, I wanted her! Hadn't she said that when we got back Fallut was going to marry her?

"I bumped into a man." He fell back heavily on his pillow, and his whole face crumpled up in an expression of utter agony. "Since you know—" he croaked.

"Yes, it was Jean-Marie's father. The trawler was in dock. Only the captain and Adèle were left on board. He was going to take her off. Then—"

"Stop!"

"Then you told this man, who had come to look at the boat in which his son had died, that the kid had been murdered. Isn't that so? And you followed him! When the captain came along you hid behind a truck!"

"Stop!"

"The crime was committed before your eyes."

"Please!"

"No! You were a party to the crime. Yon went on board! And you took the woman off."

"By then I didn't want her any more!"

Outside there was a loud siren blast. Le Clinche's lips trembled and he stammered:

"The *Océan.*"

"Yes. She sails at high tide."

They were silent. All the sounds of the hospital came to their ears, including the subdued rumble of a stretcher being wheeled toward the operating-theater.

"I didn't want her any more!" the operator repeated convulsively.

"Only it was too late."

There was another silence. Then Le Clinche said:

"And yet now, I so much want to—"

He didn't dare pronounce the word on his tongue.

"To live?" asked Maigret.

"Oh, don't you understand? I was mad! I don't understand it myself. It all happened somewhere else, in another world. We came back here and I realized it. Listen! There was that black cabin and ourselves outside it. And nothing else existed. It seemed to be my whole life. I just wanted to hear her say 'My big boy' again. I couldn't even say how it happened. I opened the door. She went away. There was a man in yellow shoes waiting for her, and they fell into each other's arms on the quay.

"I must have been dreaming. That is the right word for it. And from that moment I wanted not to die. Then Marie came with you. Adèle came too, with that man.

"It's too late, isn't it? They let me out. I went on board and got a revolver. Marie was waiting for me on the quay. She didn't know. And that afternoon that woman began talking. And there was the man with yellow shoes too.

"Who could conceivably understand all that? I fired. It took me a long time to make up my mind. Because Marie was there!"

He sobbed. He literally cried:

"I'll have to die all the same! And I don't want to die! I'm afraid to die. I—I—"

He began tossing about so violently that Maigret called a nurse who, with the calm precise movements acquired during long years of professional experience, managed to quiet him.

A second time the trawler gave its piercing summons, and women ran to line up on the jetty.

XI

MAIGRET arrived at the quay just as the new captain was giving the order to cast off the hawsers. He saw the chief engineer saying good-by to his wife, and went up and took him aside.

"Tell me something. It was you, wasn't it, who found the captain's will and put it in the police letter-box?"

The other hesitated, rather anxiously.

"You've nothing to fear. You suspected Le Clinche. You thought it was the way to save him. Although you had been after the same woman."

The siren shrieked angrily to latecomers, and on the quay couples loosened their embraces.

"Please don't talk to me any more about it. Is it true he's going to die?"

"Unless they can save him. Where was the will?"

"In the captain's papers."

"And what was it you were looking for?"

"I hoped to find a photo," he confessed with lowered head. "You'll excuse me. I've got to—"

The hawsers fell into the water. The gangway was being taken up. The chief engineer jumped on board and gave a last wave to his wife and a last look at Maigret.

Slowly the trawler made its way toward the harbor exit. A man was carrying the cabin-boy, who was scarcely fifteen, on his shoulders. The boy had taken the man's pipe and was holding it proudly between his teeth.

On shore women were crying.

By walking quickly one could follow the ship, which got up speed only when it was beyond the jetties. People shouted last-minute instructions.

"If you meet the *Atlantique*, don't forget to tell Dugodet about his wife!"

The sky was still overcast. The wind ruffled the sea and raised little white waves which made an angry noise.

A Parisian in flannel trousers, followed by two laughing girls in white, was taking photographs of the ship's departure.

Maigret nearly knocked down a woman who clutched his arm and asked:

"Well? Is he any better?"

It was Adèle. She couldn't have powdered her face since morning, because it was shiny.

"Where's Buzier?" Maigret asked.

"He preferred to hop it to Le Havre. He was afraid of trouble. And I was giving him the bird. But that boy, Pierre Le Clinche?"

"I don't know."

"Tell me!"

But he didn't. He left her. He had caught sight of a group on the jetty—Marie Léonnec, her father, and Madame Maigret. All three were turned toward the trawler, and Marie Léonnec was saying fervently:

"That's *his* boat."

Maigret went forward slowly, grumpily. His wife was the first to see him in the crowd of people who had come to see the sailing of the Newfoundland ship.

"Have they saved him?"

Monsieur Léonnec's monstrosity of a nose turned anxiously toward him.

"Ah! I am very glad to see you. Where does the inquiry lead now, Inspector?"

"Nowhere!"

"You mean?"

"Nothing. I don't know."

Marie's eyes opened wide with astonishment.

"But Pierre?"

"The operation was successful. He'll probably pull through."

"He's innocent, isn't he? Please! Tell my father he's innocent."

Her whole soul was in the request. And Maigret, as he looked at her, imagined how she would be in ten years' time, with the same features as her father, and rather a severe expression, meant to impress her father's customers.

"He didn't kill the captain," he said. Then, turning to his wife: "I've just had a telegram recalling me to Paris."

"Already? I had promised to go bathing tomorrow with—"

He gave her a look and she understood.

"You'll excuse us."

"But we'll accompany you as far as the hotel."

Maigret caught sight of Jean-Marie's father, very drunk, shaking his fist again at the trawler, and turned away his head.

"Don't trouble, please."

"Tell me!" declared Monsieur Léonnec. "Do you think I could take him back to Quimper? People are bound to talk."

Marie looked at him pleadingly. She was quite pale.

"Seeing he's innocent!" she stammered.

Maigret's face wore its vaguest and grimmest expression.

"I don't know. It would probably be best."

"But you'll allow me to offer you something—a bottle of champagne?..."

"No, thank you."

"A small glass? How about some Benedictine, as we're in the district?"

"I'll have a glass of beer."

UPSTAIRS, Madame Maigret was fastening the bags.

"So you're of my opinion, are you? He's a good boy."

Still that pleading look from the girl, begging him to say yes!

"I think he'll make a good husband."

"And a good businessman!" The father outdid him. "For I don't intend to let him go sailing off for many months to come. Once you're married, you've got to—"

"Of course!"

"Particularly as I have no son. You'll understand that!"

"Of course."

Maigret kept looking at the stairs. Finally his wife appeared.

"The bags are ready. It seems there is no train until—"

"Never mind! We'll hire a car."

It was a real flight!

"If you ever have the occasion to visit Quimper—"

"Yes. Yes."

Still that look from the girl. She seemed to realize that it wasn't quite so clear as it appeared, but she was begging Maigret to keep quiet.

She wanted to have her fiancé.

The inspector shook hands, paid his bill, and finished his beer.

"Thank you a thousand times, Monsieur Maigret."

"Don't mention it."

The car that had been telephoned for had arrived.

. . . and, unless you have discovered elements that have escaped me, I conclude by suggesting that this case be classified as . . .

It was a passage out of a letter from Superintendent Grenier, of the Le Havre *Brigade Mobile*, to which Maigret replied by wire:

AGREED.

Six months later he received a communication which read:

Madame Veuve Le Clinche has the honor of announcing the marriage of her son Pierre to Mademoiselle Marie Léonnec . . .

And, a little later, when he was on a case that necessitated visiting a special house in the Rue Pasquier, he recognized a young woman who turned her head away.

It was Adèle.

That was all! Except that, five years later, Maigret passed through Quimper. He saw a rope merchant standing at his shop door.

He was quite a young man, tall, but with the beginnings of a paunch.

He had a slight limp. He was calling to a little boy of three who was playing with a top on the pavement.

"Better come in, Pierrot! Mamma will be cross!"

The man, preoccupied with his offspring, did not see Maigret who hurried past, looking the other way and making a rather rueful face.

COMING IN THE NEXT ISSUE

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SLAY RIDE

A Gripping Mystery Novel Featuring Hard-Boiled Private Eye Johnny Liddell

By FRANK KANE

ONE of the GANG

By J. S. ENDICOTT

Jack Tucker was slated for death—once he told what he knew!

WITH the coming of night Jack Tucker found the city had become a place of swiftly increasing terror.

Dark side streets were strange labyrinths in which he might become lost and never again be able to work his way out of the maze. The shadows of the buildings were black pits waiting to engulf him in their depths.

He walked on steadily, furtively, a lean man in a striped suit. The brim of his soft hat was pulled down so that it shaded the eyes that were always seeking, always watching. Often he paused for a few moments to stare into a dark shop window, standing there listening for the sound of Conn Beaton's footsteps.

Tucker knew that he would recognize them the instant he heard them. There was no mistaking the limping man's walk. Thud, shuffle, thud, shuffle—that was the way it was and always would be. Slow and deliberate and as ruthless as the man himself.

He paused in the dark doorway of a grocery store, the old scar from a knife wound on his right cheek vivid in the glow of a street light. Just a moment when the weariness of the long hours of walking, at times even running, caused him to relax his guard—then suddenly the three of them were there with him.

"We've been looking for you, Jack," Dent Fillmore said in his cold voice, thrusting the barrel of his gun hard against Tucker's back. "You've been kind of hard to find."

Steve Westlake stood a little to Tucker's right, the automatic in his hand gleaming dully in the light. Conn Beaton was back against one of the plate glass windows of the store, watching and waiting.

"I didn't think he would be so big a fool," Beaton said without the slightest trace of emotion in his tone. "Frisk him, Steve. See if he is still carrying the stones."

"Keep your hands high, Jack," Fillmore said, prodding Tucker with the gun held against his back. "I keep worrying about you doing something foolish."

"So do I."

Steve Westlake dropped his automatic back into his pocket, stepped closer and began to search Tucker. For just a fraction of a second he was standing where Tucker could have grabbed him and swung him around. But Tucker would have had to risk the chance of getting a bullet from the gun Fillmore held against his back to do it.

"A little more to one side, Steve,"

Beaton said. "I'm afraid you'll never learn."

"He should learn," Tucker said bitterly. "He's had a good teacher."

WESTLAKE continued searching through Tucker's pockets. Careful to stand far enough away and behind Tucker so there was no chance of grabbing him unless Tucker swung completely around.

"He hasn't the diamonds on him now," Westlake said finally. "And he's not even carrying a gun. Looks like we went to a lot of trouble trailing him for nothing."

"You're wrong about that," Beaton said. "He did have the diamonds, and probably knows where they are now. A man can be made to talk."

"Not if he knows he's going to die either way," Tucker said.

He deliberately lowered his arms; it was a gesture of defiance. It was strange how the fear was leaving him now that the danger that had haunted him had become a real and living thing. Just the slightest pressure on the trigger of that gun hard against his back and he might die in slow agony, a bullet in some vital organ.

Far down the street the siren of a police car wailed in sudden warning—a banshee cry that grew steadily louder.

"Put your gun away, Steve," Beaton said. "Dent, you and Tucker start walking west along the street. Steve and I will join you after you circle around the block."

The four men moved away from the dark doorway. Tucker and Westlake walked west, while Beaton and Fillmore headed east. The siren rose to a wild, shrill scream as the police car flashed by and kept on going, to disappear into the distance.

"Probably some dame heard a mouse and phoned in a burglar alarm," Tucker said as he walked beside Westlake. "Signal six-four-eight-six."

"Six-four-eight-six," Westlake said in a strange voice. "What's the code color?"

"Gray on black," Tucker said.

"Right. You're one of us, Jack." Westlake shuddered. "And I might have killed you."

"I didn't feel so good about that either, with Fillmore's gun prodding me in the back," Tucker said. "Stealing that bag of unset diamonds that Beaton and you and Fillmore got from that jewelry store robbery was a crazy idea on my part anyway."

"Sure was crazy," Westlake said. "You work your way into the gang, have Conn Beaton believing he might find you useful then all of a sudden you grab the diamonds, knock me over getting out of the apartment and get away. I still don't get it, Jack."

"I suddenly wanted out in a hurry," Tucker said. "Guess you three were closer behind me than I thought or you never would have got me."

"We moved fast," Westlake said. "One of us had you in sight almost all of the time. I nearly lost track of everybody when Conn made me get rid of that light gray topcoat I was wearing. He said you would spot that coat a mile away. Boy, you sure pulled a fast one in getting rid of the diamonds. I don't see how you did it with us watching you all of the time."

"How did you get rid of the topcoat?" Tucker asked.

"Left it in a pool room and told them I'd be back for it later," Westlake said. "Seeing as we are working together on this, what did you do with the diamonds, Jack?"

"Dropped the bag into the pocket of your topcoat when I knocked you down leaving the apartment," Tucker said.

"*What?*" Westlake stopped and stared at Tucker in amazement. "You mean the diamonds are in my topcoat?"

"They are," Tucker said. "At least they were. Depends on whether your pool room friends would go through the pockets of a topcoat when they see one hanging around."

"If they did, it's going to be tough for someone," Westlake said grimly. "I'll find out about that later."

THEY circled the block and when they were half way around Tucker saw Conn Beaton and Dent Fillmore coming toward them. Fillmore made little noise as he walked but the thud, shuffle, thud, shuffle of Beaton's footsteps was loud. In a few minutes the four men were together again.

"Obviously the police weren't looking for us," Beaton said. "But it is just as well not to take chances."

"It worked out good," Westlake said. "You were right about Tucker, Conn.

He's an undercover man for the police or the G-Men, I'm not sure which."

"How do you know?" Beaton asked.

"Remember that scrap of paper Tucker must have dropped back at the apartment?" Westlake said. "It just said 'signal-code color.' Well, when the police car went by Tucker said, 'Signal six-four-eight-six.' I pretended that I knew the signal, that I was an undercover man, too. I asked Tucker about the code color. He said it was gray on black."

"Gray on black," repeated Beaton. "We'll have to remember that."

"He tricked me!" Tucker's voice was almost a wail. "I even told him what I had done with the diamonds!"

He staggered as though suddenly weak and dizzy from fright. He clawed at Westlake to keep from falling to the sidewalk. Then he quickly thrust his hand inside his coat as though to feel the beat of his heart.

"I—I feel funny," he muttered in a choked voice. "Like I'm going to be awfully sick."

"Where are the diamonds?" Beaton demanded and it was quite obvious that he didn't care how sick Tucker might be. "What did he tell you about them, Steve?"

"That he dropped the bag into a pocket of my topcoat when he knocked me down getting out of the apartment," Westlake said. "The topcoat you made me leave at that pool room, Conn."

"You fool!" Beaton snapped. "Did you feel the bag in the pocket of the coat? Didn't you realize it was there?"

Tucker staggered over and leaned against the wall of a building. The shadows were deep all around him. The other men paid no attention to him. He was still close enough to hear their voices clearly.

"That bag was small and light," Westlake said. "And six diamonds aren't heavy. I couldn't notice the weight of the bag in my pocket."

"Six diamonds, every one of them worth at least ten thousand dollars," Beaton said coldly. "Sixty thousand dollars in stones and you leave them in a topcoat pocket! I'm afraid you have made too many blunders, Steve. Having you with us any longer isn't safe."

"No, boss!" Westlake said anxiously. "You told Shorty Hagan that a month ago and he ended up in the morgue after the cops fished him out of the river."

"Exactly!" Beaton glanced at Fillmore. "You better take care of this, Dent. Quietly, of course. Without using a gun."

"Aw, don't be like that, Conn," Westlake said. "You've been smart, having gangs working all over the city with apparently no connection between them and yet you are the boss of the whole bunch."

"I didn't even know that," Fillmore said. "Even when those men I had been working with told me they had orders to lay low for awhile and sent me to see Conn Beaton I didn't tumble that we all were part of one big gang."

"Never mind all that," Beaton said impatiently. "You've got a job to do, Dent."

"Yeah." Fillmore began to whistle softly, a strange plaintive air, but he did not move.

Tucker straightened up against the wall as he listened to the tune that Fillmore was whistling. He thrust his hand beneath the left side of his coat.

"I'll kill you both if you come near me," Westlake snapped, trying to keep the fear out of his voice as he reached for his automatic. "I—I—" His voice broke off and he just stood there, his hand still in his pocket.

Fillmore was still whistling softly. Beaton's left foot scraped on the pavement as he moved impatiently.

"Get him, Dent," Beaton said. "He hasn't the nerve to shoot."

FILLMORE stopped whistling. "I just work for you, Conn," he said. "You do your own killing."

"You're in this pretty deep to back out now, Dent," Beaton said. "Six months ago you got in with one of the other sections of my gang. The police were hot on your trail after that hotel robbery you tried to pull all by yourself. When I ordered that bunch to keep quiet for a while, I sent word to have you join me."

"I know," Fillmore said. "Have I been dumb! All the robberies and looting that has been going on around town has been organized crime and you've been boss of the whole works."

"But on special jobs I have preferred to use you three men," Beaton said. "Such as that jewelry store robbery last night. Those diamonds we got are part

of the biggest haul we've made yet." His voice grew hard. "But when I give any of my men orders I expect them to be carried out."

"Suppose I refuse?" Fillmore asked.

"That would be very foolish," Beaton said. "I've had you covered with the gun in my pocket ever since you stopped whistling and we started talking. I've been quite frank because it has dawned on me it might not be safe for you three to live much longer."

Fillmore deliberately again started whistling the strange plaintive tune. He broke off right in the middle of the melody. From the shadows Tucker picked it up as he started whistling.

Beaton cursed. Fillmore dropped flat on the sidewalk as the gun in Beaton's pocket roared a second too late. Tucker's right hand flashed out, holding an automatic. He fired and Beaton reeled back, a bullet in his right shoulder. Fillmore quickly got to his feet and covered Westlake with his gun.

"You're so careless, Steve," Tucker said. "You didn't even notice that I got your gun when I pretended to be sick and grabbed at you to keep from falling." He looked at Fillmore. "I had been told there was another undercover man working with some section of the gang, but I didn't know who it was until you started whistling, Handel's 'Largo,' Dent."

"I was told to whistle that, and if there was another detective working with any part of the gang he would recognize it as the code signal," Fillmore said. "And you did, Jack."

"But I thought those numbers you mentioned were the signal," Westlake said as he listened. "And what was the stuff about the code colors being gray on black?"

"You've got me," said Tucker. "I just made all that up as I went along, just as I was careful to drop that slip of paper with that stuff written on it back at the apartment. You see Beaton was also a bit careless—I found a list he had with the names and addresses of the leaders of all the gangs he had working for him. With that list in my possession I knew I had to get away fast, so I swiped the bag of diamonds and managed to escape from the apartment."

"Too bad you didn't have a chance to do anything with that list yet," Fillmore said.

"But I did," Tucker said. "I phoned it in, and the police are rounding up all those men right now."

"You were smart, Tucker," Beaton said, stepping forward. His wounded shoulder prevented him using his gun, and Tucker still had him covered with the automatic. "But you slipped up badly in leaving the diamonds in Westlake's topcoat."

"Sometimes I'm an awful liar," Tucker said. "I wasn't fool enough to put the bag of diamonds in the pocket of the coat. I've had the bag with me all of the time."

"You're crazy," Westlake said. "I searched you good when we first caught you and I didn't find the diamonds or the bag."

"I know," Tucker said. "Keep them both covered, Dent."

He dropped the automatic back into his pocket and took off the dark soft hat that had been pulled down so firmly on his head. He reached inside the hat and pulled out a little bag.

"Here is the bag and the diamonds," he said with a grin. "Much better than doing it with rabbits."

In the distance the sound of police sirens grew steadily louder. Someone in the vicinity had heard the shooting and reported it to the police.

"That is sad music for Conn and the rest of the gang," Tucker said. "I'll bet they are being picked up all over town."

"First time I ever liked the sound," said Westlake. "But at least because of police undercover work I'm still alive!"

Fillmore began to whistle softly.

"Shut up!" Beaton snarled. "I hate music!"

●

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A LEMMY CAUTION NOVEL

The irrepressible Lemmy turns Paris topsy-turvy in his frantic search for top secrets!

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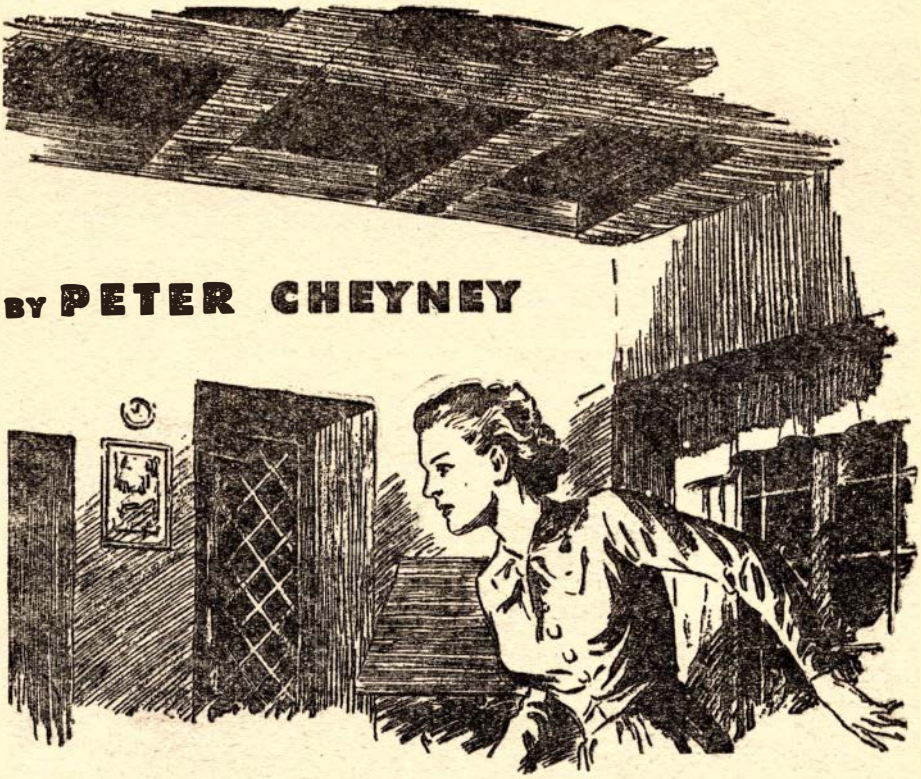
I hit him a honey under the jaw, and the gun drops outa his hand (Chap. XI)



BY PETER CHEYNEY

I

LIFE can be wonderful. And how! But me—I am feelin' so depressed I could cut my throat. An' the reason for this depression which is now settlin' over Paris in March, 1945, can be summed in one word—dames! Even if I was Aladdin an' rubbed the lamp, I reckon the genii would not produce anythin' I wanted unless I handed in the coupons first.

The guy who called this alleyway the Place des Roses has got a sense of humor, because believe it or not it smells plenty. Maybe its because the Germans haven't been out of Paris for long. The place is dark, but I can see a crack of light comin' outa the first floor window. I reckon this is the house all right. I give an iron bell-pull a jerk an' the door opens.

Lookin' at me is a tall, thin, bronzed guy. He has got a humorous face an' nice gray eyes.

He says: "Would you be Lemmy Caution?"

I say: "Yeah, that's what my mother said."

"I'm Jimmy Cleeve," he says. "I'm a private dick from New York."

I say: "Yeah, so I heard."

Cleeve leads the way upstair . Halfway up he says:

"There's a pal of yours here. A boyo named Dombie."

I say: "Yeah, he's a nice fella. Talks too much, that's all. An' he's got a leery eye for dames. Has anybody got anything to eat up there?"

He opens a door at the top of the stairs. He says: "Yeah. Dombie's got a bottle.

The room is not bad. There are a

coupla chairs an' a bed, an' a bottle that looks like whisky.

I say: "Hello, Dombie. I ain't seen you for two years. You remember that job we did in London?"

He says: "Yeah—I remember. You hooked a lovely dame off me."

An' then Cleeve says: "Wait a minute, you two. Ain't there a little business goin' around here?"

I say: "Yeah? What's the business?"

I have got a good idea why this Cleeve, a good private dick, is kickin' around with the F.B.I. office in Paris. It looks like something's broke.

Dombie takes a swig at the bottle, then says: "Listen, Lemmy. It looks as if you're in bad with the big boy."

I say: "What have I done now?"

Dombie goes on: "I reckon it's janes again. That last job you did—there was a leakage or something. Somebody wised up the boss that you were gettin' around a bit with a hot dame—Marceline. You know, the one they knocked off. He's got the idea that maybe you shot off your mouth a little bit."

I say: "I can get around with any dame without shootin' off my mouth."

Cleeve says: "Lemmy, I'm just sorta musclin' in on this business, see? But I've been dragged over here from the New York agency because the chief reckoned I knew something. He asked me plenty an' I had to tell him what I knew."

I say: "That's all right by me, but I'd like to know who gave him the big idea I'd been shooting off my mouth to a dame."

Cleeve says: "She did. The Marceline baby."

