

# EDGAR WALLACE

mystery magazine

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VOL. 1 No. 2

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SEPTEMBER

**EDGAR  
WALLACE**

Thieves Make  
Thieves

**NIGEL  
MORLAND**

Cyanide City

**JACQUES  
PENDOWER**

Mrs. Webber's  
Profession

**REX  
DOLPHIN**

The  
Last Bandit

★

**TRUE  
CRIME**

The Wigwam  
Murder





**EDGAR WALLACE**

*Born London, 1875*  
*Died Hollywood, 1932*

He knew wealth and poverty, yet had  
walked with kings and kept his bearing.

# EDGAR WALLACE

## mystery magazine



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***Edited by Keith Chapman***

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**A swindled lawyer and an attractive secretary spell trouble for a pair of loathsome rogues . . .**

**I**F you had told Mrs. Cayling Appleton that she was a criminal, she would have neither wept nor fainted. She would have regarded you through her jewelled lorgnettes as though you were some prehistoric animal that had been revived, escaped from a museum and strayed into her

Edgar Wallace

## **THIEVES MAKE**

**THIEVES MAKE THIEVES** was originally published in 1930 by George Newnes in a sixpenny collection of eight short stories by Edgar Wallace. Miss Penelope Wallace, daughter of the author, says: "This story illustrates the writer's innate belief that justice should prevail even when the rogues are within the letter of the law."

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beautiful London drawing room. Had you added in your natural exasperation that she was a conspirator of a most dangerous type, and that she was qualifying, if she had not already qualified, for a long term of penal servitude in the establishment at Holloway, she would have thought you were mad - for she stood in such close relationship to the Law that she thought she was superior to it. For was not Mr. Joshua Wendell, senior partner of Wendell, Wendell and Crale, both her nephew and her protégé?

In many ways Mrs. Cayling Appleton had the mind of a man, albeit a bad man. Yet in appearance she was extremely feminine. She was small, sharp-featured, inclined to be fluffy. She had been a widow for twenty years but it was difficult to assess her age and her hair was an expensive and most convincing dull gold. John Crale, who was thirty, good-looking and caustic, used to say that the firm of Wendell, Wendell and Crale was really Wendell in small type and Cayling Appleton in capitals. The first of the Wendells had been her brother, the second had been financed from her own account. He was Mr. Joshua Wendell,

# THIEVES

thirty-five and dyspeptic, and he had been quite disinclined to add the name of Crale to the brass plate which decorated the door of his City office.

“Don’t be a fool, Joshua,” said his masterful aunt, “it is very necessary that there should be somebody in the firm who understands law. This young Crale is clever, he is willing to pay ten thousand pounds for a share of your practice, which shows that even a good lawyer can be a fool, too.”

So John Crale was admitted and signed an agreement that only an imbecile or a solicitor would have signed on his own behalf. For this is the peculiarity of lawyers, that they are quite incapable of managing their own legal affairs.

Six months after his admission he awoke to the discovery that he had paid ten thousand pounds for the privilege of earning his partner a comfortable competence. He consulted another lawyer and learned that he had been badly but legally swindled. He was tied by the neck to a business which offered him a meagre salary and a one per cent return on his investment.

He used to sit in his office late at night and silently curse the name of Wendell. The need for silence disappeared in the third year of his servitude, when Joshua Wendell engaged a new secretary, Miss Eileen Mannering.

She was extremely attractive; her unromantic age was twenty-four but she looked eighteen and she was devastatingly intelligent. She was supposed to be working late one evening when John Crale took her into his confidence. She sat chewing the end of her pencil.

"Isn't it strange how silly a man can be?" she asked, and John choked. "But you are! Don't you realize that you can be retired whenever they grow tired of you? For example, there's a clause in your agreement that you must not gamble -"

"Good Lord!" John Crale's jaw fell. "How did you know, and why do you say 'they'?"

She smiled, and she was lovely when she smiled.

"I've seen the agreement and I've heard 'they' talking. I see more of Mrs. Appleton than you do. I was down at her house in Egham last week-end and Mr. Wendell was there. They kept me working from Friday till Monday morning and gave me £2 for overtime."

John Crale frowned.

"But gambling -?"

She nodded.

"It came out over poor Bennett."

It had been while John was on his holidays that the unfortunate clerk had been arrested and sentenced to six months' imprisonment for embezzlement.

"Apparently the bookmaker who came to collect money from Bennett - that was how the Wendell found out about the eighty pounds he had stolen - told Mr. Wendell that you owed him a lot of money -"

"What did they say about it? The old lady and Flossie?"

She did not know till then his nickname for the senior partner but when she stopped laughing she was discreet.

"I can only tell you that they know," she said. "I've told you too much already."

They knew indeed and at that moment 'they' were discussing it in Mrs. Cayling Appleton's London home. Joshua Wendell was inclined to be severe but not too severe. His aunt lost little time in making her attitude clear.

"Anyway, we'll have to get rid of Crale and it might as well

be done sooner as later. He is taking a most extraordinary attitude over the Murdoch estate. I lay in bed thinking about it the other night. I am really worried, Joshua. I was talking to Sir Hubert Lesford; he is the best authority at the Bar on property. Naturally I was only putting hypothetical cases to him; in fact I told him it was a case I had heard of years ago. And he was very emphatic. He said that what you have been doing is – well, he said it was criminal conspiracy.”

Joshua Wendell shifted uncomfortably in his chair.

“I would not say that our action –”

“*Your* action, Joshua,” she corrected. “Whatever happens, my name must be kept out. Crale suspects something, he was almost rude to me the last time I was at the office.”

Mr. Wendell was obviously agitated. “Why not let Crale go?” he pleaded. “Give him his money and let him out in a good humour?”

But the ten thousand pounds which John Crale had paid had been transferred to Mrs. Appleton’s account to liquidate an old debt.

“No, certainly not, certainly not,” she said emphatically. “We can get rid of him without repaying any of the money. The only trouble is that he might make absurd statements about us – you. The ideal method, of course, would be to discover something that would utterly discredit him. It’s possible that a man who gambles . . . couldn’t you get in an accountant?”

The lawyer pursed his thin lips.

“My secretary is a rather clever accountant,” he began.

Mrs. Cayling Appleton sniffed.

“She’s much too pretty to be clever,” she said.

None the less, to Eileen Mannering was given the task of investigation. It was necessarily a slow business and a month passed before her work was completed. And in a month much may happen.

One morning . . .

Wendell came to the office in an irritable mood. There were several unpleasant letters to deal with and his secretary was strangely apathetic, not to say weary. She hid a yawn behind her hand.

“My good young woman, don’t yawn please!” he snapped.

“I’m sorry,” she said, “I didn’t leave the office till twelve last night.”

Joshua Wendell very much objected to this reminder of his responsibility.

"I have arranged with the cashier that you shall receive £5 extra pay for all the night work," he said impressively, "which I think you will agree is rather handsome. Have you found anything?"

She shook her head.

"Nothing. I went through the transfer books –"

He looked dubious at this. "Yes. I don't know whether you have a sufficient knowledge of accountancy to be able to detect anything irregular, even if you saw it?"

"I have a diploma," she said coldly.

"Yes, yes," he was impatient. "You found nothing? No notes about the Murdoch estate?"

"No," and then she turned to a personal matter. "Tomorrow is Good Friday, Mr. Wendell, you know that I am going on my holiday?"

Mr. Wendell never failed to protest against the nuisance of holidays. Crale was going away, too.

"I never take holidays. It is not for me to influence you, but if you would care to forego a week it might considerably enhance your prospects with the firm," he suggested. But apparently she was not impressed. "I think – ten pounds a week," he went on. "That is not bad pay for a young girl. I daresay we shall be able to put you up to twelve next year. I don't promise, but it is possible. You can hardly expect more."

"I expect nothing," she said. "I hope – a lot."

Mr. Wendell thought it an opportune moment to point a moral.

"The ideal existence," he said profoundly, "is a successful business career."

She sighed.

"I wonder. There are mountains somewhere, and beautiful plains and rivers and glorious blue seas where you can bathe and lie on a beach while the sun warms you. That seems pretty ideal to me."

Her employer was shocked.

"I'm afraid you've been reading novels. That is bad, unsettling. Don't forget Mr. Bennett, a wanderer on the face of the earth."

He seldom failed to bring in the gambling Bennett to support his argument. Happily she was spared a dissertation on the shiftless life, for John Crale came in. He hung up his hat and walked to his desk, apparently oblivious of his partner's presence.



"Good morning, Crale. Mrs. Appleton telephoned you." There was a certain significance in Wendell's tone.

"How long ago?" asked John carelessly.

Mr. Wendell waited until the door closed on the secretary. The name of Mrs. Appleton frequently provoked his partner to violent language.

"About twenty minutes ago. She said she'd ring you again. She wouldn't tell me her business."

"Naturally."

Irony maddened Mr. Wendell. "I mean - er -"

John Crale was sorting his letters.

"You mean that she would not tell you her business. One can hardly find fault with that, particularly as you knew what her business was."

Mr. Wendell was pained.

"You're being rather unpleasant, aren't you?" he asked. "You might at least be polite. I've saved you an unpleasant experience this morning."

Crale looked up quickly.

"Oh? What was that?"

"Bennett came and wanted to see you. Of course I sent him packing. You know the man I mean, the clerk who embezzled -"

John nodded.

"Poor devil," he said, not for the first time.

"I really don't like your moral values, my dear Crale," said the other with asperity, and John Crale smiled faintly.

"That's because you know 'em. I'm puzzled about your moral values because I don't."

Wisely, his partner declined the challenge and returned to the question of Bennett.

"He's going to Canada and wanted some sort of recommendation! The nerve! A man who embezzled eighty-two pounds!"

"Oh, eighty-two?" Crale was most offensive when he sounded most innocent. "I thought it was only eighty. You didn't save me from the experience, I saw him in the street and told him to come and see me."

"That's very unwise. He had a good job -"

Crale snorted.

"Fifteen pounds a week after twelve years' service, with the prospect of a ten shilling rise. He brought up a family on that."

Mr. Joshua Wendell thought an opportunity had arrived.

"There is one thing I have never told you about Bennett's

arrest. I hesitate to tell you now," he said deliberately. "This man who came to collect Bennett's debt was a very common fellow and he seemed to be under the influence of drink."

"You mean he was drunk?"

"He was intoxicated," said Mr. Wendell primly.

"Oh, I see, just pickled. Well?"

"He said, 'I shall be coming back here again. I've got five thousand pounds to collect from Crale.' He didn't even say Mr. Crale."

"Oh, then he was drunk," said John Crale calmly. "What does Mrs. Cayling Appleton want to see me about?"

"I'm not sure." Joshua was very sure indeed. "I have an idea it is about selling the Belton Abbey estate."

John Crale regarded him thoughtfully. "Belton Abbey? She wants to sell that swamp to the Murdoch estate?" he demanded.

Mr. Wendell stiffened.

"I don't know why she shouldn't," he said.

Crale and he were trustees for both estates. He knew Mrs. Appleton to be an enormously rich woman. The Murdochs were a large and unbusiness-like family. Mrs. Appleton had bought the Belton Estate and thought she was going to make a garden city out of a large damp field. She had burnt her fingers and was now trying to switch her liability elsewhere.

"It was on my advice she bought Belton," said Wendell shortly.

"Is it on your advice she's selling it?" asked Crale. "They gave Bennett six months for eighty-two pounds; what should we deserve for doing the Murdochs out of thirty thousand?"

He saw his partner's face change colour.

"I wish you wouldn't jest about such matters, Crale. Yours is a monstrous suggestion. I honestly believe that the Belton estate is worth all that Mrs. Appleton asks."

Eileen Mannering came in then and the question of the Belton estate was shelved.

"Mrs. Cayling Appleton to see you, Mr. Wendell," said his secretary.

Crale caught her eye. "I shall have a letter for you later, Miss Mannering," he said, and she nodded.

"Yes, darling." The word was out before she could check herself. Nevertheless the face she turned to the startled eyes of Mr. Wendell betrayed no embarrassment.

"What did you say?" he asked in horror.

"I said, 'Yes, after'." Her voice was very steady, she seemed surprised at his question.

"I thought you said - what did you think she said?" he asked John.

"I didn't take much notice. Why?" John's face was a mask.

Joshua Wendell hurried from the room, a puzzled man.

When the door closed on him . . .

"Angel!" John Crale's voice was mildly reproachful. "You really put your pretty foot in it."

"I did something worse," said Eileen. "I wore my wedding ring to the office this morning. I've only had it a week and I hate taking it off. That ghastly old woman out there is out for blood, Johnnie."

Crale scratched his nose thoughtfully.

"I wonder what she wants?"

Eileen had startling news for him. "She wants the transfer of her securities to the Northern Trust," she said and he stared at her.

"Who told you?"

"I saw a letter she wrote to Wendell. Johnnie, she'll still be terribly rich, won't she?" And when he nodded, "I'm rather glad of that."

"So she wants to transfer her securities to the Northern Security Trust, does she? Pray hard, Eileen, for a miracle."

The miracle happened at that moment. The office telephone rang and Eileen picked up the receiver.

She listened for a moment, then said to John, "Will you see Mr. Bennett?"

Bennett! He had forgotten all about the errant clerk.

"Send him in."

Wendell wouldn't like it, but he had got out of the habit of wondering about what Wendell liked.

Bennett was thinner, his face white and haggard; prison killed men of his calibre. John Crale grew even more thoughtful as he pointed to a chair.

"I'd rather stand, thank you, sir. I hope you don't mind me coming to you. You're my last hope."

He explained that he and his wife were leaving for Canada the next morning, travelling steerage; and then, at the last minute, he'd had a wonderful chance. His people had been farmers for years and had a place in the north of Scotland and the farm had just come on the market.

“Well?”

Bennett made a gesture of despair.

“I know it is madness to ask, but I don’t want to go to a country I don’t know.” He hesitated. “Is there any chance of raising the money to buy the farm? It’s a lonely place, nobody knows about my past, my wife could buy it in her maiden name.”

John Crale thought quickly.

“How much?” he asked.

“It’s a bargain, sir. Three thousand pounds.” He laughed harshly. “I know it’s stupid to ask but you’ve been a good friend of mine.”

Eileen appeared at the door and her nod told him that Wendell was returning. There was no time to lose.

“You know Mrs. Appleton?” he asked.

“Yes, sir. I saw her come in.”

“Well see her go out,” said Crale quickly. “When she’s gone, come back. Go into my private room and wait.”

Bennett had hardly passed through the door when Mrs. Appleton and her nephew came in. “Good morning, Mr. Crale.” There was something very ominous in that “Good morning”.

“Good morning, Mrs. Appleton. What brings you into the City on this beautiful morning?”

It was Wendell who answered. “A very serious matter, my dear fellow, very serious.” His voice was shrill.

“Hold your tongue, Joshua! The first thing, and it is the least important, is this letter.” She produced an envelope from her handbag and threw it on the desk. “I regard this as most impertinent.”

Crale hardly glanced at it.

“Oh, the Belton affair. Well I really can’t let you sell a dud estate to the impoverished Murdochs,” he said.

“Impoverished Murdochs!” she scoffed. “They have three cars to my one.”

“They’re living beyond your income, that is all,” he answered coolly.

“You have never been so ultra-scrupulous before.”

He knew instinctively that this was the merest preliminary to the grand attack. The question of the Murdoch estate had been fought out before, but it could now be re-fought in plainer terms.

“Mrs. Appleton, I know exactly what you and your nephew have been doing. We are the trustees for a large number of estates. My respected senior partner handles most of them. He would have

handled yours, only you were most anxious that he should not know too much of your private affairs. For years, as I have discovered, he has been juggling his trusts."

Joshua Wendell protested violently but was silenced by his aunt.

"He has been juggling the trusts to enrich an already bloated bank balance," Crale went on. "Buying cheaply from one, selling dearly to another. I have calculated that in seven years your estate has benefited to the extent of eighty or ninety thousand pounds by this organized conspiracy."

"That is a most serious accusation," began Wendell, but he was again snapped to silence.

"Now, Mr. Crale," her voice was like steel, "we will leave the Murdochs."

"Happy Murdochs," said John.

"You hold a considerable number of securities of mine," she continued, and when he nodded, "A very large number of these have recently come on the market."

To her amazement he showed no evidence of confusion or guilt.

"I sold them, yes."

She had difficulty in asking the next question.

"You have the money in your bank?" Again he nodded.

"Yes, it is customary to sell securities when one decides upon reinvestment."

Mrs. Appleton consulted a paper. "Nearly seventy-five thousand pounds."

"You're nearly four thousand out," he said coolly. "Seventy-nine."

The colour mounted in her face and for a moment her nephew thought she was on the verge of hysteria, but she kept a tight rein on her emotions. "The money is in your bank, and in your name," she said. "I have made that discovery. I want you now to give me a cheque for the full amount and an order to the bank to deliver the remainder of the securities."

If she expected a gesture of defiance she was to be agreeably surprised, for John Crale sat down at his desk, took out a cheque book and wrote.

"I'm a business woman, Mr. Crale," she said. "I take no risks."

"Naturally." He did not look up from his writing.

"Of course, I shall require a full statement, but that will do later."

He tore out the cheque, wrote a few lines on a sheet of notepaper and passed both of them to her. She examined the cheque and frowned.

“Do you bank at Torquay?”

“Yes, I like the climate.”

His flippancy jarred, but she was a very relieved woman.

“I have distrusted you, Mr. Crale, ever since I saw you at an expensive restaurant six months ago with the young lady who was here when I came.”

Joshua Wendell’s mouth opened.

“Miss Mannering? Impossible! This is monstrous, monstrous! You’ve been living a double life.”

Crale smiled. “You’re understating the facts. I’ve lived a quadruple life, and three of them were perfectly delightful.”

He saw Wendell press his desk bell viciously and then Eileen came in. Joshua Wendell could be very dignified.

“Miss Mannering, you will go to the cashier and draw two weeks’ salary in lieu of notice.”

“She’s entitled to four weeks,” interrupted Crale.

Mr. Wendell shrugged his shoulders.

“Very well, you may have four weeks and I must ask you to be gone before I return.” And in dignified silence he escorted his aunt from the office. It was the last time that John Crale ever saw her. When they had gone Eileen turned to him.

“Why four weeks?” she asked.

“Every little helps,” he said. “Go and get it before he changes his mind.”

He opened the door for her and then returned to his desk, unlocked a drawer and took out a pad of banknotes which he put in his pocket. Stepping swiftly to the door of his private room he beckoned the waiting Bennett.

“Come in,” he said. “What does that wife of yours look like?” he asked, and the man was taken aback.

“I’ve got her photo on my passport.” He felt in his pocket and handed the book to John.

Crale looked at the photograph carefully.

“She’s rather pretty, too. Looks like any other pretty girl,” he mused. “And that’s your picture. If I took off my moustache I’d look rather like you, wouldn’t I?”

Bennett was bewildered.

“Why, yes, sir, you would in a way.”

Inside the passport were a number of folded papers and John

Crale could see that these were boat tickets. He put the book in his own pocket.

"Go to Scotland by the first train," he said rapidly. "I'll keep these as souvenirs. You need never mention the fact that I bought them." From his pocket he pulled a roll of notes. "Three thousand pounds," he said, holding it out, "and five hundred for luck."

Bennett stared at the money.

"I may want to use your passport and your tickets, for a poor friend of mine," Crale went on. "He's got himself into trouble. Well, he's not so poor, but the trouble is very real."

The man nodded slowly.

"I see. You can depend on me," he said.

"And keep straight," warned Crale solemnly. "Honesty is the best policy. Thieves make thieves. Good luck." He gripped the hand of the clerk and hustled him through the outer office. Eileen was waiting for him there.

"Angel," he asked in a whisper, "how d'you like the prospect of a long sea journey, steerage," and she smiled.

"That will be the Royal Suite, with you," she answered softly.

"Wait here, I'll get my hat," he said prosaically.

When he returned to his room Joshua Wendell was waiting for him. Mr. Wendell had been shown copies of some correspondence and he was very agitated.

"Crale, you posted a letter to Lady Murdoch last night, they tell me."

John Crale nodded curtly as he took his hat from the peg.

"Yes, I advised her to get another solicitor. I told her you were trying to rob her. So long!" He made for the door.

"Wait, please!" Joshua was almost frantic with anxiety. "I may want to get in touch with you. It's rather awkward that your bank is at Torquay. It's Good Friday tomorrow, and then Easter Monday . . . it will take four days to clear that cheque."