I say: "Do you mean that?"

He says: "Yeah, Lemmy, I mean it. It don't rate a lot because when they pulled her in for questioning they reckon she's liable to say anything she thinks is gonna help her." He yawns. "I reckon this Marceline had plenty imagination, but the thing is to get the chief to think that. There is also another thing. You remember that guy who was working with you?"

I say: "You mean Ribban, the Federal man from Connecticut? Well, he knows all about it."

Cleeve says: "That's what I thought. I thought you might like to have a talk with him before you saw the chief. I sorta fixed it."

I say: "That's pretty swell of you, Jimmy. When do I see the big boy?"

DOMBIE comes up for air.

He says: "Around ten o'clock tonight, an' he's burned up, Lemmy. He says there are leakages everywhere—Paris, London, and everywhere else. They even say that the Jerries knew when the British paratroops were gonna drop an' where."

I say: "Maybe the chief thinks I told 'em that, too." I say to Cleeve: "So I see the boss at ten. Maybe it's a good idea if I have a talk with Ribban first. You said you fixed something up?"

He says. "Yeah. There's a bar he goes to just off the Place Pigale—Leon's place. He said he'd be there at nine o'clock. It's a quarter short of that now."

I say: "Okay. I'll get movin'."

Outside, I stall around for a bit. I'm not in any great hurry. The longer I stall seein' Ribban the longer I stall the showdown.

I get to thinkin' about this babe Marceline. A little cute jane who knows how to mix the poison good an' plenty. I would give a coupla months' pay to know what that cutey told the chief about me. Maybe I did do a spot of talkin' when I oughta have kept my trap shut. It looks like the kid was cuter than I thought.

Down the end of a little street I am passin' I see a light. I go down there. It is a dump called Wilkie's. I lean up against the bar an' make a sign to Wilkie that I need brandy—an' outa the right bottle, too. I drink two slugs, then take a look around. An' I realize that the buy who wrote that number "My Heart Stood Still" musta been thinkin' of yours very sincerely Mr. Lemuel H. Caution, Special Agent of the Federal Bureau of Investigation now attached to General Headquarters Intelligence an' Secret Service U.S.. Army, Paris.

The reason for this shock to my system is that sittin' at the end of the bar an' lookin' just as if she had jumped out of a fashion plate book is my old friend Juanella Rillwater, who is the wife of Larvey Rillwater who rates as about the best safe-blower in the United States, an' who has been chased all his

life by every type of copper that there is, most of whom have just been wastin' their time because there are no flies on Mr. Rillwater. Except once when there were plenty.

The sight of this babe takes my breath away for two reasons, the first bein' the that Jimmy Cleeve, the private dick that I just been talkin' to, is the guy who eventually put the finger on Larvey Rillwater for a bank safe job in Illinois about eighteen months before the war. Right now, Mrs. Juanella Rillwater's husband, the said Larvey, is stuck safely

"I'll fog you for that!" yells the girl in the zephyr pants (Chap. III)

way she looks. She is a sweet parcel, is Juanella. On the tall side with curves just where they oughta be. She has got auburn hair that looks as if it had just been done by the world's champion hair fixer, an' green eyes; an' when they was issuin' out sex appeal I reckon Juanella took a shoppin' bag an' drew double.

The second reason why I am sorta intrigued, seein' her here in Paris, is away in prison in the U.S.A. an' I reckon Juanella has thought she might as well make hay while the sun shines an' has by some means got herself over here in Paris to see if there is anything worth piekin' up.

I ease over an' stand behind her an' say: "Well . . . well . . . well . . . if it is not that gift to mankind, Juanella, an' how's it goin'?"

She spins around on the high stool. Then she says:

"Well, for cryin' out loud in Chinese! If it is not the only guy I ever really wanted to make—Lemmy Caution. You are a sight for sore eyes an' I love you like death."

I WINK at her. This stuff is a line with Juanella.

I say: "Talk to me, sweet, an' tell me what you are doin' in this city of gladness an' sorrow. Also how is your spouse—if he is still your spouse—Larvey?"

She says, sorta soft: "You know well enough that my spouse, as you call him, is, at this minute, permanently at home to everybody entitled to take a look through the cell bars in Alcatraz. What about buyin' me a drink, Mr. Caution? Or may I call you Lemmy?"

Wilkie runs up a couple of cocktails which we take over to a table. She takes a sip at the cocktail an' says:

"That tastes swell. But you always did buy the best drinks, Lemmy. Selective, aren't you? The only trouble is that you never got around to selectin' me."

"Never mind, Juanella," I tell her. "While there is life there is hope." I light myself a cigarette an' one for her. "I am stuck here, Juanella," I say. "They sent a bunch of us G-men over here to work with the Army people an' it ain't so easy. Besides, I been a top grade mug."

She raises her eyebrows. "Mr. Lemuel H. Caution, the pride of the F.B.I.? I don't believe it!"

"I wish you was right," I say. "But I opened my mouth a bit wide to some dame."

She says: "That's bad, Lemmy. What are they goin' to do to you?"

I shrug. "I'm not worryin', Juanella. What's the good? What're you doin' over here? An' who fixed it? It's difficult to get outa U. S. these days an' get a permit for Paris, especially for a dame with her husband in the cooler."

She looks at the end of her cigarette. Then she says: "Well—I'll tell you, Lemmy. Maybe you know Cleeve who sent Larvey up. A private dick who was workin' in the Illinois State Police office—loaned there for the war. Well, he put the finger on Larvey but he was decent about it." She is still looking at her cigarette. "When they slung Larvey inside I was all broke up, goin' all to pieces an' just when I felt the time had come for me to chuck myself into East River I run inta this Cleeve boyo an' he says if I like to come over here an' do a job in one of the U. S. Despatch Departments he will get me over in spite of my record not bein' so hot. So here I am an' all the better for seein' you."

I look at my watch. It is half-past nine. "Look, Juanella," I tell her. "I got to go. But I'd like to see you again."

She says: "Sure. I'm stayin' at the Hotel St. Denis. Call me some time an' whatever I got on that evenin' I'll ditch it. That's how I feel about you—honey."

I say so long an' scram.

I walk up the Hill thinkin' about this smart Chinese Palooka, Confucius. This Confucius is a boyo I go for in a big way, because he has spent most of his life reducin' things to terms of some sayin' or the other. One of the things he said was that there is only three sorts of trouble—dames, dough, an' not being well. Well, there's a fourth one he missed—the one you have if you have not got any of the others.

Fifteen minutes' walkin' an' I get to this Club Leon, not far from Rue Clichy. It is a sorta *bistro* with a little place at the back for dancin'.

I go over to the bar. Leon is standin' behind it, leanin' on his elbows, with a thin Spanish cigar stickin' outa his mouth.

I say: "Is there a Mr. Ribban around here?"

He nods. "Yes, he's got a room on the top floor. He's up there now. You can go through the bar. Take the door at the end of the passage."

The passage is dark, an' right in the middle of it some G.I. is neckin' a French girl like it was his last night on earth. I squeeze past, walk up two flights an' take a breather on a little landin'. The stairs are wooden, there are no carpets on them an' there is no light. Halfway up the stairs I tread on something soft. I reckon somebody musta dropped a handkerchief.

AFTER I get to the top I switch on my cigarette lighter an' take a look. In front of me is a door. I push it open an' go in. It is a bedroom an' it's empty. I look around. There is a blottin' pad on the desk an' on it are a couple sheets of writin' paper an' an en-

velope. Maybe Ribban was gonna write a letter to somebody an' got interrupted an' went out.

I take the candle an' I go down the stairs. The something soft I'd trod on wasn't a handkerchief. It was the sleeve of Ribban's coat. The guy is lyin' with his head toward the bottom of the stairs, bunched up against the banister rail. He'd dead as last week's cold cuts.

I put the candle down on the stairs an' I slip my hand just inside his shirt. He is still warm. Then I pick up the candle an' hold it close to his head. Just inside his right ear, the uppermost one, I see a little yellow fluid.

A bell starts ringin' back in Ribban's room. I ease up the stairs. There is a telephone on a little table. I grab it. I say hello.

A voice says: "Is that you, Ribban? This is Jimmy Cleve speakin'. Is Caution with you? If he is, put him on."

I say: "Jimmy, this is Caution. Things are not so good around here."

He says: "Things are not so good around *here* either. The chief is raisin' the devil because you have not showed up. What goes on there?"

I say: "You tell the big boy that something that looks as if it might be important has broke—something big, see? You get yourself a jeep an' come around here as quick as you can, but don't bring the jeep up to the Club. You don't wanta make any sorta fuss, see?"

He says: "Okay, Lemmy. I'll be with you in no time at all."

I hang up. I pick up the candle an' I go down the stairway an' take another look at Ribban. His left arm is caught underneath him, but the hand is sticking out. It is clenched an' there is something between the fingers—a fountain pen with the cap still screwed on.

I take out my handkerchief, get hold of the end of the pen an' ease it out of Ribban's fingers. It is a French pen—the sorta thing you can buy on the black market. I put it in my pocket, then I feel in the left-hand lower pocket of Ribban's vest an' I find a little two-inch stub of pencil. I put the pencil back an' button up his coat.

I think: "Well, that is that." Then I sit down on the stairs an' wait.

TEN minutes go by an' Cleeve comes up the stairs. He stops dead when he sees me sittin' there with a candle be-

Ribban is lying on the stairs, as dead as last week's cold cuts (Chap. I)

side me an' Ribban givin' an imitation of the sleepin' babe in the wood.

He says: "Look, Lemmy. What happened?"

I tell him what I know.

He says: "That is not so good. Have you taken a look around his room?"

I say: "Yeah. There's some notepaper an' an envelope on the desk just as if he was gonna write a letter."

Cleeve says: "Yeah. He was always writing letters." He looks at the stairs. He says: "It would be easy for anybody to fall down these stairs. Look, was there a pen an' ink on the desk?"

I say: "There was no pen an' ink."

He nods: "You see? He sits down to write a letter, an' he suddenly realizes that he hasn't got a pen or ink. He goes to get one off Leon. He falls an' breaks his neck."

I says: "Yeah? Take a look in his right ear." I hold the candle up. He bends down an' looks.

He says: "So what? There is some yellow wax or something in his ear."

I say: "That is not wax. That means a fractured base of the skull. Take another look an' you will see where the fracture is. Somebody sandbagged the boy."

He says: "What—on the stairs?"

I say: "Nobody was waitin' for him on the stairs. I reckon he was sittin' at that desk upstairs without noticin' that there wasn't any pen or ink. Well, somebody comes gumshoein' up the stairs. The door is open because Ribban is expectin' me. They go in an' they hand it to him. Then they lug him down here an' push' him up against the wall, so some mug"—I grin at him—"like you will think he fell down the stairs an' broke his neck."

He says: "Well, I still reckon he tripped an' broke his neck. That's my story an' I'm gonna stick to it. About this yellow fluid in his ear an' this fractured base of the skull stuff, they're gonna worry too much if we send him to the mortuary an' *we* tel' the authorities what happened."

I say: "Somebody creased Ribban."

He says: "Lemmy, won't you get some sense in your head? You got a date with the old man tonight. You're gonna see him about puttin' out a little explana- about shootin' off your mouth to this dame Marceline."

I say: "So what?"

He says: "So this. Who examined Marceline when they brought her in? Who got the story about you? Wasn't that Ribban?"

I say: "Yeah, I suppose it was."

"All right," he says. "Ribban knew all about what you told her and what you didn't tell her. Okay. Well, you come here an' see him an' the pair of you are gonna see the big boy tonight, an' I ring up because I wonder what is happenin', and' you're here an' he's been creased. It don't look so good for you, does it?"

I says: "Meaning that I creased Ribban because he'd got something on me?"

He says: "That might be an idea. Maybe there are one or two people which go for a story like that. Supposin' you *did* tell this Marceline baby something that mattered, an' she shot the works to Ribban. It wouldn't be so good for you, would it? If he'd shot his mouth?"

I say: "No. But you're forgetting we've got Marceline. If I'm supposed to have told this baby so much, maybe she can tell us what I told her. Let's get outa here an' see the big boy, an' let me talk to this Marceline. I wanta get my hooks on that frail."

He says: "That would be swell, Lemmy, if you could. But you can't."

I say: "Why not?"

He says: "Because Marceline is no longer with us. They had her stuck in the local cooler, the Number Fourteen French Police base. An hour or so ago, somebody walks in there with a forged order from the big boy an' got her out. About twenty minutes ago they found her dumped on a doopstep, in the Rue Zacherie. She'd been shot twice an' dumped there. You got that?"

I say: "I get it, fella." I do a little concentrated thinkin'. I say: "Jimmy, I reckon you're right." I point to Ribban. "If this is murder," I say, "it don't look so good for Mr. Caution."

II

I HAVE seen the big boy lookin' tough before, but I have never seen him looking as tough as he is right now at Headquarters. The light from the desk lamp is reflecting on the star on General Flash's shoulders. He takes a look at Cleeve, and one at me.

Then he says, "I reckon I know you

well enough, Caution, to talk straight. You've always been regarded as one of the best agents in the F.B.I. If anybody had told me that you'd shoot your mouth, I wouldn't have believed it. Well?"

I say: "General, what does it matter what I've got to say? I know what I've been *told* about it."

He says: "Maybe you're right. The position is even more unsatisfactory because there's no means of checking on the report. I'll just go over the salient details. Marceline du Clos—a French citizeness—and an American named Varley—at least he was a reputed American, though there seems to be a little mix-up about his passport— have been operating an interior decorating business in New York practically since the war started. They were suspected of being in the pay of the Germans or the Japanese. Two agents of the F.B.I. were detailed to take care of the job. One was George Ribban and the other was you, Caution. You both had your instructions and worked separately.

"Du Clos and Varley, by some means nobody has yet discovered, got permits and passports and came to Paris two or three weeks after the American and British Armies got into Paris. Ribban came over after them and so did you, Caution. The next idea was that you should try and get to this Marceline du Clos."

He sits back in his chair, lights a smoke, and says: "Well, one night you took her out and it looks like you hit the liquor. They find you cockeyed the next morning in a dump off the Rue Clichy. Nobody knew where du Clos was.

"By this time certain information had got out about troop movements. Intelligence believed that du Clos and Varley were responsible. We couldn't find Varley, but Ribban got du Clos. He threw a scare into her, and she talked. The main thing she said was that you, Caution, had shot your mouth off good and plenty. You told her what you were doing and did a little beefing about what our Secret Service and Intelligence organizations are doing. Ribban couldn't understand it. Neither can I. All right, you haven't got anything to say. I think you're right. If you talked when you were drunk you wouldn't *know* what you said anyway. Ribban could tell us what she told him, but I'm told he fell down some stairs tonight and broke his neck. Also, Marceline du Clos has been found shot. That's inconvenient too."

I say: "General, is the big idea that I shot this Marceline du Clos because I wanted to stop her talking? It looks as if I'm qualifyin' for murder on a big scale."

He says: "Don't talk like a fool, Caution. Personally, I don't think the matter is as serious as one or two have tried to make out. Du Clos was apparently temperamental. When Ribban pulled her in and she got scared, she may have said anything she thought might help her. As for Ribban, Cleeve gave me all the details of his death on the telephone."

HE brings a box outa his desk drawer an' puts it on the desk.

He says: "You two give yourselves cigarettes and listen to me." He looks at me first. "I'm going to keep you on this job, Caution. I don't see why an agent with a good record should suffer for accusations which can't be substantiated. And now we'll be constructive. Varley has got away. We believe he's got over to England, and it is not going to be easy to put a finger on him over there. There are a lot of American troops in England. If he's got friends there and forged papers, maybe he could give our people and the English authorities a run-around for a long time." He looks at Cleeve. He says: "Cleeve, you know Varley?"

Cleeve nods. "I know what he looks like an' I think I know what his game is or was. Varley was workin' in with the Hitler Bund in the U.S.A. before America declared war. He's got some tie-up over here an' he's probably got a tie-up in England."

The chief says: "Did du Clos tell you anything about Varley, Caution?"

I say: "She told me plenty an' most of it was hooey. But here an' there a little bit of sense was stickin' out. The night I contacted Marceline du Clos, I think she sorta got the idea that her number was up, and that if our people didn't get her here in Paris, the Germans would. For some reason that baby thought she was unpopular with them, an' she told me that Varley hadn't been trustin' her much for six or seven

months, that he'd been using her as a front. Varley, a tough egg, believed she was gettin' scared and might do some talkin'. She had the idea that's why he brought her over here."

The chief says: "I see. She didn't give you any ideas about any of Varley's associates?"

I wait for a minute, then I say: "Yeah, she told me one thing. This Varley has got a sister. I sorta got the idea that this dame is in England. I got the idea, too, that she didn't like this baby."

The big boy says: "Did she give you a description of this sister, Caution?"

I say: "And how! You know, General, when a dame really hates another dame she notices everything about her. Du Clos said she was a brunette with a lovely skin an' big amethyst eyes. She had everything—figure, style, knew how to dress, spoke a couple languages, maybe more. There's one other point. This baby has got a peculiar identification mark. The little finger of her left hand is twisted. Du Clos told me she had lovely hands with long fingers, beautifully manicured nails, an' that the contrast of this little finger bein' twisted was terrific."

He says: "I see." He takes a pad an' writes that description down. Then he says: "I'm sending you and Cleeve to England. You find Varley and, if you can, get him back here to me alive. You'll get all the help you want from the English authorities. Leave the day after tomorrow." He looks at me and his blue eyes are not quite so hard. He says: "I'd like you to pull this off, Caution."

I say: "You mean it would be a come-back for me?"

He only says: "Find Varley. Bring him in, and"—he says with a sorta grin—"while you're doin' it, have a look at this lovely sister of his. I've an idea we've either got a firing squad or a nice cell at Alcatraz for twenty years for those two."

I get up. I say: "Good night, General."

We have a drink together, and when we separate it is just after midnight. I get to thinkin' about Juanella Rillwater. I did not think the world was so small that I'd meet that honey-belle in Paris at a time like this. This bozo Confucius once shot an earful when he said: "The unexpected woman is like the dew rose seen in the hedge. She springeth suddenly. She cometh from no man knows where and disappeareth after she hath smacked some poor fish a sweet one across the beezer like nobody's business." Confucius certainly knew his packaged goods.

I START walkin' to the Hotel St. Denis. This is not far from the Boulevard Michel, an' is a coupla old-fashioned houses which have been knocked inta one. I ring the bell an' a guy in a baize apron opens the door.

I say: "Look, there is a lady by the name of Mrs. Rillwater livin' here. Is she in?"

He says he wouldn't know, but gives me a number on the second floor. He says why don't I go up an' take a look.

When I get to No. 23 on the second floor I tap quietly on the door an' nothing happens. I turn the handle an' give the door a little push an' I go in. The room is dark but on the other side is a door leadin' to some inner room, an' I can see a crack of light. I feel for the electric light switch, put it on an' shut the door. As I do the door on the other side opens an' a dame comes out.

Me, I am never very surprised at anythin'. I have seen some funny things happen an' this dame is one of the funniest. She is wearin' Turkish slippers, harem trousers that anybody but a blind man could see through, a *brassiere* made out of a coupla rhinestone G strings, an' an amused expression. She has got one of the finest pair of legs I ever saw, a face that looks like a piece outa your geography book, an' a squint. She is also a strawberry blonde an' the dye is beginnin' to fade.

I say: "Well . . .well . . . well! If you are not the swellest little picture, I am an Indian Princess with a cork leg."

She says: "Listen, mug, what d'you think you are—the Gestapo? Maybe they didn't tell you that this part of France is unoccupied right now an' the free list is suspended."

"Don't you believe it, babe," I tell her. "Me—I am practically an Army of Occupation. But maybe you might satisfy my curiosity just for once. What are you wearin' all that stuff for—or are you rehearsin' for a strip-tease act?"

She says: "Maybe I was thinkin' of

the old days. I was a stripper one time. I had a feature spot, too."

"Some feature," I tell her. "I take you six to four that if any of the customers took one look at that squint of yours you wouldn't see 'em for dust."

She says: "Never mind the squint, boys. The customers never paid to look at my face. Now maybe you'll tell me what you want around here. This is private."

I say: "I'm lookin' for a dame called Juanella Rillwater. This is her room. Maybe you know where she is?"

She says: "It is *not* her room an' I don't know where she is. Anyhow," she goes on, "I do not wish to know anything about a dame called Rillwater."

Lookin' at this baby, something touches a memory chord in my brain.

I say: "Well . . . well . . . well. If you are not Marta Frisler who used to do a strip-tease act in Metzler's Burlesque in Chicago I'm Adolf Hitler."

I take my badge outa my pocket an' I show it to her.

"My name's Caution," I say. "I'm a Federal man attached to the Army Intelligence here. You say you don't know Mrs. Rillwater. Then what are you doin' here?"

She looks over my shoulder an' a little grin comes over her face. I screw around an' take a look. A man has come inta the room. He looks like a Cuban—an' he has got an automatic in his right hand.

III

I SEE the guy come into the room and look over at my girl friend.

She says: "This is Mr. Caution. He's a G-man, an' he's lookin' for some dame called Rillwater."

He says: "We don't like people who stick their noses into our beezness, Mr. Caution. Especially, we do not like policemen—even if they are working with the U. S. Army."

I say: "Why don't you put that gun away? You might hurt yourself."

He grins, an' says: "Me, I get hurt ver' seldom. It ees the other one who gets hurt."

He has got a fancy pencil stuck in his top vest pocket. That takes my eye. But all the time he is watchin' me an' the gun is still nice an' easy in his hand.

I can see that the safety latch is off. Maybe he means business.

I say: "You must be a lucky guy. But this is one of the times you are liable to get hurt good an' plenty. Maybe they didn't tell you we got an Army here?"

He says: "Yes, but accidents, senor, will sometimes 'appen. Supposing I knock some of your teeth down your throat. Maybe you are going to like that."

"I wouldn't like it at all," I tell him. "But look, you interest me."

He says: "Oh, yes! All right, Mr. Caution, you tell me why."

I say: "That pencil you got sorta fascinates me. I always went for fancy pencils in a big way."

He takes out the pencil and looks at it. He says: "What's so funny about this?"

"Nothin'," I tell him, "except I saw the pen that goes with that set tonight. That pencil is sold with a fountain pen, but you haven't got the fountain pen, have you, fella?"

He looks at the dame an' says: "I theenk he mus' be mad."

She says: "Well, if you think he's mad you gotta do something about him."

I say: "Listen, baby, why does anybody have to do anything about anybody. Why can't you relax?"

He says: "All right, senor. Now you tell me what you want?"

I say: "Okay. You wouldn't know a place called the Club Leon, would you?"

He shrugs, then he remembers. "I theenk I know the place."

"I think you know it, too," I tell him. "There was a guy called Ribban—a G-man—sandbagged tonight in a top floor room there. He's dead. I suppose you wouldn't know anything about that?"

He shrugs again. "Why should I know anything about that? I was never near the Club Leon tonight."

I say: "That means you've got an alibi—a real cast-iron alibi—one I could maybe check without goin' outa this room." I sorta casual start walkin' up an' down the room. "Maybe the alibi would be this. There was a babe called Marceline du Clos. She was stuck in a cell at the Fourteenth French Police Post tonight—until somebody with a forged police pass got her out. After that somebody takes her to the Rue

Zacherie an' puts a bullet in her where she's gonna feel it most. That wouldn't be your alibi by any chance, would it?"

He don't say anything. I take a quick look at the dame. She is lookin' so scared she has even forgotten to squint.

I say: "Look, maybe I am only tryin' to throw a scare into you pair of near humans. But I am goin' to ask you to realize this!"

I wag a finger at him as if I am comin' to some big point. Then, suddenly, I take a jump at him, shoot out my left leg an' give him a king kick in the stomach.

He lets out a holler, drops the gun, doubles up on the carpet an' starts moanin' and rollin' around.

I take a step toward the gun. But the girl friend is there first. This baby shoots across the room as if she was shot out of a cannon. She grabs the gun an' yells:

"I'm gonna fog you for this, you crawlin' Federal!"

She has a quick shot at me but what with being all steamed up an' cross-eyed she misses. I make a grab at a rye bottle an' throw it at the electric light globe. I get a direct hit an' the light goes out.

SHE now tells me some more about myself an' what she hopes is gonna happen to me. I reckon that she is waitin' for me to go outa the door to see me against the light in the corridor. I ease over to the guy who is still writhin' on the floor. I grab the pencil, crawl to the door, get hold of the handle, throw the door open an' wriggle around the corner.

I was right. She starts some more shootin', but the bullets go high. I scram.

When I get back to my hotel room I call Dombie's number. When I hear him say hello, I say:

"Hello, Dombie. This is Lemmy Caution."

He says: "Yeah! You have to ring up at this time of night just when I got a beautiful dame here. Well, what you want?"

I say: "Dombie, get yourself outa that dump an' come round here. I wanta talk to you."

He says: "All right. Me, I never get time to relax. I'll be seein' you."

Twenty minutes go by an' Dombie gets around.

He says: "Well, fella, what's it all about?"

I tell him. I got quite a respect for Dombie. He is deep. What they call a would-be dumb fella. He is always pretendin' to be worrying' about some dame, but he's a wise guy all right. Also he is tough. He started the war off in the Canadian Commandos, went from there to British Intelligence, an' is now workin' with us as a sorta liaison.

I say: "Look, Dombie, you heard about Ribban?"

He says: "Yeah, Cleeve told me. He fell down some stairs an' broke his neck."

I say: "He broke nothin'. Somebody creased him."

He says: "No! How?"

I say: "Somebody hit him with a blackjack."

He looked surprised. He says: "I wonder what they did that for?"

I say: "It looks to me as if Ribban was sittin' at a desk an' somebody eased up behind him an' let him have it, see? Ribban goes out cold, an they drag him down the stairs so some mug's gonna think he fell down the stairs."

He nods. "You got any ideas?"

I say: "No, not many. But something funny happened earlier this evenin'. I ran into a baby I usta know in New York—a swell piece."

I tell him all about Juanella, and how I go to the address she gives me, and find Marta Frisler there, an' about this guy who looks like a Cuban or an Argentine.

"He is not so pleased with me because I am askin' questions," I tell him. "In fact I get so unpopular with this mug that eventually he unlimbers some artillery an' starts loosin' off at me. Then there's one other thing. When I found Ribban he had something in his hand. A fountain pen."

Dombie says: "Yeah! Well, he was just gonna write a letter."

I say: "The cap was screwed on the fountain pen an' Ribban never used one. He always used a stub of pencil. The pencil was in his vest pocket."

Dombie says: "So what?"

I say: "The pen was a French pen—one of those colored things you buy in a set with a pencil in the black market.

The boyo who was doin' the shootin' tonight at the Hotel St. Denis had a propellin' pencil stickin' outa his vest pocket that matches up with the pen Ribban had. I took it off him." I throw the pencil across to him.

He says: "Lemmy, you got something in your mind?"

I say: "Yeah. You get out early tomorrow mornin'. Try an' find where that pen an' pencil set came from. Find out the mug who's sellin' the things. Usually there are only two or three of each sort in a set. If this pencil belonged to the set that Ribban's pen belonged to, maybe we got something. An' Dombie, you might get in touch with one of the 'I' Sections an' find out just where Mrs. Juanella Rillwater is really livin'. Phone an' let me know. An' I'll bet a lotta money it's not the Hotel St. Denis."

HE gets up to leave, and says: "Okay. But maybe I got an idea where that baby is livin' right now."

I say: "So you knew she was over here. How did you get that?"

He says: "Well, the other night was Cleeve's birthday. We had a little party an' he gets high. He's gotta scheme about this Rillwater baby." He looks at me sideways. "You know Cleeve is a brain guy all right. That's why Flash sent for him. I reckon he's pulled some story about why he got Juanella Rillwater over here, but I reckon it ain't the true one."

I say: "Maybe you can give me the genuine article?"

He says: "Maybe I can. I got an idea that the Juanella baby knows plenty about the Varley that Marceline du Clos was gettin' about with. I got an idea that in New York he used to get around with Larvey Rillwater. I think they pulled one or two little jobs together—bond robberies, jobs like that. Maybe Varley was using Rillwater. Maybe the stuff Rillwater was knocking off was much more important that he knew. Maybe it wasn't always bonds."

"I get it," I say. "You think Varley used Rillwater to steal documents he wanted, that Rillwater didn't know what he was doin'."

"That's my idea," says Dombie. "Rillwater gets slung in Alcatraz. Cleeve brings Juanella over here to work for him. She knows Varley. If she runs across Varley, Varley is gonna tie up with her, ain't he? Especially as Larvey Rillwater got in the cooler through him."

I say: "You're dead right about Cleeve. The boy certainly has brains."

Dombie says: "He knows what he's doin' all right." He gets up. "If I get anything on this fountain pen thing I'll call you, an' I reckon I'll have the Rillwater dame's address by ten o'clock."

A nice guy, Dombie. . . .

I wake up at nine o'clock. The telephone bell is janglin'. It is Dombie.

He says: "Hello, fella. I been doin' a lotta leg work for you. The fountain pen thing was not difficult, because there are not a lotta fountain pens in Paris at the present moment. There were about six dozen of those sets—a pen an' a pencil in a box. There were only four of each color. The one your boy friend had is sold by a black marketeer called Paul Le Fevre. You'll find him any mornin' at Fritz's bar in Montmartre."

I say: "I got it."

He says: "The second thing is Mrs. Rillwater. There's some dump out near Auteuil, a big house—usta belong to some count or other. It's called the Villa des Fleurs."

I say: "Yeah! And what goes on there?"

He says: "Well, it's a gamblin' *spieler*. Mostly black marketeers. There's big play every night. I reckon you'll find Juanella around there any night. The customers go for her in a big way. But she's still stuck on that husband of hers—the boy in Alcatraz."

I say: "Yeah, that's what I think."

He laughs. "Well, I'll be seein' you," he says an' I hear the receiver click down.

I go out on the landin' and bawl down for coffee. When it comes up I drink it, have a little meetin' with myself, an' wonder if I shall ring up Jimmy Cleeve. Then I think I will play this on my own, which is exactly what this boy Jimmy is doin'.

I take a shower, dress myself in a quiet dark gray suit, an' walk to Headquarters. Flash is sittin' behind his desk smokin' a cigar. He looks at me an' says:

"Well, Caution? You been getting some ideas? Maybe you want to talk?"

Sittin' on the corner of the desk is

a lieutenant in Intelligence, who is lookin' a little uncomfortable. I reckon he has heard about me.

I say: "General, my story is I have not told anyone a thing, an' I'm stickin' to it."

Flash shrugs. He says: "Personally, I think you're wise. Well, what can I do for you?"

I say: "Just a little thing. There is some dump at Auteuil I wanta get out to. There's a spieler out there black marketeers use." I tell him the name of the place. "I want some papers showin' I'm an American business man, and' an introduction to get me inside."

He takes a long look at me. He says: "Well, I guess you know what you're doing. I'll have the papers sent to you in an hour's time. You can be one of the big business men over here on the U.S. steel contract."

I say: "Thanks a lot. I'll be seein' you, General."

He says: "I hope."

OUTSIDE the sun is shinin'. The streets look good. So I leg it up to Fritz's bar. I go up to the bar an' Fritz comes along.

I say: "Look, Fritz, d'you know a guy called Le Fevre—Paul Le Fevre?"

He says: "Yes."

He looks over in the corner. Sittin' behind a table, drinkin' a Bock is a little fat guy with a bald head an' a small black mustache.

I pick up my drink, walk over, an' sit down. I say: "Good mornin', fella."

He says: "Good morning, *m'sieu.*"

I take my F.B.I. card an' my French police pass outa my pocket an' I stick 'em on the table.

I say: "Take a look at that. You try bein' funny an' I take you right away an' smack you inside. All you have to do is just tell me one or two little things. If you don't, it won't be so hot for you." I bring out the fountain-pen I took from Ribban. "D'you remember that?"

He says: *Mais oui,* but of course. *M'sieu,* I buy several sets of those pens and pencils. There are four colors of each set. I have only one set in that color."

I say: "You wouldn't know who you sold it to, would you?"

He says: "But perfectly. I sell it to an American gentleman, three or four days ago. I let him have it ver' cheap, because he's one of the liberators of my country. I only do that because I know who he is and what he is doing."

I say: "Fine. Who was he and what was he doin'?"

He says: *"M'sieu,* he was in your Service and his name was Ribban—*M'sieu* George Ribban."

I say: "Thanks a lot, Le Fevre. That's all I want to know."

IV

AROUND eleven o'clock I get out to Auteuil. This dump is the usual sorta big French house the aristocracy used to own in the old days. I ring the bell, an' some old gray-haired guy opens the door.

He says: *"M'sieu?"*

I say: "I am Mr. Cyrus C. Hicks, over in Paris on business. I been introduced here by Mr. Paul Laroche."

I show him the card the General sent me. It is a visitin' card of some Paul Laroche an' there is something written on the back of it.

He says: "Very good, *M'sieu.* Will you come this way?"

He takes me to a hallway, pretty big an' well-lit. A *maître d'hotel* comes forward an' says:

"M'sieu?"

I give him the same line of talk I gave the other bozo.

He takes a look at the card. He says: "Excellent, *m'sieu.* You want to play immediately or would you like to eat? Or would you like to see a floor show?"

I say: "Well, I came for a game, but I'm tired. Maybe I'll take a little drink an' have a look at the floor show."

He smiles an' he waves his hand to a big staircase at the far end of the hall. At the top is a cloak room. I check in my hat an' overcoat, an' go through two swing doors.

Well . . . well . . . well! It is the old night-club scene an' it could be anywhere—Bermuda, Paris, New York, Madrid. A band dressed in black evenin' pants an' frilled shirts is playin' Argentino stuff. There are some people at the tables. Champagne corks are poppin' an' nobody seems to be goin' easy on the liquor.

I look at my watch. It is seven minutes to twelve. I sit down at a table in the corner. I order whisky an' when a

waiter brings it I say:

"Look, what time does this floor show start?"

"Any minute now, *m'sieu,*" he says. "Usually at twelve o'clock."

I sit back, light myself a cigarette an' drink my whisky. Presently the band starts off on a hot number an' the curtain goes up. Half a dozen girls wearin' pretty dresses—modest sorta dresses—come on, sing a number an' go inta a dance. This strikes me as funny because this sorta turn is usually more undressed in this country. But all of a sudden the girls form up three on each side of the stage an' in comes my little pal Marta Frisler!

Marta is lookin' swell. She is wearin' a long blue velvet cloak. She takes the cloak off. Underneath she is wearin' a normal frock. She starts singin' some silly little song in French an' goes into the old strip-tease act that I have seen her do in Metzler's Burlesque years ago in New York.

I finish my drink an' I get up. The lights are out an' anyway nobody is takin' any notice of me. There is a door at the right of the stage, an' I open it an' go through. I am in a little passage that leads to the dressin' rooms. I look into one, then another, which turns out to be a storeroom. But the third time I go lucky. There, hangin' on a peg is the zephyr pants I saw Marta wearin' at the hotel.

Sittin' in the corner lookin' not quite so good is the Cuban guy. When he sees me his eyes are narrow, like snakes' eyes. He says in a low sorta voice: "What do you theenk you are doing here, senor?"

I say: "Listen, Handsome, don't you trouble yourself with that problem. The thing you've got to ask yourself is where it's gonna get *you* to. Look, you tell me one or two things. What did you come to Paris for? How'd you meet up with the Frisler dame an' what's the big idea? I suppose you're tellin' me that you work here."

He says: "And why not? I am seeck because you kick me, otherwise I'd be workeeng in the bar at this minute."

I say: "Yeah?" I pull out a chair an' I stick it down opposite him. "Fella, I got some ideas about you an' I got some ideas about Marta. The best thing you can do is talk."

He spits right in my eye.

OUTSIDE I can hear the music workin' up to a climax. I reckon in a minute Marta will be comin' back to start dressin' again. I get up and I take another look at the boy friend. He is scared all right, but he's not gonna talk, because he's scared of something else more than he is of me.

I say: "All right. Here we go."

I hit out once with a short arm jab that connects with his jaw an' makes a noise like choppin' wood. The guy goes out like a light. I pick him up, take him outside, open the store-room door, sling him inside, and lock the door. I put the key in my jacket. Then I go back to Marta's dressin' room.

Marta comes in. She looks at me like a sour-faced cat. She does not like me a bit.

She says: "What is this? And where is Enrique?"

I say: "D'you mean that guy who tried to crease me last night? If you must know, babe, I got an American military police wagon outside. He's inside it with a pair of steel bracelets on."

She says: "Yeah? What have they got on Enrique? He ain't done anything."

I say: "No? Baby, I told you last night that a good guy in the Federal Service named Ribban was killed up at the Club Leon. He was sandbagged. A couple days before, he bought a fancy fountain pen set off a man I know. There was only one set like that in Paris. Here's the pencil that belongs to it. It's the pencil I took off Enrique last night. That's good enough."

She says: "What d' you mean, that's good enough?"

I say: "Are you tryin' to tell me that he didn't bump Ribban? Listen, Marta, if you don't talk you're goin' out to that wagon, too. If the M.P.'s get their hooks on you it's a stone certainty you're gonna find yourself in bad over this Ribban killing. For all I know you might have done it. It'd be easy for a dame to sandbag Ribban when he was gonna write something down." I laugh. "*You* didn't kill Ribban, didya?"

She goes as white as death. She says: "I wasn't even there."

I say: "But Enrique was?"

"Yes," she says. "What else do you want to know?"

I say: "Everything that's been happenin' to you an' Enrique since you've been in Paris. How'd you get here?"

She says: "There was somebody called Varley. I don't know him. Enrique knew him. He fixed it."

I say: "That bein' so, what did Enrique wanta crease Ribban for?"

She says: "I think Ribban had an idea about Varley—I don't know what. Varley was aimin' to get outa here. He had it all fixed."

I say: "Where was he aimin' to go?"

She says: "England."

"Well, why did Enrique have to fix Ribban?"

She says: "Varley wanted Ribban fixed because he knew too much."

I say: "Yeah! You know Marta, I think you're tellin' the truth. Okay, I'll leave you out of it."

She says: "Willya? Honest, Mr. Caution, I never had anything to do with it. I knew about it, but I couldn't stop it."

I say: "Well, you know what they'll do with Enrique, don't you?"

She says: "Yeah, I know."

I say: "An' you won't even miss him, hey?"

She shakes her head. "I won't miss him one little bit."

I tell her: "Fine. Don't go outa this room for another ten or fifteen minutes. I wanta get that police wagon away before you're seen. Otherwise somebody might wanta take you in. But if you keep your trap buttoned maybe you'll be all right."

She says: "Thanks a lot, Mr. Caution. I'll do what you say."

I go outside an' shut the door. Outside the passage is quiet. I unlock the store-room, go in.

Enrique is lying where I left him. There are two or three theatrical baskets corded in the corner. I take the cords off an' I truss this guy up. He's got a big silk handkerchief in his pocket an' I gag him with that. An' I shut the door an' lock it again.

I reckon it's gonna be some time before they find him.

Back in the dance room I sit down an' give myself another shot of whisky.

IT is half-past twelve when I push open the doors leadin' into the big room where the faro, roulette and *chemie* games are. I start lookin' around for Juanella because I gotta get my business finished with this baby before somebody discovers the Cuban. If Marta finds I've been stringin' her along about havin' pulled this guy in things may not be so hot for me.

On the other side of the room I see Juanella. She is talkin' to some fat bozo with a bald head. After a few minutes the fat guy goes off an' Juanella turns an' sees me. Her mouth curves inta a smile as she comes over an' says:

"Lemmy, am I glad to see you! An' what are you doin' around here?"

I say: "Hush, Sweetie-pie. My name is Mr. Hicks. I am a U.S. steel magnate here on business."

She says: "I reckon what you are doin' here is nobody's business. Why don't you come an' talk to me an' have a little drink?"

I says: "That sounds a good idea to me, Juanella."

She takes me to a nice little sittin' room, where there is a bottle of rye an' a syphon on the table.

I say: "Look, Juanella, what are you doin' around this dump?"

She says: "I gotta job here. I'm a hostess."

I say: "You talk the boys outa gettin' steamed up when they're taken for a big roll?"

She smiles at me. She says: "Something like that." She pours out a drink, squirts some soda in it, hands it to me. Then she gives herself one an' she says: "Well, here's to you, Lemmy."

I say: "An' here's to you, Juanella. I haven't seen anything like you since I worked in the circus. You look younger every minute."

She says: "Yeah, that's as may be, but I'm sorta sad."

A faraway look comes inta her lovely eyes.

I say: "Juanella, tell me something. You're only stuck on one man an' that would be Larvey T. Rillwater, your husband. Right?"

She says: "No." She sits down, puts her elbows on the table an' leans forward. She says: "As if you didn't know."

"Meanin' what?" I ask her.

"Meanin' this," she says. "I'm a two-man woman. I go for Larvey, that unfortunate husband of mine who's in the cooler, in a big way. But maybe I wouldn't if the man I'm really crazy about would give me a break."

I say: "That man being?"

"That man being you," she says. "An' you know it."

She is a cute baby, this Juanella.

"All right," I say. "So you're a two-man woman an' I'm one of the two men. So where does that get me?"

"Where do you *want* it to get you?" she asks. "You don't think you could ask me for something I wouldn't give you, do you, Lemmy?"

"Is that a fact?" I ask her.

She leans forward. "That is a fact," she says.

"Well, if that's a fact," I tell her, "maybe you *can* help me. So listen, honeybelle. When I saw you last night I told you what was breakin', didn't I?"

She says: "You told me you'd got yourself in bad, shootin' off your mouth. Well, so what?"

"So a lot of things," I say. "First let me ask you a little question. You told me you was livin' at the Hotel St. Denis. Well, I went around there. I meet a *concierge* who tells me the number of your room. I go up there but I don't find you. I find Marta Frisler an' some Cuban. I have quite a tough time with them. The Cuban unlimbers some artillery an' they try to fog me. What's the big idea?"

She says: "Lemmy, where *is* this Hotel St. Denis?"

"Wouldn't you know?" I ask her. "It's a dump near the Boulevard St. Michel."

She starts laughin'. She says: "Lemmy, that ain't the Hotel St. Denis I was talkin' about. The place I'm stayin' at is between here an' Paris. Why should you think I'd stay in a dump like this place on the Boulevard St. Michel?"

I DON'T say anything.

Then: "Well, if you're tellin' the truth there is so many coincidences in this business I don't know which way I'm pointin'."

She says: "Why don't you tell me what the trouble is, Lemmy? Why don't you let me help you?"

I think: "Okay. Here goes. I'll try anything once." An' I tell her about Marceline du Clos, an' about my findin' Ribban dead on the staircase. "An' then," I tell her, "I go to this dump where I think you're stayin' an' I find Marta Frisler an' this Cuban. Maybe it's coincidence that she's workin' here doin' a strip-tease act. Maybe it's another coincidence that this boyo is workin' in the bar here, or says so."

She looks at me an' says: "Yeah, it's sorta funny, isn't it, Lemmy?"

I say: "Well, here's some more coincidences." I tell her about the fountain pen and the pencil in the Cuban's pocket.

She says, when I have finished: "So you think that this Cuban—his name's Enrique an' he works in the bar here—you think he killed Ribban?"

I smile an' say: "No, Sweetie-pie. That's what somebody *wants* me to think."

She says: "Tell me some more."

I say: "Okay. I come out here tonight because I heard you were workin' out here. I see the Frisler piece playin' in the strip-tease act on the dance floor. I go around to her room an' I find Enrique there. I bust him one, tie him up an' chuck him in the store-room. Then I go back to the dressin' room an' I wait for Marta. When she comes I tell her I got a military police wagon here an' I have had Enrique run in for killin' Ribban."

"Well," she says, "how does she like that?"

"She loves it," I say. "She says he did it because he had to do it. Because of some guy called Varley who brought those two over here, who's since made a getaway to England. So it looks like this Frisler baby is tryin' to ditch Enrique for something he didn't do." I give her a long look. "Listen, Gorgeous, I suppose you wouldn't know anything about Varley, wouldya?"

She says: "I never heard of him in my life."

"Okay," I say. "So you don't know Varley an' you think Enrique creased Ribban?"

She spread her hands. "But why shouldn't he have done it, Lemmy, if he had the pencil from the set?"

I say: "Look, honey, Enrique is no mug. We'll imagine for the sake of argument that he went to the Club Leon to kill Ribban. He goes to Ribban's room an' Ribban is gonna write something. He takes his fountain pen out of his pocket an' is just gonna unscrew the cap when Enrique kills him."

She says: "Yeah. That's all right."

"So then," I go on, "Enrique takes the propellin' pencil outa Ribban's pocket. He does not worry to take the pen. Is that sense, honey, or is it?"

She says: "No, that's not sense."

"Then we agree that if Enrique had killed Ribban, he wouldn't have taken

the pencil an' left the pen. He'd have taken both or neither. So it wasn't Enrique that killed Ribban. When I found Ribban he had a fountain pen in his hand. The cap was still on it, see? The mug who killed him knew somebody was gonna see that pen. So what does he do? He takes the pencil an' he gives it to Enrique because Enrique likes havin' pretty things around him, an' the killer knows that Enrique is gonna like that pencil. The killer knows somethin' else, too. He knows there is only one set like that on the black market, an' that some clever guy like me is gonna find out where it came from."

V

JUANELLA'S listenin' hard but she does not realize I been giving her a line of hooey.

She says: "I get it, Lemmy. All you wanta find out now is who gave that pencil to Enrique."

I finish my drink. I say: "I reckon I *know* who gave that pencil to Enrique."

Her eyes pop. She says: "Who was it, Lemmy?"

I say: "If I'm not very much mistaken it was the lad called Varley. When I told Marta I thought Enrique slugged Ribban she agreed too quick. She was also in a hurry to tell me Varley had made a getaway."

She says: "She was tryin' to alibi Varley an' hang the rap on Enrique. But why did Varley have to kill Ribban?"

I say: "There could be half a dozen reasons, Juanella. Let's make a coupla guesses. Varley has Marta an' Enrique workin' for him. He knows that Ribban has got next to Marceline du Clos, his other side-kick. I have been told that Varley was suspicious of du Clos. He got the idea she was gettin' scared, might shoot off her mouth, see?"

She nods and pours me some more whisky. I am watchin' her as I drink. Her fingers are tremblin'.

"Well," I go on, "Ribban sees du Clos, an' du Clos talks to him. Ribban throws a scare into her. She's frightened sick she's gonna be shot or flung inside for espionage. So she tries to make it good for herself. She probably tells Ribban about Varley, an' a lotta stuff about me. By tellin' them that I've been talkin' to her she's sorta doin' what she can to get a break. You got that?"

She says: "I've got it."

"All right," I go on. "Well, somehow Varley finds out that she's talked to Ribban. So he's gotta get rid of Ribban quick, *an'* the dame. Maybe he's got some pals in Paris. He certainly seems to have because he fixes up a forged Police pass an' gets du Clos out, takes her over the river to the Rue Zacherie an' bumps her. Then he goes up to Ribban's place an' slugs him. An' he reckons he's sittin' pretty." I grin. "Personally speakin', I think he is. He did himself a good turn an' he did me a bad one."

She says: "It *is* a tough situation. It's—" She looks over my shoulder an' her eyes widen.

I turn around. Standin' in the doorway are two guys. One of 'em has got a short snub-nosed belly gun in his right hand.

I give a big sigh an' say: "What is this?"

One fella says in a sorta sarcastic fancy French accent: "You would not know, *m'sieu, hein?* A leetle while ago we find this unfortunate Enrique in the store-room. He tell us interesting theengs about you." He grins. "Enrique is not ver' fond of you."

The other guy says: "Yeah, that's how it is, buddy."

I look at Juanella. She is lookin' scared, but she gets up an' goes to bat.

She says: "You boys are makin' a mistake. This gentleman is Mr. Hicks —an American business man."

The fat man says: "Yeah, he's Mr. Hicks an' I'm the King of Spain. You'd better come along with us, Mr. Caution."

I say: "Hey! What goes on here? It won't be so good for you if you get fresh with a Federal officer."

The Frenchman with the gun gives me another grin. He says: "*M'sieu,* Paris ees in a ver' etxraordinary state. The police organization is not ver' good. People disappear every day but nobody knows where they go to. You will be just another."

I say: "Well, if that's how it is that's how it is." I am doin' a little quick thinkin', wonderin' how I'll get out of this one.

Juanella turns an' gives me a big smile. She says: "Well, whatever happens, Lemmy, remember I'm for you."

I say: "Yeah, sweetheart? I hope it's gonna do me some good."

She says: "Well, you can only die once, an' I'll think of you. One for the road before you go. These boys won't mind waitin' a minute."

She gives me my glass. She has filled it up again.

I say: "Well, thanks a lot."

Just for a minute the idea passes through my head that I might take a chance an' fling this whisky inta the eyes of the boyo with the gun. But what good is that gonna do me? I reckon the other is heeled, too.

So I say: "Well, here it is." I drink the drink.

I put the glass down on the table an' the next minute the room starts spinnin'. The table comes up an' hits me a neat one on the snoot.

I go out like a lamp. . . .

WHEN I decide to come back to earth I do not feel so good. I am leanin' up against a stone wall in pitch darkness. I gotta headache like somebody has hit me with an iron bar an' a taste in my mouth like I have been eatin' bird seed.