"I know," said John Crale.

---

Lucia looked at him sadly. "Is your skull so thick you can't see that your old life is finished for good?"

## Rex Dolphin

# THE LAST BANDIT

Rex Dolphin has been a freelance writer since 1931, when he was 16. He has specialized in hobby articles, short stories, and detective fiction of all lengths. He wrote several of the Sexton Blake novelettes which appeared between 1958 and 1963, and is the present Treasurer of the Crime Writers' Association.

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THE ancient bus ground to a standstill outside the café in the village square, its radiator shooting off steam-clouds, its whole shuddering body grateful for the temporary rest after the gruelling climb.

Pietro was the last passenger, the others had dropped off en route. They hadn't been much company anyway, he thought. He got out, wiped his forehead, and gazed deep down at the glassy Mediterranean. Somewhere over there was the mainland prison he'd left only that morning.

"Don't bother to come back, Pietro!" the warders had teased him. "We enjoy your company, but you really should get some air before you die!"

They were damned right, he wouldn't go back. Twenty years were enough out of any man's life, but for a man who lived for the wild open spaces, the confinement was worse than death. In fact he'd choose death if the choice had to be made again.

He turned slowly, taking in the bright market square and the dark alleys that stemmed from it, the grey huddled houses brightened by flower-decorated windows, the cobbled paving – then up, beyond the village, the *macchia*, the mountain scrubland which he and his fellow bandits had made their domain.



And where he intended to reign again . . .

But where were the people who should have come running from their houses, eager to welcome their old hero back?

He entered the café.

"A bottle of your finest champagne, garçon!" he said grandly. "And join me . . . celebrate . . . *voici* Pietro, returned from the living death!"

The proprietor reached indifferently for the bottle. "Which Pietro?"

Pietro strode across the boards, to where a twenty-year-old poster offered several thousand francs dead or alive for a lusty bandit in black cloak, coloured sash and bandoliers.

"That Pietro, garçon!" he thundered. "Now tremble."

The man started polishing a glass. "Sure, I recognize you. But Corsica has no use for bandits now. The nearest thing the village has is the young pickpocket Lorenzo. And it's part-time with him. Everybody works nowadays, even Lorenzo."

Pietro drank up. "I'll show them. Now where can I find Luigi?"

"Somewhere at the bottom of the Med."

"Tino, then?"

"Gone to Marseilles to keep a café. You'll find none of your old gang, they've all gone one way or another. Only Alberto is left, and he's the village *flic*."

Pietro chuckled. "I'll soon recruit new ones . . . Alberto . . . Lorenzo . . ."

"It's hardly likely. Alberto's a conscientious policeman. And Lorenzo is strictly a lone wolf."

"*Ventre bleu!* What's the matter with you people – lost your joy, your guts?"

"I'll tell you what we've lost. Fear. What you and your kind mistook for admiration –"

Pietro slammed down his glass. "I can't listen to such drivel! Where can I find Lucia?" At least Lucia would welcome him . . .

"At Gaston's store."

He went out into the strong sun, found the shop. Outside was a girl, arranging fruit in colourful pyramids. She was slim, long-legged, with a tanned, laughing-eyed face. He started towards her, then stopped. He was a big fool. This girl was no more than seventeen.

But the name "Lucia!" had already left his lips. The girl turned, and smiled. "I am Marietta. Lucia is my mother. She is inside."

Inside the store it was cool. There was a counter, a chubby man in spectacles, and a square dark woman. He realized with a shock that this was the girl who had shared the bandits' exploits twenty years ago.

"Lucia!" he said softly.

Gaston said: "We are pleased you are free, Pietro. Greetings. Now go, and leave us in peace."

"Let Lucia speak for herself!" said Pietro harshly.

"He does speak for me, Pietro. He is my husband."

"You said you'd wait for me," he reproached her.

Lucia shrugged. "I was lucky to find Gaston . . ."

"Now I'm back, it's going to be different – it's going to be as it was."

She looked at him sadly. "Is your skull so thick you can't see that your old life is finished for good?"

A weight was gathering on Pietro's shoulders. He raised his head. "Is the respected hero suddenly become a monster? The village gives me no welcome. *Eh bien*, I will do the honours myself and tonight there shall be a party at the café, and everyone will be welcome. After that, who knows?"

Evening came swiftly. Golden squares of light sprang up, and the night air was sweet with the wind from the mountains. Someone in the café started up with an accordion, then a guitar joined in, and a tenor voice in an old song.

Inside, noise and gaiety filled the air. Streamers, lanterns and party clothes gave colour to the café's usually drab interior. There were meetings and greetings, but mostly Pietro stayed at his table with Lucia, Gaston, Marietta and Lorenzo. It wasn't easy, renewing acquaintance with the villagers. He didn't seem to fit any more.

At odd moments he studied Lorenzo. So this was the one who had taken his place – this was what the old glory of banditry had descended to. Lorenzo was a thin youth with an insolent pale face. He sported an American-cut suit and had a mop of black, oiled and waved hair.

Lorenzo caught his eye, and said: "They tell me you used to run some kind of circus around here, Pietro. Do tell me about it . . ."

Pietro frowned at the insolence in Lorenzo's tone. "Young man, I was King of the Bandits, admired by the hill folk, feared by the police and the rich. We were the finest horsemen and pistol-shots in the island –"

Lorenzo leaned back, slit-eyed. "As I said, a circus. Very pretty. But what did you *do*?"

Pietro couldn't see that he was being baited. "We held up tourists, fought the police –"

"I see. Lots of horses and noise to cover up lack of guts and sense. You were bigheads, showoffs – a circus . . ."

Pietro gripped the table, as if he would overturn it on to the mocking young pickpocket.

"At least we acted like gentlemen, while you, Lorenzo, are just a dirty bug in the night."

Lorenzo murmured: "A bug, after all, relies on his own speed and wits."

Pietro fought to hold his anger. "That makes you the better man, eh?"

"You said it, Pietro."

"You think you could carry out an exploit like ours on your own?"

"Sure I could. Kids' play."

"I don't think you've got the *guts*."

Lorenzo licked his lips. "All right, bigshot, I'll take you on that."

Pietro stood up. His glare bit deep into the youth. He said harshly: "Succeed, and I'll take second place. Fail, and I'll boot you out."

"Big talk, old man!" Lorenzo yawned behind a pale hand. "Now quieten down. You're spoiling your party . . ."

Next day, Pietro packed food and climbed the mountain to his old retreat, a many-galleried cave hidden away behind the jungle-like undergrowth. He dozed, and the ghosts of his comrades came from the past. And he thought of Lucia and Marietta, and of Lorenzo who wanted Marietta . . . She was too good for a flea like him . . .

Towards nightfall he heard noises – the snort of a horse, and voices. He went to the front and looked out.

The riders appeared dimly through the screen of low trees, a man and a woman on one horse. Lorenzo and Marietta. Both looked tired, scared, dishevelled. Lorenzo wore a dusty black cloak.

They dismounted. Lorenzo looked sick as he stumbled forward. The girl put an arm around him and looked up at Pietro. She saw no help in his eyes.

She said urgently: "He's wounded, uncle. Do what you can for him. He is a big fool . . ."

The old bandit wasted no time. While Marietta took the horse away, he made Lorenzo sit down. He undid the youth's clothes with surprising gentleness.

"Ha! Only a little bullet. In the shoulder. I'll soon dig him out."

He got out a first aid kit. Marietta came back.

"Tell me what happened, Marietta, while I look for the bullet." The talking would help to take Lorenzo's mind off the pain of the probing.

Marietta said: "I told him he didn't have to do it to impress me. But he said he'd got to go through with the challenge. He stole a horse, made himself up with a big hat and a cloak and a handkerchief over his mouth, and held up a car-load of American tourists. But one of them drew a pistol, and another a camera. Lorenzo had a pistol but no ammunition, so he bolted."

Pietro's face, like that of an old lion, was close to Lorenzo's.

"Yesterday you talked about guts and sense. Today you act the fool and the chicken, and probably lead the police here. Now who is the better man, eh, *louse?*"

Lorenzo gritted his teeth. "Drop dead! But get that slug out first!"

Pietro grinned. "It's out . . . Now to dress the wound."

"O.K., Pietro, you win. I was a fool. I wouldn't have come if I'd known you were here. But Marietta said it was a good hide-out."

"It's too well known now. But it's a good job you did come, or who would have removed the bullet, eh? Now we must get away and disperse before the *flics* get here."

There was a cry from Marietta. "It's too late! See, down in the valley - lights and men and horses. They are already here!"

Pietro went out to the ring of rocks that protected the cave.

"You're right. But there is yet a chance. If we can hold them off till it's really dark and they can't see the cave, you two can get away by the mountain route. Find some beach and pretend you've been there all day."

"And you?" asked Lorenzo.

"Me?" grinned Pietro. "Like you said yesterday, a flea travels quicker on his own. I can look after myself. But we must protect Marietta at all costs."

Lorenzo's eyes met his. "Yes, that's all that really matters."

Pietro prepared his rifle and position. "Keep out of sight, you two. If they get me, take over the rifle, Lorenzo. Do not shoot to

kill. Just keep them off. Unfortunately they may not be so considerate . . .”

The sounds outside came nearer, and there was movement of shadows and lights in the middle distance.

A loudhailer carried Alberto's voice over the intervening distance. It said: "We know you are there. Come out with your hands up!"

Pietro said low: "He mentions no names. He doesn't know who it was. You still have a chance, Lorenzo."

He squeezed the trigger in a warning shot, deliberately aiming at a rock. so that the screaming ricochet should add strength to his message. The shadows dashed for cover.

There was red flame and a savage clatter as the police opened up with automatic rifles. The sharp bursts intermingled so that the bullets seemed to come in one continuous stream, chipping the rocks around the cave and whining away, some even finding their way through the narrow entrance.

Against this racket the single explosions from Pietro's rifle were hardly heard. Pietro took careful sight and fired low below one of the belching barrels. That gun stopped instantly, and for a few moments the enemy's fire was intermittent.

Marietta was crouched close to the ground near Pietro. Her eyes in the dim light were brave but troubled.

Pietro said: "They have good weapons. The chances of escape get less."

The girl trembled.

Suddenly the firing stopped. The silence was frightening.

A moment later the earth some yards in front seemed to blow apart, and the concussion threw them back against the cave floor. Debris, only half-seen, showered all around, and the mountain echoed and shuddered with the blast.

When the silence returned, with it came again the metallized voice of Alberto. "The next grenade will enter the cave. You have thirty seconds to decide whether to come out or to die."

Pietro looked at Marietta and Lorenzo stumbling to their feet, earth-begrimed, shaken, bruised, bewildered.

"Quickly, you two. Get into the back of the caves. You must pretend to be prisoners."

Lorenzo said: "No, Pietro, I die with you - fighting. Give me a rifle."

Pietro looked at him, then reached out his arms in an embrace . . . Suddenly the embrace turned into a rib-cracking hug -

and as Lorenzo fell back groaning, Pietro hit him once under the chin. Marietta looked at the old bandit in disgust. But Pietro knew what he was doing. Time was too valuable to be lost in argument. He dragged Lorenzo into the back of the cave.

There could not be many seconds left. And Alberto had always been a man of his word.

Pietro bellowed: "O.K., Alberto, I'm coming out. Hold your fire!" To Marietta: "Get back and look after him. Make like you are prisoners."

He walked out with his hands up, but proudly. The police closed in. They had torches. With Alberto were three from the town, and one of these was limping. Their weapons pointed at Pietro's middle.

Alberto said: "I might have guessed it was you, Pietro, you old fool."

Pietro said: "You used a lot of artillery against one helpless bandit. You could have done your worst, but I couldn't let you kill my prisoners."

The policeman looked at him hard, then went inside and fetched out a terrified Marietta and sick-looking Lorenzo.

The leader of the town gendarmes said to Pietro: "This afternoon there was a hold-up. We have traced the horse here. *Voici* a photo of the horse and rider. What have you to say?"

Pietro looked at the photo. It showed a blurred silhouette of a cloaked rider. He looked at it for a long time. He shrugged.

"Against that proof, and as you have traced the horse, what defence have I! Arrest me, officer."

"We already have. But as it's Alberto's territory let him do it officially."

Alberto said: "You are an old fool, Pietro."

Did he guess that Pietro was giving himself up for something he hadn't done, to save the girl who was his *daughter* and the man who would probably become her husband?

Pietro said: "Do your duty, Alberto. There comes a time for each man when he does what he knows to be right. This is the best way for me."

Marietta clung to him, tears filling her upturned eyes. "Oh, Uncle, I have known you for such a short time . . ."

Pietro looked down at her, and spoke rapidly in the local patois which only Alberto among the policemen would understand.

"Do not grieve for me, little one. Do not ask Lorenzo to prove

himself the better man by giving himself up. Hold on to him. Make something of him. He's had a lesson he won't forget, and his future as a bandit is finished.

"As for me, I am not too sad. There is no life for me in the village now. Perhaps you will do me the honour of visiting me in prison one day. And perhaps tonight, when you tell them, the village will remember me with gratitude instead of fear."

He turned to Alberto. "And you, my old comrade, please see that the newspapers make a big story of this, with great headlines saying: PIETRO RIDES AGAIN!"

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**Julian knew now that murder would be done. It was only a question of who struck first, and how . . .**

## **Jacques Pendower**

# **MRS. WEBBER'S PROFES- SION**

**Jacques Pendower was born and educated in Plymouth, and had his first story published at the age of 16. He served in the Army and Civil Service before he became a full-time author. Under his own name and that of "T. C. H. Jacobs", he has written over eighty novels, four non-fiction volumes of studies in Crime, numerous serials and short stories. His work has been filmed and broadcast. He is a member of the Press Club, the Paternosters, and the Studio, and was founder Treasurer of the Crime Writers' Association and its Chairman in 1960-61.**

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**T**HERE is something attractive, even endearing, in names with a smooth alliteration, like Julian Jordan Jones. The man who bore these names might have bathed in oil, his manner was so smooth. But there, any similarity of names and character ended abruptly.

Julian was tall and thin, with a lean, cadaverous face, large, bony hands and a slight stoop. His eyes were pale blue, hungry and enquiring, as befitted his peculiar occupation. He was employed by a firm of private detectives who were not too particular in the commissions they undertook. Being naturally a snooper and a man who could follow a trail with patient, dogged determination, he was one of their most reliable and successful agents.

It was the hot suspicions of a dead man's family which had brought Julian to live at the boarding house run jointly by Mr. and Mrs. Webber. It was here that the deceased had lived and died. The only legitimate cause for suspicion was the fact that Mrs. Webber – Belle to her friends – was the sole beneficiary to an estate valued at £20,000.

The relatives, who had visited the lodger during his short illness, and at considerable inconvenience to themselves, were definitely angered by his gross ingratitude. It is true they



hadn't bothered too much about him for some years. In fact, it was largely by chance they had discovered where he was living. But when they did locate him, and found him knocking on death's door, they didn't like the set-up at all.

As the cause of death had been duly attested by a highly respected, if somewhat aged medical practitioner, and the signature to the will witnessed by an equally respected solicitor, it was scarcely a matter, as yet, in which to ask the police to take an active interest.

So the disappointed and angry relatives had consulted Julian's firm of private enquiry agents, being quite sure some very odd business had been afoot when a hitherto remarkably healthy old man had folded up so quickly and with a mysterious and unsuspected heart complaint, leaving all his fortune to a stranger. That sort of money, they felt strongly, should have been kept in the family . . .

Green Shutters was a large, rambling house at the west end of the seafront, with a well-kept lawn and a tall white flagpole. Mrs. Belle Webber was delighted to welcome Julian as a paying guest for an indefinite period. Unfortunately, Mr. Webber was not very well, being confined to his bed with a serious gastric disorder. Julian said he hoped Mr. Webber would soon be recovered.

With his oily, ingratiating manner Julian was soon on good terms with the rest of the paying guests, mostly elderly ladies, who were inclined to accept people at their face value. He had, he explained, come into rather a large fortune and for the first time in his life was able to give himself a real holiday while he decided what he would do with so much money.

He spoke with great affection and tears in his eyes of his late wife and of a beloved son killed in a flying accident. He did it exceedingly well and the old ladies were full of sympathy for him. If Belle Webber's small eyes, of a similar pale blue to his own, were somewhat thoughtful and estimating when she regarded him, Julian seemed quite unaware of the fact.

Household duties kept Belle at home most mornings. But it was her habit on fine, warm afternoons to walk along the seafront. "Taking her constitutional" she called it. Certainly it seemed to do her good, because she was a woman in robust health, full of vigour.

Julian soon checked on this routine and, following his profession, snooped into Belle's bedroom, and the writing bureau which stood rather incongruously by her bed. An adept at picking

any kind of lock, he gained access to all her private papers.

What he discovered he found most interesting. Not the least of his discoveries were three insurance policies on the life of the sick Mr. Webber, each for £5,000, and a marriage certificate which revealed that Belle had been a widow at the time of her marriage to George Webber, only two years ago.

All his professional hunting instincts aroused, Julian thought it would be a smart idea to trace back on Belle's history. It was the kind of enquiry at which he was most accomplished. So he announced the following day that he had to visit his solicitors in London and might be away for a day or two.

He departed for the Yorkshire town in which Belle had married George Webber, armed with several good photographs of her which he had taken secretly at various times as opportunities had occurred. Photographs were always such a help in the tracking game when the trail was recent.

From the information he had gained from his perusal of Belle's private papers, and his own natural ability for snooping, Julian had no difficulty in piecing together Belle's history.

When he returned to Green Shutters he was in possession of a number of facts which he considered well worth the time and trouble the trip had taken.

Among other things, he had discovered that Belle had been a widow when she married her previous husband. So George was at least husband number three.

In addition, he learned that Belle was a qualified dispenser – a fact which he felt was of great importance. She had practically run the shop of the local chemist, who had had a reputation of being more wedded to whisky than his business. This may have been pure slander. Julian had had no chance to check, because the chemist was dead, having fallen into the river one dark and windy night. He had been grateful enough for Belle's assistance to leave her the business. But as this was heavily mortgaged she hadn't come out of it too well.

Julian now had enough information to report to his employers. However, his natural cunning warned him that a full revelation might be premature. So, instead of the carefully written and accurate statement of all his discoveries, he drafted and sent a report full of promise, but containing very little hard truth. He did not believe in slaying a job so pleasant and loaded with possibilities as this was proving to be . . .

Mr. Webber's health had deteriorated so rapidly and he was

now in such a grave condition that it was obvious to Julian the undertaker would shortly be calling. Actually, it came even quicker than he had calculated. Although he was full of admiration for Belle's nerve and technique, he did find himself wondering uneasily if this time she hadn't rushed her fences and was due for a very nasty fall.

However, he need not have worried. The same elderly and highly respected doctor had no hesitation in signing the death certificate, and George was given as nice a funeral as was consistent with the circumstances.

Quite naturally in a house peopled largely by old ladies it fell to Julian to be the support and comfort of the widow, who was almost prostrated with grief and received sincere sympathy from everyone who knew her. Julian admitted to himself that had he been just an acquaintance, without his inside knowledge, there was just a possibility he might have been hoodwinked by her grief and floods of tears.

Not that a women's tears distressed him unduly or kept him awake at night. The last woman he had blackmailed had cried bitterly, but she had found the £1,000 which was his price for silence. Being a careful, frugal man without any of the popular vices, he had banked the money with considerable satisfaction, because he hadn't really expected to get it. He still wondered how she had raised so much so quickly.

Julian found himself in something of a quandary. He could not make up his mind whether blackmail or marriage would be the more successful venture. He was not habitually against Holy Matrimony. He had made the venture three times already in three widely separated towns, and in three different names. Belle was a nice, plump, comely little woman, a good cook and thrifty housekeeper. And she had, he knew, large sums of money deposited in various banks . . .

In the end, after long and careful thought, he decided it would have to be marriage. He felt that a woman of Belle's cool, steely nerve might call his bluff if he attempted to put on the screw of blackmail. So he wrote a long report to his firm, who were getting rather impatient, and set about his courting of the widow with his characteristic thoroughness and smooth approach.

The insurance companies had written off the late lamented George as one of their bad risks and honoured their agreements to the total sum of £15,000, which was something Julian found very satisfactory.

Julian, for all his unprepossessing appearance, had the right approach to a lonely heart. But he did find it a trifle irritating when the object of his passion showed much more interest in his fortune and his prospects than in himself. The barrier of virtue she erected, too, was more than a little frustrating. However, he was a patient man and he continued with his courting, playing it soft and simple.

When at last he felt reasonably sure that he had hooked his fish he wrote a long report to his firm exonerating Belle from all suspicion and asking for his annual holiday of one month. If the firm's clients were more than disappointed there was nothing they could do about it except pay the substantial fees demanded and cut their losses.

By the time Julian's holiday had expired, he and Belle had so far progressed as to have anticipated some of the joys of marriage, and the wedding day was fixed. Here again Julian was in something of a quandary. Should he return to work, or resign his appointment? If he resigned it might look bad and, what was worse, he would be forced to draw on his savings. Six months would be long enough, but a lot of money could be spent in that time, especially as Belle was now revealing extravagant tastes which previously she had kept concealed.

Belle solved the problem for him when she said she wanted to move from a house and town which held so many sad memories for her. She thought she would like somewhere near London, which suited Julian admirably, because he had inherited a house at Sidcup from his mother, and it was here that he had lived, catering for himself, at such times as he was not travelling.

It wasn't a large house, or much of a house at all, but Belle agreed it would do until they found something more to her taste. Julian said he thought he would return to business again, if only for a short while.

He drove himself to the station each morning in an old Ford and left it in the station approach until he returned in the evening. As it happened, all the work he was asked to do following his marriage was in and around London. He had not, of course, mentioned his marriage to his employers. They preferred single men as agents. They were so much more mobile.

It wasn't long before Belle began to give rein to certain aspects of her character which grew to be a mounting annoyance to him. But he was a patient man, prepared to bide his time, like a vulture beside a body not quite dead.

Before their marriage they had wisely made wills; each named the other as sole beneficiary. Julian knew that it was now only a question of who struck first, and how. He had no doubt about who that should be. His problem was that he could think of no absolutely fool-proof scheme. He toyed with many ideas and rejected them all, seeing the loopholes for error and subsequent detection. Perhaps his detective training had made him too cautious.

It was a sheer accident which put him on the right track. Starting up the car one morning, he had forgotten to open the garage doors. He was able to get into the garage from the house and it was his practice to drive in and back out. The fumes from the ancient engine filled the small garage in a matter of a couple of minutes. When he came to open the doors he found the rusty bolt had stuck. It was only the timely arrival of Belle which had saved him from what could well have been a dangerous situation.

Julian thought quite a lot about that bolt. True it was rusty, but he could never remember it sticking before . . .

Anyway, he suggested to Belle that she ought to learn to drive, and she was enthusiastic. He paid for tuition, and in due course Belle passed her driving test and was entrusted with a licence to drive all types of motor vehicles.

The allotted six months had now elapsed and Julian was already heartily sick of Belle and her uncertain temper. The time had come.

The following week it was her birthday and Julian came home early to take her out to dinner in town. That morning he had bent the bolt on the garage door just a trifle more. He was all set to make his play for a fortune which he knew could not be less than £30,000, and was probably considerably more.

Julian spent a lot of good money that night. Having dined and wined his wife so well, he was feeling in very cheerful mood as they drove home from the station. He was still sucking the peppermint cream Belle had given him when he drove into the garage. As she had said, if a policeman stopped them, or they had an accident, they wouldn't want to be smelling of wine. She had taken one herself from the same box.

In Julian's pocket was a small bottle of knock-out drops which he intended to slip into Belle's nightly glass of hot milk. Harry the Horse had assured him they were quite odourless and tasteless and the real quick sleep medicine. No one would see him carry her out to the car.

It was as he opened the car door to get out that he was aware of a peculiar weakness in his legs. If Belle had not seized him and held him behind the wheel he would have fallen. He opened his mouth to scream for help, but only a husky rasp came from his throat. Even that might have been his fevered imagination . . .

He was aware that Belle was searching his pockets and he saw Harry the Horse's small bottle in her hand. But his body refused to function, even though his brain was all too alert, filled with a hideous certainty.

"Too bad, Julian darling," said Belle, and kissed him fondly on the cheek before she switched on the engine and eased out the choke. She closed the garage doors and pushed in the defective bolt. Then she waved to him as she went out through the side door into the house and softly closed it after her.

It was a sad affair. Belle admitted to the police that they had been celebrating her birthday and were both a little high. She had felt sick and gone into the house, never dreaming that her beloved Julian was still in the car with the engine running. Yes, it was true she had shut the garage doors. She always did, getting out of the car in the drive, seeing it into the garage and then walking through into the house. No, she had not noticed that the engine was running. If she had, she would certainly have warned Julian. But she was feeling so sick that she had wanted to get to the bathroom and hadn't really taken notice of anything.

The police were sympathetic, touched by the widow's grief. Discreet enquiry had established that they lived on good terms. There was no life assurance and no obvious motive. Quite the contrary. So it went in the book as just one of those unfortunate accidents.

It did not take Belle long to discover how outrageously she had been deceived by the perfidious Julian. She was quite shocked by such heartless, criminal deceit. But, of course, the bottle of knock-out drops had already roused unpleasant suspicion. She knew now that she had been lucky in striking when she did. All the same, she was shocked that she could have been so cruelly deceived.

She was more shocked when a partner in her late husband's firm called, asking for certain office keys which had been in Julian's possession.

The partner knew what Belle did not: that Julian's suitcase contained a false bottom designed to secret documents or other objects when the occasion demanded. The case did, in fact, belong to the firm. The caller found the keys, certain bank deposit books

for amounts which astonished him, and the full report which Julian had drafted so long ago, before he had decided what he would do about Belle, marry or blackmail. Being such a cautious man he had kept the report. One never knew. He might one day have needed it.

The partner, having read the report, turned it over to the Metropolitan Police, who did some discreet investigating. The next time they called on Belle they were not nearly so sympathetic.

Not having used a gun or offensive weapon in her profession, Belle was not charged with capital murder, which carried the death penalty.

But she found reason to congratulate herself on having made such a careful study of mental illnesses at the time when she had contemplated gaining control of her first husband's estate by having him certified as insane. (A car accident had, however, saved her taking that particular risk.)

Three learned psychiatrists, on the orders of the Home Office, examined Belle and declared her to be a person of diminished responsibility, who was unable to tell the difference between right and wrong, and therefore could not be held fully responsible for her actions.

So Belle was sent to Broadmoor, where, if she played it right, she could count on release as a person restored to normal sanity within three or four years.

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## Nigel Morland

# EDGAR WALLACE, THE PHENO- MENON

Connoisseurs of crime fiction will need no introduction to Nigel Morland and his unique detective character, Mrs. Pym. Recently, on the occasion of Edgar Wallace Limited's 30th Anniversary celebration at London's Park Lane Hotel, I had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Morland. Now, in this special article for readers of EWMM, Nigel Morland records his memories of the late Edgar Wallace in writing. And he tells, too, the story of Mrs. Pym's creation . . .

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CRIME writers seldom come alive for their readers. Their books may be popular, and their personal lives may earn them occasional headlines.

But as people they are seldom heard of; affection and devoted public interest are things they seldom achieve.

With, of course, the agreed exception of Edgar Wallace.

It is possible there has never been another writer in this century who could truly vie with film stars in terms of personal popularity. In his heyday, one could walk along Piccadilly with Edgar Wallace and from almost every other passer-by would come the inevitable: "Hi, Edgar". On any English race-course it generally seemed as if everybody had the same ready greeting: "Good old Edgar!"

Nothing quite like it has ever happened before, or since. One went in his company as one walked with a king - no, an international film star because not everybody knows the faces of kings.

Edgar Wallace was that rare great man whose talents were not only large but one whose personality matched his fame and, rarest of all, whose presence equalled both.

You could never ignore him. His jaunty attitude to life, his smile, and, somehow, his spiritual *bigness* made him the focal point of any gathering.



More than that, you were attracted to him before he had said a word. Your eyes were drawn to him all the time he was near you. You found him irresistible, for here was not only a brilliant and important man, and a famous one, but (which the sensitive always instinctively knew) a very good and a very kind man.

He had his faults . . . which was just as well, the perfect man being revolting to all ordinary souls. He enjoyed his fame – and who would not in his place? – and he had his moments of being awkward. Yet there was never any real unpleasantness about him, no matter what the mood.

\* \* \*

Time and distance, it is maintained, enchant the view of a dead man. It is also something of a truism that the dead slowly grow over the years from their sometimes dull, possibly mean or petty selves, into memories capable of competing with the nearest archangel. Edgar died in 1932, which suggests that recollections must obviously be unreliable, and over-coloured.

I would deny that in what I am writing now. Being an iconoclast, I have also the power of total recall which, together, would tend to make my portrait of Edgar Wallace a real one.

I first knew him when he became a family friend at the time I was small boy in 1915, and he remained so until the day of his death. In all that time, and with so many things connected with him in mind, it seems quite impossible to fault him in any serious fashion. He certainly did not possess the feet of clay which so many modern biographers love to reveal about *their* subjects.

It is perfectly certain that none of us today who write crime stories can hope to equal his record of fame. It did not, which is so remarkable, die when he died.

This is not criticism. But many headline writing names usually fade at their deaths with varying displays of fireworks. This applies particularly to crime writers, despite the apparent security of their reputations while they are still alive. Ten years after they are dead, they are usually difficult to recall.

Edgar was free of such a thing. He died at the height of his fame when his name was one known even in the remotest backwoods, and he died over thirty years ago.

And what has happened since? Book reprints, films, television plays – there has been a steady reissue of his material for all this time, and he is still the unforgettable Edgar Wallace. Adults

unborn when he died know his name as well as their own. There is hardly a living Anglo-Saxon who has not read something he wrote, or, having read nothing at all, is quite convinced that this is not so by some peculiar osmosis, which makes him at some time or other a part of their lives even if only for a brief moment.

Admitted I am an aficionado of Edgar Wallace. I am quite outrageously partisan, and given to an extravagant admiration.

And why not? It is not often in a lifetime that a man can know another man who can command his entire devotion and appreciation, and be entirely worthy of it and more.

\* \* \*

Objectionable as the constant use of the first person singular must be, recollection is quite impossible without it. And when, as a child, I first knew Edgar it never registered on me what a writer was – his books meant nothing, and though I had seen him often enough on family visits, he was just another adult. He remained so until he gave me a copy of *Sanders of the River* which was not even looked at for a year. It was read at first desultorily, and then feverishly.

There will probably never again be that same exciting thrill of complete identification with a book and its creator. Sanders, and those in the story, were alive and four-square in my mind. The vague grown-up Edgar suddenly became a real person, larger than lifesize, wonderfully romantic. He never failed to sustain that high level in the years I was to know him: he was as gripping a being on the last occasion that I saw him as he was on that day when I went to his flat with my Mother, my eyes blinded with the colour of Sanders and his world.

From that day there was never a word of Edgar's I did not read (and still re-read). It is difficult to say if it was a personal thing, or if it was Edgar's quality as a writer, but it has always been impossible *not* to be thrilled by Edgar Wallace. Admitted this is a newspaper reviewer's phrase; nevertheless, it is true. The faults, the patches of bad writing, the errors or even, at times, the trite plots – they are unimportant flaws. It is there – the excitement, the fun, the warmth and blazing vitality, in everything he wrote.

Perhaps it can be summed up that in some way the reader and Edgar Wallace in some fashion identify themselves with each

other: they become inseparable in a form of abstract yet real enjoyment.

Obviously enough in the child's imitative fashion, I decided to become a writer. The first achievement was a wild and woolly "novel" of eight hundred words called *Jack o' Justice* (the inspiration for that cannot be far to seek!). Even my Mother, that hopelessly biased critic, thought it was quite shocking.

Next came a short poem about a film star of the time which a periodical called *Picturegoer* bought for five shillings, and published. Edgar could not have been more proud than if it had been his own.

His advice and suggestions became constant. His taste in books was old fashioned – from Charles Dickens to the Old Testament – and these he ordered me to read (and always books about people, never about things).

The chance of a cub-reporter's job in China came along, together with the opportunity of seeing the world, something no intelligent teenager would miss.

It was out there, with the encouragement I got in Edgar's letters, that I got down to writing . . . and such writing!

Stories and poetry were turned out endlessly, together with perhaps hundreds of articles – possibly vigorous but always over-dogmatic and extremely ill-informed. There was not a publication in English in the Far East which did not at some time or another publish me.

My conceit grew with my output. Edgar was thought of at times in that patronising fashion peculiar to the young when climbing too fast.

When I came home again, and duly went to see him in that well-remembered flat in Clarence Gate Gardens, I took along a mass of cuttings of my writings and sailed in on him – and still wriggle to think of it – smoking a cigarette in a longish holder not unlike, I will swear, one conquering hero meeting another.

\* \* \*

The gradual way Edgar's always-expressive eyebrows rose as he poked through those cuttings, and read some of them, is quite unforgettable.

He spoke briefly and, for him, severely, and put me deftly in my place, which did me a vast amount of good. He told me I was

writing complete tripe, that I should be written out in another year, and that I should be ashamed of myself for imagining such nonsense was even fit to be called writing.

He also told me I could come and learn things with him. I was to use a small room across the passage during this phase.

Perhaps going back to school was unpleasant (chiefly for that swollen ego); but the lessons have remained. Over the next year or two I sent him this or that writing, and struggled at turning out the Great British Novel.

It could not have been long before he died that he relented, perhaps deciding I was in some way purged of my earlier grossness.

His exact words were many and an attempt at verbatim quotation would be unwise. The sum of his suggestions was that I could indeed be a writer, if I marked time. The enthusiasm was there, and the power to entertain: the basic quality and the very necessary self-discipline were absent. Also, I was always inclined to over-write (a fault still apt to plague me).

Mark time for five years or so, was the key. Write nothing important other than exercises; learn everything possible, for all good writers are magpies. Read, and read, and *feel* the personalities in what you are reading.

His further point was that I should follow him in a writing category. I could make a fair thriller writer. But first the stipend of no real writing.

"You might," he said and these words are unforgotten, "try your hand at a detective novel. About . . ." and here he brooded, "yes, about a Scotland Yard detective. Middle-aged, heavy, strong, called – let us say – Pym." He paused here and his eyes were mischievous. "No, *her!* Why not a middle-aged lady at Scotland Yard, a real old battle-axe . . . you know, I think I'm sorry I'm giving this to you . . ."

There was more advice, in that generous open-handed way of his in which he gave people what they needed – advice, help, kind, or money; he always gave.

His final words were to the effect that if I kept to my writing Sabbatical, I would in about five years find I could turn out my first detective story. The first publisher who saw it would take it and I would have a profession for life. In that unfailingly psychic way of his, he was right.

The book was written three years after his death, with the violent title of *The Moon Murders*.

In it Mrs. Pym, of Scotland Yard, sprang fully-armed and

panoplied into roaring life. Once she got into the story she stayed there and took over everything in sight.

It went to Desmond Flower, of Cassell's. He bought it at once, and it began a close personal friendship that has lasted ever since. He still continues to publish Mrs. Pym.

But that first novel was very much a first novel, with all the faults and failings multiplied. Desmond Flower saw those but also saw – as one of the shrewdest of living publishers – what Mrs. Pym would become in time.

Nevertheless, the book could have died comparatively unknown, for the way of first novels was as hard then as today. The short cut to earlier notice was Howard Spring. In *The Evening Standard* he penned quite the rudest (and clearly well deserved) criticism I have ever seen. He tore *The Moon Murders* into small pieces, and hinted he did not like the pieces, either. The Editor must have been impressed, too, by such vitriol because he published the criticism under its own news-head.

It got Mrs. Pym a lot of sympathetic attention which could have waited for years. The short cut also gained me many friends. And I was so damned mad that I was determined to write well, even if it killed me.

That remains a matter of opinion. The salutary treatment was the finest thing in the world for a young novelist. It got the hardest knocks over at the beginning, taught the virtues of being wary of the world's opinion, and rubbed it in that writing demands everything one has at all times – a thing easy to forget.

This is getting a long way from Edgar Wallace.

The only return, small as it is, I have ever been able to make to his shade, has been in each edition of Mrs. Pym published for the first time in a foreign land, to dedicate the initial title to Edgar. The phrasing is always the same, in English or any other tongue: in memory of Edgar Wallace, best of friends and counsellors, who originally outlined the character of Mrs. Pym for me.

There was one other piece of advice he gave me, and in thirty years he has not been wrong, so far as I am concerned. This was to stick to melodrama in crime stories, to turn out larger-than-lifesize yarns because Mrs. Pym, as he had limned her, was big enough to go with showy adventures.

It was his firm opinion that many critics and reviewers, who, in general, favour true-to-life mystery stories, would most of the time be rude or patronizing to me (a not untrue prophecy!) but

by sticking firmly to a melodramatic last, I would always find a large and loyal public would provide my bread and butter.

So far he has not been wrong in a single thing he said to me.

Which, with all the remarkable things about him, makes it no surprise that a thriller writer – dead for so long – is still head and shoulders above his kind writing today . . . yes, even above the sacred James Bond, who will certainly be forgotten before this century is over.

But not, I will stake my reputation, Edgar Wallace.

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# LETTERS

## LIKES AND DISLIKES

Dear Sir,

Congratulations on the first issue of your magazine.

I should like to see more work by Arthur Kent and Rex Dolphin. However, I was under the impression that this was to be a short story magazine, and did, therefore, find the Wallace and Hansen contributions too lengthy.

No doubt you shall come across many small snags, but I am sure you and your team will continue to turn out a pleasing magazine.

*Mr. G. A. Gildea, 1 May Road, Glenburn, Paisley, Scotland.*

## SATISFIED

Dear Sir,

I would like to say how much I enjoyed the first edition of EWMM. Every single story and novelette was first class, and I look forward to receiving my future copies.

I wish the magazine the best of luck.

*Mrs. J. Donald, School House, Bond Road, Mitcham, Surrey.*

## PREFERENCE

Dear Sir,

The magazine will have my support in preference to others as long as you use no serials and any reprints are of rare material only.

*Mr. Trevor Parry, 85 Bromfelde Road, Clapham, London, S.W.4.*

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**A ruthless killer stalked Birch City. Who was he? And who would be his next victim? Even Scotland Yard's Mrs. Pym was baffled . . .**

## **Nigel Morland**

# **CYANIDE CITY**

**"The mantle of Edgar Wallace seems to have fallen on Nigel Morland. He wears it with a jaunty style of his own."**

- New York Times

**". . . To me that is quite the highest possible compliment."**

- Nigel Morland

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**A**S the crime man on the *Birch City Star*, I had been assigned to meet Mrs. Pym, and was on hand with the civic reception awaiting her at the depot.

Here in upper New York state we have a thriving little town with a rising population of twenty thousand, and several local industries. Any visitor driving along Main Avenue gets a good impression of an up-to-date community with money to spend.

That warm October morning, with the trees a red and gold panorama right across the county to Ogdensburg, we were on our toes to make it a great occasion. It had been Brod Peyton's idea. Being our chief of police, Brod also had a brother in New York City in the Mayor's office who had passed along the word about the official visit of Assistant Commissioner Mrs. Pym, of Scotland Yard.

Brod is all for putting Birch City on the map. Through his brother he asked Mrs. Pym to pay us a visit. I daresay she was tickled at the invitation, and promised us three days. From there the community took over . . .

That same morning, just before dawn, an unknown caller telephoned police headquarters. Brod and a patrol car went roaring out to Dona-

hue's Tavern on the Niagara Turnpike, and there they found Marie Paluzzi dead in a private room.

It was the biggest sensation we'd had in years. Just how big we never figured . . . until Mrs. Pym blew it to larger than life-size.

\* \* \*

When the New York train came to a stop, we got our first look at her.



Stolid and solid, she wore good English tweeds and a hat so crazy it would have thrilled a psychiatrist. Her face was strong and her blue-gray eyes implacable. She looked as if chewing her way through concrete walls was her idea of fun, but her personality seemed to hit you with a whack like a wooden stake. She was tough and feminine at the same time. You could see just why Londoners were crazy about her and the British newspapers followed her smallest move.

Once we got her into the private reception room at the Main



Avenue Hotel, she wrapped us around her pinky and we loved it.

Fat little Brod Peyton, spruce in his blue and gray police uniform, did the honours. He toted this gray-haired English-woman around the local socialites, then finally he and I got her alone in a corner – Brad as her official host, and me as the Press.

After watching her all the time, I learned she was quite a girl. Being the top London cop, and the only female detective with high executive rank at Scotland Yard, she obviously had brains. She was also big enough to have time for what must have seemed to her a bitsy little place like Birch City.