After a bit I start wonderin' what this is all about. I start thinkin' about Juanella. What is this baby playin' at? Why, just when these guys propose to bump me off does she have to hand me some Dutch drops an' put me out? That was the quickest Micky Finn I have ever had in my life.

Maybe I know why she did it. Maybe she thinks if she puts me out the gentleman with the shootin' iron is not gonna get busy.

I search my pocket an' I find they have not frisked me because my cigarette lighter is still there. I snap it on an' take a look around. I am in a sorta cellar. There is a door at one end. I go over an' try it. It is locked an' it is a very solid door. Up in the wall just above where I have been lyin' is a gratin'. I reckon that gratin' leads to some room on the ground floor. But it is too high for me to get up to an' closed anyway.

There is an electric light switch on one side of the door an' I switch it on. Then I see that in the middle of the stone floor is a key. It has gotta label attached to it. Somebody must have thrown it through the gratin'. It is a big key, an' some writing on the label says:

Aren't you the big mug? If I hadn't slipped you that Mickey Finn these two wolves would have fogged you. You'd have been cat's meat by now. Just remember that, will you? Maybe you'll give me a tumble some time. And for the love of Mike tear this up. Otherwise they'll probably fix me too. Just get out of here, will you?

Yours, Juanella

I take out my lighter an' I burn the label. Then I try the key in the door. It opens easily enough. I switch off the light, go outside. I am in a stone passage, an' I can see some steps. I go up the steps, open a door an' I find myself in a vegetable garden at the back of the house.

I look at my watch. It is six o'clock in the mornin' an' the air don't taste so bad either. I draw in a big breath an' start walkin' back towards Paris.

* * * * *

I am walkin' down Picadilly an' the sun is shinin'. Me, I am feelin' good an' I am not lookin' so dusty. I am all dolled up in the uniform of a Captain of U.S. Marines. I have got my cap stuck over one eye an' creases in my pants that you could shave yourself with. I am feelin' well-groomed an' slightly handsome an' by the looks that one or two babies sling me I got the feelin' that I am registerin' one hundred per cent an' no misses.

I stop a cab an' tell the driver to take me to Scotland Yard. When I get there I give my name an' say I would like to have a few words with Chief Detective Inspector Herrick.

Herrick is in his room. He gets up an' comes around the desk with his hand held out.

He says: "Well, Lemmy, this is pretty good seeing you. Take a chair."

I sit down an' we do a little talkin' about the old days. Then he says:

"Well, what's the trouble?"

I give him a big grin. I say: "Of course you wouldn't know anything about it, wouldya?"

He grins back. "I've instructions to render you all the assistance in my power. I understand that you and a Mr. James Cleeve, who is attached to your Service, are looking for an American infantry officer named Varley, and his sister. I've already seen Cleeve. I suppose you haven't contacted him yet?"

"Nope. I got balled up in Paris an' missed the 'plane. I reckon I'll be seein'

him pretty soon. He's at the Savoy." I light myself a cigarette. "Would you know anything about this Varley proposition?" I ask.

He shrugs. "It's like looking for a needle in a haystack," he says. "There are quite a few Americans in this country. And they're difficult to check on."

"Did you tell Jimmy Cleeve that?"

He says yes. "He didn't seem to mind," he says. "Perhaps he's got an idea where Varley is. He seemed optimistic about finding him."

I nod and say: "Okay. I'm stayin' at my old dump in Jermyn Street. The place I had when I was here before. You got the telephone number?"

He says he's got it.

"Well," I tell him, "any time somethin' breaks you think I oughta hear about give me a call. When I got somethin' to tell you I'll call."

HE gives me a sealed envelope an' we shake hands an' I scram. I go out inta the street an' start towards the Savoy Hotel.

When I get to the Savoy I ask the reception clerk if Mr. Jimmy Cleeve is in. He tells me Mr. Cleeve checked out this mornin' an' won't be back for two-three days.

I go to my dump in Jermyn Street, take off my uniform an' dress myself in a nice suit of grey pin-head. Then I open the envelope Herrick has given me. Inside is a British police pass with an endorsement askin' all police forces in the country to render me assistance, if required, two National Registration cards in different names, two licenses for a motor car in the two names on the registration cards, the address of a garage near Jermyn Street with a check to get the car out an' a whole wad of petrol coupons, all folded up in a sheet of paper that has got written on it: *"Good luck, Lemmy,"* an' signed by Herrick.

So it looks like I am all set to go somewhere—the only thing bein' I do not know where.

I am walkin' up an' down the room, thinkin', when the telephone jangles. I yank off the receiver an' say hello.

Some voice says: "Hello, Lemmy. How's it goin', fella?"

I nearly do a coupla backfalls because it is Dombie speakin'.

I say: "What's cookin', Dombie? Are you talkin' to me from Paris?"

He says: "No. I'm not so far away."

I say: "Well, what's the big idea?"

He says: "Look, there's a place about twenty-odd miles from London called Reigate, an' if you go along the Reigate-Dorkin' road there is a little village called Brockham, one of them old-fashioned places. Tourists like it."

I say: "What sort of tourists?"

He says: "That's just nobody's business. Well, right in the middle of this village is Brockham Green an' on the other side of the green is a little country road leading to a pub called 'The Square Bottle.' If you're not doin' anything much I reckon it's a good place to stay."

I say: "Thank you for nothin', Sourpuss. What's goin' on? Maybe you'll talk to me some time. I hate bein' curious."

He says: "Well, maybe I will, but right now I gotta scram. I'm talkin' from a pay-box. I'll be seein' you."

He hangs up. I get myself a kitbag an' throw inside it a nice line in pajamas an' one or two other things. Then I go around to the garage an' get the car. Me, I am all set for a little holiday in the country. . . .

It is five-thirty an' a lovely afternoon, an' I am just about seven miles outa Reigate when I find a side road with a sign-post on it that says "Brockham." After a bit I come to a big green. There is a church on one side with a clock an' everythin', an' period, if you get me. I drive the car down a side road and come to a funny little inn back off the road. There is a sign outside that says "The Square Bottle."

I go inta the bar, order myself a whisky an' soda. I tell the doll behind the counter I am an American business man, and that I heard that this was a great place for tourists. She says they can put me up at the inn if I wanta stay.

I finish my drink, go outside an' start walkin' down the road. Away on my right are fields an' beyond them a golf course. I have started walkin' towards the golf course when I hear a whistle. I look behind me an' comin' along the path is nobody else but Dombie.

VI

DOMBIE looks terrific. He has got on a plus-four suit with a check cap. Slung across his shoulder is a bag full of golf clubs.

I say: "Well . . . well . . . well! What is the make-up for, Dombie? First, what're you doin' here?"

He says: "Just sit down under this hedge an' relax. I wanta talk to you."

We sit down.

He says: "After you'd gone Flash got a little worried about something."

I say: "Maybe he thought I'd be talkin' to some more women."

He gives a big grin. "I don't think so. You know, Lemmy, Flash has got some ideas about Cleeve, that maybe he knows more about Varley's whereabouts than he lets on. He also noticed that Cleeve was keen on makin' a quick getaway from Paris an' gettin' here before you. Cleeve might be tryin' to run away with this job, an' Flash don't wanta see you ditched."

I say: "You mean he wants me to bring Varley in?"

He nods. "Anyway, directly you got away, he gets in touch with London. He gets somebody to keep tabs on Jimmy just in case he tries to ditch you."

I grin. "A wise guy, the General," I say, "because that is exactly what Cleeve has done. When I went to the Savoy this mornin' he wasn't there. They said he'd be away for two-three days."

He says: "Yeah, he's down here. He's stayin' at North Holmwood, on the other side of Dorkin'. At Thorpe Cottage. I reckon he's got an idea that Varley is here somewhere. There are lots of Canadians around here. If Varley had some place to hide out nobody'd find him in a thousand years."

I light myself a cigarette. I say: "Did you have any other instructions, or is this the works?"

He says: "That's all. After the General got somebody to keep a line on Cleeve he sent me over here quick. The guy who was lookin' after Cleeve told me where he is an' scrammed this mornin'. I also got a line that you'd arrived an' were stayin' in Jermyn Street, so I called you. Well, where do I go from here?"

I think for a minute an' I say: "Look, Dombie, you scram back to London. I shall be stayin' at this Square Bottle dump. When you get back to town call me an' give me a phone number where I can get at you."

He says: "I always do what I'm told, but it's a bit hard."

I ask him why.

"Dames," he says. "Always just when I am gettin' away with it with some beautiful dame I get sent off some place. I never get any luck. I feel sorta embarrassed."

I give him a big horse laugh. "You—embarrassed!" I tell him. "Anyway, what have you got to be embarrassed about here?"

He says: "Listen—last night I see some beautiful babe. She is walkin' down one of the roads leadin' to the green in Brockham an' she is the berries. This dame has got everything that Cleopatra ever had. She is the most terrific piece of woman that I ever got my eyes on. So what do I do?"

"I'll buy it," I tell him. "So what did you do?"

"I sling her a hot look," says Dombie. "Believe it or not, does she react! She gives me one of them long, sideways looks that woulda taken the varnish off a battleship. Then she goes inta one of those cottages with honeysuckle around the door just off the green. An' just when she is goin' in the door she slings me another look. All I gotta do is to wait until I see this babe next time just to put the old high-sign on her. So instead I haveta go back to London."

"Maybe I'm doin' you a good turn," I tell him. "This dame may not be good for you."

"Yeah," he says. "Maybe. But I woulda like to have found out for myself. Listen, Lemmy, this honeypot is the definite frail to end all frails. She is *terrific*. She is a brunette with big amethyst eyes that make you go funny inside. She has got a figure that is nobody's business. Everything about this babe is perfect—except maybe one little finger."

SOMETHING goes *click* inside my brain. I say sorta casual: "An' what was the matter with her little finger?"

He shrugs. "She's got the little finger of her left hand sorta twisted," he says. "But even that looks good to me."

I give myself a big grin inside, remembering the description of Varley's sister I gave to the General.

Dombie says: "So I reckoned that I would stick around this evenin' until this lovely comes out for her evenin' walk. An' now I gotta scram. It ain't right."

"You'd be surprised how right it is,"

I tell him. "You get back to London, Dombie, an' I'll keep an eye on the girl friend for you."

He says: "That's what I was afraid of. Well, I'll be seein' you."

He picks up the golf bag an' starts back across the fields. . . .

Somewhere away in Brockham Village I can hear a clock strike seven. I am lyin' on my bed at the Square Bottle Inn. The bedroom I have got in this dump is in the corner of the house. There is a window in both walls. Outa one window I can look across Brockham Green an' the other way I can look down the dirt road where two cottages stand. The nearest one has a lotta honeysuckle round the door.

I get up an' start walkin' up an' down keepin' an eye on both windows. Then I see the door of the cottage with the honeysuckle around it has opened an' a dame is comin' out. She starts walkin, towards the Square Bottle.

When Dombie said this babe was a honeybelle that big lug certainly knew what he was talkin' about. This dame is the answer to every sort of prayer that was ever put up by everybody in the Marine Corps an' every other unit. She is too far away for me to see her left hand, of course, but I reckon the little finger is twisted.

I say to myself: "Well . . . well . . . well!" I ease down the stairs to the door an' stand there leanin' against the doorpost pretendin' to be lookin' across Brockham Green.

By now she is almost opposite me on the other side of the narrow road. I say sorta quiet:

"Hey, sister!"

She stops. Then she says in a soft Virginia accent: "Did you say something?"

Now I can see her left little finger is twisted.

I say: "I said 'Hey, sister' an' I wasn't too far wrong either, was I?"

She says: "Meanin' exactly what?"

"Meanin' that you're American," I tell her. "Well, you are, hey?"

She gives me a little smile. She says: "I take it you're American, too."

I say: "You bet. Me, I'm a Marine—Captain Clauson, Seventy-first Battalion. I gotta little leave so I thought I'd kid myself I was a civilian an' come down here an' take the country air. Maybe you an' I could go a walk some time?"

She tilts her nose a little. She says: "Possibly. But why? Do you want to go walking with every woman you meet?"

I say: "No. Believe it or not, lady, I am very selective. You know, it's funny, but just now I was lookin' at your left hand and I see you had an accident with that little finger. I thought I met you before some time."

She raises her eyebrows a little as if she was curious. She asks: "And where did you think you'd seen me before?"

I take a long time before I answer. Then I say: "Well, when I was back in the States I went to a party. A big guy threw it. His name's General Flash. I had an idea I met you there."

When I say the name "Flash," her face sorta tautens up.

She says: "I never knew anybody called by that name. Well good day to you." She gives me a little cool nod an' starts walkin'.

I say to myself: Well, so long, Miss Varley. I think I'll be seein' you some time.

AT nine o'clock it is dark. For what I wanta do this evenin' I'd like a little dark. I have been eatin' dinner an' now I walk around to the back of the inn where I have got the car parked, and I start her up. I drive through Dorkin' to North Holmwood. I see some farmer comin' along the road. I pull up an' ask this boyo if he knows a place called Thorpe Cottage. He says it's a big white cottage standin' back from the road between North Holmwood an' the next place—Capel. He says you can't mistake it because it's got a red roof.

I say thanks a lot. I drive along the road for another coupla miles. Then I run the car through a gate inta a field an' stop behind a hedge. I take out the rotor cap an' start walkin' along the road. Pretty soon I see the white walls of this cottage. There is thick shrubbery around it on three sides. I walk across the fields an' come on this place from the back. I am careful not to make any noise.

There is a little white palin' around the back of the cottage an' inside the palin' is a flower garden. I get behind a tree an' wait.

Confucius has got somethin' to say about this waitin' business. "All things are for him who hath the patience," says Confucius. "This guy who sticks

around an' does nothin' is liable to save himself a lotta grief through not gettin' entangled with beautiful babies through sheer inertia; which is a good thing in its way because it stops you from doin' anythin' an' you have no worries at all."

I am just gettin' myself some more great thoughts about Confucius when I hear the back door of the cottage openin'. Then I hear a woman's high heels on the stones of the path. She opens a gate in the middle of the palin's. A little path runs from this gate past the clump of trees where I am standin'.

Pretty soon I can hear this dame singin' "As Time Goes By." I step outa the trees.

I say: "Just a minute, Juanella. Look, you're not gonna give your old friend Lemmy the frozen mitt?"

She turns an' looks at me. She says: "Of course it would *have* to be you!"

"Right, honey," I tell her. "Instead of 'As Time Goes By' you oughta been singin' 'It Had To Be You.'" I give her a grin. "Larvey is the guy who should be singin' 'As Time Goes by.'"

I can see that she has got tears in her eyes.

She says: "It's a shame about Larvey, I'm tellin' *you!*"

"An' why, Sweetie-pie?" I ask her. "Surely you ain't gonna tell me that old bed-time story that he was framed. If Larvey got what was really comin' to him he woulda got about four hundred an' twenty years. That boy has been so lucky that it positively creaks."

She says: "He certainly has not been lucky this time." She stands there with a sorta sad expression on her face. Then suddenly she takes a step toward me an' flings her arms around my neck an' starts kissin' me like it was her last night on earth. I take it easy an' get what is comin' to me. By now she is cryin' like a waterfall.

"Lemmy," she sobs, "I'm in about the worst jam a girl ever got into an' I can't see my way out. An' so is poor old Larvey. They won't even let me write to the poor sap. An' you can help me because you got a big heart as well as bein' the most handsome thing in pants. So for the love of Mike *have* a heart an' do somethin' about it."

I take her arms from around my neck an' start cleanin' some of the lipstick offa my mouth with my handkerchief. I get a whiff of her perfume.

"Okay, Sweetie-pie," I say. "But you gotta come clean. You gotta give me the whole works from the start an' no nonsense."

She takes out a little lace-edged handkerchief an' dries her eyes.

She says: "Lemmy, I'm gonna play ball with you if it's the last thing I do. But it's a long story an' you got to believe it. You got to believe every word of it even if it sounds phony."

I GIVE her a reassurin' grin. After all there is no reason why this baby—if she is scared enough—should not tell the truth, if it suits her.

"Look, honeypot," I tell her. "Where are you livin'?"

She says: "In South Holmwood—a little cottage called Mayleaf. It's just at the bottom of the hill near the church."

I look at my strap-watch. It is now nearly half-past ten.

"You come an' see me tonight, about twelve o'clock. Come to the Square Bottle Inn at Brockham. I'll be waitin' for you at the side door. But you gotta give me the genuine stuff an' no nonsense."

She says: "I'll be there, Lemmy. I'll tell you everythin'. I don't care what happens I'm gonna spill it all."

I grin at her. "That's the stuff, Juanella," I tell her.

As she goes off I can hear her start hummin'. This time it is "It Had To Be You."

I think, "Well . . . well . . . well!" An' I wonder what Confucius woulda done about Juanella.

VII

LIGHTING myself a cigarette I stick around leanin' up against the tree, thinkin', an' when I have finished the cigarette I start walkin' towards the cottage. I bang on the knocker an' after a coupla minutes the door opens. Standin' there with a surprised expression on his face is Jimmy Cleeve.

I say: "Well, how's it goin', Jimmy? I wonder if you expected to see me quite so soon."

He laughs. "Well, Lemmy," he says, "I'm not *really* surprised. But I hoped I'd get a few days more start on you. Come on in."

We go inta the sittin' room. There are two bottles of Haig whisky on the table,

some syphons an' glasses. Jimmy pours out a coupla stiff ones.

Then he says: "Well, so what?"

I hold up the glass. I say: "Here it is, Jimmy! An' I'm *very* glad to see you again."

I sit down on one side of the fireplace an' he sits down opposite me.

He says: "Look, Lemmy, you don't have to be sore at me. You're ace high in the F.B.I., an' I'm just a small-time private dick tryin' to make the grade. I figured if I could get my hooks on Varley an' take him in without you I'd be in line for a job with the Federal Service."

"Jimmy, that is okay by me," I tell him. "I'm not sore, but it's no good you an' me workin' against each other. We gotta pool our information. What are you doin' down here? Maybe you got something?"

He says: "Yeah, I got something all right. Lemmy, I been holdin' out on you. Before I came over to join up with the General in Paris I had an idea this Varley would slip over to England if things got hot for him on the other side of the Channel. So I gotta guy detailed to work with me here. He's a Lieutenant in a Canadian Infantry Regiment, but he used to work for the Agency. He's a good dick. He's got brains, he's young an' he's keen."

"An' he's been stuck over here keepin' things warm for you, hey?" I ask him. "I'm beginnin' to think you got brains, Jimmy."

He shrugs. "I'm tryin' everything I can. Do you blame me? Well, this guy—his name is Sammy Maynes—knows Varley. He came up against him once when Maynes was workin' for the Agency."

I nod. "I reckon we can use everybody," I tell him.

"Another thing," he goes on, "*I* had a line about Varley. He was here in England before he went to New York to start that interior decoratin' business. He had a cottage down here—usta like this part of the country."

I say: "Yeah? An' where is the cottage?"

He grins. "This is it," he says. "I'm stayin' here waitin' for him."

I say: "So you think the big boy is gonna come back here?"

"That's what I think," he says. "As a matter of fact I sorta know." He grins. "Lemmy, I'm gonna tell you something. When Varley was operatin' in New York he knocked off a lotta documents—Government stuff. But Varley didn't knock 'em off himself. He got somebody else to do it for him—a safecracker called Larvey Rillwater. Maybe you heard of him?"

I say: "An' how!"

He says: "Well, I suppose they wanted to keep Larvey safe for the war, so they slung him into Alcatraz. It was a Federal charge—accessory to espionage or something like that."

I say: "Go ahead, pal."

He says: "Well, I was on leave from Illinois State Police when the Federal Bureau got the idea that I could help 'em with this Varley business. They asked me what I knew. I told 'em I knew very little about it, which wasn't the truth." He gives me another grin. "But I have a bit of luck. Who do I run into one day but Juanella Rillwater—Larvey's wife. She's crazy about that husband of hers, an' when they flung him inta the can she was like a ship without any rudder."

I say: "So you thought you could use Juanella?"

He says: "Sure I did. Juanella knew Varley when Larvey was workin' with him. She told me Varley had lived here before he went to New York. She thought he'd come back here if it got too hot for him in Paris."

I say: "It looks like this dame was pretty useful to you, Jimmy. It was pretty smart of you to bring her over to this country."

HIS eyes widen in surprise. "So you've seen her?" he says.

I say: "You bet. I saw her walkin' down the street in South Holmwood this afternoon. There's only one figure like that in England an' that belongs to Juanella. An' there's only one figure that's better than that one. Fella, this is where we get crackin' because I had a bit of luck too. You remember my talkin' to General Flash about Varley's sister? Well, I saw Varley's sister this afternoon."

He says: "Well, how do you like that! Then he *is* here. What do we do now?"

I say: "The first thing is stop this competition business. Let's clean this job up. You stick around here, an' as soon as you set eyes on that Varley

palooka get in touch with me at the Square Bottle in Brockham. I'll look after the sister; she's stayin' in my part of the world. Another thing. I think it would be a good idea if Juanella was to lie low for a bit. If Varley saw her maybe he'd get suspicious."

He says: "I'll let her know."

I finish my drink. I get up. I say: "You got a phone here?"

He says: "Yeah." He gives me the number.

"Okay," I tell him. "Here's the number of the Square Bottle." I write it down for him. "Call me tomorrow evenin' an' send Sammy Maynes up to see me. Maybe we can put the screws on that sister of Varley's. Say—did Maynes ever meet her?"

He shakes his head. "Nope," he says. "Varley never talked about his family." He thinks for a minute. "Maybe this dame is not his sister. Maybe she's some other baby he's got playin' in with him an' she's frontin' as his sister because that's the easiest way. Varley was always keen on blondes."

"If he was he altered his mind this time," I tell him. "She's a brunette, an' she's some oil paintin' I'm tellin' you." I open the door. "Good night, Jimmy," I tell him. "Keep your nose clean. I got an idea things are comin' to a head. . . ."

AT nearly twelve o'clock midnight I am standin' by the side door of the Square Bottle waitin' for Juanella to show up. I take a look towards Brockham Green. The green is bright with moonlight an' comin' across is Juanella. I give a little grin to myself because I am relieved that this baby had turned up an' I also see she is dressed to make a killin'. She stops a couple paces from me an' gives me a long look. I get another whiff of her perfume.

I say: "Look, Juanella, that is *some* perfume you got."

She says: "I got it in Paris. It's good, hey? It's called Imprudence."

I say: "Yeah? Well, you oughta know. I was wonderin' whether you was gonna turn up or not."

She says: "Listen, Lemmy, an' listen good because I'm tellin' you I'm on the up an' up from now on. Even if I haveta play a bedroom scene with you, I'm doin' it."

I say: "Don't worry, my sweetie-pie. There are no bedroom scenes in this act because I gotta sittin' room here. Come on in."

We go in an' I take her up to my sittin' room. I pull a big chair for her an' give her a whisky an' soda. She puts her handbag down on the table.

Then I say: "Now, honey, get crackin'. An' make it good. Your lies are so thin they creak."

She says: "Oh, yeah! Such as what?"

I go on: "Such as that stuff you told me in Paris. You told me that Jimmy Cleeve had found you kickin' around New York, that you weren't feelin' so good so he got you that job in Paris. Remember that?"

She says: "Yeah, I remember."

"You didn't tell me that Jimmy was in Paris at the time," I go on. "But you knew it, didn't you? Look, you been workin' for Cleeve all along. Why don't you come clean, Juanella? Mind you, I don't blame you an' I don't blame him. Both of you got motives an' maybe they're not bad ones."

She takes a drink of whisky.

I go on: "How does this go for guessin'. You know Jimmy wants to get in the F.B.I. You know he was a small-time dick playin' around some private agency in New York. Okay. He gets a break. He gets loaned to the Illinois State Police while the war's on, an' while he's there he hears there is a drag-net out for Varley. He takes a chance and tells the Federal Authorities who want Varley as a main squeeze in the Hitler Bund, that he knows all about the guy. But Jimmy Cleeve has never even set eyes on Varley. That's why he's usin' you. Well, is that the truth or is it?"

She don't say anything.

"This is the way it goes," I go on. "Jimmy Cleeve does not know Varley, but he does know your lovin' husband has been thrown in the cooler, an' he knows why—because the said lovin' husband was concerned with Varley in pinchin' some documents. I'm a bit sorry for Larvey. That poor mug probably didn't know they were State documents important stuff. But I reckon Jimmy Cleeve had an idea about that. He knew that Larvey T. Rillwater knew Varley an' it was a stone certainty that if Larvey knew him you knew him as well. Is that right?"

"Lemmy, you're a good guesser," she says, after a moment.