“Now we’ve told you all about our town, and how real proud we are to have you with us,” Brod explained with the beguiling smile that pleased her as much as it did every woman, “we hope you’ll enjoy your stay, ma’am. We’re still sort of dazed you could stop off to visit with us.”

“Wondering why I came to a small American town?” Her level eyes were suddenly friendly. “I was sick of the noise and the junkets in New York. I wanted to see ordinary people in an average nice town. It’s that simple, Chief.”

“Gosh!” Brod was beaming. “Get that, Eddie?” He saw I was making notes. “You won’t mind Eddie Kohler, ma’am? He’s young, but they think a lot of him on the *Star*.”

“I like reporters; I was one myself, in my early days.” She leaned forward so abruptly we were startled. “What’s all this about a murder?”

“Marie Paluzzi? But . . .”

“Don’t be startled, Chief. I got a paper when we stopped at Albany. Local lovely butchered, wasn’t it? Dancer with plenty of money, or a way of collecting it?”

“I’ll say!” Brod winked at me, just to tell me how swell everything was turning out. “Our first murder since the war. We’re stuck right at the beginning . . . ma’am . . . say, you wouldn’t *consider* . . . no, it’s crazy!”

“Tagging along with you? Ask me. I’m a vain old party, and if Eddie keeps me in the headlines I’ll be happy. Let me help to run things my own sweet way, and we should have the thrills of a lifetime.”

It was so good I beat it back to the office with my copy in my head. My editor went one better. One of the *Star*’s rare special editions hit the streets an hour later, spreading the news with crisis-size headlines.

Marie's death was certainly murder. She had money, prospects, and a fixation to make the big time in New York City. Suicide was ruled out, but who had been with her in that private room at Donahue's nobody claimed to know.

Doc Marvin did the autopsy. He found she had been fed cyanide in a gelatine capsule. It melted when it got to her stomach, killing her within minutes.

It was as simple as that. There was no motive, no suspect and no lead. Lean, ornery Jack Donahue, the nearest thing we had to a big shot in the locality, had been away when it happened and could prove it.

There was a conference at Brod's office in headquarters that afternoon. Mrs. Pym was there, and Brod was behind his desk. On the other side in the easy chair was seated Lester Benedict, the best local lawyer. Handsome, charming, and heavily built, Les was our most eligible bachelor. That pink tip to his nose was not dyspepsia, though only Brod and I knew just how big a secret soak Les was, not that outsiders ever realized how much liquor he drank a day. I was present as well. For some reason I had come to be accepted as Mrs. Pym's sidekick: she didn't mind, and it suited me fine.

"There's not much more about Marie I can tell you," Les was saying. "I handled that dancing contract of hers with Donahue. She's got about five thousand in the Birch City National Bank, and," he drooped an eyelid at us, "a way of prying dollars from the wad of any man, with one exception."

Brod stared in astonishment.

"You wouldn't mean Bernard Flecker Laffan?"

"Certainly." Les bowed to Mrs. Pym. "Our local tycoon. Owns most of the factories, the bank, and half the real estate. His father founded Birch City, and Laffan's just turned eighty; he'll make the century for sure."

"H'm. And he's mean?"

Les Benedict nodded and Brod whistled gently.

"Close as paper on a wall. Must be worth all of fifty million dollars. He lives alone on Blucher Heights in a gingerbread mansion, filled with every last bit of rubbish. Got one relative, John Laffan."

"The town idler, ma'am," Brod added. "Nobody knows how he lives. Just trails around, or props up walls. Old Laffan never speaks to him, but he has enough money to live an easy life. He rooms with Mrs. Parker, on Maple Street."

"Bernard Laffan liked Marie Paluzzi in a queer way," Les explained. "When he looked in at Donahue's for a soda pop once a month, he sat in the spectator gallery with the teenagers and that was his idea of a wild night, Mrs. Pym. Marie always made a dead set for him. She tried every trick in the book to make him loosen up. She never succeeded, but I think the old devil likes a trier."

"That doesn't help me." Mrs. Pym studied her hands. "Unless you mean Laffan fed her poison?" Her eyes glinted at the shocked silence. "Treading on toes, am I? Sorry. Could it be a love affair?"

Les shook his head definitely. "The only man she ever looked at twice was any of the tellers at the National Bank."

Brod chuckled; Lester Benedict seldom made jokes.

"He's right, ma'am. Money and nothing else counted with Marie. Maybe it was some sucker she'd swindled?"

"Possibly," I put in my two bits' worth, just to let them know I was there. "Or some man's wife after revenge?"

"Take a capsule from a woman!" Mrs. Pym was scornful. "The Maries of this world aren't crazy, Eddie. Somebody fed the capsule to her and that somebody was a man. Thing is, what do we do next?"

"That's your worry," Les told her, getting up. "Our city has its eyes on you, ma'am. You'll have to deliver, or Scotland Yard will smell in these parts!" His broad smile took any offence from the remark.

"I've cracked tougher ones." She looked around. "An old Limey battle-axe showing off? You never can tell."

Les waved.

"I'll get along, then. Eddie, I think you said you wanted some background material on Marie for your Sunday edition? Step around to my place tomorrow at nine on the nose, and I'll show you my files. Be prompt. I'm due at the Rotary at ten. Be seeing you all."

\*

\*

\*

I went with Mrs. Pym to check Marie Paluzzi's room at a place outside town. There was nothing to help us, just a bijou apartment prettied up by a smart decorator. There was a mutation mink stole and a Kolinsky jacket in the closet, which Mrs. Pym said were worth money. There were no personal effects worth any attention.

All the way back to Main Avenue in my battered old Chrysler, Mrs. Pym was irritable.

"Here am I, visiting queen of Birch City, and at the moment I haven't an idea. Somebody's going to laugh, and it won't be me."

"It's early, ma'am." I glanced at her strong profile: a day with her and I was beginning to learn why this tough lady was so likeable. "You'll crack it."

"Loyal cuss, aren't you, son – hullo, this looks like excitement."

It did. The ancient headquarters' building had almost every light on. Our collection of prowl cars were all parked nose to tail in front.

Brod Peyton's office was a madhouse, but he took time out to make us welcome.

"Glad to see you folks. Hell's loose. A patrol car out on Blucher Heights contacted us. He's lying out on his front lawn – Bernard Flecker Laffan."

"Dead, you mean?" Mrs. Pym asked.

"Sure thing, and a typical cyanotic contortion. The doc's going to say it's cyanide!"

## 2

MRS. PYM and I sat in the back of Chief Peyton's own car in the race through the warm night towards Laffan's home, a matter of two miles from Main Avenue. The low moon in the cloudless sky made a swell pattern of light and shade out of Birch City.

The Heights were no more than a couple of low hills, an elaborate real estate development filled with modern Virginia Colonial and ranch-type homes. The Laffan residence had been the first house there, a beat old hodge-podge in the showy style favoured at the time when Bernard Flecker Laffan's father founded our town.

It had gone to seed now, but it still looked solid and cosy, even with the owner sprawled out in the centre of the tatty front lawn.

When we stopped, Mrs. Pym headed towards Laffan's corpse. It was guarded by the big bulk of officer Walt Swenson whose son, George, started out with me the same day that I went to work on the *Star*.

She nodded after one look at Laffan.

"You couldn't go wrong, diagnosing a death like that; any

first-year medical student could work it out. The cyanide man, or whoever it is, at work again?"

It stuck in my mind. I fled over to the next lot where the Korders lived, and made use of their telephone. Re-write argued with me from the office when I'd dictated the story, but accepted my notion we should dub the killer "The Cyanide Man". It would make a mighty impressive scare-head.

Doc Marvin was on his knees beside the body when I got back. He was talking to Brod Peyton.

"Could be a poison capsule at that, Chief. He certainly did not drink the stuff straight. The autopsy will tell."

"This is trouble." Brod's voice was mournful. "First that dancing girl, and now the richest man in town. There'll be trouble, and before you know it Albany will be nosing around, pulling the state capital stuff on us all."

Mrs. Pym's sniff was mild.

"Trouble's always been my business; I'll try being a bossy Limey visitor if Albany worries you, Chief. Let's take a look in the house."

It was a dump, a real dump. Newspapers going 'way back were stacked in every corner; coiled string, wrapping paper, old clothes - it looked and stank like a junk shop. With fifty million dollars in the bank, Laffan had clung to every last bit of refuse that had come his way. And had never dusted any of it since the sinking of the *Maine*.

\* \* \*

Birch City was in a ferment the next morning. The *Star* sold out for the first time since it broke the news of Hiroshima. There were knots of people talking on every corner along Main Avenue, and in most of the downtown business section.

At her orders, I was waiting for Mrs. Pym at her hotel when she came out from breakfast at nine o'clock. She looked trim and dangerous, and matched her mood with another crazy hat I promptly blueprinted in my mind. It would be something for Lassie Jukes, our social page editor, to write up when I got to the office.

"Morning, Eddie. I saw your story in the *Star*. The picture of me looks like the wrath of God in a blackout, but I've seen worse." I took this as praise. "I may be Scotland Yard's shining light, but at this moment I feel dim. Do you make a habit of wholesale murder in Birch City?"

I eased down in the chair facing her in a corner of the lobby.

"Oh, sure, once a week –" She looked sour at my play for laughs. "Sorry. The last one was 'way back when . . . this is a peaceful community."

"So it seems. We'll get along to headquarters and see what's doing."

Ferment had also hit police headquarters. We have about the same crime rating and police strength as most other cities of our size. With two murders so quickly the result was chaos.

Brod Peyton was knee deep in trouble; he also had got his wish granted to put Birch City on the map. The murders, and Mrs. Pym's hat in the ring, had got headlines in many of the New York City papers. By noon out-of-town visitors began streaming in, plus some visiting reporters, which added up to traffic jams – Main Avenue was lined with parked cars.

Brod stared beseechingly at Mrs. Pym across his desk when we entered his office.

"I told you we had trouble!" He waved to Conk Pettigrew at his side, our local Homicide brass. "Conk's stuck, along with me."

"And if Scotland Yard was ever on trial, this is it." Mrs. Pym sounded cheerful – the worse the situation, I learned, the merrier her disposition became. "Is that right what they told me at breakfast, that you can't find John Laffan?"

"The old man's heir? If he's in Birch City, then he's hiding." Brod waved defensively. "It wasn't my idea, this general alarm. I've known John since he was knee-high, and he wouldn't do murder. But he's heir to fifty million, and you know how people figure these things."

"He *is* the heir, then?"

"Sure. Old Laffan's lawyer spoke to me from Ogdensburg this morning. The will was made ten years back."

"It's probably a psycho, if it isn't John," Conk Pettigrew told us.

Mrs. Pym's grunt was loud.

"That's wishful thinking! Eddie, here, invented that label, the Cyanide Man – it's good newspaper stuff, but I won't subscribe to any psychopathic solutions. It's fancy psychiatric stuff, to avoid real thinking. There's something clever at the bottom of this – for example, why capsules?"

Brod looked intrigued.

"We've got a line on that. Marie Paluzzi used to take those

medicated oil capsules every night – fixes your inside, or something. We found the box in her room. Two genuine capsules and one containing cyanide, in the drug store box.”

“It still doesn’t follow.” Her mouth looked obstinate to me. “Did Laffan take them, too?”

“Maybe so.” Brod shrugged. “Not that anything’s come to light in his home, yet.”

“A tightwad like that wouldn’t waste money on special capsules. No,” Mrs. Pym shook her head, “in some way those capsules are a big part of the secret. Come along, Eddie; we’re going to visit Doc Marvin.”

\* \* \*

The doc had been with us since the beginning of time. I knew him all my life, as did many of us in Birch City. His familiar office was at the far end of Main Avenue, over Hormel’s grain store.

He swung round from his worn roll-top desk when we went in, a perky little man with a face seamed like a dried apple.

“Howdy.” He waved us to chairs. “If it’s Laffan you’ve come to ask about, Mrs. Pym, it’s Marie Paluzzi all over again. He died around midnight; that’s all I know.” His brown eyes were bright and friendly. “I have a notion you’ll crack this one for us.”

“Thank you. My name will stink if I don’t. Doctor, suppose you tell us about the poison? I know, but you can refresh my memory and Eddie will be glad of it.”

“Cyanide? He can turn up the types in a medical dictionary. It’s a general protoplasmic poison, Eddie, swiftly absorbed by the mucous membranes. It’s even toxic when it’s inhaled – hell, boy, you can look it up in your library.”

“Why capsules?” I asked him.

“The victim won’t know what’s happening, if you can get him to take one. The poison doesn’t act till the capsule disintegrates inside.”

Mrs. Pym grimaced. “They would be easy for anyone to make up?”

“Easy, once you have the ingredients. With a hypodermic and some care, you could fill ordinary gelatine capsules and seal the entry hole with a warm needle. Care’s the chief need, ma’am.”

“I thought so.” She held out one hand and stared at it as if it was a crystal ball. “I’ll say this isn’t the end of it all.”

“You mean, there’ll be more killings?” My voice went into the upper registers on the question.

“I’m convinced of it. Thank you, Doctor, you’ve been very kind.”

\* \* \*

The rest of that day we trailed around on ordinary routine. Mrs. Pym had another look at Marie Paluzzi’s apartment, and she spent an hour in Laffan’s house, digging through the dust and dirt of years. I left her to it; there was my feature article for the Sunday edition to get written.

At a quarter of nine that evening I suddenly recalled my date with Lester Benedict, and made it to his house in Willow Valley a minute ahead of time.

There was a light in his study. When no-one answered my ring on the doorbell, I went in through the open garden window; Les would have no objections. He had asked me to call, and he had known me since I was a boy.

The room looked empty. The desk was covered with papers. There was a half-empty bourbon bottle and a dirty glass on one side. It amused me: Les soaked it up like a dry sponge, and I imagined when he turned up he would be in his evening condition of semi-drunkenness.

If he was, he had obviously gone out and forgotten. I went through the house, where he lived alone. It struck me I had made a timing error, and he was already on his way to the Rotary. I went back to the study, and stepped around his desk towards the telephone, and there he was, flat on his back.

Even then I thought he was sick. He was breathing heavily when I bent over him, and an empty whisky bottle in the wastebasket was convincing.

Something made me take a good sniff at his mouth – it was clamped so tight I couldn’t open it, but I got his top lip back.

Chief Peyton came on the line almost as soon as I finished dialling his personal number.

“Brod? This is Eddie. I’m at Les Benedict’s house. Brod, I think it’s another cyanide case – and he’s still alive!”



## 3

AN hour later the Benedict home was still busy with police. Brod had come out in a fast car, bringing Doc Marvin with him, and a stomach pump. Doc shook his head when he came down from Les's bedroom in his shirt-sleeves, and lit one of his favourite stogies.

"Fast work, Eddie. Les is in a bad way, but I guess we can save him. How he stayed alive beats me."

"It's cyanide?" Brod asked.

"Certainly is. He's been washed out, and loaded with atropine, ether, brandy, and glucose. With plenty of warmth, and the luck of the devil, he *may* be saved."

"Les Benedict? Darn it!" Brod exploded this time. "He *knew* about the capsules and the Cyanide M— *poisoner*. Why did he have to take a capsule? Why, nobody in Birch City will ever touch a capsule again!"

"Les did." Doc rubbed his nose. "We'll straighten him out, I daresay. It'll be a miracle and I'll be darned if I don't do a medical article on it."

Conk Pettigrew, over by the window, made a gesture.

"And how does that help Homicide, Doc? I want the guy who did it. Can't Les talk a minute for me?"

"He's unconscious, and that's the way I want him. You shall know when he can talk, *if* he does."

Mrs. Pym came in just then, bleak as a winter night in Maine. She nodded heavily when the story was told.

"He's lucky, but if he can't talk he's no use to us. You made any progress, Chief?"

"I'm stuck. We're all stuck, ma'am. If we could find John Laffan it might help. But while I could figure him killing old Laffan, just what could he have against a lawyer and a dancing girl?"

"I've got a sort of a funny notion . . ." Mrs. Pym waved away the spate of inquiries. "Vague stuff, Chief, and I don't propose to try pipe dreams on you. Suppose we make a search here, if you haven't done it yet. We might find a lead."

Action was what Brod Peyton wanted. He and Conk got down to it, even sifting through the metal deed boxes in the next room

– Les kept a lot of his files at home. I daresay plenty of Birch City secrets were revealed to Brod that night.

Conk Pettigrew came up with something from under Les's desk blotter.

"Look at this!" He held it out by its edge, to protect any prints.

We looked at a plain sheet of thick white paper, tidily type-written:

You next, Benedict. You should have some companions soon. The Cyanide Man.

It did not excite me that the killer was using the snide name I had coined. Doc Marvin pointed at the letter.

"That's a copy done with carbon paper, surely?"

Mrs. Pym appeared to have lost interest.

"Oldest trick in the book, Doc. It's the easiest way there is of disguising typefaces – the carbon blurs the serifs and outlines too much for easy identification with a particular machine."

Brod fanned himself with his hat.

"More of them, he says! It's going to mean my badge unless I can sort it out in a hurry."

"But if he was warned, why did he swallow poison?" I asked anybody who would listen.

"Doc," Conk asked. "If Les was high, and we all know how he soaks it up, would it be possible for someone to get him to take one of those capsules?"

"Why, yes . . ." Doc hesitated at Mrs. Pym's curious expression. "I don't see anything against it for the simple reason no-one can figure exactly what a drunk or half-drunk man is liable to do in certain circumstances."

\* \* \*

The *Star* came out with crisis-type bannerheads next morning: **CYANIDE MAN STALKS CITY.**

A whole flock of reporters arrived, soon after our story went out over the wire. The local stringers contacted their head offices and in no time the big writing names were coming in, competing for hotel rooms. Mrs. Pym began a slow burn when she found news-hounds sitting on her heels, and Brod had a night and day guard on headquarters to keep visitors out. The New York City early editions reached us, with headlines from **IS PUZZLED, ADMITS**

ACE SCOTLAND YARDRESS to the several which dubbed us CYANIDE CITY.

Les Benedict was holding on nicely – this got front page treatment, and so did the search for John Laffan with the background story.

It was meagre. He had a small room in Mrs. Parker's on Maple Street. He was a man of forty, the son of old Laffan's dead sister. It seemed John had a weekly income of thirty dollars. No one knew where it came from, but it was assumed Uncle Laffan paid it to his nephew. But where John had gone was unknown.

The pattern was baffling. Mrs. Pym had talked it over with me. All we knew was that Marie Paluzzi's only connection with old Laffan was to see him occasionally at Donahue's. Les Benedict was Marie's lawyer, and he knew John, who was also old Laffan's heir. All of us, come to that, knew them as local people. It was as simple and as baffling as that.

There was plenty of panic. Quite a few people got out of town, but with the influx of tourists they were not missed. The tradesmen and the rooming houses did land-office business: our traffic problem became formidable.

Work snowed me under. The staff on the *Star* was too small for specialization. Though I handled the crime detail, I had to cover visiting celebrities as well, see what town notables were doing, and never let Mrs. Pym so much as scratch her nose without me knowing it.

\* \* \*

She was in her hotel when I called in after lunch. It seemed she wanted some information.

"I've tried the library, here. It doesn't have the book I want, Eddie. It's technical. Any suggestions?"

"We could take a run over to Ogdensburg, ma'am. It's twenty miles. They have a fine library there."

"We'll try it. Can you run me there, son?"

"Why not? I'll call my office on the way out, and we'll head there now."

In my tired Chrysler I took her along the bottom lands to show her some local scenery, and came around by way of the Oswegatchie, then pointed to Canada across the St. Lawrence. She did not seem over interested, not even when she learned Birch City was moving ahead of Ogdensburg: maybe she was in no mood

for civic boosting. While she was in the library, I slept in the car.

"Anything, ma'am?" I asked when she returned.

"We'll save it. Know where I can find old Laffan's lawyer?"

"Yes. Two blocks along that way. Shall I take you?"

We spent only a few minutes with him, a Connecticut Yankee who hated answering questions, even for anyone so famous as Mrs. Pym.

She was a mite hard with him, but he seemed to like it. It also gave me an understanding of how tough she could get.

"That's that," she told me on our way towards home. "It's correct that John Laffan is the heir, but the lawyer says the thirty weekly dollars never came from the old man."

"Could it have been willed to him by someone, ma'am?"

"There's that. Where can we find out?"

"I'll ask around." We began climbing on the home stretch. "It should be easy to solve."

"Good. I'm damned if I know why I took up this case. My neck is out, and it's going to be chopped off if I'm not very careful."