"All right," I say, "let's go on from

there. Jimmy gets himself sent to Paris attached to General Flash's staff an' he takes you with him, because you're the little girl who's gonna identify Varley. But when you an' Cleeve got to Paris there is no sign of Varley. Cleeve reckons he's here in England. Then you play your trump card. Larvey got a fifteen-year sentence, charged with stealin' Federal documents, which is a pretty bum offense in wartime. But Larvey had no previous convictions an' you believed if you could prove that Larvey pinched those documents thinking they were only bank securities or something like that, that sentence could be reduced considerably. There was one guy who might pull that for you—Jimmy Cleeve. So you made a deal with Jimmy. You'd tell him where Varley had a hide-out in England if he'd guarantee to get Larvey's sentence reduced on the grounds I just mentioned after he'd got his hooks on Varley. Am I right?"

She says: "Yeah, Lemmy, you're a hundred per cent right."

I POUR her another drink an' as I put her glass down I knock her handbag off the table. It burst open an' everything spills onta the floor. I bend down an' pick up a .38 Colt automatic. I pull out the clip. There are ten shells in it.

I say: "Hey, what's goin' on here? Maybe you haven't heard these English don't like people who tote guns in this country—not unless you gotta police permit. How come?"

She says: "Well, I thought I oughta have one. I thought it might not be safe here with Varley about."

I throw the gun back in her handbag, and I put the handbag back on the table. I say: "Well, the dame who carries a gun is always the dame who gets shot. Also, you're just a little mug, Gorgeous. Why don't you use your brains? Jimmy Cleeve is out for himself. All he wants is a job with the F.B.I. To get that he'd ditch you; he'd ditch me. He'd ditch anybody." I give her a grin. "He has already tried to ditch me."

Her eyes pop. She says: "What! He's tried something funny with *you?*"

I nod. "Jimmy is nobody's fool," I tell her. "He's gotta have you around so's you can identify Varley. But do you seriously think that after he's got his hooks on Varley, Jimmy Cleeve is gonna worry about Larvey?" I look at her sideward. "Now if it had been me, that woulda been different. I am a G-man with a good record. I reckon if I wanted to get Larvey out I'd get him out."

She says sorta doubtful: "Yeah, but—well, there was a rumor flyin' around that you've slipped, Lemmy."

I give myself a cigarette. I say: "Yeah, *I* told you about that. Maybe Jimmy Cleeve told you too?"

She says: "Maybe he did." She gives a big sigh. "What was I to do? Jimmy told me he didn't think you'd be able to do anything for Larvey. He said you were in bad, were workin' like crazy on this case tryin' to make a come-back, that General Flash was tryin' to give you a break."

I say: "Juanella, why don't you be your age? I've told you Cleeve does not give a hang so long as he makes a big killin'—at least that's how it was."

She says: "What d'you mean, *was?*"

I say: "I stuck a pin in that balloon. I've seen Cleeve tonight. From now on he an' I are workin' on this job on the up an' up. Nobody is tryin' to take anybody, see?"

She says: "I see. What do I do?"

I grin. "You tell me one or two little things I want to know. First, what does Varley look like? I want an exact description. Get crackin', sweetie."

She says: "Well, I'll tell you." She pauses, then begins to speak, but I interrupt her.

I lean across the table. I say: "Look, Juanella, are you the brown snake in the grass? Are you the little complete heel? You're tryin' to make up a description of Varley because you've never seen Varley in your life!"

She sits back an' she gives a gasp.

"I know enough about Larvey T. Rillwater," I tell her, "to know that if he was in any funny business with Varley the one person he wouldn't have told anything about it would be you. Larvey is a smart guy, an' he's stuck on you. He would never do anything that woulda got you up against the Federal Authorities such as introducin' you an' Varley."

She says: "Yeah, Lemmy, I reckon that's the truth."

"So," I told her, "you take Jimmy Cleeve for a ride. He thought he was bein' clever with you. Instead, you were

bein' clever with him. Maybe you had an idea, an' maybe it was right, that Varley would come here to this place. Maybe Larvey let something fall by accident, so you saw a way of gettin' Larvey's sentence reduced by makin' a deal with Jimmy. An' Jimmy Cleeve believed you —the poor sap!"

SHE spread her hands.

She says: "Well, Lemmy, what was I to do?"

"I reckon you did what you thought was best for you an' Larvey," I tell her. "The thing is what are you gonna do now?"

She shrugs. "I don't know," she says. "I reckoned that if Cleeve got Varley, or somebody he thought was Varley, he might do something about Larvey. I was hopin' against hope, playin' it any way I could."

I say: "Well, maybe Cleeve has got some other means of identifyin' Varley. Maybe he wanted you for sorta corroborative evidence. Cleeve is clever. So go back to Mayleaf Cottage, honeybelle, an' stick around there. If Jimmy Cleeve asks you to do anything for him, play ball as far as you can an' when we get this job cleared up I'll do my best to get Larvey's sentence reduced."

"Lemmy," she says, "you've always been swell!"

She takes a dive at me, flings her arms around my neck an' starts kissin' me as if I was her long-lost husband. Juanella is a little bit overpowerin'. I put her back in her chair.

I say: "Honey, you relax. You're too temperamental for this business. Take a nice cool walk back to the cottage an' think things out. Now finish your drink an' scram."

She says: "Yeah, Lemmy, an' what conclusion am I gonna come to?"

"You'll conclude that Mr. Caution is not such a mug as he looks."

She gets up. She heaves a big sigh. "The trouble with me is I'm a two-man woman. It makes life difficult. Maybe you're right. Maybe it's my temperament. Well, so long, Lemmy."

I go an' open the side door for her. I stand there watchin' her walk toward Brockham Green. There is still a suggestion of the scent she is wearin' hangin' about the place. Some perfume—Imprudence!

You're tellin' me!

VIII

UNTIL Juanella is outa sight I stand at the doorway, watchin'. Then I turn back an' am makin' for the stairs when the telephone in the bar parlor starts janglin'. I dive in, grab off the receiver.

Some voice that I do not know says: "Is that the Square Bottle Inn?" an' when I say yes the voice wants to speak to the American gentleman stayin' there.

I say: "Yeah? I am that American gentleman, an' what can I do for you?"

There is a little pause, then the voice says: "Is that you, Mr. Caution?" When I say yes, he goes on: "My name's Sammy Maynes. I usta work in the same agency as Jimmy Cleeve. Maybe he told you. I've been workin' for him an' the F.B.I. on this job that you're on, an' I think you an' me oughta have a little talk—with nobody around."

I say: "Not even Cleeve?"

He says: "I certainly mean not even Cleeve. Maybe you haven't guessed he's sorta stringin' you along."

I say: "Yeah. I guessed that all right. So you wanta talk to me. Would you call this urgent?"

He says: "I call it dynamite. Another thing. "It's gonna be bad if we meet anywhere around here. But I wanta see you soon."

I say: "Okay. Where are you?"

"I'm at Leatherhead, but I gotta car an' I can get any place you like."

"You drive up to town," I tell him. "Go to One-seven-seven-a, Jermyn Street. My apartment's on the first floor. Tell the night porter to let you in an' give yourself a drink. I'll be there within an hour."

He says: "Okay, Mr. Caution, I'll be seein' you."

I hang up the receiver, wonderin' what he wants to talk to me about. Maybe Jimmy Cleeve is tryin' to pull the same stuff on Maynes he pulled on me. If so, an' the Maynes bozo gets sore maybe he's gonna do some talkin', an' maybe he knows somethin'.

I go upstairs an' grab my hat. Then I come down an' get the car an' head toward the Reigate-Dorking road. When I come to a little stone bridge I slow down an' somethin' smacks hard against the nickel edgin' of my windshield. Then I hear something fall in the car by my

foot. I snap on my cigarette lighter an' have a look. It is a bullet from a .38 automatic.

I remember the gun that Juanella had in her handbag.

I get outa the car an' start lookin' around, but it is a dark night an' I cannot see a thing. I get back inta the car an' drive on, wonderin' if Juanella took that shot at me. Supposin' she got the idea I'm gonna make it tough for her. Maybe she'd think it would be easier if I was outa the way.

Because Juanella would not have a car an' would haveta walk home, I get a bright idea. I swing around an' head straight for South Holmwood. I find Mayleaf Cottage halfway up South Holmwood Hill and it has got the name on the gate.

I walk up the path an' knock on the door. I wait two, three minutes, then I go around the back. There is a kitchen window which is easy. I get inta the kitchen, then go along a little passage an' find two doors. The one on the right is a sittin' room an' the left hand one is a bedroom.

I go inta the bedroom, pull the window curtains an' put the light on. It is Juanella's bedroom all right. I get that perfume, Imprudence.

I open the chest of drawers. They are stuck full of pretties an' stuff. I go through everything, lookin' for somethin' I'm not quite certain what, but there isn't a thing. I straighten the room up, put the light out, go inta the sittin' room. Over in the corner is a little writin' desk. There is a blotter on the desk an' I take off the top sheet because I have noticed that dames who wanta hide something always stick it under the top sheet in a blotter because they think nobody is ever gonna look there.

I AM dead right, because there is the second page of a letter to Juanella. It says:

And if you play ball with me over this Federal business you don't have to worry about a thing. When Larvey pinched that stuff for Varley he didn't even know what he was pinching. Varley had told him that the stuff he wanted was some counterfeit State bonds he had deposited at the Bank to get a loan on. Varley said he was afraid somebody was going to find they were counterfeit. So as far as Larvey was concerned he was just pinching a block of counterfeit stock. He didn't know that stuff was important Federal documents having a direct bearing on the conduct of the war.

He played ball with Varley and took the rap. But I can prove he didn't know what he was pinching. And as he'd got a clean record before, if I tell my story, that sentence is going to be reduced.

Another thing, when I get Varley I'm going to tell the Authorities that you helped me one hundred per cent. They may even let Larvey out on parole. So you lie low and say nothing. When I want you to do the identification I'll let you know.

All the best, kid,

Yours,
Jimmy Cleeve.

So there you are! I put the sheet of notepaper back under the blotter, put out the light, go back to the car. One of these days I'm gonna tell these two—Jimmy an' Juanella—just where they get off.

It is nearly a quarter to two when I get to Jermyn Street, an' find a guy in my sittin' room with a large glass of whisky balanced on the arm of his chair.

"Good mornin', Sammy," I say. "I'm glad to meet you."

He gets up. "I'm even more glad to meet you, Mr. Caution," he says. "Gee, I've been worryin' plenty."

I say: "Yeah? Well, sit down. Maybe you haven't got so much to worry about as you think."

He looks at me hard. "You don't know the half of it."

I throw my hat in the corner an' pour myself a drink. I like the look of this Maynes. He is a short guy with nice eyes an' wavy brown hair, an' a thin, humorous face. I take my drink an' I sit down opposite him.

I say: "You know, Sammy, this is one of the funniest cases I have ever been on. Most of the time I seem to be chasin' myself around in circles. Nobody ever does anythin' but talk an' what they mean I wouldn't know."

He says: "Yeah, when you're workin' with guys who're throwin' a spanner in the works all the time it can be difficult for the cleverest guy."

"Meanin' what an' or meanin' who?"

He says: "Meanin' Jimmy Cleeve."

I say: "Why don't you start from the beginnin'? Give yourself a cigarette an' let's hear the story, because I reckon you didn't ask me to meet you just to discuss the weather."

He laughs. "You're tellin' *me*. Well, I've got three people to talk about. One of 'em's Varley, one's Jimmy Cleve, an' the third is Juanella Rillwater. What a trio!"

I say: "You sound as if you don't like 'em."

He says: "Well, the like or dislike I've got for each one is inclined to vary. But I think either meanin' it or not meanin' it, they are bein' nice to each other."

I say: "So it's like that, Sammy?"

He says: "That's what I think. Here is the story. I was workin' for the Alliance Agency. The big shot in the Alliance Agency was Jimmy Cleeve. Well, I reckon that guy's got one little failin'."

I grin at him. "That's interestin'. An' what is the failin', Sammy?"

He says: "He's got too much ambition. He wants to get some place an' nothin' is gonna stand in the way of him gettin' there—nothin' or nobody." He laughs. "Well, now, I had a bit of luck. There was some small-time job came to the Alliance, so unimportant they put me on it. I cleaned it up. It was my first successful case, an' I felt like a king. But the really important thing was something I didn't even notice at the time."

"Yeah?" I ask. "Which was what,"

"Which was Varley," he says. "I met Varley. The case was a small-time jewelry steal. The fella who pulled this job was put inside by a guy who wanted him outa the way an' was prepared to find the evidence to put him in the cooler. That was Varley. I reckon he had it in for this other bozo.

"I took Varley's statement, got the evidence from him that we got this mug convicted on. I kept Varley in the background, nobody had anything on him. He was simply givin' evidence. That's why I am valuable to Cleeve, why he got me fixed over here. That's why I'm hangin' around in this Canadian uniform stoogin' for him. *I* know Varley and Cleeve never set eyes on Varley in his life."

NOW I am beginnin' to see daylight. Now I got the idea why Cleeve wants Juanella Rillwater hangin' around. But I only say: "Well, it looks as if Jimmy Cleeve is a pretty fast worker."

He nods. "There's some more," he says. "When the war started the Illinois State Police borrowed some responsible dicks from good agencies in New York. They were short-handed an' had a lotta trouble on their hands. One of the guys they borrowed was Jimmy. He was tickled stiff. He thought from the Illinois State Police to the F.B.I. was just another jump, an' he was lookin' for some way to make it."

I say: "Well, there is nothing wrong with that. Sammy. An' it looks to me, if he goes on the way he's goin', he's gonna make it."

He gives me another grin. "Maybe. But I think the boy has too much brains. Well, he goes to the Illinois State Police, then something breaks. The F.B.I. get a line on Varley that he's been workin' for some time with the Hitler Bund. He's been gettin' information to the enemy. He's found a swell way of makin' big money. So he arranges a little organization of three or four crooks—small but good—but he don't let 'em know exactly what he's playin' at, see? But he pays 'em plenty an' everybody's happy"

"I'm ahead of you," I tell him. "I take it that one of these guys is Larvey T. Rillwater, our safe-blowin' friend?"

"That's right," he says. "Okay. There are some Federal documents stuck away in some bank, waitin' to be moved to Washington. They're something to do with what was gonna happen after the invasion, an' Varley wants to get his hooks on 'em." He grins. "He did get his hooks on 'em. He's got 'em now. That's why they want him so badly."

I say: "These are the things that Larvey knocked off for him?"

"That's right," he says. "Varley tells Rillwater those documents are just a lot of counterfeit bonds in big sealed envelopes. Larvey blows the bank vault, gets the stuff an' hands it over to Varley. He doesn't know what he's pinched. Larvey T. Rillwater may be a crook but he wouldn't have sold his country out for money."

I say: "An when the F.B.I. got steamed up, Rillwater took the rap. How was it the F.B.I. knew Larvey pinched the stuff?"

He knocks the ash off his cigarette. He says: "Through an anonymous letter. But it's stickin' outa foot that the anonymous letter was written by Varley."

I say: "But why didn't Larvey open his trap when he found out the truth? I bet the F.B.I. told him."

He nods. "I reckon they did," he says, "an' this is where Jimmy Cleeve comes in again. Larvey doesn't say anything about Varley for reasons which I'll tell you in a minute, but the F.B.I. are no

mugs. They checked up on the people Larvey had been gettin' around with just before this business happened, an' one of 'em was Varley. Well, nobody knows anything about Varley. He's got no record an' nobody knows where he is, see? An' then a guy comes forward who knows all about Varley an' says if he's given the chance he can pull him in. That was Jimmy Cleeve."

I say: "Why is he able to say this if he never met Varley?"

"That's easy," he says. "When the F.B.I. sent the information around to all State Police Forces that they wanted Varley, Jimmy remembered I had contacted Varley in the little case I was handlin' for the Alliance Agency. So he gets himself attached to the F.B.I. on the strength of the fact that he knows Varley. Then he comes to New York an' sees me. He tells me he is gonna turn me inta a big shot if I work with him. He says all I've gotta do is to get as much information as I can about Varley an' let him know, an' he will look after me —maybe get me in the F.B.I.

"So I get crackin'. I find that Varley was operatin' an interior decoratin' business in New York with a woman called Marceline du Clos. The business was just a front. Then I found out they had it all planned to make a getaway to France. An' I found that for a long time Varley has had a cottage near North Holmwood, England, his third line of retreat if France gets too hot for him."

I say: "So you told all this to Cleeve?"

HE gives a big grin. "Yeah." Then he proceeds to get me pushed outa the way. He fixes it with the F.B.I. an' the Alliance Agency that I shall work with him, an' before I know where I am I am sent over here an' stuck here in England, leavin' him behind to be the big shot." He laughs. "I think I rate the grade of Public Sucker Number One."

I say: "Wait a minute, Sammy. This business is not over yet. Now you an' I know as much as Cleeve does. Wouldn't it be funny if we got there first?"

He says: "I'd give a coupla months' pay to get in front of that bozo. He will ditch me an' you as soon as he can."

I say: "You got something else in your mind?"

He says: "Yes, two things. When I was talkin' to him in the States, I told him one of the best bets was gonna be Juanella Rillwater. That baby is really stuck on that husband of hers. I told Cleeve that if he got permission for Juanella to see Rillwater in the cooler, and she told him she'd seen Varley an' that if Rillwater would keep his mouth shut to the Federal Authorities about Varley's part in the game she would skewer out of Varley where the documents were; that when those documents turned up Cleeve would get him out on parole."

I say: "So that's why Larvey kept his trap shut. An' why Cleeve sent Juanella over to France, an' why she's here in England now?"

He says: "That's it, an' you can see what's in his head now, can't you? Varley is gonna make a bee-line for that North Holmwood cottage. He's got to. You know how hard it is to get along without proper identity cards an' ration cards an' this an' that. He's goin' to North Holmwood because he was known there—a sorta respected citizen. That gives him a background an' he's safe."

I say: "Well, that's okay. When he gets back there, Sammy, we pick him up."

"Yeah," he says. "That's what I'm afraid of."

I say: "What do you mean? Why should you be afraid of that, Sammy?"

He says: "You know what I think? All Jimmy Cleeve wants is to get his hooks on those documents. Once he's got those he'll scram back to headquarters in France an' be the big shot." He grins. "You an' I'll knock off Varley all right. Maybe Jimmy'll let us have him, but who'll worry about Varley once they got those papers?"

I say: "Well, you might be right. But forewarned is forearmed as the old lady said. Maybe we can pull a fast one on Mr. Cleeve."

He says: "Yeah." His voice is sorta dubious. "There's another thing, Mr. Caution, that I don't like so much."

"Which is what?" I ask him.

"Which is this," he says. "Jimmy told me about you bein' supposed to talk to that Marceline baby who was killed in Paris. I reckon he didn't dislike the idea of you bein' under a sorta cloud one bit."

"Yeah," I tell him. "I get that one too." I think for a moment. "Look," I say, "you wouldn't mean that Jimmy Cleeve might be waitin' around to get

Varley before you an' I get a chance to see him? That he might make a deal with Varley, tell Varley he was gonna give him a break provided he'd hand over the documents. You wouldn't mean *that*, would you?"

"That's precisely what I mean," he says. "If he gets away with the documents an' Varley makes a break, who's in charge of this case? Who's gonna be suspected? Certainly not Jimmy Cleeve who cashes in with the papers, but Lemmy Caution who is already under suspicion. Am I wrong or am I wrong?"

I go over to the sideboard an' give myself a short one.

I say to him: "Sammy, you are one hundred per cent right. It looks to me as if Mrs. Caution's little boy Lemmy has to look after himself which he is gonna do from now on. An' you're gonna help, Sammy."

He says: "You bet your life I'm gonna help."

I say: "I'll tell you something that's gonna give you a big surprise. What would you say if I told you that Varley's sister is livin' not five or six miles from Varley's cottage in North Holmwood?"

He raises his eyebrows. He says: "What! I never knew Varley had a sister."

"Well," I tell him, "I was told he had. She was pointed out to me in New York. She's a swell dish—a lovely piece of frail—only she's got a twisted little finger on her left hand."

He says: "Well, it could be true. Varley was always mixed up with a lotta women. Maybe she wasn't his sister. Maybe he just said she was."

I say: "Does that matter? Whatever she is, she's not down there just for fun. She's in on this racket. Yeah, I think we'll go an' see that baby. I think we'll go see her now. I got a car outside. Maybe we can put the screws on her. Maybe we can pulla fast one on Mr. Cleeve."

He gets up. He says: "Now I'm really interested."

I say: "Okay. Here we go."

IX

I TAKE the by-pass road around Leatherhead. On the other side of Leatherhead, I turn to Sammy, and say:

"Sammy, I been thinkin'. You said you'd never heard that Varley had a sister. Well, supposin' this baby at Brockham is not his sister. Supposin' she is not even related to him but is just callin' herself Varley. What about that?"

He says: "What's in your head?"

"Only this," I say. "Supposin' this dame knows that Varley has those documents an' is comin' to Holmwood to lie up. Maybe she is playin' in with him. Maybe he arranged that when he knew he was comin' back to Holmwood she should stick around at Brockham. Maybe she could act as a sorta post office for him."

He says: "What good's that gonna do him?"

I say: "You know they got a good postal service in this country. Nothin' ever gets lost or goes astray. Maybe Varley is gonna mail those documents to her, which would be a wise thing to do because if he gets picked up he's got somethin' left to bargain with. The Federal authorities want those documents a blasted sight more'n they want Varley."

He thinks for a bit. Then he says: "I believe you got something, Mr. Caution. It looks like this dame is playin' in with him. What are we gonna do about it?"

I switch on the engine an' start the car.

"We'll still have a little talk with the girl friend," I tell him. "There is one thing we're takin' a chance on. If this dame is not Varley's sister, if she's his girl friend an' stuck on him, we're gonna give our hand away."

He says: "You mean she's gonna agree with everything we say an' then wise Varley up?"

"Exactly," I tell him. "But we gotta take a chance."

A while later I drive around Brockham Green to the back of the Square Bottle an pull up.

I say: "Listen, Sammy, stick around for a minute. I wanta see if anything has been goin' on while I been away."

I scram across to the side door an' gumshoe up to my room. There is a note from the landlord on the table. It says:

Dear Captain Clauson,

At half-past two a gentleman by the name of Dombie telephoned from London to tell you that his number is Mayfair 63261, but that he does not wish to be disturbed as—and these are his own words—"he is all tied up with a Duchess." Under the circumstances he does not wish to be sent any place unless it is absolutely necessary.

John Shaw.

So Dombie has come through an' even if he had to get the landlord of this place outa bed to take that phone message I reckon it was worth while. I ease down to the bar parlor, grab the telephone an' ring Dombie's number.

"Hello, Unconscious!" I say when his voice comes on the line. "How's the Duchess?"

He says: "Not so loud, you big low-life. I don't want her to hear you."

I say: "Look, I don't wanta interfere with your love life, but I got an idea that something is gonna pop. You get a heap from somewhere an' start for here good an' quick. You oughta be here in forty minutes. Start operatin' on the road between South Holmwood an' North Holmwood. Keep one eye on Mayleaf Cottage in South Holmwood an' keep the other on Thorpe Cottage between North Holmwood an' Capel where Jimmy Cleeve is expectin' Varley to turn up. Stick around until I pick you up. I'll be seein' you, fella." I hang up.

Outside, Sammy Maynes is still sittin' in the car.

I say: "I just called London in case we need any more assistance some time. Now let's go an' see the girl friend."

He gets outa the car an' we walk to the cottage with the honeysuckle. I bang on the door. Presently a window above the front door opens, an' the Varley dame's head comes out.

"Good mornin', Miss Varley," I say. "This is my friend, Mr. Maynes. We'd like to have a little talk with you."

SHE heaves a big sigh. She speaks in that soft Virginia accent.

"Really, Captain Clauson, you're a most amazing person. You don't really think I'm going to let you in at this hour in the morning, do you?"

I say: "Gorgeous, I'm certain you're gonna let us in. I reckon you are an extremely intelligent baby. That bein' so, when I tell you my name is not Captain Clauson, but that I am Special Agent Lemuel H. Caution of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, an' that this is my assistant Mr. Sammy Maynes, maybe you, being a good American citizen, will have sufficient horse sense to come down an' open the door."

She says sorta demure: "Oh yes, and what happens if I don't?"

I give her a big grin. "If you don't I shall be under the painful necessity of bustin' the front door down."

She comes down an' opens the door. We stand there lookin' at her, an' I hear Sammy give a sorta little gasp. She has put the electric light on in the hall an' I'm tellin' you that this babe is some oil-paintin'. She has on a long aquamarine velvet housecoat with pillarboxred silk facin's. She is wearin' a wide red sash an' little blue velvet mules with high heels. She stands there as cool as a cucumber, an' she has got this, that an' the other in a big way. When they was issuin' sex-appeal, somebody left the key in the cupboard door an' this baby just helped herself.

She says: "Well?"

I say: "Just a minute while I get my breath. It is a long time since I have seen a sight like you. This oughta be a pleasant meetin'."

She says: "I hope so. But first of all I would like to see some sort of identification, Mr.—"

"Caution is the name," I tell her.