"You don't mean you're giving up!" I was so shocked I nearly ran off the highway.

"Watch it, son. Trouble is, I don't know how to go from here. There are twenty thousand people in Birch City, and I can't stop the killings."

"Find the Cyanide Man is the answer, ma'am."

I nearly went off the road again at her answer:

"Oh, I know who it is, but there's no way of stopping the killings!"

#### 4

SHE refused to say anything more than that, and I had to promise to keep my mouth shut.

"It's by no means simple, Eddie. I don't want you writing about this, either. And don't think I'm sitting on the secret for the fun of astonishing everyone when I've got them gathered in one room where I reveal the killer." Her blue-gray eyes were sardonic.

"But there *must* be -"

"There isn't, at the moment. Something that was said when Brod Peyton and Conklin Pettigrew were talking in Mr. Benedict's

study gave me the lead; the rest of it I got in Ogdensburg. Believe me, son; talking won't help . . . yet."

"Okay, if you say so, ma'am. Will I get the story?"

"You'll get it; don't worry. Thing is, we'll have to tackle Chief Peyton to ask him for permission for you to run a warning in the *Star*, telling people to eat and drink with care."

"Wow!" I nearly lost control of the car. "I couldn't do a thing like that! Why, folks would never eat or drink a thing – I know our ornery little town!"

"Like that, eh? What do we do, sit tight and wait for the next murder?"

"Unless you reveal the killer."

"That wouldn't help anybody. We'll just have to keep our fingers crossed."

We were heading along Main Avenue, lined with parked cars. It was so bad I had to ask the officer on duty outside headquarters if I could park in the police zone. He agreed when he saw my passenger, tearing off a salute for her that would have excited the Marines.

Brod was very much on his official toes. One of the big local citizens had been on to the governor's mansion at Albany, and they had lighted a fire under poor Brod Peyton that was souring his disposition.

"I'm being ridden for letting you in on it, ma'am," he told Mrs. Pym apologetically. "The people who don't like anything I do have been raising hell from here to Christmas."

"Take it in your stride, Chief. It's my normal way of life in London, and I assure you it's nothing to worry about. How's Benedict?"

"Coming along. He's still out, but Doc thinks he should be talking soon. Any news at your end, ma'am?"

"Not a thing. Don't let it worry you, though."

"I'll try. The television networks have been moving in – Birch City's on the front page sure enough."

"That's what you wanted, Brod," I pointed out.

"Not this way. It's driving me nuts, I tell you. Every fool in creation worrying me, and now Albany's making it political!"

Mrs. Pym made a sudden movement.

"Eddie, is there a local radio station?"

"Certainly is, and a television station at – "

"That'll do." She swung round on Brod. "Chief, suppose we work out something for Eddie, a sort of a reporter's-eye-view of

what's happening. It might quieten the nervous people and I'd like him to slip in something innocent enough about capsules – it might keep possible victims on their toes."

"The business section will scream we're knocking trade," Brod seemed helpless. "And the Mayor –"

"Let me worry about it. I'm trying to work up a notion to beat the killer. I'll take the raps, Chief."

Brod sighed, and turned away when both his desk telephones began ringing together.

\* \* \*

The radio station was willing. With their newscaster we thrashed out a five-minute broadcast. If it wasn't brilliant, it was workmanlike. It carried a capsule warning well hidden so that it wouldn't start a panic. I got it over in a special spot arranged for me at two o'clock, and hoped it would work.

I spent an hour with Mrs. Pym in the room she had been lent for an office at headquarters. There was detail work for her, but nothing useful. John Laffan of course had been sighted in every state in the Union. Then screams began pouring in from business federations that people were beginning to come in with capsules containing every sort of material, asking for their money back. Later, it seemed as if capsules were just not to be sold in any part of these United States.

It did not worry Mrs. Pym. She had something in her mind that satisfied her. Just to please her, and to keep busy, we drove out to Donahue's Tavern.

"Not that there's any sense in it," she told me on the way. "We'll just look round at the scene of the first murder."

It was not a gay scene. Donahue's was a sprawling, T-shaped roadhouse off the Niagara Turnpike in its own fenced lot. It seemed deserted.

A bored handyman, on a ladder fixing some drapes in the main lobby, directed us to Donahue's office. We found him there, his lean body encased in good clothes. He looked as mean as they come, and looked worse when he heard Mrs. Pym's name.

"You the dame who unloaded all this trouble on me?"

"What trouble? I didn't kill Marie Paluzzi."

"Nor me, but you try and convince anyone around here of that!" He slammed papers on the desk top. "Know what we took last night? A sawbuck, a lousy sawbuck!"

"You think that's me?"

"No. Maybe not." Donahue wriggled at her chill eyes. "But all this publicity, and you speaking your piece. If it goes on, I'll have to shut down."

"Would that be a loss, Eddie?" She turned to me.

"Only for Donahue, ma'am."

She waved him back when he started to rise from his chair.

"Sit down and stop worrying. Take it out of Eddie for that remark, and I'll take it out of you." She leaned on the desk looking so mean that Donahue had to chuckle. "That's better. Suppose we stop arguing and do some thinking? You'll be in business again before the week's out. Now, Mr. Donahue, tell me about Marie."

"There's nothing to tell. She was a looker; her dance routines were good, and she could sing. I hired her a year ago out of Las Vegas. That'll be the lot."

"It's not much."

"I have other things to worry about besides the hired talent. She behaved herself. If she rode the suckers, that was her business. Her job was to entertain and so long as she kept her nose reasonably clean, I didn't gripe."

"This story about Bernard Flecker Laffan was true?"

"That she tried to get money from him? Sure!" Donahue roared with laughter. "I had a couple of side bets that she would never get one thin dime. She didn't. She even tried John Laffan."

"*He* came here?" Mrs. Pym was surprised.

"Now and again. Harmless guy; never had more than one beer, but Marie went after him like she did after every man with money or hopes of it."

"Having John Laffan here was all right with you?"

"Why not? If he sat four hours on a bar stool nursing one beer, I should worry. Soft-hearted."

"I'm sure you are. You know there's a big search on for him?"

"Not being blind or deaf, I do. Now if that's all, Mrs. Pym, you'll have to excuse me. I have work to do. There *could* be some customers tonight."

"Fair enough."

Mrs. Pym turned round. From what I'd seen of her, she was dainty on her feet. Like all strong, well-built women she moved gracefully and lightly. This time she somehow caught the heel of her shoe in something and went over like a wall coming down.

I would have been dead scared if I hadn't seen it was her flat hands hitting the floor that made the noise. Donahue came running around his desk.

We heaved her on to a chesterfield where she lay, then she groaned.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Donahue. Clumsy of me. Could I have some water?"

"At once." Donahue studied the tray beside her. "No water here. Something else suit?"

"I don't drink liquor. Could you send for it?"

"I'll get it myself. You rest easy. Be right back."

The moment he had gone, she gripped my arm.

"Top desk drawer on the left, Eddie. Look inside, and hurry back."

I did that and was at her side again when Donahue returned, and hoped I was keeping a good poker face.

Ten minutes later Mrs. Pym, limping heavily, was back in the Chrysler. Once she was stowed comfortably, we headed back towards town.

"When I talked about the search for John Laffan," she told me conversationally when we were on the highway, "Donahue's hand half moved towards that drawer. Instinctive, and that's why I faked my fall. Did you find anything?"

"I'll say! All neatly written out and bearing yesterday's date, an I.O.U. for ten thousand dollars. Signed by John Laffan!"

## 5

THE calm way she accepted that was an even bigger surprise to me.

"You mean, you knew?"

"Hadn't a notion, son, just a suspicion of sorts."

"That means he saw John Laffan yesterday?"

"Could be so. It added up in a way."

"How do you figure that, ma'am?"

"Laffan wanted to hide, I'd say. Who else but a man like Donahue would take a chance on him? Somebody told me he's an ex-convict."

"Donahue is; tax evasion. But John Laffan hasn't got ten thousand dollars."



“He will have, when he gets his uncle’s fifty million. I’m astonished Donahue set the price so low. His tavern’s a good hiding place, just the same.”

“He won’t get a nickel if John Laffan’s indicted for his uncle’s murder. A killer can’t benefit from his victim’s estate, ma’am.”

“We have civilized laws in England too, Eddie.” She nodded her latest funny hat. “However, this is home again. Will that policeman let you park in the headquarters’ section again?”

He did. We went up to Brod Peyton’s office, and found him sitting there. He even looked cheerful.

“Nothing else new, ma’am. It’s the visitors who have me stumped.”

“At least you have no more murders, Chief.”

He shuddered.

“The Governor would like to see you, ma’am. He knows how you’ve been helping us. The invitation’s to show the grouchy folk you rate high at Albany.”

“Suits me. When do I go?”

“You’ll go in my car, with a motorcade. The way the roads are now, you’ll need it.”

“And a siren?”

“Sure.” Brod had his first laugh for days. Limeys, to use Mrs. Pym’s word, have a craze for riding behind police sirens. Maybe they find it exciting, after the little firebells their police use.

She leaned forward with that bland look I’d got to know as hiding explosive.

“Now we’ve settled the social side, can you send a squad to fetch John Laffan?”

Brod bounced from his chair.

“You’ve found him?”

“I think so.” She detailed our visit to Donahue. “Sound like it to you?”

“Yes. What other reason would John have for signing the I.O.U.?” Brod was uneasy. “This could be awkward. Donahue has never given us trouble, yet. That doesn’t say he could not. He has quite a few boys around that place who could be awkward for me.”

“You’ve got policemen, Chief.”

“Sure I have. And where are they? Out untying traffic tangles. Keeping the sidewalks clear, and hauling in lost kids. This isn’t a town any more, it’s a three-ring circus. I don’t have a man to spare right now.”

Mrs. Pym sighed and opened her big purse. Out of it came a Luger as long as her arm.

"I have all the proper permits for this, Chief. If you'll give me a local one, I'll handle Donahue."

\* \* \*

It took argument before Brod Peyton would hear of a woman on such an assignment, and he wasn't sure what the Constitution would have to say about it, or if a foreigner could arrest a United States' citizen on native soil. He was worried sick, but agreed when she was prepared to take a single patrolman along with her - as Brod saw it, Mrs. Pym loose in Birch City was bad enough. Sending her after an ex-con with that Luger was scaring stuff.

In the Chrysler headed for Donahue's, I was worried and the patrolman wasn't easy. Mrs. Pym was almost gay.

"I've handled this Luger most of my life, Eddie," she told me amiably. "If I have to shoot Donahue, I'll do it kindly." The uniformed man in back groaned. "You be quiet, or do you like Donahue?"

"It's not that, Mrs. Commissioner," the poor guy went pink. "I've seen Lugers work. Blow a hole in a man you can drive a truck through."

"I'll be careful. I like Americans, even bad ones. So I won't hurt him."

I peeked at the Luger in her open purse.

"I don't see how that thing could do a light job. If you missed him, he'd break his neck falling into the hole the bullet dug." By the relaxed lines around Mrs. Pym's firm mouth, I guessed she was amused. I felt better. So long as she was amiable she wouldn't be in a hurry to shoot off her block-buster.

It was all for nothing. Something had scared Donahue: he was nowhere around, and his staff claimed not to have seen him for quite a while.

We spent an hour searching, and found nothing. There were places where John Laffan could have hidden, but there was no proof whether he had hidden or not.

Mrs. Pym did not seem worried. On the way home she was almost cheerful.

"Once Lester Benedict can talk, we'll get somewhere. I'm waiting for that."

"You mean, he knows the killer?"

"Certainly! Give it a few hours, son, and maybe we'll have it all settled."

With my eyes fixed on the *Star's* midnight deadline, I asked: "You mean, this evening?"

"The eternal newspaperman? Yes, unless Benedict fails to come round. I hope not. I have appointments in New York City waiting for me, and my flight home on the third."

\* \* \*

Mrs. Pym was duly installed in Brod Peyton's official car. Two motorcycle officers escorted her, and they set off for Albany in fine style. She found another unbelievable hat to try out on our Governor. I hoped she was pleased when I heard the police driver switch on the siren as they pulled away from Main Avenue.

It left me out on a limb. The clock went creeping on, and I had no story. My editor wanted copy and wasn't inclined to rely on my hope of a showdown by midnight.

I waited around. Nothing came in; no news of Donahue or John Laffan. Brod Peyton, whose office I went to in the end, was sitting there chewing his fingers.

Then, just before eight o'clock, a flash came from the hospital. Brod took it on his private line. Conk Pettigrew and I kept crossed fingers, listening.

Brod slammed down the receiver, and came to his feet.

"Les is conscious, and he's talking! I'm on my way." He waved us back. "The doc says only me. You sit tight and wait."

We did, for an hour. I chain-smoked my way through a new pack of cigarettes. Conk sat at the desk, playing cards with himself.

Then Brod came in, looking troubled.

"He's mad, he's raving mad!" He grabbed up a telephone receiver and began barking orders, talking to us at the same time. I almost fell over backwards at what he was saying.

"But it's crazy, Brod. I've known him -"

"I know it's crazy, Eddie. I've known him even longer than you have, dammit!"

Then the second telephone began ringing. Brod grabbed the receiver and listened, palming it to tell us: "Mrs. Pym."

He listened to her for a minute, nodding.

"Sure," he told her at last. "Les is talking. Gave me the story."

I hightailed around to Doc Marvin's surgery. Yep; found it all in a cupboard - hypodermic, capsules, the lot. *Eh?*" He stared at the telephone as if it had barked. "Yes, ma'am. I will." He cradled the receiver. "Says it's a load of boloney."

I shook his arm. "*What's* it all about, Brod?"

"She's on her way back, spitting fire. Les indicted Doc Marvin as the killer, and I found the fixings for these murders in Doc's surgery, but I can't find Doc!"

## 6

CONK was inclined to be tough about it. He came from Boston, and didn't see local things in the same light as Birch City natives.

"I can't touch Doc," Brod snapped. "There'd be a riot; he's the most popular guy in town. I'm waiting for Mrs. Pym."

"We've got our duty, Brod. We can't play favourites. And Mrs. Pym's strictly an official guest. She can't dictate to you."

"You do it." Brod's face was irritable. "You have my authority. I'm not bucking Mrs. Pym. Maybe she has no real teeth where my job's concerned, but she can damn-well bark, and that I dare not risk."

We sat around and worried some more. I watched the clock creeping towards my deadline. And then, at eleven o'clock, the United States Marines sailed in, wearing that dotty hat, her personality setting the place alight like a brush fire. She must have cut the siren because we never heard her car arrive.

"What's this, a wake?" Her blue-gray eyes went round us like skinning knives looking for hides. "You didn't touch Doc Marvin?"

"No, ma'am." Brod and Conk spoke together.

"Good." She patted Brod's head like he was a good little boy. "I have it all wrapped up for you."

"You mean, the *killer!*"

"Certainly. Shall we let down our hair and get it sorted, ready for action?"

"You mean . . . right now?" Brod stood up. "*No!*"

"Yes." She leaned companionably on the desk. "I've got a good memory and I play hunches because women work that way - it's the same as logic, but it's quicker."

"And the thing's obvious. The killer wanted money fast. The whole thing was dreamed up for a big prize - Bernard Flecker Laffan's millions - and because old Laffan looked as if he was going to live for ever, the plot was put into action."

"By who, for land's sakes?" Brod demanded.

"Lester Benedict." Mrs. Pym beamed for the first time since I'd met her. "Shows you it pays to be wary of lawyers."

\* \* \*

When we were in some sort of order again, Mrs. Pym perched herself on the edge of the desk, for all the world like a schoolmarm sorting out a bunch of kids.

"I stopped at the hospital on my way here," she explained. "I talked to Lester Benedict, and after a time he talked back. He didn't like doing it, but decided to when I said I would knock him through the wall if he didn't. Not," Mrs. Pym added in a mild voice, "that I would have been so unladylike."

Brod shot back in his chair, while I peeked at the clock.

"I don't get it, ma'am. If it's *true*, Les will be on his way to points west -"

"Les is safe enough. I found an officer outside the hospital - the one who came out to Donahue's with me - and told him to stay by. He's sitting with Benedict, his gun out."

"I hope this is right, ma'am." It was Conk this time. "He's a big man in this town. If you're wrong he could sue our pants off -"

"Don't worry. This is what happened:

"It began a long time back. John Laffan was broke, and he told Benedict about it. Benedict agreed to pay John thirty dollars a month until he came into Laffan's money when Benedict's reward was to be a hundred thousand dollars. John signed the papers and sat happy.

"Then Benedict began telling John things weren't going well, financially. And John, who is a decent man, began to feel worried. He warned Benedict if anything happened to his uncle that wasn't natural, he would come to the police."

Brod breathed like a man swimming.

"It's beginning to figure."

"I thought it would. Benedict couldn't wait in the end. His bills were going sky-high; he was soaking up liquor and letting his law business slide. He got the outfit for the poisonings and, with an eye to alibis, planted duplicate material early on in Doc

Marvin's store cupboard, having what you'd call a fall guy ready for any mishap. He was ready for business, especially because John Laffan had promised him, out of gratitude for the allowance, that he would put all his business in Benedict's hands when old Laffan died."

"But, Marie Paluzzi?" Brod asked.

Mrs. Pym held up one hand.

"Hold it, Chief." She looked at me and then the clock. "Your deadline, Eddie?"

"Ma'am, I'm going to miss it."

"Be my guest." Brod waved to the telephone.

I hooked up the receiver, and began dialling.

"I've never done this before, ma'am," I told Mrs. Pym. "I've seen it on television; I wonder if it will work?" My office came on. "Dinty? Put me through to the Editor. Mr. Richards? Eddie here. Boss, hold the presses for a replate! No, sir." I think I blushed just then. "Sorry, sir; I was copying television - I meant, sir, I have the story." I yielded the receiver to Mrs. Pym.

"Hullo? This is Mrs. Pym, here. I have Eddie with me, Mr. Richards. He was just excited, I think, but I'd consider it a personal favour if you can hold everything for thirty minutes. He'll be along with the whole story, the solution. An interview with me as well? Okay. I'll do it." She put down the receiver. "That's in order, Eddie."

"May we have it now, ma'am?" Brod asked patiently.

"Why not? Benedict made his capsules, visited Marie's apartment when she was out, and put two of the poison capsules with the others - the harmless ones. One night she picked one up and took it to Donahue's with her and took it because she was going away for the week-end and didn't wish to miss her daily capsule."

"And it killed her there?" Brod nodded in a melancholy fashion. "It's reasonable. But he couldn't pull the same trick on old Laffan."

"He didn't need to. Laffan was a hoarder and a sucker for anything free. That's obvious. Benedict just walked in and talked him into taking a capsule. A new health line, he said, and Laffan swallowed it. He was too mean to buy the *Star* and knew nothing of Marie's death."

"And John?" I asked her.

"He had no reason to suspect Benedict, but he just did not like what was happening. He took no chances and gave Donahue that

I.O.U. to hide him as a simple safety precaution – he'll be back when he hears what's been happening."

"I don't get it." The puzzlement on Brod's face was very obvious. "Why all this fancy business?"

"There could have been more killings," Mrs. Pym went on calmly. "It's the old principle of hiding a tree in a forest. Laffan was the victim; the others were to deflect too much curiosity."

"And Les went and took a capsule himself in error?" Conk's dry chuckle was genuinely amused; it was that quite unpredictable New England sense of humour.

"Not at all. The anonymous letter was deliberately planted for us to find. Laffan and Marie were dead; Doc Marvin was waiting in the wings, the fall guy. Benedict's nose was ready to appear clean.

"He arranged for Eddie to call on him. He emphasized the need for punctuality because of a Rotary meeting. The moment he heard you arriving, he swallowed a capsule full of cyanide, and left it to Nature. I never could understand the capsules as such, and then, after we found Benedict, you, Chief, and Mr. Pettigrew were talking, wondering if liquor could have been in it somewhere. Remember?"

"I do," Brod answered, "but how . . .?"

"It struck a chord. I looked in the local library, without luck, and went to Ogdensburg and there found something I had at the back of my mind in Taylor's *Medical Jurisprudence*."

"I've heard of that." Conk seemed pleased to have something to say. "An English book on legal medicine."

"It gave me the lead to the murderer, but I couldn't do anything until Benedict came round. Nor did I know of any other potential victims until he talked. He just stayed in his nice warm bed, safe because he had been saved by Eddie just as he planned. A hell of a chance, I'd say.

"And how was it done? Remember Rasputin? He was fed cyanide by his executioners but did not die. Benedict read that in a biography, and he started to find out why.