I bring out my Federal Bureau identity an' my English police pass. She looks at 'em, then she looks at me.

"Mr. Caution," she says, "if I can tell you anything that you're enitled to know it's my duty as a good American citizen to do so. Won't you come in?"

We follow her inta some sittin' room an' she shows us a coupla chintz-covered chairs an' puts some cigarettes on a little table. She takes one of em an' I light it for her.

Then she says: "Well, what is it? Don't tell me I'm suspected of murdering somebody."

I say: "Look, lady, supposin' you take your weight off your pretty feet an' sit down. Let me do a little talkin' because I would hate to see you get inta a jam an' it looks to me like you are standin' just on the edge of one."

She sits down in a big chair. "Really," she says. "How interesting! So you think I'm nearly in a bad jam, Mr. Caution? May I ask why?"

I say: "Yeah, I'll tell you why. We are after a guy called Varley. You remember when I saw you yesterday, I said I thought I'd seen you before. Well, whether I've seen you or not I had a description of you. The little finger on your left hand's twisted a bit, isn't it? Well, if you're not Varley's sister you're some relation of his, an' you know who I'm talkin' about."

She says: "Do I? My name being Varley I'm likely to have relatives of the same name."

"Maybe," I tell her, "but I'm only interested in the one who owns a cottage at North Holmwood—the fella who had a hand in two murders in France an' skipped over here with a bunch of important state documents in his pocket."

She says: "How exciting—if I had a relative as romantic as that. Who did he kill in France?"

This dame is beginnin' to give me the needle. I say: "You wouldn't have a passport anywhere around the place, would you? I'd like to see it. It might save a lotta confusion."

She says: "Of course I have a passport. I'll show it to you with pleasure."

She goes over to a writing desk, opens a drawer, takes out a passport. I look at the photograph. It is hers all right an' the passport is made out in the name of Lana Geraldine Varley. She is a citizen of the United States an' she comes from Richmond, Virginia.

I GIVE her back the passport.

I say: "That looks okay."

She puts the passport back in the drawer an' sits down.

She says: "Well, gentlemen, having established my identity where do we go from there?"

Sammy has gotta sorta amused expression on his face.

I say: "Well, I thought I oughta tell you it is not good to play funny games with Uncle Sam, which is what I think you are doin'."

She gives another little sigh. She says: "Mr. Caution, I don't know what you're talking about."

I say: "Okay, okay, Miss Varley—or may I call you Lana?" I slip her a big grin. "I just think it is peculiar that this Varley we are lookin' for should have arranged just about this time to come to this part of the world, an' that you, just about this time, should be hangin' around here. I think it is in the cards that Varley has possibly arranged to slip you those documents so he could make a deal with us in case we caught up with him."

Her eyes widen. She says: "Suppose all that were true, what good would it do me and what good would it do Varley? How could he make a deal—supposin' for the sake of argument that I had those documents?"

"Be your age, baby," I tell her. "You know we want both Varley an' the documents if we can get 'em both, but we gotta have the documents. Well, supposin' we got Varley with no documents. Maybe Mr. Varley thinks we should *have* to deal. If we let him scram you might hand over the documents."

She says: "That might be a clever scheme, mightn't it, Mr. Caution?"

I say: "It's common sense. Think it over, baby. I am not gonna waste time at this hour of the mornin'. Maybe tomorrow you'd like to talk."

She gives me a bewitchin' smile. She says: "But I like talking, Mr. Caution, an' *I* think you're most amusing." She gets up. "I am awfully sorry you must go. Come in and have tea some day."

I take a look at Sammy. He is almost grinnin'.

I say: "Okay, Miss Varley. Have it your way. I'm sorry we got you outa bed."

She says: "Not at all. It's been a great pleasure, I assure you."

We walk down the road to where the car is.

Sammy says: "You think she was playin' for time?"

I say: "Maybe. Look, Sammy, I got an idea. That dame doesn't like my face a lot. But she might like yours better. I'm goin' back to bed. You wait five or six minutes, then work around the back of that cottage. Knock quietly on the door. Go in an' see her."

He is lookin' at me pop-eyed. "What for?" he says. "What d'you think I can do?"

"You'd be surprised." I grin at him. "Tell her you're a private dick workin' for the Alliance Agency, that you're workin' with me because you got to, but that you don't like my face much. Then tell her that supposin' my guess is right an' Varley does send her or post her those documents, she becomes a Federal outlaw an' is liable to get a sentence in the pen."

I can see he is wonderin' what's comin'.

"Then tell her this," I go on. "Tell her if she was workin' in with you she'd be all right even if she got those documents providin' she got 'em for the purpose of handin' them back to the Federal Authorities. When you get that inta her head tell her that there is a reward of

one hundred thousand dollars issued by the Federal Authorities for the return of those papers. Ask her which she'd like to have—the first proposition or the second."

He says: "Gee, Mr. Caution, that's a clever idea. If this baby is a girl friend of Varley's I reckon she's gettin' good an' scared. If she can see a way out an' some money on the end of it, she'll play ball. When do I see you?"

I say: "Don't bother. Call me tomorrow mornin'. Now get crackin', Sammy."

HE scrams. I go to my room in the Square Bottle. I sit there waitin', because I got an idea I am gonna hear somethin' from Dombie before long. An' I am not wrong. At a little after four the phone downstairs starts janglin'. I make a dive for it before it wakes the whole place up. It is that mug all right.

He says: "Lemmy, I don't know what this means, but about ten minutes ago when I'm watchin' this Thorpe Cottage place who should come out but Juanella Rillwater. What d'you know about that? She starts walking towards South Holmwood. I didn't know whether to stick around or go after her. I stuck around."

I say: "That's all right, Dombie. You can take a powder now. Go an' fix yourself up some place in the vicinity. Get some sleep an' tomorrow keep an eye on Thorpe Cottage. I'll be seein' you."

I hang up, an' a couple minutes later I am in the car and headin' out Brockham Road. I park the car at the bottom of the hill at South Holmwood, behind some trees where nobody is gonna see it.

Mayleaf Cottage is in darkness. I give two, three hard raps on the door an' Juanella's voice says:

"Who's there and what do you want?"

I say: "This is Mrs. Caution's little boy, Lemmy, an' I wanta talk to you, sweet puss. So open the door."

She says: "All right. Wait till I put on a dressing-gown."

The two or three minutes she keeps me waitin' she has used to good effect. She is all dolled up in a black crepe-de-chine robe with a gold girdle. Under the hem of the robe are two, three inches of apricot silk nightgown.

I say to her, standin' in the doorway: "Juanella, during the day you are a honey. At night you are even better."

She says: "Oh, yeah? Well, come in."

I close the door behind me an' we go inta the sittin' room. She brings out a bottle of Scotch an' pours out two shots.

"Well," she says, "what's on your mind?"

I say: "Look, honeybunch, sit down. I am gonna talk turkey. It wouldn't be you, would it, that took a shot at me over at Brockham bridge earlier tonight, soon after you left the Square Bottle?"

Her eyes are poppin'. She says: "What d'you mean by that one? Why should I take a shot at you?"

I say: "Well, you might have a lotta reasons, but I know one good one—Larvey T. Rillwater."

She takes a sip of her whisky. "Okay," she says. "So I am gonna bump you because of Larvey. I cannot make any sense out of that."

"No?" I say. "Well, I can. It looks to me like you got it all fixed with Mr. Jimmy Cleeve that if this an' that happens he is gonna have Larvey's case tried again. Or maybe, because of the services that Mrs. Juanella Rillwater has rendered to him, Mr. Jimmy Cleeve is gonna get Larvey out on parole."

She says: "You know the whole bag, don'tya?"

I say: "I read the second page of the letter you got stuck under the blotter—a sorta agreement, wasn't it, between you an' Jimmy Cleeve? Now, get some clothes on, baby."

She says: "What do I have to put clothes on for?"

I say: "Juanella, you look terrific, but I would not like to take you to London in your nightgown. So go an' put some clothes on, an' get crackin'."

She says: "I am not leavin' here."

I say: "Sweetheart, you are leavin' here within ten minutes—clothes or no clothes. I know what all the trouble's about, Juanella. You got the idea that if I take you to town you're not gonna be able to play this thing the way Jimmy Cleeve wants it played, an' old man Larvey is gonna be stuck in the cooler to serve that fifteen-year sentence."

She gives a little sob. "That's the truth, Lemmy," she says.

"Okay," I tell her. "Now listen to me. The thing is who do you wanta believe in—Mr. Cleeve or Mr. Caution—because I'm tellin' you this—come to town with me an' keep outa the way tomorrow. You do what I tell you an' I give you my

word that when I get this job cleaned maybe I'll spring Larvey, an' if I say I'm gonna spring a guy I spring him."

She takes one of her well-known dives at me, slings her arm around my neck an' gives me a kiss. When she breaks away that scent she is wearin' seems to be all over the lapels of my coat. "I won't be a minute," she says. Give yourself another drink. An' I hope you choke!"

X

WHEN we reach my apartment it it is a quarter of five.

I say: "Now, listen, babe, I have gotta get crackin'. When I leave here you stick around in this apartment an' don't put that little nose of yours outside till I come back for you."

She says: "Lemmy, I'm trustin' you a hundred per cent."

I tell her: "You're trustin' me because you got to. Now tell me something. You've never seen Varley in your life. Is that right?"

She says: "That's right, Lemmy. Larvey never let me meet him."

I say: "That's fine. Jimmy Cleeve has never seen Varley, an' you've never seen Varley, but you're gonna identify him, an' you make a deal with Jimmy Cleeve to do it."

She says: "How d'you know that Cleeve has never seen Varley?"

I say: "I know he hasn't because the guy who's been workin' for him here —Sammy Maynes—told me the whole work. Cleeve got you over here to identify Varley when he got him. You've never seen Varley, but you were prepared to do a tough sorta thing like that."

She shrugs. She says: "Why should it be tough? All I have to say is that the man is Varley. That's the only way I can get Larvey outa the can."

I say: "When Larvey was talkin' to you about Varley did he ever mention a sister called Lana?"

She says: "Yes, he talked plenty about her—a cute piece an' all brains."

I say: "Just relax. I'll be with you shortly."

I go inta my bedroom. I get my big trunk open an' I take out the bunch of pictures an' reports I got stuck away in the bottom. After a bit I find what I want. It is a picture of a swell dame with a twisted little finger. There is some writin' on the back.

I go back to Juanella with the photograph. I say: "Does that dame look like the Lana Varley that Larvey talked to you about?"

She says right away: "No, because this girl is a real peach. I remember Larvey tellin' me that Lana Varley woulda been a real good-lookin' girl except she had a mouth like a chasm. This dame's mouth is sweet, so she can't be the one."

I say: "That's all I wanted to know."

She looks at the photograph again. "Then who is this one, Lemmy?"

I say: "Turn it over an' read what's on the back."

She turns it over. She reads:

Amanda Carelli (Federal Bureau Research No. 6587654) Finger Prints and Latent Finger Print on Record. Brunette. Fair skin type. Usual pose that of well-born girl of good Southern parentage. Suspect White Slave operator with Venny-Kravavics Mob 1938. Come-on girl Lyle Venzura 'con' organization. Wanted for suspected accessory safe blowing Periera Bank 1939.

She says: "I get it. This is another of Varley's girl friends. He had a lot of 'em."

I give her a grin. "That's what I thought." I take the photograph, stick it in the breast pocket of my jacket. "Well, Juanella, I'll be on my way. Don't forget what I told you. You want food, call downstairs. I'll talk to the night porter about you on my way out."

A few minutes later I am driving back to Brockham. . . .

IT is twelve o'clock in the mornin' when I waken. I have my bath, grab some breakfast an' I am just lookin' in the glass an' thinkin' that if I had a better sorta nose I would be very nice-lookin', when I hear the telephone janglin'. I take a runnin' dive down inta the bar parlor before anybody else gets there.

Like I thought it is Sammy Maynes. I say: "How did you get on with the girl friend, Sammy?"

He says: "It is okay—I *think!* I'm at the railway station at Leatherhead. It's safe enough to talk."

I say: "Go ahead. What happened?"

He says: "Well, I went to see little Lana an' I handed her the line like you said. I made out you was a too clever cuss just playin' your own hand."

I say: "What did she say to that?"

He says: "She was sorta careful. She said that was a funny attitude for your assistant to take. So I told her I was just a private dick workin' for the Alliance an' had been pushed inta this business. I sorta gave her the idea that I wasn't too stuck on the F.B.I. an' she seemed to soften up a little. Then I said maybe your guess about her was right, that she was hangin' around Brockham hopin' she'd get her hooks on the documents Varley had, that she thought she'd be sittin' pretty if she got em. I told her there was a much better way to play it than that."

I say: "Yeah? And what did she say, Sammy?"

He goes on: "Well, she was definitely interested. She says exactly what do I mean? I say I am just as keen on gettin' my hooks on some dough as she is an' I can see a day where we can both make a bundle an' still keep our noses clean."

I say: "Your technique sounds swell to me."

He says: "Well, thanks, Mr. Caution. An' this time it does look like I have hit the bull's eye. She says she will be glad to make some money, if she can make it legitimately. So I tell her if she takes those documents from Varley, or if he sends them to her, an' she tries to hold 'em that she can rate ten, fifteen years in Federal pen. But maybe she does not know there is one hundred thousand dollars reward for those documents."

"I bet she liked that one," I tell him.

He says: "She liked it plenty. So I say I would like her to answer me one question—does Varley know she is waitin' for him an' is he gonna try an' give her those documents somehow. She just looks at me an' smiles. After a minute she says she'd like to hear some more about this reward, so I say: 'Look Miss Varley—if this is your name—I am workin' with the Federal Authorities to get those documents back, and to get Varley if possible.' I tell her that if she makes an arrangement with me for retrieving those documents then she is performin' an act of good citizenship an' is entitled to some of the reward, if not the whole of it. I tell her as I am not a Federal officer an' as she is a private citizen I do not see any reason why the reward shouldn't be split between the pair of us."

"An' how does Sweetie-pie react?"

He says: "Well, she was a bit disappointin'. She said she'd think things over. Maybe she'd be meetin' me again some time."

I say: "Well, that looks all right. If she had not liked the proposition she'd have told you so. You go to the lounge of the King's Hotel in Leatherhead an' wait for me. I've got something that is gonna make that babe wanta play ball."

I get an idea. I go to my bedroom an' open my suitcase. I got an extra gun inside—a .38 Mauser. I stick an ammunition clip in the gun, put on the safety catch, stick the gun in my pocket. Then I get the car an' drive to Leatherhead.

WHEN I get there Sammy is sittin' in the hotel lounge. I take the picture I showed to Juanella outa my pocket an' give it to him.

I say: "Well, do you recognize that?"

He says: "Sure. "That's Lana Varley."

I tell him: "Have a look on the back. That babe is Amanda Carelli, suspected as being accessory to a safe blowin' job in Periera."

He says: "Yeah?"

"I got an idea that Periera bank job was done by Larvey Rillwater. I got an idea Amanda Carelli, alias Lana Varley, helped him."

He says: "Your idea is that when Larvey Rillwater was caught for this thing he was in with Varley, he got word to this Carelli baby and gave her the tip-off it might be a good thing for her to blackmail Varley for those documents."

I say: "You have put your finger right on it. Now scram to Brockham an' show the girl friend that picture. Show her what's on the back an' tell her she is either gonna hand those documents over to us if she gets her hooks on 'em or I am gonna have her slammed in the cooler. An' she'll spend a long time there."

He says: "This sounds good to me. An' there's another thing. If this babe was gonna stand up Varley for the documents it is a stone cinch she's gonna know when he's comin' down."

I say: "Fella, they oughta have christened you Sherlock. Have you gotta gun?"

"No," he says. "I have a regulation British Army pistol but I lent it to

Jimmy Cleeve. I don't think I'm gonna need a gun but I might."

"You better have one," I tell him. I take out the Mauser an' give it to him. "Now listen, Sammy. This babe, she's gonna say yes because she's gotta say yes. After you leave her go back to the Square Bottle. Keep under cover."

He scrams. I hang around Leatherhead for half an hour, then go back to the Square Bottle. I eat lunch, an' at half-past two the telephone rings. It is Jimmy Cleeve.

He says: "Lemmy, some big news—Varley is in London. I got a contact there who's been keepin' an eye on him. He'll be comin' down here sometime today, an' my guess is he'll come down this evening."

I say: "Well, what are you proposin' to do about it, Jimmy?"

"It's a cinch he's goin' to Thorpe Cottage," he says. "I'm gettin' out but I'm stickin' around an' am gonna keep my eye on that place. When he arrives I'll give you a tinkle from the call box on the Capel Road. You'd better come over right away. I'll go inta Thorpe Cottage an' have a few words with the boyo while you're on your way."

I say: "Well, be careful, Jimmy. I reckon he is not likely to be too good-tempered when he sees the game is up."

He says: "Let me play it my way, Lemmy. Varley knows I'm not a Federal officer. Maybe he thinks he'll be able to make some sorta deal with me. We got *him* where we want him. The thing is to get those documents. Maybe if I tell him if he hands 'em over to me I'll make things easier for him he'll listen."

I say: "Okay, Jimmy. I'll wait till I hear from you."

At three o'clock Sammy Maynes arrives, an' he is plenty excited.

He says: "You were dead right about this babe. When she had a look at the back of that picture she knew the game was up. She dropped that high-falutin' Southern accent an' started talkin' Brooklyn. She's Amanda Carelli all right. I ask her how she knew about Varley havin' those documents, an' how she knows when he's comin' here, an' you were right there, too. She tells me she got the tip-off through a friend of Larvey Rillwater's. She was told that Varley had a hideout here. The idea was for her to be here when he arrived. There was some guy in London they knew he would go to when he got to England. This guy is tippin' off Amanda when Varley arrives. An' she expects him soon."

I say: "Nice work, Sammy. So it's all fixed up?"

"Well, Mr. Caution, I told her the thing for her to do was to get the documents off Varley then hand 'em over to you an' she'd get a cut in the reward. So everything's on ice. Now what do I do?"

I say: "Get back to the King's Hotel in Leatherhead an' stick around. I've had word from Cleeve that Varley is expected tonight. Cleeve's gonna give me a tinkle when the boy friend arrives, but he's gonna see him first, hopin' to make a deal for those papers."

Sammy laughs. He says: "Cleeve must be a mug if he thinks Varley's comin' down here with those papers on him."

"You're tellin' me," I say. "But he's hopeful. Maybe he thinks he's still gonna pull a fast one on Mr. Caution."

"My money's on you," says Sammy. "I'll be seein' you."

He scrams.

I GO up to my room an' go to bed. I am woke up when the telephone in the bar parlor jangles. I ease along the passage inta the bar an' grab the receiver. It is Jimmy Cleeve.

He says: "Listen, Lemmy—he's here! Varley just drove up along the Dorkin' road in a high-powered car. He drove it to the back of Thorpe Cottage, parked it where it can't be seen. I reckon he's goin' in the back way, so I'm goin' over. Don't be too long. This guy is tough."

I say: "I'll be with you in twenty minutes."

I hang up. I've only just put back the receiver when the telephone rings again. It is Dombie.

He says: "Hello, Lemmy, somebody just shot past here in a car. I was in a clump of trees just on the top of Holmwood Common. I could see this palooka pull round by Thorpe Cottage. He's parked there somewhere."

I say: "Just stay there behind that tree of yours. I'll pick you up shortly."

I hang up, go up to my room, get out the Luger, load it an' put it in a shoulder holster. Then I get the car an' get goin'. I find Dombie in his clump of trees.

"Listen," I say to him. "There's gonna be trouble. Our friend Varley has at last arrived. He was the guy you saw in the car. Cleeve called an' told me about it. He's gone over to the cottage. He's tryin' to pull one on Varley to see if he can get those papers. I don't think he's gonna succeed. Let's get goin'."

When we get near Thorpe Cottage I swing the car under a hedge, turn out the lights an' get out.

We ease across the field an' round to the front door of the cottage. I give it a push an' it opens. We go inside. There is a light in the sittin' room, an' as I go in through the doorway, with Dombie at my heels, Cleeve comes along the passage from the back of the cottage. He has got a .45 regular Army service revolver in his hand.

I say: "So what, fella? Did he try somethin' funny?"

"Yeah," he says. "It's too bad, Lemmy, but I had to fog him."

I say: "What happened?"

He says: "I came over here an' came in through the front of the cottage just as he came in through the back. I said: 'Good-evenin', Varley. I wanta talk to you.' He went for a gun an' took a shot at me before I could get my hand on this one. Then he turned an' scrammed. I waited a minute because I thought he might be waitin' to take another crack at me, but when I heard the engine start I gotta move on. His idea was to make a getaway. I scrammed outa the back door, took a quick shot an' got him through the head. He's in the car. He don't look so good."

I say: "I'll go an' have a look at him. Dombie, you stick around."

Dombie says: "Okay," an' he an' Cleeve go into the livin' room.

The guy in the big touring car is not a pretty sight, shot with a .45 service pistol at close range. There is practically no head or face left.

I take out my cigarette lighter, snap it on an' take a look inside the car. Lyin' on the floor just by the gear lever is an automatic pistol. I take a look at the dead guy's clothes. They are smart clothes. Then I pull open his coat. By the flame of the cigarette lighter I see a pencil—a propellin' pencil—in his left-hand breast pocket.

I take it out.

Then I close the car door an' go back inta the cottage.

XI

CLEEVE an' Dombie are sittin' in the livin' room. There is some whisky an' glasses on the table. I pour myself one.

Cleeve says: "Well, we got Varley but it looks as if we haven't got those documents."

I drink some of the whisky, then I put my hand across the table an' I pick up the gun. I throw it across to Dombie.

"You look after that, pal," I tell him, then I say to Cleeve: "What makes you think that guy you've just shot was Varley? You've never seen Varley in your life."

His face is sorta white. He says: "Of course it was Varley. There's somebody around here who can prove it."

I say: "You mean Juanella Rillwater?"

He says: "Yeah."

I say: "Jimmy, you're a liar because Juanella Rillwater never saw Varley in her life either, which is exactly the reason you got here over here to identify him."

He jumps to his feet.

I say: "Shut up an' sit down. I been wise to you from the start. What d'you think we are in the F.B.I.—a lotta mugs? Your trouble is you're too clever an' you like killin' people too much."

He says: "Caution, I had to kill this guy in self-defense an' he was Varley."

I say: "Yeah?" I take out the fancy pencil. "Have you ever seen that before?"

He says: "Why should I?"

I say: "That pencil was part of a fountain pen an' pencil set that George Ribban gave you in Paris. I *know* he did. He bought it off a black marketeer called Le Fevre. He went to your party an' he gave it to you.

"When you killed George Ribban maybe he saw what you were gonna do an' took a grab at you. He grabbed the fountain pen outa your pocket. That's why the cap was still on it. When you moved him to the stairway you saw the pen in his hand, but you left it there because nobody had seen him give it to you at the party, an' you had a big idea. You gave the pencil to Enrique, who was workin' with that strip-tease baby, Marta Frisler, because you knew I was goin' to see him. You knew Juanella Rillwater had met me that evenin' an'

give me the hotel St. Denis address.

"You knew I'd see Enrique there an' he liked showy things, so he'd wear that pencil in his waistcoat where I'd see it, an' I'd think he killed Ribban." I give him a grin. "Nice work if you can get it!"

He says: "You're talkin' hooey. What do I wanta do all this for?"

I say: "You're askin' me. Look, when you heard the F.B.I. was lookin' for Varley you got yourself tied on the job an' told them you knew Varley. Well, I reckon that was the only true thing that you did say. You've been in with Varley from the start. That's why you thought you'd get me in bad."

He gives a weak sorta grin. "So I did that, too?"

"You bet you did," I say. "I'll tell you why. Varley had already left for England. Marceline du Clos was gettin' good an' scared. George Ribban was put in to scare her still more. She told him that Varley had already left for England. An' she told him that she suspected you was workin' with him. So you got to work quick. You got rid of the Marceline du Clos dame an' George Ribban before either of them could talk.

"In the meantime you have been mixin' a little poison about me with the General. You told him that Marceline du Clos has told Ribban that I have been shootin' off my mouth. You fake this report from Ribban an' give it to the General. An' remember the night you an' I had that conference with Flash? Well, you got the forged pass an' got du Clos outa the Fourteenth Police Post in Paris, an' it was easy for you to do it. You took her to the Rue Zacherie an' bumped her. You weren't worryin' about me because you had Juanella Rillwater on my tail. Maybe you told her to keep me busy for a while. When I went into Wilkie's Bar she slipped in an' sat down at a table. She knew I'd see her an' talk to her."

HE sneers at me.

"Yeah?" he says. "So she's doin' all this for me. Why?"

"You were gonna get Larvey Rillwater's sentence reduced, weren't you? You were gonna get him out on parole if she did what she was told. Well, Juanella'd do a lot for her husband, but she wouldn't make herself accessory to murder. But she thought you were on the up an' up. You told her the same story you told everyone else—that you were keen to get Varley, to get yourself transferred to the F.B.I. an' be a big shot, to get in ahead of me."

Dombie says: "You know, Lemmy, this is not a nice guy. I thought you was losin' your grip, but I reckon you're still on top of the heap."

I say: "Thanks, Dombie."

He says: "I get it. Somebody is killed. Juanella Rillwater is gonna identify the body as Varley. The real Varley gets away with the documents. He's probably in London."

"Maybe," I say.

Dombie says: "Say, who is this dead guy in the car anyway?"

I say: "He is the guy who had the fancy pencil—the poor mug Enrique. Dombie, take this mug out to the car. Take the stiff out of the drivin' seat an' sling him in the back. Make Cleeve drive to Dorkin' Police Station. Then hand him over. You can tell the inspector in charge that he'll have a call from Chief Detective Inspector Herrick of the C.I.D., London. An' show him this." I give him the British Police pass that Herrick has given to me.

Dombie gets up. He has still got the service pistol in his hand.

He says: "I suppose he hadta blow most of his face off so's nobody could recognize him?"

"That's right, Sherlock," I tell him.

I get outa the cottage, call the hotel at Leatherhead an' ask for Mr. Maynes. He comes on the line. He says: "Well, Mr. Caution, how's it goin'?"

I say: "There's a lot of funny business here. Cleeve has shot some guy, an' the thing that's worryin' me now is gettin' my hooks on those papers. I got an idea our little friend Lana Varley, alias Amanda Carelli, will have them by now. They've been passed to her or sent to her. I think we'll go an' see that babe. Come along to the Square Bottle right now. I'll be waitin' for you."

The moon has come out. I am standin' at the side door of the Square Bottle leanin' against the doorpost. I hear a car an' a hired heap from Leatherhead comes up an' Maynes gets out.

He says: "Well, Mr. Caution, it looks like things have started poppin'. What's goin' on?"

"Plenty," I tell him. "Come upstairs, an' I'll tell you."

We go up the stairs to my room.

"Sit down an listen to me," I tell him. "Because you are gonna be good an' surprised to hear that Cleeve is a phony."

"What!" he says. "A phony!"

"Keep cool, Sammy," I tell him. "That guy took you for a mug like he tried to take me, like he tried to take everybody. You trusted him because he usta work for the Alliance Agency where you was workin'. Well—the mug knew Varley. Probably he met him before America came into the war an' he knew what Varley was up to."

He says: "Well, it could be—but—"

"But nothin'," I tell him. "I reckon when Varley planned to pinch those Federal documents Cleeve was in it. These two have an idea that's terrific. Varley tells Larvey Rillwater he wants some counterfeit bonds pinched from a bank. Rillwater does it. Directly the documents are missed the Federal Bureau is called in. Rillwater gets pinched. Because probably this Varley, workin' in conjunction with Cleeve, sends an anonymous note to the F.B.I. sayin' Rillwater pinched 'em.

"So Rillwater gets arrested by the F.B.I. who are busy lookin' for Varley who, they have an idea, is behind the job. When the drag-net goes out Cleeve says he met Varley when he was with the Alliance an' he gets himself transferred to the job.

"He then gets Juanella Rillwater to go see Larvey in the cooler an' tell him to keep his trap shut about Varley. He tells her to say that if Larvey Rillwater plays ball Cleve will get him out on parole because Juanella is helpin' to pull in Varley. He tells her to say that if Larvey does *not* play ball Varley will bump Juanella."

SAMMY seems a little uneasy.

He says: "Cleeve is clever."

"*Was*," I say. "He is not gonna be clever any more."

"Go on, Mr. Caution," he says.

I say: "Cleeve tips the wink to Varley, so Varley an' Marceline du Clos scram to Paris, an' Varley has the documents with him. Probably these two are looked after there by Enrique and Marta Frisler who are also workin' for Cleeve.

"Cleeve gets himself sent to Paris on the Varley job, which is clever because he is gonna know everything that is goin' on. But what he does not know is that the F.B.I. have got George Ribban an' me workin' on the job an' we are not sayin' a thing to anybody."

"Yeah," he says. "That's where that boy musta gone wrong."

I say: "Anyhow, Marceline du Clos tells George Ribban she is scared of Varley *an' Cleeve*. So George Ribban starts to try an' get next to Cleeve. He buys him a fountain pen set an' goes to his party. Ribban has not had a chance to talk to me.

"Cleeve tells General Flash, the big boy at Intelligence, that *I* have been talkin' to Marceline He is gonna bump Ribban before he gets a chance to say anythin'. Cleeve killed Marceline du Clos in Paris an' he killed George Ribban in Paris an' he has done this third job tonight. He has killed some guy, an' we cannot tell who because he has got the pan shot off him. But Cleeve says it is Varley an' personally I do not care whether it is or not."

Sammy scratches his head. "Why don't you care?"

"Why does Cleeve select tonight to kill this guy whoever he may be?" I ask him. "Because he wants to take the heat off Varley. He wants Varley to have a free hand handlin' those documents. If Varley was gonna hand 'em over—or send 'em—to Lana Varley, alias Amanda Carelli, then I reckon tonight was when the job was gonna be done."

His eyes pop. He says: "Mr. Caution, maybe she's sittin' on those documents right now."

"Get your hat, fella," I tell him. "Let's go see Amanda."

It is after midnight. I give the knocker a good smack. The door opens, an' the honeypot standin' in the hall looks terrific. She is wearin' a cherry-colored corduroy dress with shoes to match an' she looks as if butter would not melt in her mouth.

I say: "Hello, Gorgeous. It is such a lovely night that Mr. Maynes here an' me thought we oughta come visitin'."

I can see her eyes twinklin'. She says: "Come in and have a drink. I'm sure you've got something interesting to tell me."

We go inta the sittin' room. She puts a bottle of whisky an' glasses on the table, an' we all sit down.

I say to her: "I will start the talkin'. First, you oughta know that when Sam-

my came the other evenin' to talk turkey to you, that was my idea. I should also tell you I dug up that picture an' your police record, Amanda, an' I sent him back to sorta get things straight between all of us."

"I see," she says.

"Well," I tell her, "I think the time has come when I can be on the up-an'-up with you, Amanda. Tonight we pinched a guy who has been pretendin' to be workin' along with us. Instead, this mug Cleeve has been playin' along with your boy friend Varley. Cleeve shot some mug tonight. He tried to kid me this was Varley. Maybe you know why he did that?"

She looks at me with dreamy eyes. She says: "You tell *me*, Mr. Caution."

I give her a big grin. "Lana or Amanda or whatever your name is, you are a little saucy so-an'-so. But if you want me to tell you why Cleeve bumps this mug, a sap called Enrique, I will tell you. This guy wishes me to think that Varley is not with us any more, because he knows Varley is probably gonna hand those papers over to somebody. So I reckon you know all the answers now. There is only one thing *I* wanta know. Have you got those papers?"

HONEYBUNCH draws a long puff at her cigarette.

Then she says, "Mr. Caution, your assistant, Mr. Maynes, told me there is a reward of one hundred thousand dollars for the documents. He told me that if I agreed to hand them over to the Federal Authorities if they came into my possession, I would share the reward with him. He said I'd get fifty thousand dollars an' no questions asked." She stubs out her cigarette, smilin'. "Mr. Caution, I've got those papers and now I'd like to hear from *you!*"

I get up. I say: "Nice work, girlie. I'm for you."

I turn around to Sammy. He is sittin' there with his glass in his hand, smilin' at us.

"Look," I tell her. "I think a little new introduction is now necessary. Miss Flash—*allow me to introduce Mr. Varley, the boy we been lookin' for, the silly mug who handed those papers over to you!*"

He just looks at me with snake's eyes.

"You smart guys make me laugh," I tell him. "Just because I got a photo of Miss Flash here an' had a lot of dope written on the back of it about her bein' Amanda Carelli you fall for that. You think that if this babe is Amanda Carelli an' I am mug enough to pay over that reward you are gonna get half of it an' nobody is gonna know you are Varley."

Sammy looks at her. His eyes are glitterin'. "So you're the Flash girl, are you?" He turns to me. "That makes her General Flash's daughter, hey?"

"Right," I tell him. "An' a very smart baby, too. When Cleeve an' me was havin' our interview with the General I got an idea. So I started talkin' about Varley havin' a sister. The General caught on when I described his own daughter, spoke about her twisted little finger. He knew I wanted her put here as Varley's sister. He didn't know why an' neither did she. But she knows an' *he* will soon. They got brains, the Flash family."

He says quietly: "Yeah. Well, I hope they got brains enough for this!"

He jumps to his feet, a pistol in his hand.

He says: "This is for you, Miss Flash —curse you!"

I jump between him an' the girl an' I hit him a honey under the jaw. He flops on the floor an' the gun drops outa his hand. I pick him up an' stick him back in his chair. I put the gun in my pocket. Then I hold out my hand to the girl.

"Lalage Flash," I say, "I'm glad to meet you, an' thanks a lot for what you've done. You've been terrific."

She shakes her head. "I haven't done a thing. Just what you indicated, an' I must say you've been pretty good. The documents are upstairs—*and* they're the right ones. I've identified them with the code Father gave me. He told me you always got away with it in the long run and to take my lead from you. I think you ought to have a drink."

She pours one an' I sink it. Then I say: "Lady, I am gonna take this thug in an' hand him over to the Dorking police. We have already got Cleeve there. After which maybe you'll come for that little walk we never had."

She says: "I'd like to, Mr. Caution. It's a lovely night."

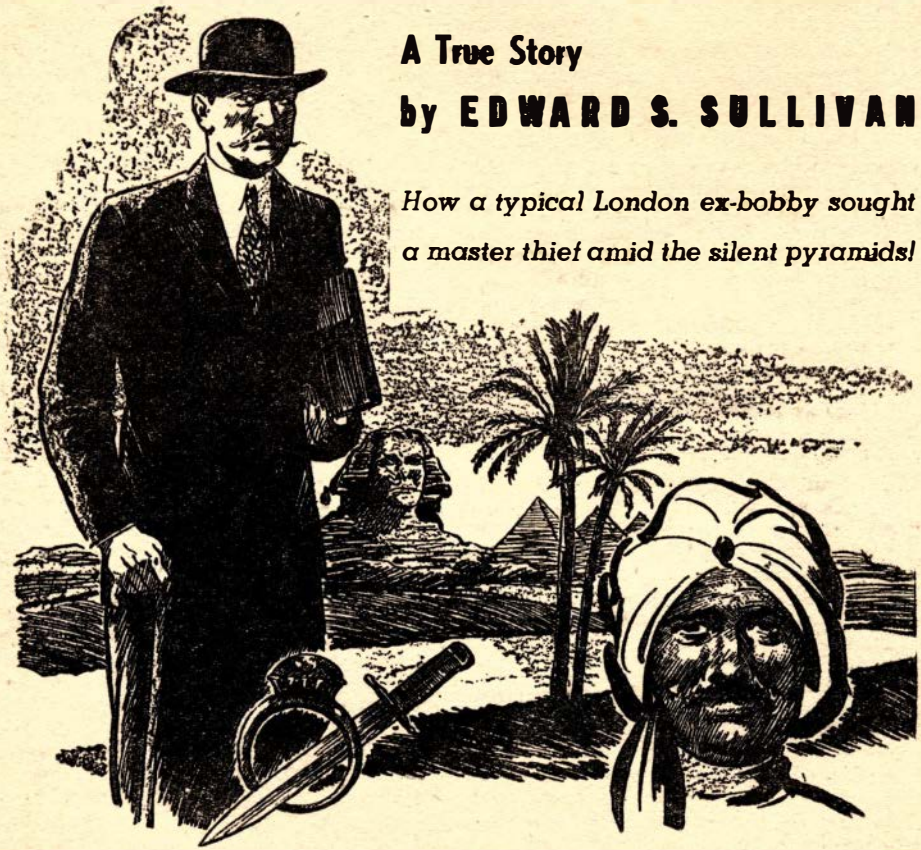
I pick up Varley, put him over my shoulder an' carry him to the car behind the Square Bottle. Then I get in, start up an' roll off toward Dorking.

I reckon it's been a pleasant evenin'.

MR. BRONSON
on the Nile

A True Story
by EDWARD S. SULLIVAN

How a typical London ex-bobby sought a master thief amid the silent pyramids!



SCHEHERAZADE, she of the exotic imagination, would have been hard pressed to invent a tale to rival the true-life saga of the former London bobby who invaded the land of djinns, harems, and houris, to tangle with a wily Moslem killer on his home grounds and come off winner.

The yarn-spinning queen of the Arabian Nights might have titled it the Tale of the Young Merchant, the Dancing Girl, the Houseboat, and the Turquoise. But to Mr. Bronson, the "private inquiry agent" of Bishopgate, it was just another case.

The picture of Mr. Bronson, with his handlebar mustache and bowler hat, stolidly pushing his way around the

fantastic underworld of Egypt, and stalking his quarry along the ancient Nile, stands alone in the history of crime detection.

The stage for the classic battle of bowler versus turban was set when a wealthy young Londoner with the improbable name of Wilibald Landenau went to Egypt for the prosaic purpose of selling locomotives to the blossoming network of railways on the Nile Delta. It was shortly after the opening of the Suez Canal, and Egypt offered commercial opportunities for energetic young Britishers with a bit of capital.

Landenau's business associate, Mr. Worthley, was also his future father-in-law. The traveler's enthusiastic reports to the exporting office in Moorgate Street alternated with glowing letters to his fiancee, demure young Alice Worthley. They were to be married as soon as he returned to London.

Suddenly the flood of letters stopped, with no explanation. Mail and cables sent to Landenau's last known address in Cairo were returned.

Mr. Worthley, being a man of the world, at first was inclined to view the lapse philosophically. Possibly Wilibald had been so engulfed by the glamor of the East that he had no time to write. It was spring, and it was understandable that a young man foot-loose in a strange land might wander a bit. It was his last chance for a fling before marriage. He'd turn up eventually. So Mr. Worthley made light of Alice's apprehensions.

Locomotive Salesman Vanishes

But when several weeks had gone by, not only without love-letters but without any sign of certain urgent business reports, Worthley began to take a more serious view of the matter. Wilibald, whatever his romantic tendencies might be, was not a man to neglect his business.

After ascertaining that none of the youth's family nor other friends had heard from him, Worthley instituted a cautious inquiry through a friend in the Foreign Office.

The reply, in the form of an official cable from the embassy in Cairo, confirmed Alice's worst fears.

Wilibald Landenau had disappeared —simply dropped from sight—while visiting the Delta city of Tanta. The local police had made an investigation, and were of the opinion that he had been slain by robbers.

Frantic cables and letters elicited a few more details. Landenau had chartered a boat for a business trip down the Nile. He had gone ashore at Tanta to attend a festival in the native quarter. In the crowd, he had become separated from his dragoman. That was the last anyone had seen of him. His disappearance had been reported after several days by the owner of the boat, who was still holding Landenau's luggage against the unpaid balance of his fee.

Was the Case Closed?

Direct inquiries to the Tanta police brought no satisfaction. They replied briefly that there was little likelihood that Landenau would ever turn up alive, or that anything further would be learned about his fate. Such incidents were not uncommon in the Delta country; the Tanta authorities appeared to consider the case closed. Worthley sent for Landenau's luggage; it arrived in due time and in good order, but yielded no clue, save to confirm that his disappearance had not been voluntary. His careful diary was full of plans and business appointments for the future. The last entry told of his intention to go ashore at Tanta, to witness the colorful Mohammedan festival of Said-el-Bedui.

Mr. Worthley was inclined to accept the official verdict and consider the unfortunate affair closed. But Alice, whose demure exterior masked a strong will, was far from satisfied.

"I don't trust those native police," she said. "They seemed to be in a great hurry to close the case. There may be quite a bit that we don't know about it. I won't rest till I find out for certain what happened to Willie. If he's been murdered, I want to see his murderers brought to justice."

"Well, what do you suggest? We've done everything possible."

"No, we haven't. Daddy, you've been promising to take me on a trip abroad, to help me forget about Willie. Well, I want to go to Egypt. I want to go to Tanta, and talk to the boatman and the dragoman at first-hand. I swear, Daddy, I'll never look at another man until I'm satisfied about Willie's fate!"

Thus it was that some four months after Landenau's disappearance, the Worthleys arrived in Cairo with Mr. Bronson, the inquiry agent and former constable, whom the prudent exporter had retained in the dual capacity of investigator and bodyguard.

The British officials at the embassy were willing to cooperate, but looked on the mission as a wild-goose chase. They had accepted the report of the Tanta police; they pointed out that there were many by-ways of native life impenetrable to Europeans; that murders and disappearances in Lower Egypt, if not immediately explained, were rarely if ever solved.

The Orient-wise officials were vastly amused at the matter-of-fact self-confidence of the London detective, who set about his task just as though he were investigating a routine housebreaking in the East End. Bronson still wore his business-suit and bowler, refusing to make the slightest concession to his exotic surroundings.

Inquiries in Cairo turned up nothing new, beyond the information that Landenau had been carrying about five hundred pounds in notes in his wallet, and had scoffed at warnings against wearing his valuable personal jewelry in his travels in the hinterland.

At length the dogged Londoners, on the advice of Bronson, decided to charter the identical boat on which Landenau had sailed down the Nile, and trace his journey to Tanta.

Although the embassy gave a good character to Reis, or Captain Tabut, the owner of the boat, Bronson thought it best for them to masquerade as ordinary travelers and not disclose their real purpose.

Bronson's square figure, impassive countenance, bowler, moustache, and large blunt-toed shoes cried detective a block away; but fortunately, Egyptian rivermen were not too familiar with the aspect of London detectives, and he passed as an eccentric tourist.

So the little party, augmented by a young attache from the embassy who had eyes only for Alice, and their dragoman or interpreter-guide, duly boarded the houseboat *Timsah* in the shadow of the pyramids, and set leisurely sail down the Rosetta Branch of the Nile, ostensibly for a tour of the Delta.

Reis Tarbut was a portly, moustached Egyptian who spoke bombastic English and affected the grand manner. He fastened immediately on Worthley and Alice, sensing where the money lay, and paid little attention to the others. He paced the deck, magnificent in gaudy kaftan and turban, twirling the ends of his moustache and discoursing on the beauties of the Nile.

At about the fifth or sixth twirl, Alice gave a sudden start, grasped Bronson's arm and drew him urgently aside. The preoccupied captain noticed nothing.

"That big turquoise on his finger!" the girl whispered. "It's one of the pair that Willie wore in his cuff-links. I'm positive of it!"

That night, when the others had retired, Bronson contrived to corner Reis Tabut alone on deck and strike up a conversation. He admired the turquoise, a large round stone set in gold-seamed white enamel, and complimented the captain on his taste in gems.

Turquoise Ring

Flattery was plainly the key to the big Egyptian's confidence.

"Yes, it's a very nice stone," he said, holding up his hand and examining the ring critically in the moonlight, "but it has tragic memories for me. It was given to me by a rich young countryman of yours who chartered my boat a few months ago. He had two of them, set in his cuff-links. He lost one overboard, and having this one loose in his pocket, he was moved to give it to me as a token of our friendship. A few days later, the poor man disappeared and has never been seen again. I had the stone set in a ring, to honor his memory, may Allah rest his soul."

When Bronson expressed interest in the Englishman's disappearance, the loquacious captain, reclining in his deck-chair, told him the whole story.

Alice's intuition had been right: there were a few important details that had never reached England, nor even appeared in the official reports at Cairo.

Reis Tabut confided, sotto voce, that there had been a woman in the case—a Moslem woman of high rank.

It seemed that late on the night in question, after Tabut and Landenau and the crew had all gone asnore to spend the night in Tanta, watchmen on the docks had seen a veiled and expensively

gowned young woman go aboard the *Timsah*. Discreetly, they had looked the other way and had seen no one else; but it was assumed that she must have gone aboard to keep a rendezvous with the *Inglisi*, which accounted for his sudden disappearance from the festival.

"The watchmen said she was clad in the costume of an emir's wife," Tabut breathed in the detective's ear.

"What happened is all too clear. The festival of Said-el-Bedui is one of the rare occasions when the wives of the wealthy and powerful are allowed to leave the harems, accompanied by their women attendants, and mingle with the crowds in the streets. Emirs' wives are no different from other women. This one took a fancy to the handsome young *Inglisi*, and he to her. They made a rendezvous aboard the deserted boat.

"But the emir's spies were following her. They fell on my poor romantic friend and did away with him. Perhaps he never even reached the boat. It's my guess that he's lying at the bottom of the canal, weighted with stones.

"Emirs are powerful men, and dispense justice in their own fashion. When the police learned that a veiled woman, richly clad, was involved, they prudently dropped their investigation. And there the matter rests."

One Concrete Fact

Bronson the next day induced the unsuspecting captain to repeat his story to the Worthleys. He did so, embellishing it with full details. He introduced them to Landenau's dragoman, young Anastasio Adriani, who was now a member of the *Timsah's* crew. The guide confirmed the story, and told how the Englishman had apparently slipped away while they were watching the dancing-girls in a crowded cafe.

The story and the Egyptian's manner of telling it had the ring of truth, and Worthley and the heart-broken Alice were reluctantly inclined to accept it, especially when they went ashore at Tanta and the native police, under pressure, confirmed the business of the mysterious harem beauty. They made it politely clear that the unidentified emir had a right to take the unwritten law into his own hands, and that they were not interested in any further investigation.

But the plodding-minded Mr. Bronson found it hard to swallow the romantic unofficial story. He had never read the Arabian Nights, had never met an emir's wife, and was used to simpler explanations of things. The one concrete fact that stuck in his mind was that Reis Tabut, whatever his explanation, was wearing the missing man's turquoise. He noted that there was no mention of the gift of the turquoise, nor of the loss of its mate, in Landenau's rather full diary.

And, although the Tanta police gave them a clean bill of health, Bronson's London-bred detective instinct distrusted the too-eloquent captain and the shifty-eyed dragoman.

So, when the Worthleys wanted to give up the job and return to England, he persuaded them to stay for a few days in Tanta and let him pursue his investigation.

Armed with a list of Landenau's missing valuables, he made the rounds of the native pawnshops and second-hand bazaars. When he turned up nothing in this routine direction, he took to following Reis Tabut and the dragoman around town, watching them taking their ease in the cafes and dancing-houses, where the open-handed river-captain seemed to be a great favorite. His quiet surveillance seemed to bother Adriani, the dragoman, but the jovial Tabut appeared not to notice it.

Detective Gets a Break

It was in a noisy dancing-house that an old man plucked the detective's sleeve.

He introduced himself in cultured English as Abdul-Safet, a Tanta merchant and father of Reis Tabut's late wife.

"I've noticed you watching our good captain," he said. "I, too, have an interest in him. Perhaps we can put our heads together, as your saying goes."

To the interested detective, he explained that Tabut's wife had died under equivocal circumstances, and that he suspected Tabut had murdered her for her money. He was convinced the corpulent captain was a Jekyll-Hyde and made a business of murder and robbery. He had dedicated his life to seeing him brought to justice.

The merchant was equally interested

when Mr. Bronson identified himself and told him about Landenau and his own suspicions. Abdul-Safet had heard of the Englishman's disappearance, but knew no details.

When Bronson described the emir's wife and showed him the list of missing valuables, the old man without a word grasped his arm and led him to another dancing-house around the corner.

He pointed out a slim, sultry-eyed girl swaying among the dancers.

"Her name is Gazale," he said. "She used to be a great favorite of Tabut and the dragoman. Take a good look at her."

Bronson looked. On one of her fingers gleamed a large round turquoise set in white enamel—the mate to Reis Tabut's ring. And in her girdle hung Willie Landenau's red Russian-leather wallet, with his initials tooled in gold.

Abul-Safet introduced the detective as a tourist, and Bronson paid her to dance for them. He got into conversation with her, with the old man interpreting. He asked her casually how she had come by the ring and wallet. Obviously frightened, she said they were presents from Adriani, the dragoman. She made haste to get away from her questioners.

Bronson and his new colleague hung around till she left, and followed her to her cubicle-apartment in a narrow, villainous-looking street. She was too frightened to resist their entrance. Over the shrill protests of her aged mother, Bronson searched the little room.

He found no more of Landenau's belongings, but in a chest he found the complete costume of an emir's wife, just as the watchmen had described it.

Things broke rapidly after that. When the terrified girl refused any further statement, they took her with them, picked up the embassy attache, and roused the cadi, or native police-judge. When he heard their story, he ordered the girl imprisoned as a material witness, and sent two officers with them to pick up Reis Tabut and the dragoman.

At the Rosetta docks, they found the *Timsah* with sails set, about to cast off. They arrested the captain, but Adriani was nowhere to be found.