"The whole scheme grew out of it. You see, alcoholics – the real ones – have a stomach condition which makes them immune to cyanide; they just throw it up . . . something to do with the stomach's digestive system. It's all in Taylor, if you want to read it up.

"Benedict saw the answer in himself as a confirmed alcoholic. As a good lawyer should, he checked every angle, laid his plot

and thought up capsules of cyanide as a safe and sensible means for his plot. His was free to murder, to hide Laffan's murder in the forest of killings, and provide himself with an alibi no police officer could break."

We none of us said a word, but we collectively beamed on Mrs. Pym as if she was a dream come true.

\* \* \*

Once the news was out, John Laffan returned with Donahue from a country hiding place they had sought.

In Brod's office we were a jubilant party – Brod Peyton, Conk Pettigrew, Doc Marvin, John Laffan, Donahue, the Mayor . . . and our gorgeous Mrs. Pym, with me and a *Star* photographer standing by.

When the group pictures were done, Mrs. Pym opened her mighty purse and hauled out a cheque. She gripped John Laffan's arm.

"Now, photographer, take this one – me, handing over John Laffan's fifty million dollar inheritance."

Brod, who would have given Mrs. Pym the moon, could not swallow this one.

"But, ma'am, that's crazy. He hasn't got it yet; you wouldn't be giving it him like that. The will isn't even probated –"

She suddenly smiled – and a swell smile it turned out to be – and pushed her nutty hat at a daft angle.

"Who cares? The public will know it's a phoney picture. But I'm away from home. Americans like big gestures, showy gestures, and I like making them. Besides, find me a bigger gesture than me handing Laffan fifty million dollars. Okay, photographer, *shoot!*"



As the blade rose and fell in its dreadful sweep, the black pupils of the murderer dilated in the horror of his dead past re-born . . .

## Martin Thomas

# DEATH SENTENCE

Martin Thomas, whose novelette, *Harvest of Homicide*, appeared in our first number, is a man of wide interests and many talents. Besides detective and thriller fiction, he has written tales of the occult, western novels, satirical verse, a weekly newspaper page, and science fiction. (His novel, *Beyond The Spectrum*, is currently available in paperback.) In addition to this, he has drawn newspaper and magazine illustrations, cartoons, and advertisements, and lists as his relaxations, riding horses, reading psychology and philosophy, and listening to good music of most types.

THE weekly visit of Dr. John Spalding to his friend ex-Detective Inspector Stephen Elliot, was for both men almost their only remaining social activity. On this Thursday evening, in the customary absence of Stephen Elliot's housekeeper on her evening off, the former police surgeon let himself into the villa as usual, promptly at seven.

For the two retired bachelors recent weeks had been of special interest. A serialised version of Elliot's memoirs of his career as a detective was appearing in a popular weekly paper, and each Thursday the current instalment led inevitably to a spate of shop talk on those *causes célèbres* with which both men had been professionally associated.

Hurrying into the sitting-room, John Spalding was clearly eager to begin the conversation which revived his and Elliot's more vigorous days. With the weekly paper in one hand, the medical man waved a greeting to his old friend, waiting as usual beside the fire. Quickly Spalding took off his hat, scarf, and overcoat, then accepted the gestured invitation to the second fireside chair.

"Ah, that's better!" he sighed, lowering himself into it. "Chilly again, Stephen. Sight of a blazing fire does one good, eh?"

Elliot nodded in agreement and pushed the cigar-box across the occasional table beside them.

With a cigar ignited to his meticulous satisfaction, Spalding shook his head in good-natured envy.

"Your stories are still going down well, old fellow. The public always relish gory details of famous crimes, and you've certainly given them new facts about some of those old cases. Facts new to them, at least!"

Elliot inclined his head, frankly gratified.

"But you know," he said, "you yourself could have told them almost as much about some of these cases." The hand with which he gestured was thin and frail. "You were concerned with several of them – and as for gory details, you probably knew more about them than I did. Those 'Slasher' murders, for instance . . ."

A quick smile of interest creased Spalding's face. A tap of his finger on the newspaper emphasized it.

"That's one of the things I was going to mention! In this week's issue you hint that after next week's instalment on the Zweigman swindles you will be revealing details about the Slasher affair. Details so far unknown to anyone but you! You know how to whet the appetite – but is there anything in it? It's news to me that –"

"It'll be news to everybody, I fancy!" Elliot grinned, with almost childish pleasure. "It's a surprise I've been saving up for some time now – thought it would make a fine climax to my . . . life story." He snuggled back in his chair. "Remember what a roasting we poor coppers got from the Press over our failure to get the Slasher? Nearly a quarter of a century ago the murders were committed, back in the war-time blackout. But did the Press – or the authorities – make any allowance for our handicaps? Chaotic conditions of the blitz. The police force seriously undermanned. Half the adult population in the Forces or civil defence organizations. Thousands of foreign servicemen in the country. People on the move as they never are in peace-time. But did the top brass take this into consideration? Did they! The public wanted the killer – or an official scapegoat."

His mouth twisted with the bitterness of ambition long soured and unrealised. "Detective Inspector Elliot I was when I was put on the case, and detective inspector I remained – instead of retiring as Superintendent or Chief Superintendent." His brows drew together. "But my retirement hasn't been wasted. It's given me one thing the police organization couldn't."

“And that’s – ?”

In the pause before Elliot replied, the only sounds in the room were the crackle of the coal fire and the soft ticking of the clock on the mantelpiece. The ex-detective’s left hand played idly with the periodicals and sheets of typescript mixed untidily on the little table.

“It’s given me time to think!” he said quietly. “Expect you’ve found that too, John. Sitting here, with all the time that’s left to one, it’s possible to see things in detachment which we missed at close quarters in the hurly-burly. We used to waste a lot of energy then, but I know now that we’d have done better just to sit down and think.”

The ex-police surgeon smiled indulgently. “Armchair detective, eh? And you’ve realized something about the Slasher murders that you missed then?”

Elliot nodded. “Yes – that’s what I’ve done.”

“Something new on the Slasher atrocities! That certainly will cause a sensation when it appears! But – you old devil – you’re not going to keep *me* waiting a fortnight to learn what it is, are you? A fortnight’s a long time, you know.”

Again Elliot nodded, his expression very serious.

“It is a long time, John. That I know only too well . . .” Some odd edge to his tone caused the medical man to look at him quickly.

“That sounds – ”

“I know. The fact is, John, that I may not be alive to read the printed revelations myself.”

“You – !” Shocked, Spalding stared at the pale face as though suspecting a joke. “Stephen, you’re not – ”

“I’m quite serious.” A quirk of sardonic humour twisted the long mouth. “I suppose one usually is after being sentenced to death.”

\* \* \*

“Sentenced . . .” Still Spalding’s stare held a blank disbelief. “But Stephen – what is all this? You’ve never mentioned – ”

“No, I haven’t. But the fact is, John, that two very reliable physicians have given me about three months to live. There’s nothing anybody can do about it. It’s just a matter of time.” Elliot shrugged. “Oh – don’t look so concerned! I’ve had a good run, and privately I think even the medical experts’ estimate is

optimistic. As I've hinted, I shall be surprised if I'm still alive to read my own revelation of the Slasher's identity – ”

“Identity!” The suggestion was so sensational that even the prospect of personal tragedy was for the moment eclipsed. “After all this time? You can't mean that just by sitting here . . . ”

Elliot gave a wintry grin.

“Oh, I've had the idea for a little while now. It's really so simple that it only needed to occur to me. So simple that, sitting back in this chair, it was possible to reconsider all the circumstances and see that it – ”

“Yes – yes! But who could it – ”

“Just consider!” Elliot sat upright and leaned forward. “You know as much of the details as I do,” he repeated. “There were seven known Slasher murders. Seven women of sordid character brutally killed and hideously mutilated. All in the same district. And when the series of killings came to an end, it was variously suggested that the killer had been a maniac who had since recovered some degree of sanity, or else, unsuspected in his normal identity, had died.”

Elliot spread his hands. “There were other theories, of course – among them the suggestion that the efficient butchery pointed to a killer with surgical knowledge. A medical student, some said. Others worked up a theory of a medical man with an insane grudge against women of that type – due to the ruin of his own son by such a woman. But all those ideas remained just theories, because no such person with surgical knowledge ever came under suspicion. No medical man who could be avenging a son. No medical man, in fact, who could have been on the spot each time and have got clear away from the district so easily . . . ”

“Go on!” Spalding commanded in a whisper, his hands clasped in the absorption of his interest.

“Well, that was really the point which led to my own idea. Quite idly, one day it occurred to me that there *had* been a medical man in the vicinity each time. A medical man who'd been in the vicinity *because it was his job to be there*. It came to me as a rather absurd whimsy that that was precisely why he had never occurred to anybody as a possible suspect! Would anyone expect the fox to be helping the hounds? How could the man who'd been called each time to inspect the body – to certify the poor victim as dead, unnecessary as that was – how could that man possibly be thought of in a more sinister connection? The

coincidence would have seemed too fantastic for a moment's consideration."

Conscious of Spalding watching his face in intent silence, Elliot drew a deep breath.

"That's what it seemed, you see. And that's where my remark about sitting down and thinking applies. Sitting here now, I'm able to see that man as a human creature with human passions and fears, not as he was automatically regarded then – just as an efficient, emotionless, professional member of the team."

"Go on!" Spalding whispered again, his hands now thrust in his jacket pockets.

\* \* \*

The ex-detective said quietly: "It was only sitting here, with hours and days and weeks to run over every tiny circumstance, that I began to realize that the theory would imply no coincidence at all. It would simply mean that the killer had chosen to carry on his murderous plan in the district in which he happened to live – while everyone naturally assumed him to fly straight from each crime to some distant refuge. It never occurred to anyone that he merely returned to his own home and surgery in the same district, to wait for the call he knew must come – the call to inspect professionally the corpse for which he himself was responsible."

Sitting quite still, Spalding made no comment.

"In this chair," Elliot went on, without emotion, "I saw each circumstance of those days, and the more carefully I reviewed the details, the more convinced I became of the feasibility of my idea. I even made inquiries into my suspect's early antecedents."

"Oh?" For the first time, Spalding's intent scrutiny flickered.

"No confirmation of that old theory of a ruined son could be found, to explain a morbid, psychopathic hatred of that type of woman. My man was a bachelor. But what I did discover was a situation almost the reverse. That my suspect had himself been the child of a woman of the type so hideously slaughtered. The abandoned child . . ."

"And you say he was a – a doctor?"

"Yes." Elliot leaned back in his chair, smiling strangely into his guest's steady eyes. "He'd been abandoned by a worthless wanton mother – passed to an orphanage, and then adopted by a wealthy widower who gave him his chance. And my inquiries

showed that throughout his youth – till maturity brought an ability to conceal his thoughts – he showed a profound mistrust of women in general, and a deep detestation of the good-time girl type. At the university he even – ”

“Your article revealing his name?” Dr. Spalding interposed hurriedly. “That has gone to the paper?” Hands in pockets, he rose to his feet and gazed down at the hunched figure of the police pensioner.

Elliot’s answer came with a lack of intonation that was almost indifferent.

“No, it hasn’t gone yet . . .”

From his pocket Dr. Spalding withdrew his right hand, and in it was held an old-fashioned cut-throat razor. Without moving his eyes from the face of his host, he brought his left hand across to open the shining blade. Elliot’s gaze did not falter as the medical man bent over him, and on his mouth was even the trace of a smile.

“You are very clever, Stephen,” the doctor murmured dispassionately. “It’s a pity . . .”

\* \* \*

“Not a pity, John!” the ex-detective contradicted. “As I told you, I’ve already been sentenced to death, and what’s the loss of a couple of months, compared to the gain of – ”

Spalding’s brow furrowed with a spasm of perplexity.

“You have not given the paper his name?” he repeated, barely audibly.

“No. Only next week’s Zweigman article. You’ll find my copy of that on the table. You must read it.” Elliot’s pale lips grinned up almost triumphantly at that stone-like face looming above him. “The police these days are very clever . . .”

“Are they?” The question was perfunctory – for as the blade rose and fell in its dreadful sweep, the black pupils of the ‘murderer’ dilated in the horror of his dead past re-born. Only when the thing in the chair lay still did he turn with shaking hands to the typescript spread on the table.

In the carbon copy of the dead man’s final article he came to the last paragraph – with its concluding sentence that was his own sentence of death.

“ . . . and, as promised, in next week’s issue will appear sensational revelations concerning the infamous ‘Slasher’ of nearly a quarter

*of a century ago. To the terrors of the wartime blackout was added the nightmare of surgical skill employed in a campaign of murder. Who was 'the Slasher'? Should anything happen to prevent me making my disclosures in writing, it may well be found that this fact itself will furnish the only sort of evidence which could now be completely convincing. For at this late stage, it has naturally been impossible for me to amass conclusive proof to back my beliefs."*

The typescript dropped to the floor. The respectable Dr. Spalding glared wide-eyed over one shoulder, as if already sensing the hunters converging on him. Then his grasp tightened again on the razor.

In the hush of the little house his sentence was self-executed with the blade's chill kiss at the side of his waiting throat.

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How easy it was to die on the Marseilles waterfront! The swift stroke of a knife after dark, the brief splash of a body entering the scummy black waters of the Basin, and then - nothing . . .

**William H.  
Fear**

## **THE DRUG SMUG- GLERS**

Pace and action are the keynotes of this tough novelette which features that popular hero of today's thriller fiction - the lone-wolf, undercover agent.

William H. Fear, 36, married and with an eight-year-old son, has been writing fiction for fourteen years. Now out in paperback is his suspense novel, *The Killers* (Digit Books). "Fear" is his own name and not a nom de plume, as many readers have thought. The name has a gipsy origination, and Fear's great grandparents, we are told, were "gipsies of the first order".

### *The Man With The Yellow Beard*

THE vilest crime in the world today is the smuggling and peddling of illicit narcotics. It is also the most lucrative with net profits to the international underworld of over £1,000,000 every year, tax free.

Not surprisingly, the reins of the drug traffic are held firmly in the hands of the big crime syndicates; one of the most notable being the Sicilian Mafia.

The crime of drug smuggling is, additionally, one of the most difficult to combat and destroy as the victims are the least likely to complain to, or help the police. They are the unfortunate addicts.

The drug addicts number many hundreds of thousands all over the world, and especially in the United States of America - a fact that the U.S. does not openly advertise.

Teenagers - addiction to heroin and other dangerous narcotics, is chiefly among teenagers - invariably first sample drugs in search of new thrills. They end at a point of no return where their regular "shot" is as vital to them as the air they breathe.

From drug addiction springs



most of the crimes in the calendar. When the young addicts, or "junkies" as they are called in professional circles, are unable to obtain the white death they crave, they will steal and commit acts of violence. Even murder has been traced back to them, carried out in their struggle for money to buy heroin. Young girls will sell their bodies for the cash with which to purchase a cap of heroin.

The men who fight the illicit narcotics traffic are the agents of



the Federal Bureau of Narcotics of the U.S. Treasury Department, the United Nations, and Interpol – to name but a few. They must of necessity work alone, and in the dark . . . walking a tightrope with death on either side if they should fall. Their reward is the knowledge that by their efforts some unknown youngster may be saved somewhere from the shame and the death that lie at the end of the white-powdered road of drug addiction.

Such a man is Agent John Caine of the United Nations Commission on Narcotics.

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\*

The Liberian freighter, the *S.S. Freetown* was entering the territorial waters of the United States, bound from Marseilles to New York with a cargo of olive oil, when she was overhauled by a United States Customs launch which radioed her to stand by to receive officers of the Customs and the Bureau of Narcotics.

The crew of the rusty freighter lined the decks curiously as the trim launch forged her way through the choppy grey water, and came alongside the *Freetown's* hull where a rope ladder had been thrown down by the ship's chief officer.

Two blue-uniformed Customs men climbed aboard the ship, and were followed by two others in civilian clothing. When they were all standing on the freighter's well deck the chief officer was there to greet them.

"I do not understand," he proclaimed in heavily-accented English. "Why do the American Customs board us out here?"

One of the uniformed Customs men answered him shortly.

"We wish to speak with the captain, please. Will you take us to him?"

"As you wish." The swarthy mate shrugged his shoulders. "He is in his cabin. I take it you have no objections to our continuing on our way?"

"None at all."

The four men silently followed the ship's officer aft to the midships superstructure, and then along a white-painted companionway to the door of the captain's cabin.

The captain was waiting to receive them. The senior Customs official made the introductions.

"Gentlemen, this is Captain Steiner of the *Freetown*. Captain Steiner, I believe you already know my colleague, Mr. Harris. These other gentlemen are Mr. Raymond Paul of the Bureau of Narcotics, and Mr. John Caine of the United Nations."

John Caine, special agent for the United Nations Commission on Narcotics, at present on duty in the United States, nodded briefly in Captain Steiner's direction. Caine was tall and well-built; that was obvious even under the loose overcoat he wore. His face was lean and intelligent. A casual observer would have guessed him to be a young college professor or maybe a businessman in the City. A casual observer would be wrong. Thirty-year-old John Caine was a man dedicated to the endless war against organized crime. Since 1950 he had been an agent of the United Nations Narcotics Commission, and as many drug traffickers

could say from prison cells all over Europe, a lot of his cases were successful.

Right now he was here aboard the freighter *Freetown* in answer to a tip-off received in New York from the Marseilles police through the offices of Interpol in Paris.

Captain Steiner frowned heavily.

"I do not know why you are here, gentlemen. Always my ship is searched for illicit drugs when she berths in New York. It is always the same. You never find anything. I have told you before, and now I say it again. The *Freetown* is no drug carrier. All my crew are clean."

"Maybe," grunted the Customs man. "However we have reason to believe drugs are being smuggled into the United States on this trip, captain. I hope you have no objection to myself and my colleagues making a thorough search?"

"Do as you wish." Captain Steiner shrugged his shoulders nonchalantly. "It would do me no good to refuse."

"None at all, captain." John Caine spoke for the first time in his clipped English accent. "And if you have drugs hidden aboard your ship you would naturally wish that we should find them."

After a short discussion the four men began their tour of the *Freetown*. They all knew what they were looking for, and the most likely places used for smuggling narcotics.

Personally, Caine had a feeling that they weren't going to find anything. This freighter had been searched every time she had hit New York for the past six months, and to date nothing had been found. But the curious thing was that each time the *Freetown* came to port from Marseilles there was a rise in the drug traffic in the Brooklyn area.

And now this tip-off from the Marseilles Police Judiciare seemed to clinch the matter. But where were the narcotics being hidden? That was the big question.

Two hours later, when the rusty-hulled ship was being towed in to the Hudson by a couple of fussy harbour tugs, the Americans and the Englishman were completely baffled. They had searched the *Freetown* from stem to stern, starting with the most likely hiding places, and then going on from there to the unlikely ones. They had come up with nothing. A complete blank.

Captain Steiner was jubilant as he offered the four men a drink in his cabin.

"I told you there would be nothing, gentlemen," he crowed. "The *Freetown* is not a carrier."

John Caine reserved his judgement, although the Narcotics agent and the Customs officials were inclined to agree. From what the district supervisor in the New York Bureau of Narcotics had told him, the French police had sounded pretty sure of themselves when they had contacted Interpol.

\* \* \*

That evening Caine was closeted with the district supervisor who had ordered the search on the incoming freighter. The two men sat alone in the supervisor's office with the busy hum of the great city's traffic coming faintly through the half open window behind the large desk.

"I just don't understand it," growled Supervisor James Spooner savagely. "Interpol told us the Marseilles police were certain they knew what they were talking about. We should have found the stuff aboard that stinking tub!"

John Caine calmly lit a cigarette. He shook his head doubtfully.

"I don't know, Mr. Spooner. These people in Marseilles who are smuggling the drugs over are very clever. There is no doubt in my mind but that the *Freetown* is a carrier. Yet nothing is ever found. If one of the crew members is the actual courier then he is extremely clever. The crew and the cargo have been watched closely from the time the *Freetown* berths until the moment she sails again for the Mediterranean. Who was the man who gave the original information in Marseilles?"

"The French detective you mean?" grunted Spooner disconsolately. "His name's Moreaux - Roger Moreaux."

Caine bit his lower lip thoughtfully. He watched the glowing end of his cigarette for a while then said calmly: "All right, so we can't find the stuff when the *Freetown* berths in Brooklyn. But we know it's coming in. The next thing to do is to plant an agent among the *Freetown's* crew for the next voyage out."