Reis Tabut denied everything, called on Allah to witness his innocence. When he was safely locked up, Bronson and Abdul-Safet took the train to Cairo, where they procured authority to search Tabut's house. They found nothing, but his servant, threatened with arrest, told them of another secret house in a side-street.

There they found a frightened fifteen-year-old girl, bearing evidence of beatings, who said Tabut had stolen her from her parents in an Upper Nile village and held her in slavery, under threat of death if she tried to escape.

And a secret vault yielded not only Landenau's gold watch and signet-ring, but a hoard of other valuables obviously stolen from European travelers.

Back at Tanta, Reis Tabut was immediately brought to trial for murder, kidnaping, and robbery.

Reis Tabut Is Tried

When she saw the other evidence against him and was convinced he could no longer harm her, Gazale, the dancing-girl, made a full confession.

Tabut, she said, had hired her to dress in the harem costume and go aboard the *Timsah,* making sure the watchmen saw her, in order to throw the police off the track by injecting the mysterious figure of the emir's wife.

She had never even seen Willie Landenau. But Tabut and Adriani had told her how they had lured him to a suburban dive, set upon him with knives, robbed and stripped him and left his body in a ditch. In addition, they had confided to her they had killed Tabut's wife.

The keeper of the murder-tavern was located and confirmed the girl's story.

The fat captain kept up his desperate denials, said the whole thing was a frame-up engineered by the missing dragoman, who alone was guilty.

The *cadi,* as Egyptian law provided in such cases of overwhelming evidence, ordered Reis Tabut beaten with rods until he should confess.

The captain withstood the beating in silence for several minutes, then rolled over, dead.

The tavern-keeper was sentenced to a long prison term, and Gazale, who had clearly acted in mortal fear of the murderous pair, was set free.

Adriani, the dragoman, was shortly found floating in the canal with his throat cut—apparently killed by Tabut

(Concluded on page 156)

TOMMY DUFF'S BIG CASE

By RAY CUMMINGS

Ezra Lang was sprawled backward over the table

TOMMY DUFF stood against the wall in the second floor hallway, listening to the angry voices of his grandfather and his cousin that came through the closed door of his grandfather's sitting room.

"Well, *I* think you amount to nothing," Ezra Lang, his grandfather, was saying. "I think you're just a shiftless—"

"Who asked you what you think? You're a pinch-penny, selfish old fool. You—"

Nobody was hearing the argument but Tommy. It was about eleven o'clock, a hot summer evening. Old Mrs. Clancy, the housekeeper, had gone to her room on the third floor; and she was too deaf to hear anything much anyway.

". . . and you're a liar," Jim Boynton was saying now.

"Oh no I'm not," the old man retort-

Was a Member of the Police Force Guilty of Murder?

ed. "You've just been a drifter, batting around the country all these years. In an' out of jail every little while. Oh, I've heard of it, don't kid yourself. Now you turn up here and start telling me—"

The argument went on, and Tommy stood listening with a wry smile. Tommy Duff was a rookie cop—a slim, wiry young fellow, red-headed, freckle-faced, with a turned up nose and Irish blue eyes. He was starting out for the station house now on night duty, the middle of his first week pounding the pavements of the small city of Plankton. His uniform was new, neat, spotless, his cap jauntily on the back of his head, his shock of red hair tousled in front of it.

The argument in the room was getting worse.

"Then why the devil don't you get yourself out of my house, Jim Boynton," his grandfather roared. "Don't think Tommy and I want you around, do you?"

"Why you rotten old crook!"

Briskly Tommy opened the door and strode in. "Hey, you two. What goes on here?"

It was a small, old-fashioned sitting room. Ezra Lang was seated at his antique table desk. He was a smallish, solid man. His red hair, originally like Tommy's, was sparse and flat, fading into gray. He sat glaring, puffing, waving a fist at Boynton who was seated before him.

"You keep out of this, Tommy," Lang shouted. His fist pounded on the table desk so that the big inkwell jumped.

"Shut up, both of you!" Tommy said. "Cut it out."

Boynton growled at Tommy. "You're the trouble-maker around here. You with your piddling cop job."

"A darn sight better job than you ever had, or ever will have!" Tommy retorted, suddenly mad. That was the trouble with arguments, you get pulled into them so fast.

Jim Boynton leaped out of his chair. He was a man in his thirties, a heavy-set, gruff, bespectacled fellow with stiff black hair.

"Don't think I'm not wise to *you*," he threw at Tommy.

"I told him about the job you could get him at Peters' Hay and Feed Store," Lang put in.

"Might be a good idea, Jim," Tommy said. "Take some of the flab off the middle of you. Steam down. Grandpop doesn't want to sell the place here and move, so what? It's his place."

Vaguely Tommy Duff was thinking that he was a peacemaker here. But most certainly he wasn't. At the doorway now big Jim Boynton stood glaring malevolently through his spectacles.

"You can both go to the devil," he muttered and slammed the door. His heavy tread sounded down the hall.

"Well," Tommy said. "Guess he had a few too many."

"I don't want any part of him!" Lang declared.

"Forget it," Tommy said.

HE tried to forget it himself, as presently he left his grandfather, went downstairs and started for town. It was about a mile walk over to the station house in Plankton. The Lang place, a shabby old farmhouse with a few stony acres around it, once had been well out in the country from the little village. But the village was a city now, with the bus passing along the road here and Plankton's outlying cottages and stores hardly more than a stone's throw away.

Tommy was about half way to town on the bus-line road, when he met a man coming out. Tommy knew him—a fellow named Jake Johnson whom his grandfather had hired to help with the chores. Jake had been drunk a few times, and last week was surly and threatening when reprimanded, so that Ezra Lang had to fire him.

"Hello," Tommy greeted.

"Your grandfather at home?" Jake demanded. "I wanta see that guy." Johnson's voice was thick, his manner belligerent.

"See him?" Tommy said. "What for?"

"I got a few things I wanta tell him, thass all." Johnson had decided now that he wanted to be paid for a month's notice. "He's gonna give me that money or else," he declared. "Nobody gives Jake Johnson the runaround an' gets away with it."

"Oh, I wouldn't do that," Tommy said. He put his hand on Johnson's arm, turning him around. "He's in sort of a bad mood tonight, Jake. Come on back to town with me."

But the big fellow slung off his grip. "You lemme alone. I wanta see that guy."

Tommy grinned and gripped him

again, this time by the collar of his shabby jacket. "Look," he said, "you seem to forget I'm a cop. Maybe I ought to take you in for drunk and disorderly conduct, Jake. Shall I?"

Johnson wasn't so drunk but that he got the point. Mumbling, he let Tommy lead him back to town. The shabby little lodging house where Jake lived was only a block or so from the Plankton Police Station. Tommy took him home, sent him in to bed.

At the station, Tommy lounged around a while before starting out on his beat at midnight. Captain Greneker was just leaving. The big police captain was a handsome, commanding-looking man. He was Tommy's ideal of what a police captain ought to be.

"Hello, Tommy," Greneker smiled. "How you doing?"

"Fine. Fine, Cap'n."

Tommy left at midnight. Apparently nothing much ever went wrong in Plankton, certainly not on Tommy's beat anyway. Pounding pavements all night you have plenty of chance to think. Tommy Duff wanted to be a detective, eventually, a great and famous detective. He liked to picture himself with criminals in awe of him, with the newspaper boys crowding around to hear about his big murder case that was making the headlines and was the current sensation. And by then there would be a girl, and maybe some little red-headed kids with freckles and snaggle-toothed grins.

At about one o'clock Tommy went past McGovern's Bar and Grill. Its front doors were open, this hot night, and as Tommy glanced in he noticed Jim Boynton. His cousin didn't see him. Boytnon was seated with a glass of beer before him. He wasn't wearing his spectacles now. His big, slightly protruding eyes looked owlish. Tommy moved on.

It was flat, early morning daylight when Tommy reached home. The shabby little farmhouse drowsed in the heat. His bedroom was on the ground floor. The whole place was silent; it was too early for Mrs. Clancy to be up. Tommy went to bed and to sleep. He was awakened by his door bursting open and old Mrs. Clancy standing over him, wild-eyed, ashen.

"Tommy! Mr. Lang—he—oh my soul, he's up there—you can see him—"

Tommy wrapped his bathrobe over his pajamas, put on his slippers and dashed into the hall. Their shouts brought Boynton from his bedroom which was also here downstairs. Boynton's thick figure was wrapped in a dressing gown.

"Hey, what the devil?" he asked hurriedly.

Mrs. Clancy was almost incoherent. She had gone to call Mr. Lang. He wasn't in his bedroom. His sitting-room door was locked on the inside. She could see a light in there, and when he didn't answer, she had looked through the keyhole. Tommy and Boynton dashed upstairs.

The sitting room had a modern lock, a spring lock, which locked the door on the inside when anyone closed it. The big, old fashioned keyhole was under it. Tommy stooped and peered. The table desk was visible, with a yellow glow from the overhead room light shining down on it. Ezra Lang was sprawled backward over the table, his head down, his unbuttoned vest flaring.

Then Boynton peered. He gasped. "Maybe he had a fit or something."

Together they broke down the door. They could see that Ezra Lang was dead; his face was horrible, puffed, with goggling mouth and protruding tongue. His popping, glazed eyes stared. And there were marks on his throat.

"Strangled," stated Tommy grimly.

"No need for the doctor—the police," Boynton muttered.

FOR a moment Tommy Duff stood dazed and trembling. All he could think of was that here was the grandfather he loved. He forgot all about being a cop, and that this was a murder case—until he saw Boynton starting for the telephone across the room.

"I—I'll do it," he said, pushing him aside.

It was Sergeant Mullins who answered.

"Your grandfather *murdered*. Holy cats!" he said. "We'll be right out. I'll phone Greneker. Take it easy, Tommy. Don't touch nothin' around there."

Despite his dazed confusion, Tommy remembered the scene with Boynton here in this room last night. And then he remembered the encounter with Jake Johnson. He told Mullins about it.

"We'll pick him up," Mullins said.

"Might bring him over to the sta-

tion," Tommy said. "I'd like to talk to him."

Tommy Duff and Jim Boynton waited in the lower hall until Sergeant Mullins, Captain Greneker and the others arrived.

"It must've happened pretty early last night," Tommy told the men when they came in. "Grandpop was still in his sitting room—and he generally went to bed about midnight."

The little upstairs sitting room showed plain evidence that there had been a fight. The rug was scuffed. The chair in which Lang had been sitting was overturned, and the things on the desk were scattered. The big inkwell had spilled its contents on the polished ebony top—a big dark splotch of liquid, glistening violet-black in the light from the hooded bulb overhead.

"Jim and I were in here talking to him about eleven o'clock," Tommy explained to Greneker and the others. "Jim left first and then I did." He decided not to mention their personal family troubles for the present.

"I went down to McGovern's," Boynton said.

GRENEKER'S questioning of Boynton and Tommy was interrupted by another radio car bringing in Jake Johnson. The big ex-gardener was thoroughly frightened. Greneker confronted him.

"Duff took you home last night, he says."

"Sure. Sure he did," Johnson agreed.

"And when he'd gone, you came back out here—"

"I didn't! That's a lie. I just went to bed—" He tried to smile—"slept it off. Next thing wuz the cops wakin' me."

They were in the upper hallway. Sergeant Mullins suddenly called from the sitting room. "Captain, here's something—"

He had found a little brass button on the floor by the desk table. They all gathered to see it. Mullins and Greneker exchanged glances.

"Looks sort of familiar," Mullins muttered. There were buttons just like it on the blue summer shirts of the police department. Now they were looking at Tommy. "Could it be yours, Tommy?"

They brought Tommy's uniform shirt up from his bedroom. The button of the upper pocket flap was missing, the threads dangling. Captain Greneker's face was solemn.

"When'd you lose that, Tommy?" he demanded.

Tommy didn't know. He hadn't even missed it. His freckled face was troubled. It was queer how he felt himself flinching under the gaze of these men who were his friends. In that moment everything changed for him. Up to now he had been pondering on whether this killer could be Boynton or Jake Johnson, and suddenly he himself was the chief suspect. Then came another shock.

"Cap'n—look at this." Mullins was standing by the corpse, and the captain joined him. They spoke in low tones for a moment and then called Tommy.

Boynton was slumped in a chair across the room. He had looked startled at the new turn of events, as though for the first time he suspected that Tommy could be the killer.

"Captain Greneker," he murmured incredulously, "don't be hasty. Tommy couldn't—"

Now Tommy saw the new evidence, and chills struck through him. There in his grandfather's dead fingers were a few strands of unmistakable red hair. Greneker removed them carefully, held them under his magnifying glass.

"Red hairs, Tommy," Captain Greneker said.

"Mr. Lang's hair is red too," Mullins reminded. The big, beefy-faced sergeant liked Tommy. So did Greneker, for that matter, but he was more experienced, less emotional.

"A man being strangled doesn't reach up and pull out his own hair very likely," Greneker said. "Besides, his is dirty red, with gray. This is all red, and younger hair. Yours, Tommy. It sure looks like it." He certainly felt sorry, you could see it on his face, but he added, "Looks as if I'd have to hold you, with evidence like this."

Silently Tommy stared. He could feel his eyes misting. Then suddenly he got hold of himself. This was all the bunk—just plain mad. It was too much a coincidence that such evidence would be here.

"I want to go down to my room for a minute," he said grimly.

"Sure thing," Greneker agreed. But Tommy didn't miss the captain's look and gesture to Mullins.

"I'll come along, Tommy," the ser-

geant said. "What's the idea?"

"A comb on my bureau," Tommy told him as they went downstairs.

The black rubber comb was lying on the bureau top. There were a dozen or more loose hairs in it now. Tommy showed it to Mullins.

"You think somebody's plantin' evidence against you?" Mullins asked.

Tommy was tight-lipped. "That's just what I think," he said.

But who? Jake Johnson could have known about this comb; and he could have pulled off the button, in that little scuffle they had had last night on the dark road. But Tommy couldn't escape the conclusion that Boynton was a far more likely suspect. Jim lived here. He had been in Tommy's room many times. He was more intelligent than Jake, certainly more the type who would plan a thing like this. And upstairs just now, he hadn't accused Tommy. Far more crafty, he had murmured to Greneker that they mustn't be hasty.

TOMMY and Mullins went back upstairs. Mullins showed Greneker the comb and they stood whispering about it.

"Well—" Greneker said finally. He was frowning, hesitating. "Well, even so, Mullins—"

Tommy shot a glance at Boynton, who was busy watching Greneker. Boynton still wasn't wearing his spectacles. His eyes looked owlish, and on his heavy face there was that same malevolent look of last night. Now it was mixed with a leer of triumph.

That did it for Tommy Duff. He said abruptly, "There's still a lot of things about this that haven't come out yet, Captain Greneker." He turned to Boynton. "You, Jim—what happened to your spectacles? You always wear them."

"I—I broke them," Boynton stammered, obviously startled.

"You had them on when you were in here with me and grandpop last night," Tommy declared. "But you didn't have them when I saw you in McGovern's later on. You broke them during the time of the murder."

Boynton jumped from his chair. "Are you trying to accuse me of—"

"Spectacles, Tommy?" Greneker put in.

"Yes. Never saw him without them before. And here's another thing, Captain, I haven't told you. Boynton was quarreling with my grandfather when I joined them in here."

That brought Boynton out into the open. "That's a lie!" he roared. "It was just the opposite! He and the old man were raising the devil with each other. All I could do to keep Tommy from taking a poke at him."

"What about?" Greneker put in.

"I don't know—the kid's got some girl, I guess. Just a tramp, and the old man—"

"He's the one who's lying, Captain," Tommy said. "Take your choice. Anyway, where are your spectacles, Jim? Let's have a look."

Boynton had recovered himself. He grinned sourly. "I broke them about suppertime last night," he said. "They're down in my room, in my jacket pocket."

Somebody went to get them and Tommy took Greneker aside. "Just a hunch maybe," he whispered. "Seems queer he wasn't wearing his spectacles after the killing."

They were standing by the table where the body was sprawled. It was then that Tommy saw the tiny glint on the pool of spilled ink. He had seen it before, the light glinting on the violet-black surface. But now he noticed something different.

The policemen came back with Boynton's spectacles. The white metal frame was bent. One of the lenses was cracked —two converging cracks running across the oval of the lens. There was what looked like a little smudge of ink on the lens.

"Show him," Tommy murmured.

Boynton wasn't impressed. He grinned at Greneker. "You're telling me my spectacles dropped off by that spilled ink during the fight? That kid's makin' a fool of you, Captain. I guess that smudge has been there quite a while on my glasses. I'm not fussy—don't clean 'em much."

Tommy had turned back to the pool of spilled ink on the desk table. He showed the little glint to Greneker. "You've got him!" he whispered earnestly.

Greneker whirled back at Boynton. "Your spectacles fell off while you were strangling him," he accused. "They hit the desk beside the ink that had spilled, and the bump cracked one of the lenses.

Most of the glass stayed in the frame. But not quite all of it! A little sliver dropped out onto the desk."

"You can see it there," Tommy put in. "It's a tiny triangle—you can't miss it. It fits exactly into the cracked lens!"

"Does it?" Boynton said. "Okay. I dropped my spectacles there at supper-time."

"That sliver of glass got there *after* the ink was spilled in the fight," Greneker said. "It's on top of the ink—not in it! Come take a look!"

Boynton wasn't protesting now; he stood numbly staring.

"That sliver of glass didn't fall far," Greneker went on. "It flipped from the cracked lens as the spectacles hit. All liquids have a natural surface tension, and—"

"You can float a needle on a glass of water," Tommy said.

"That ink had been in the big inkwell quite a while, by the look," Greneker added. "Thickened quite a bit, increasing its density."

And there was the tiny sliver, floating like a little glint of light-sparkle on the surface of the ink-pool! The men crowded around to see it. "It sure got there *after* the ink spilled!" . . . "Hey, Pete, set up your camera. What a swell close-up this'll make!"

"And if you want to know his motive," Tommy said, "my grandmother insisted this old farm be left to him in grandpop's will. It is. Never was worth much, but now the town's here and the real estate people are after it."

"I get it," Greneker said.

"That was what the fight was about last night," Tommy continued. "Darned if he didn't want grandpop to give it to him now, and move out. But it was grandpop's home, he loved it."

Now Boynton was just glowering. You could see he was all finished.

"Well, we'll take you along," Greneker said. "Don't guess the jury'll have too much trouble."

Tommy stood silent as they took Boynton away. Then Greneker looked over at him and grinned.

"Seems, for a rookie, you're not bad," he said. "Might have the makings of a detective in you. Could be."

"Gee," Tommy said. "Gee, thanks, Cap'n."

The first big case of Tommy Duff. His mind went leaping ahead.

MR. BRONSON ON THE NILE

(Concluded from page 150)

just before his arrest, to shut his mouth.

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THE READERS' JURY

(Continued from page 8)

Scotland Yard had ever before endured from the disproportionate sense of humor of any one outlaw, that he learned the matter of Mr. Jones was a pressing one. Somehow the said Mr. Jones had learned or guessed that Brian Quell had told him things unhealthy to know before he died—probably Jones had been lurking outside in the hotel corridor and had overheard part of their conversation—and the killer made his fear known by a series of abortive attempts upon the Saint's life.

Meanwhile the Saint was also busily engaged in his perennial pastime of crossing swords with Chief Inspector Claud Eustace Teal who had been bluntly ordered by authorities higher up to get something on the Saint and make it stick, because of the ribbing the department had been taking from the press and public for their failure on that score. Mr. Teal, realist that he was, knew that this was a very large order indeed. But he also knew it had not been issued lightly, and so he threw his full weight into the duel.

Hampered in this battle of wits by the unknown but persistent Mr. Jones, Simon Templar gets plenty of aid, too —from his lovely, fair-haired accomplice, Patricia Holm, who has assisted him on a good many of his previous jousts with the law and crime, all of which had contributed to his rare fame and swelling fortune.

We think you'll thoroughly enjoy the Saint's latest brush with Mr. Teal and his strange adventure with Mr. Jones, who did such an unfriendly thing to Brian Quell in Paris because of the man Binks who could make gold. It's an exciting, intelligent Simon Templar novel of the kind that has made the Saint a byword to detective story fans, so look forward to it in your next big issue of TRIPLE DETECTIVE.

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Occupying the Number Two spot in the next issue is an unusual, psychological novel that revolves about a murder committed in the stacks of a college

[*Turn page*]

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library over an original and a cleverly faked manuscript of Edgar Allan Poe's poem, "Ulalume." Sounds kind of stuffy and long-haired, doesn't it? But it's not. A real thriller-chiller is this novel by Amelia Reynolds Long. "Death Looks Down" it's called. And, brother, death really does!

Told in entertaining style from the first-person viewpoint of one of the girl students in a small, advanced class on the works of Edgar Allan Poe, she sees three of her six classmates meet gruesome ends, as well as another who had an intense interest in Poe's writings and was early considered one of the chief suspects, before Ted Trelawney, that remarkable man from the District Attorney's office, comes in with some really high-powered deduction to unmask the killer.

For a truly different type of murder mystery, read Amelia Reynolds Long's "Death Looks Down" in the next TRIPLE DETECTIVE.

A Johnny Liddell Novel

Third on the list of novels in the forthcoming issue is "Slay Ride" by Frank Kane, featuring the tough and worldly private eye, Johnny Liddell, whom the criminal element finds a hard man to shake from their heels, be the dissuading factor guns, gems, or gorgeous gals.

When a young friend of Johnny's, a novice detective in the same agency, takes over for him on a routine buy-back of hot jewelry for an insurance company and winds up on a slab in the morgue, Johnny goes after the jewelry mob with knuckles bared, and the devil take the guilty party.

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[*Turn page*]

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in a good many millions of words of detective story reading. So for fun and thrills, it's "Slay Ride" by Frank Kane in the next TRIPLE DETECTIVE.

In addition to these three noted novels, the next issue will of course contain the usual list of select short stories and features, together with the regular departments carried in every issue. We think it adds up to quite a package of enjoyable reading and hope you'll think the same!

JURY JOTTINGS

DIPPING into the ballot box, we find first a vote from Jimmy Botte of Nashville, Tennessee, who has the following to say:

I am a real mystery fan and read most of the companion magazines to TRIPLE DETECTIVE, such as THRILLING DETECTIVE, POPULAR DETECTIVE, FIVE DETECTIVE NOVELS, etc. But I'm sending this note to you rather than the others, because TRIPLE DETECTIVE is really it, as far as I'm concerned. So far you've published all my favorite authors except Erle Stanley Gardner. By the way, let's have another issue like your one labeled Spring, 1950. It was tops, and "The Dead Don't Care," by Jonathan Latimer, one of the best stories I've ever read.

Thanks for your kind words, Jimmy. And maybe the issue coming up will rate as high with you as the Spring, 1950, number, we hope.

Next comes a ballot from down Atlanta, Georgia, way. Mary Ellen Simms is the voter, in this case, and she does it in a truly beautiful way, if we do say so.

You're all right, TRIPLE DETECTIVE. You scare me half to death sometimes, and sometimes you make me laugh, and sometimes cry. But when all is over and done with, the murderers properly hoisted, you make me feel right good and contented. So don't stop visiting me, please. I'm a woman and therefore fickle, I suppose, but I do solemnly swear that always and forever you'll have a home with me. Good luck and so long for now, TRIPLE DETECTIVE, and I'm awfully glad I met you.

That's as pretty a testimony as we've ever heard, Mary Ellen. Almost poetic, it is, and we really appreciate it. Thank you, thank you, and you can cast your ballot with us any old time at all.

We've room for one more short one

before we say adieu, and we find one here from deep in the heart of Texas, no less. Ad McCloon, from old San Antone, writes like this:

I like the good, tough, he-man stuff you find mostly in Western magazines, as a rule, but find I can get a lot of the same in TRIPLE DETECTIVE, too. May you always ride a fat horse.

Thanks for the sentiments, Ad, but you don't know these New York cab drivers. They'd take the fat off that horse in no time, and without even bruising a wither, or whatever. But we're glad you like the book.

And now once more we come to the end of a session. Thanks again for your many fine ballots, and if you haven't yet cast yours, we'd very much like to have it. Just address a card or letter to The Editor, TRIPLE DETECTIVE, Best Publications, Inc., 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y., and tell us what you think. Meanwhile, many thanks to all of you. Good luck and good reading—and we'll see you again in the next issue!

—THE EDITOR.

NEXT ISSUE'S HEADLINERS!

THE SAINT AND MR. TEAL

A Simon Templar Novel

By LESLIE CHARTERIS

DEATH LOOKS DOWN

A Baffling Mystery Novel

By AMELIA REYNOLDS LONG

SLAY RIDE

A Johnny Liddell Detective Novel

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(Not Shown:

- ☐ THE PALE BLONDE OF SANDS STREET *by Wm. Chapman White*
- ☐ NOT TOO HARROW ... NOT TOO DEEP *by Richard Sale*
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