"Dam' sight easier said than done," Spooner said almost angrily. "My strength's stretched to breaking point as it is, Caine. I could do with fifty more agents in the Bureau, and then they'd be working twenty-four hours of the day to keep up with the drug syndicates!"

"I wasn't suggesting that one of your men should be given the

assignment," Caine replied evenly. "I'll go myself. Can you arrange a berth aboard the *Freetown* for me? Union card and papers?"

"Why, yes." Spooner hesitated. "But you're here only as an observer, Caine. I thought you had to be in San Francisco in five days?"

"It will have to wait, Mr. Spooner," Caine told him with a tight-lipped smile. "The Commission will understand when you make a report to them."

"What about the men in the *Freetown*?" Spooner asked hesitantly. "Captain Steiner, the first mate? They'll recognize you. They saw you today when you accompanied Paul in the Customs boat."

Caine laughed softly as he extinguished his cigarette end in the tray on the supervisor's desk.

"I think not, Mr. Spooner. I think I can say without meaning to appear boastful that I can so disguise my appearance that not even you would recognize me if I walked into this office an hour from now."

"What's your plan?" Spooner wanted to know.

"Mingle," Caine told him. "Sound out the crew regarding the smuggling possibilities. Watch hard and see what happens when we berth in Marseilles. If necessary contact the Marseilles police, and talk to this detective Moreaux myself. I'll want an identification by the way for the French police, in case I do have to introduce myself to them."

\* \* \*

Three days later, two days before the *Freetown* was to sail in ballast for the Mediterranean and Algiers, a new deckhand came aboard and reported to the chief officer. The swarthy-skinned Spanish seaman glared at the new arrival when he reported to that worthy's cabin. He didn't much like what he saw.

The new man, Sisco, looked like what he was - scum of the waterfront. His hair and beard were a dirty yellow much in need of washing, a jagged scar ran from his left ear to the corner of his eye, and around his grimy neck was a realistic tattoo of a knotted rope.

"Get for'rard, Sisco," Mr. Gomez snapped, "and report to the bos'n. He'll show you where to bunk, and what your duties are!"

"Aye aye, sir." The yellow-bearded Sisco touched the peak

of his cap respectfully and lifted his dunnage bag to his broad shoulder.

When the cabin door closed behind him the chief officer made a gesture of spitting. The riff-raff he was forced to sail with made him sick. But what could you expect aboard a stinking hooker like the *Freetown*? Good seamen just wouldn't sign aboard this kind of ship nowadays. Owners and officers had to be satisfied with anything they could get. If only he could get his hands on that Dutchman who deserted two days ago and made this replacement necessary!

Chief Officer Gomez would have been much surprised could he have but known that the Dutch seaman who had deserted had been persuaded to do so by a highly lucrative offer from the Federal Bureau of Narcotics, and the promise of a better ship in the near future.

An hour later Sisco, alias John Caine, was esconced in the dirty fo'c'sle of the Liberian freighter, an object of curiosity and suspicion to the rest of the metropolitan inmates.

He satisfied most of their questions concerning him and his previous ships, but when some of the questions became a little too personal Sisco bared his rotting teeth in an ugly snarl, and dropped a hand to the hilt of the big knife in the sheath on his hip.

From then on the more nervous of the *Freetown's* crew members were content to let the bearded bear alone.

The freighter weighed anchor and sailed in ballast down the busy Hudson River two days later bound for Algiers. Standing on deck Caine watched the lofty Statue of Liberty, a familiar landmark to all in-coming and out-going wanderers, slip slowly by. Up on the bridge he could see Captain Steiner and Mate Gomez going about their business with the pilot. Whoever was concerned with the heroin smuggling it wouldn't be the ship's officers. They had too much to lose by being caught out on a narcotics charge. The drug ring's courier would be found in the fo'c'sle or the engine room personnels' quarters aft, he was sure. All Caine had to do, was find out which one it was from a crew of twenty-eight men.

The job wasn't easy, but the U.N. Narcotics agent started to tackle it on the first night out of New York. On his watch below he casually brought up the matter of smuggling to the men sitting on their bunks, and round the rough wooden table in the centre of the fo'c'sle.

"Smuggling?" echoed an unshaven deckhand. He laughed harshly. "Just you try smuggling anything aboard this hooker, Blondie, and you'll end up in the can. The U.S. Customs guys go through the *Freetown* with a fine tooth-comb every time we touch New York!"

Caine spat sarcastically.

"Watches, cameras, booze, yes. But what about drugs, amigo? It don't take a helluva lot of space to hide drugs aboard a ship."

A burly Negro gave him his answer.

"Jus' yew try it, mistuh. An' then see what happens to yew. Them Yankee Customs are aftuh drugs every time dey gives dis ol' tub de once ober."

"Have they ever found anything?" Caine asked innocently.

"No dey ain't," the Negro told him. "An' yew know why? Because dere ain't nobody aboard dam' fool enuff to try smug-glin' drugs in!"

"There's big money in it though," Caine mused half to himself. "These guys in Marseilles and Genoa pay well. Hundred and fifty to two hundred bucks a time."

"Go ahead den," grinned the big Negro. "I'll wave goodbye to yuh when de Yankee Narcotics boys hustle yuh down de gang-plank in Noo Yo'k!"

Caine lay back on his narrow bunk and listened to the steady thrumming of the ship's engines down in the metal bowels. It seemed these men were being honest enough. He was inclined to agree with them that any man fool enough to smuggle narcotics in aboard the *Freetown* was asking for trouble in large doses. Although nothing had ever been found aboard her, the old Liberian freighter was a highly suspect carrier. The American Customs officials and the agents of the Bureau of Narcotics knew their business from A to Z. If there *were* drugs hidden aboard the *Freetown* they would find them.

Then what was the answer? The French detective had said that drugs *were* being smuggled in the Liberian ship. He was positive that his information was genuine.

Where the devil was the stuff being hidden?

Caine sighed and turned over on his side. He could only continue to question the crew all the way to the Mediterranean, and hope to come up with an answer. In the ports they visited to pick up and drop cargo he must keep a good watch out for signs of anything being smuggled aboard, especially when they reached

Marseilles, the home of the international narcotics smuggling rings.

\* \* \*

The *Freetown* was in Algiers for four days. Unlike the rest of the crew Caine didn't take the opportunity of going ashore when Captain Steiner gave permission. He wanted to be aboard all the time in case narcotics showed up. But they didn't, and Caine wasn't surprised. He didn't really expect anything to happen until Marseilles. At Alexandria it was the same. He waited and watched, and nothing happened. Genoa was the third blank.

By this time the crew members of the *Freetown* were beginning to think that the broad-shouldered, blond deckhand was a little round the bend. He wasn't interested in going ashore to the bars and the brothels. All he talked about was drug smuggling.

Even Caine realized he was going to have to soft-peddle his inquiries a bit. The courier, if there was a courier aboard, might begin to smell a rat, and that was the last thing Caine wanted at this stage. The game he was playing could be played once only. No other investigator would ever be able to sign on aboard the *Freetown* if it was discovered that the yellow-bearded Sisco was in fact a British agent of the United Nations Commission on Narcotics.

## 2

### *The Slender Chance*

AS John Caine had anticipated nothing happened until the freighter *Freetown* reached the ancient port of Marseilles six weeks after her original sailing from New York.

Caine realized that here he would have to be especially vigilant if he was to catch the dope smugglers at their vicious work. Volunteering for extra duties so that he could be around during the unloading and loading of the freighter's general cargo, he remained on deck for most of the daylight hours, and was inclined to prow around after night had fallen and most of the crew was enjoying the many and varied forms of "entertainment" the Vieux Port had to offer.

And still nothing happened.

Caine was bewildered. Could it be that the French detective, Moreaux, was hopelessly wrong?



There was only one way to find out.

Today was the *Freetown's* last in Marseilles. She was sailing tonight with the tide bound for New York once more, and Caine had nothing at all to report to his superiors.

The sun was falling away in the sky to the west when John Caine crept from the fo'c'sle and down the gangway to the old cobbled waterfront. He moved softly, anxious not to be caught by the watchman on the bridge deck above. Tonight being the last night in port, all shore leave was banned by the captain as a precaution against last-minute desertions. Caine hoped he wouldn't be observed because he intended to go ashore anyway, and no one was going to stop him.

With the failure of his mission aboard the *Freetown* there was but one avenue of inquiry open to him, and that was a talk with the French detective who had given the tip-off to Interpol in the first place.

The dark night was his friend, and a few minutes later Caine was walking swiftly through the narrow, cobbled streets bound for the headquarters of the Marseilles Police Judiciare.

Beyond the dock area he took a taxi to his destination, and he stepped out under the shadow of the old building that housed the police of the oldest and most crime-ridden city in the whole of France.

A uniformed sergeant of gendarmes was on duty at the desk when Caine stepped into the brilliantly-lighted interior, and when that august official of the law looked up into the bearded and scarred countenance of the visitor, his own face hardened visibly.

"What d'you want?" he asked coldly.

Caine smiled calmly, exposing his carefully blackened, rotting snags of teeth, and replied: "Bon soir, M'sieur le Sergent. I would like to speak with Commissaire Capello."

The grizzled sergeant frowned. He rested his large hands on top of his desk, and thrust his face forward so that it was mere inches from Caine's own.

"Anything you got to say you can say it to me. The commissaire is a busy man."

"I prefer to say what I have to say to the commissaire if you don't mind, sergeant." Caine was being polite although it cost an effort with the big man's face so close to his own, and the pungent aroma of garlic being wafted into his nostrils.

The sergeant turned nasty at this point.

"Say it to me, scelerat, or get out. Hang around here much longer and I'll have you thrown in the cells for loitering!"

It was evident that the sergeant thought he was talking to a foreign sailor, although knowing that the yellow-bearded stranger was so acquainted with the Marseilles police that he could bring forth the name of the chief of the Police Judiciare, he might have been more cautious.

Caine was reluctant to reveal his true identity to the sergeant at this point in the game, and decided to try a bit of bullying bluster of his own.

His lips curled in a vicious snarl behind the unwashed beard as he hissed menacingly: "Tell the commissaire I want to talk to him now. The name is Sisco; he'll see me. What I've got to say is damned important. So important that if I have to wait around here until he comes out into the street you'll find yourself pounding a patrol down on the waterfront till it's time to collect your pension! Now get on that phone!"

The sergeant looked, he hesitated, and then the fight was over. Cursing volubly to himself the officer of the law called the commissaire's office with the news that a sailor named Sisco wanted to speak with him urgently.

Five minutes later Caine walked into the commissaire's well-appointed office on the second floor of the Judiciare building.

\* \* \*

Commissaire Capello, immaculate and cool behind his big desk was visibly shaken at the sight of the tough, scar-faced man who walked in upon him. He knew in advance that the name "Sisco" meant Agent John Caine of the U.N. Commission on Narcotics, but he hadn't expected anything quite so disreputable of an international officer of the law.

He rose from his chair, blinked twice, and asked in a small voice: "Are you Mr. John Caine from New York?"

Caine smiled and nodded.

"That's right, Commissaire Capello. I must apologize for my appearance, and for the way I spoke to your sergeant on duty below."

Still a little stunned the Frenchman waved the Narcotics agent to a chair.

"What - what can I do for you, M'sieur Caine?"

In a few words Caine explained the situation. The lack of

success aboard the *Freetown* in discovering the identity of the dope courier, or seeing narcotics being smuggled aboard the old freighter.

"I want to speak with Detective Moreaux, the man who reported to Interpol that the *Freetown* was a carrier. It is the only lead left to me."

"What is your intention then, m'sieur?"

Caine shrugged broad shoulders.

"Perhaps I'll be able to answer that better after I've had a few words with M'sieur Moreaux."

The police commissaire was anxious to please. Fortunately, Moreaux was in the building catching up on paper work in connection with a vice case, and he was ordered to come immediately to the commissaire's office.

Caine liked the look of Moreaux as soon as he saw him. Instinctively he recognized the "honest cop" as the Americans put it, and when Moreaux had recovered from the surprise of seeing a United Nations agent so perfectly representing a deep water pirate, he answered the questions Caine put to him without the slightest hesitation.

"Oui, m'sieur, I had the tip-off regarding the *Freetown*. It was in a small bistro down on the waterfront. I was working on a case which took me into that area in the disguise of a cheap pimp at the time. These two men, both of them are well known to the police, and have records of conviction. One is named Leclerc, a small man with the face of a fox and a fine, pencilled moustache, and the other, his companion in the bistro, is called the Bear. They call him the Bear because he looks like a bear, and acts like one. He is dumb by the way. The Marseilles criminal fraternity cut his tongue out for some reason way back in the thirties.

"Well these two thugs were sitting quite close to me at the time I speak of. There was a telephone call for Leclerc, and when he came back to his table he said to the Bear, 'Let's get out of this dump. That was the chief on the phone. He says the *Freetown* is scheduled to sail tonight instead of tomorrow, and the dope has to be put on right away.' That was what he said, M'sieur Caine. When I returned I reported the matter to the inspector who contacted the commissaire immediately."

"That is correct," the commissaire affirmed. "I got in touch with Interpol right away telling them to inform the police in New York so that they would be able to make a search of the *Freetown* and confiscate the narcotics."

"The only trouble," said Caine scratching his grimy beard thoughtfully, "was that there weren't any illicit narcotics on board the *Freetown*. I was one of the party making the search as soon as she entered American territorial waters."

Moreaux shrugged.

"Maybe we are wrong. Maybe Leclerc meant something else, or some other ship?"

"No." Caine was definite. "The U.S. Narcotics Bureau know the *Freetown's* a dope carrier. Trouble is we can't prove a damned thing." He looked at Commissaire Capello intently. "You didn't try to follow up this thing yourself, M'sieur le Commissaire?"

"I am sorry, M'sieur Caine. Marseilles is a big city. There is crime all the time. You name it, we've got it. Give me another hundred detectives and I might be able to track down every little thing that crops up. As it is - " The Commissaire made a typically French expressive gesture and left it at that.

"Then there's only one thing I can do," said Caine. "Moreaux, do you know if these two, Leclerc and the Bear visit that bistro often?"

"You can find them there sipping absinthe nearly every night of the week," nodded Moreaux.

"I hope they're there tonight," Caine answered. "What's the name of the bistro?"

"*Le Chat Noir*," Moreaux told him. "It's right down on the waterfront, only a stone's throw from Fort St. Nicholas itself."

"I can find my way there," growled Caine. "Thank you, m'sieurs." He rose to his feet, and extended his hand to the commissaire. "I hope to meet you both again."

Commissaire Capello said doubtfully: "It's a tough area down there, M'sieur Caine. A man could get a knife in his back."

"I'll try not to turn my back," Caine smiled. "Bon soir."

\* \* \*

As Caine was driven dockwards in a broken-down Marseilles taxi a certain rather crazy sort of plan was forming in his mind. It all depended on Leclerc and the Bear being in the bistro that night. The fact that the plan was suicidal for himself entered his mind naturally, but he discarded it at once. An agent had to take chances in the dope game.

The area round *Le Chat Noir* was everything Commissaire

Capello said it was. The towering stone walls of old Fort St. Nicholas overshadowed a ramshackle rabbit warren of crumbling tenement buildings and narrow alleyways where every kind of crime known to mankind could, and probably did exist. Lighting was almost non-existent, the electric lamps having been so constantly broken that the authorities just didn't bother to replace them anymore.

Men lurked on every corner, hard-faced men some of whom wore lightweight suits and hats, and others patched and stinking rags. Cheap prostitutes hawked their unsavoury wares from bar to bar, whilst their silk shirted ponces waited hawk-eyed to collect their dues as soon as a customer moved on to new diversions of hell.

On one side the lofty, slum tenements, and on the other the black waters of the Basin lapping gently against the rotting wood pilings of the piers . . .

How easy it was to die on the waterfront after dark. The swift stroke of a knife, the brief splash of a body entering the scummy water, and then - nothing.

A tough area, as Commissaire Capello had observed.

*Le Chat Noir* was a dirty hole in the wall with nothing to advertise its presence other than a crude drawing of a black cat on the wet stones over the door, and a couple of dirt-grimed windows through which yellow light gleamed fitfully.

As Caine made his way over the slimy cobbles towards it, he thought he could feel a hundred pairs of hostile eyes boring into his unprotected back.

He pushed open the creaking door, and at once found himself in an atmosphere so thick it could have been cut with a knife. The tobacco smoke was a fog, nothing less, and at the far end, hazily discernible, was the outline of a bar - of sorts. The single electric lightbulb hanging on a length of flex from the ceiling, seemed to swim in a sea of blue mist, and in its wavering glow Caine could make out the pale blobs of faces at intervals along the dirty walls.

Seamen of a dozen different nationalities and the painted whores they had picked up in the streets outside . . . pimps with pencilled moustaches and long sideboards, hard-eyed, tight lipped men whose illegalities brought them into troublesome contact with the law on every corner. Here in all its stark reality was the underworld of Marseilles with every vice flourishing, and certain death for an undercover lawman if he was discovered.

Caine, in his disguise of the seaman Sisco, rolled up to the bar and ordered a bottle of cheap wine from the unshaven barman behind the bar. With the wine and a glass in his hand he turned to survey the room at large, and although his eyes rolled in assumed drunkenness he was giving the male patrons a once-over in search of the drug smugglers, Leclerc and the Bear.

He sighed with relief when he picked them out sitting alone at a table in the corner. If they hadn't turned up at the bistro tonight his mission would have been a failure. As it was there was no way of telling how they were going to react to the trick he intended pulling on them.

A group of sailors were sitting at the table next to the two men, and it was to this table that Caine lurched his way, waving his bottle and glass in the air to ensure that there was no mistake in anyone's mind that he was very drunk indeed.

Leclerc, small of build and flamboyant and cheap in dress, watched coldly as the big, bearded seaman intruded himself upon the four men at the next table.

Caine banged the bottle of wine down on the middle of the wine-slopped table, and roared loudly: "Have a drink on me, mes amis! Sisco is celebrating for he has this night reached a momentous decision!"

"Get the hell out of it!" snarled a black-haired Spaniard at the table, but Caine affected not to hear the warning.

"Drinks on me, friends," he went on happily. "I'm sailing with the tide, and the *Freetown* is my ticket to prosperity!"

From the corner of his eye Caine saw Leclerc and the Bear suddenly become interested in him as he hoped they would. The mention of the *Freetown* had accomplished that.

Although the men at the table were trying not to take any notice of him Caine kept on talking, but now he was talking only for the benefit of the little cut-throat Leclerc, and in consequence he lowered his raucous bellow to a loud, hoarse whisper.

"They think they're so damn bloody smart using the *Freetown* for their smuggling, mes copains. They got the Yankee cops scratching their addled heads and wondering how the hell they get the stuff in, but I know. Oui, mes amis, Sisco knows all right." He laughed triumphantly. "Oh, they're damn smart, but not as smart as Sisco. I reckon the cops in New York would give a helluva lot to find out how they're getting the dope in, and Sisco's the boy to put 'em wise!"

At this point the large, ugly Bear made as though to rise to

his feet. His face was snarling. But Leclerc restrained him with a hand on the arm, and spoke a few words to him softly.

The Bear relaxed in his seat but he kept his small eyes fixed on Caine all the time. The U.N. agent breathed a mental sigh of relief. If the Bear had come for him then the plan would have come to nothing. Caine knew he would have finished up in the Basin with a knife in his back.

"Yes," he continued drunkenly, although it was plain the seamen just weren't interested. "Sisco's gonna make a deal with them Stateside cops when the *Freetown* makes New York."

Leclerc had risen to his feet, and was heading off in the direction of a phone on a shelf behind the bar of the dive. As he talked Caine watched him furtively.

The call was short; Leclerc spoke only a few words, and then hung up. He returned to the table, keeping his hard eyes on Caine constantly. He spoke to the Bear, and the big gorilla nodded and smiled cunningly.

Caine pretended to get tired of talking at men who didn't want to know. He cursed them roundly, and finished up with: "Okay, you bunch of freshwater scum, Sisco knows when he ain't wanted. The boys back on the *Freetown*, they know good wine when they smell it. Damn the lot of you!"

He staggered through the thick fug of smoke towards the door of the bar. In a fly-blown mirror on the wall he was able to see Leclerc and the Bear as they rose quickly to their feet with the intention of following him.

Now was the moment of truth. It was obvious to Caine as he lurched into the night air that Leclerc had made a fast phone call to someone higher than himself in the smuggling ring, and he had been given instructions regarding the big, yellow-bearded seaman shouting his trap off in *Le Chat Noir*.

What were those instructions?

This was where Caine had to be careful. If the boss, whoever he was, had merely ordered his underlings to kill the would-be informer, then he was going to have a damned hard fight on his hands – a fight that he would have to win.

But if Leclerc's orders were to put the seaman out of action, and then take him somewhere for further questioning as to what it was he knew, then Caine's fight must be a sham. Merely enough to make it look like the real thing before he allowed himself to be taken by the two thugs.

But he had to know one way or the other before he let them put him under.

The misty darkness enveloped him as he moved out along the alleyway in the Hell's Kitchen of Marseilles.

## 3

*Sentence Of Death*

**WHEN** he reached the far end of the alley, Caine stopped and lit a cigarette. He listened closely, but all he heard for the moment was the sharp slapping of the black water at the base of a nearby pier.

He moved on a few paces into the inky blackness, and stopped again, suddenly. Ah, now he heard it all right. The soft pad of footsteps echoing along the narrow street behind him. Leclerc and the Bear were following him as instructed.

There was no point in going any further. The fight had to come eventually. It might just as well be here as anywhere else.

Caine pressed his back against the slimy wall of a towering warehouse, and ground his heel into the newly-lit cigarette. A few seconds later he saw the furtive shadows of his pursuers wavering along the rounded cobbles, and heard Leclerc's high pitched, whining voice.

"Damn it, we must have lost the swine. We won't be forgiven this in a bloody hurry!"

Caine stepped out of the midnight shadows to confront the two thugs. There was a crooked smile on his bearded face as he spoke to them in deliberately mangled French.

"You looking for somebody, m'sieurs?"

"It's him!" snarled Leclerc excitedly. "Get the bastard, Bear!"

The Bear whipped a knife from inside his jacket, and came at Caine in a blind rush. Coolly Caine stepped to one side and smashed his bunched fist under the big mute's guard to connect to his bulging stomach.

The Bear wheezed with pain, and staggered in his stride. Frankly Caine was surprised. That blow would have put any ordinary man down on the ground for a count of ten, but the Bear merely shook his head to clear it, rubbed a large paw over his stomach, and lunged in again with knife held high.

"Careful, you damned idiot!" warned Leclerc. He was keeping well out of the way, content to let his companion do all the rough



work. "Don't kill him if you place any value on your own miserable skin. The boss wants him alive!"

Caine was satisfied. He knew now that these two weren't out to put a permanent end to his tongue. Their instructions obviously were to render the seaman from the *Freetown* sufficiently incapable to take him to meet their immediate superior in the Marseilles drug smuggling organization.

Caine played it carefully, watching every move the panting Bear made. At Leclerc's shouted warning the big thug had put the knife away in his pocket, and now advanced with his muscular arms wide apart as though he intended to crush his opponent to death in a mighty hug.

Caine moved in fast. The big hands of his adversary whipped up to encircle his throat. Caine didn't want to black out that way, so he jerked upwards with his arms inside the Bear's forearms, then outwards with terrific force so that the thug's hands came away from him. Then he moved in fast, pinning the hulking mute against the wall of the alley, and hammering blows into his belly hard enough to hurt but not to do any great damage. After all, Caine knew this was one fight he had to lose if he was to solve the mystery of the dope smuggling involving the Liberian freighter, *Freetown*.

For the moment Caine had forgotten the lurking presence of the little man, Leclerc, but Leclerc hadn't forgotten him. Snarling viciously, the pocket-sized thug whipped a short length of rubber covered lead piping from his trousers pocket, and advanced to put an end to the Bear's suffering.

Caine was reminded of Leclerc only when something exploded violently against the back of his head, and a million coloured lights flashed in front of his eyes.

Only then it was too late. The undercover agent slumped to the wet ground without a murmur. He lay at the Bear's feet unconscious.

\* \* \*

Leclerc made a hasty examination of his victim to make sure that he wasn't dead. He rose to his feet, dusted his trousers, and slipped the blackjack back into his pocket.

"It's all right, he isn't dead," he told the still panting Bear. "Let's get the swine into the car quick, before anybody comes along. You carry him!"

The Bear lifted the unconscious form as though he was lifting a bag of feathers. Without any effort he slung Caine over his wide shoulder and hurried through the alley in the wake of Leclerc's retreating form. In this manner they went through the twisting rabbit warren of slum tenements and shipping warehouses for close to ten minutes before they reached the point where the car was parked.

Leclerc pulled open the back door of the black Citroen and jerked his head at the Bear.

"Sling him in there, then get in with him. If he comes to and tries any tricks, slug him again!"

The small man climbed in behind the wheel, pressed the starter, and the motor roared to life. A minute later, the two dope smugglers were weaving their way in the car, with their victim, through the sinful heart of the city.

Caine started to return to the world as the Bear shook his shoulder roughly. He groaned and placed his hand gingerly on the back of his head where Leclerc had hit him. It came away sticky with half-congealed blood.

Leclerc turned from the front seat, and Caine found himself staring into the business end of an ugly, blue-steel Luger in the Frenchman's hand.

"Climb out, you waterfront scum, and stand by the car with your hands on your head!" Leclerc told him softly. "One wrong move, mon brave, and I'll scatter your brains all over the pavement!"

Caine staggered out, and did as he was told. The Bear was close behind him with fists clenched, eager to repay some of the punishment he himself had taken at the hands of this yellow-bearded foreigner.

But Caine played it safe. He stood with his dirt-grimed hands on his head, and did his best to make out exactly where they were. He wasn't successful. Any one part of the old city looked exactly like another. Just tall, greystone buildings mouldering and stinking, with lines of ragged washing hanging from window to window across the street, like flags and bunting hung out in a kind of bizarre celebration.

At gunpoint Caine was prodded through a narrow doorway and up three flights of stairs. Then down a corridor with doors on either side, a turning, then another, and then another corridor. Followed another flight of steps, and further on some more which they descended.

Caine marvelled at the labyrinth they were travelling. A man, it seemed, could pass from one end of the old waterfront quarter to the other without leaving the buildings. What a perfect headquarters for narcotics smugglers! The police would never be able to flush them out of this maze if they tried for a year.

At long last Leclerc stood by a closed door and knocked politely. The door swung inwards on well-oiled hinges, and the three men went inside.

They were standing in a dark hallway. Caine made out the dim figure of a man in front of him. Leclerc spoke a few soft words to this individual who grunted and ushered them on.

When at last Caine reached the end of the journey he had the feeling that he must have walked a mile at least. He also had a faint suspicion that the two mobsters escorting him had doubled back over their tracks more than once in the vast rabbit warren to confuse him.

If they had, then they had succeeded. Caine didn't have the faintest idea where he was.

Leclerc coughed to clear his throat, straightened his tie, and tapped respectfully on the door in front of him.

"Entrez!" came the command from the other side.

Leclerc threw the door wide, and pushed Caine forward.

"Inside, scelerat!" he snarled.

\* \* \*

Caine staggered into the room, and halted in front of a man who was sitting at a wide desk with his back to a blazing fire. Caine was amazed. He seemed to have stepped right out of the Marseilles slums back into the golden age of the later Louis' of France.

The room was a masterpiece of Eighteenth Century grandeur with tapestries draping the walls from floor to ceiling, furniture that was obviously antique and not reproductions, and rugs that seemed to have been transported direct from the palace at Versailles.

The only modern touch was the overhead chandelier lit by a score of gleaming electric bulbs, illuminating every corner of the vast room.

Caine's eyes strayed to the far wall where a thin-faced Corsican in a fancy striped suit leaned, paring his nails with a thin blade

stiletto. After giving him the briefest of glances this hoodlum lowered his eyes and went on with his crude toilet.

Caine faced the man behind the huge antique desk squarely. He found himself staring at the most repulsive individual it had ever been his misfortune to encounter. His head was completely bald, and his face was covered with ugly little scars so thick that it would have been impossible to put a pin's head between them.

Whether this adornment was natural, or the after effect of a serious illness, or the result of a working over with a knife, it was impossible to say, but Caine felt sickened by the overall picture.

Apart from that the man was normal. His dress was impeccable and quiet; his hands resting on the desk top, slim and well manicured. He surveyed Caine from eyes half hidden by the scar tissue surrounding them.

"What's your name?" he asked in a cold voice. It reminded the British agent of the hissing of a snake.

Ignoring the question, Caine pretended to be indignant at his rough handling.

"What's the big idea of pouncing on me and dragging me here?" he demanded angrily. "My ship's sailing tonight, and I'm due back aboard. Somebody's gonna catch hell for this!"

The Bear raised a clenched fist but the man behind the desk restrained him with a mere lifting of his little finger. He repeated his question.

Caine licked his bearded lips, and answered sulkily: "My name's Sisco, but what has that gotta do with you?"

"That I will know soon," the scarfaced man replied tonelessly. "It has come to my knowledge that you have been shooting your mouth off down at *Le Chat Noir* on the waterfront tonight."

"I don't know what you're talking about," Caine growled.

"I think you do," Scarface answered. "My colleague tells me that when you return to New York you intend to talk to the police with regard to narcotics you say are being smuggled in aboard your vessel, the *Freetown*."

"I got nothing to say." Caine ran his tongue over his lips to give the impression that he was becoming a bit nervous. As a matter of fact, it didn't need much acting. He was beginning to wish he had asked for the police to tail him when he left *Le Chat Noir* with Leclerc and the Bear after him.

"It is surprising to me," Scarface continued, "that you have any knowledge at all regarding the smuggling of narcotics aboard

the *Freetown*. Tell me, how is it that you have discovered that which the American police and Customs officials have failed to do?"

Caine kept silence. After all, what was there to say? His knowledge was nothing more than a colossal bluff. But he now knew that the dope smugglers *were* using the *Freetown* as a carrier into the United States.

"You have nothing to say?" asked Scarface gently.

The Corsican holding up the wall said eagerly: "Let me work him over for five minutes, boss. He'll spill his guts when I've finished with him!"

The Boss regarded Caine with a steady glance. He pulled a silver cigarette case from the inside pocket of his jacket and coolly lit an oval cigarette.

Caine felt uneasy. If he was worked over by the sallow faced Corsican there was a chance that in the white glare of this secret room his disguise might be penetrated. If they found out he wasn't who he was pretending to be, then they would have a good reason to torture him to extract information.

After what seemed an eternity the scarfaced leader shook his bald head.

"No, it won't be necessary," he told the Corsican slowly. He blew a blue cloud of smoke down through his mis-shapen nostrils. "We will have to dispose of him anyway. His secret can die with him as far as I'm concerned. The main thing is that he should die."

Caine started forward.

"Look here!" he blustered hotly. "I don't know what the blazes this is all about. I'm only a seaman earning an honest living. I got nothing to do with dope or smuggling. Let me out of here! I promise I won't say nothing to nobody about what's happened tonight - I swear it!"

Caine felt the round, hard muzzle of Leclerc's automatic jabbing into his back again.

"Tie his hands," Scarface told the Bear. "Then take him down to the launch with you." He glanced at the gold wrist watch below his immaculate cuff. "I expect Marcus is already waiting impatiently for the order to be off. We don't want to miss the *Freetown*."

Caine stood passive and allowed the hulking mute to bind his hands in front of him with a short length of twine. He thought rapidly. He had found out what he wanted to know, or at least

part of it. The French dope runners were using the old freighter as carrier on the New York run; how he had no idea as yet. Nor did it look as though he was going to be given any opportunity to find out.

The scarfaced man had mentioned a launch, and a launch meant water. In this case the filthy water of the Marseilles Basin. This kind of thing was happening in France's most crime-ridden city all the time. A bullet in the head, then splash, into the water, until his fish-nibbled body was eventually hauled out by the police.

And placed on a cold slab in the mortuary . . .

#### 4

#### *Bid For Life*

C AINE was hustled out of the presence of the boss by his two guards, Leclerc and the Bear. This time the journey wasn't such a long one. A few bleak passages and worm-eaten stairways brought them down to ground level, and to a bare chamber with a square stone slab in the centre of the concrete floor.

In the slab was a rusty iron ring, and it was the Bear who exercised his great strength to pull it open, revealing a twisted iron ladder leading down to murky depths.

Caine caught an odour of dirty river water strong in his nostrils. For a moment he wondered whether his life was to be snuffed out there and then by a bullet from Leclerc's pistol, and a tumble through the opening in the floor into the harbour.

But whatever the little gangster had in mind for his prisoner it wasn't going to happen just yet. He waved the barrel of the gun menacingly, and growled: "Down you go."

Caine lifted his bound hands, and smiled through his yellow beard.

"How? Hadn't you better untie my hands?"

Leclerc snarled.

"Get down best way you can. Now move!"

Caine shrugged broad shoulders, and thought it best to do as he was told. He manoeuvred himself down through the square, found the rungs of the ladder with his feet, and descended slowly, hanging on as well as he was able with his bound wrists.

Whatever the narcotics agent had expected when he reached

the end of his descent it certainly wasn't a landing stage, but there it was just the same.

The part of the house from which he had come was raised on stout wooden pilings immediately over the harbour, and he now found himself standing on a solid concrete platform with the murky water lapping all round him in the darkness. Peer as he might into the dark, he could see nothing more than pilings driven deep into the bed of the harbour, stretching in every direction.

Leclerc and the Bear came down the iron ladder close behind him, and in response to the dope smuggler's gunpoint prodding, Caine walked to the edge of the quay, where he saw the boat that was waiting.

It was the first time he had noticed the boat, and now he stared at it with keen-eyed appreciation of the lengths the dope men were prepared to go in the furtherance of their vile trade.

It was a launch, a high-powered vessel if her lines were anything to go by, with shining paintwork and gleaming fittings. A large searchlight was fitted up in the pointed bows which suggested to the agent's mind that there was plenty of night work involved in the operations of the Marseilles smuggling ring.

Before he had time for further observation Leclerc was prodding him again in the small of the back.

"Get aboard," the little French thug hissed in his ear. "We are taking you for a ride, sailorman!"

As Caine jumped down onto the afterdeck of the launch a man came from below, a kind of seafaring man this, wearing a high necked sweater and nankeen trousers. He scowled when he saw who Leclerc and the Bear had brought with them.

"Who's this?" he wanted to know. "What the hell's going on here?"

Leclerc supplied the information.

"He's a sailor off the *Freetown*. Somehow or other he's got wise to what's happening. The Boss says to get rid of him."

The man in the sweater rubbed the tip of his nose reflectively. Then: "Well, that's your business - nothing to do with me, Leclerc. I just run this boat. You'd better take him below, out of the way."

Leclerc jerked his head towards the open hatch leading down to the forward cabin, and Caine moved.

He descended the ladder with Leclerc behind him, and found

himself in a ship-shape cabin, comfortably furnished, and well-lit. But it wasn't the cabin furnishings that held his attention. It was the occupants.

There were two of them, and they were both wearing black, rubber suits, thin and close-fitting. One of them was occupied with a task on the cabin table, and when Caine switched his gaze he saw four metal objects resembling heavy containers.

They were shaped like pill-boxes, each with a lid that when it was screwed down as two of them were, it was almost impossible to see where lid and cover joined.

And then, in a sudden flash of inspiration, the whole mystery of the *Freetown* narcotics smuggling became as clear as daylight to John Caine.

\* \* \*

The two men in the black rubber suits, the flat metal containers with the screw-down lids . . .

The operation was as old as the Second World War. The Italians had been the first to operate below the water in such a manner. Clad in frogman outfits they swam into British-held harbours at night and affixed magnetic limpet mines to the hulls of ships. Nothing would be known of their silent night visit until the delayed action mines exploded, and thousands of tons of British shipping went to the bottom of the harbour.

These men were doing exactly the same kind of thing except that their objective was filthier.

The French frogmen swam from the smuggling launch under cover of darkness to where the *Freetown* was at anchor. There, under the water, they fixed their magnetized containers to the old freighter's hull, then swam back to the launch again.

The main difference was that the containers weren't filled with high explosive, as in the old wartime days, but with small water-tight packets of heroin to be sold to the drug addicts in the United States of America.

Caine figured that when the *Freetown* docked in New York, gangster frogmen of the American drug syndicate paid the freighter a midnight visit, hauled off the containers, and swam with them to where a launch would be waiting for them. After that the filth would be handed over to someone waiting to receive it along the Brooklyn waterfront.

How simple the whole thing was when you knew about it. And



this little device had been fooling the U.S. Narcotics Bureau and the Customs Department for months!

Leclerc hastened to explain to the two frogmen just exactly who the bearded seaman was, and what he was doing aboard the launch.

"When are you going to toss him over the side?" one of the frogmen asked nonchalantly.

Leclerc shrugged.

"Just before you guys are ready to leave," he answered. "He'll soon be picked up, but he won't be doing any talking, and he'll be just another nameless fish to the flics."

The Bear pushed Caine down onto one of the narrow couches, and the agent leaned against the bulkhead, watching intently as the smugglers packed tiny watertight bags of dope into the remaining containers before screwing down the lids.

The launch was under way by this time, cutting through the black water like a knife through butter and throwing up a high, creamy white bow-wave on either side of the pitching deck.

Fifteen minutes later the engine was cut, and the launch drifted noiselessly on the rolling waves. The Bear glanced at Leclerc who nodded his head.

The frogmen were already pulling their rubber helmets over their heads, and fastening their air cylinders to their shoulders. The magnetized cylinders were packed into leather containers which the rubber-suited slung over their backs, and then fastened to hooks on their wide belts.

All was ready to provide the *Freetown* with some extra cargo — cargo not entered on the ship's lading papers but which would be taken off in New York just the same.

All was ready, too, for the execution of Sisco the yellow bearded seaman; the man who had opened his mouth, and who knew too much to live.

\* \* \*

Caine climbed the ladder as slowly as he could with the others coming up behind him. His brain was whirling. Was there any way out of this?

*What could he do to save himself?*

He could start running now, but he knew that before he reached the deck, Leclerc could put a bullet in his back. It was no use.

They were up on deck now. The two frogmen were standing side by side, watching curiously but without any real interest in what was happening. A man was going to be killed violently. So what? Many men were killed violently in this game – on both sides of the law. You just had to take your chances, and hope that you came out on top.

The man wearing the high-necked sweater was standing by the wheel, a cigarette drooping listlessly between his unshaven lips.

Leclerc raised his automatic. The Bear grinned broadly.

Caine felt the low gunwale pressing hard against the backs of his knees. There was a dryness in his throat, a lump he couldn't swallow no matter how hard he tried.

Leclerc's trigger finger tightened.

"Don't shoot yet, Leclerc!"

It was the man at the wheel. He had heard something suspicious.

"What is it?" hissed Leclerc, shaken at being put off right at the last moment.

"A launch, coming this way!" snapped the man at the wheel.

"It could be a police boat. Let's get a little way off. If they see us stuck here they might start asking questions, and if they hear a shot our whole plan is ruined!"

He started the engine, spun the wheel so that the deck under Caine's feet canted crazily, and the power boat sped off into the blackness to avoid awkward questions.

Caine stood and watched the man's hands on the wheel. Two feet from him Leclerc stood with levelled gun. The Bear was immediately behind Leclerc. The two frogmen were sitting on the gunwale watching the black water flash by.

At last one of the rubber-suited men looked up to shout: "Okay, we're on our way, Pierre. Pick us up at the usual place, mon ami!"

And then they were both gone. Silent, fish-like, they had slipped over the side into the water with their priceless containers of dope, swimming under the surface in the direction of the *Free-town's* berth.

For a fraction of a second, as the two men went over the side, the attention of the remainder of the crew was diverted – and in that brief moment Caine went into violent action!

Reaching out with his bound hands he caught at the steering wheel and wrenched it hard towards himself. Caught completely off guard, the man in the sweater, Leclerc, and the Bear reeled off

balance, and in that same instant Caine threw himself backwards and over the side.

As he hit the water, Leclerc had already recovered his balance, and was coming after him, swearing obscenely. The undercover agent was still visible in the launch's erratic wake as the Marseilles hoodlum squeezed the trigger of his automatic, pumping shot after shot after the man who had tricked him.

Caine screamed, and a grin replaced the snarl on Leclerc's thin face.

"I got him, I got the bastard!" he shrieked in relief.

The Bear made horrible noises deep in his throat, and slapped his friend's shoulder to show his appreciation of his shooting skill.

Pierre at the wheel brought the launch round in a wide arc.

"It's a bloody good job for you that you did get him!" he shouted, his face filmed with fine spray. "If the Boss heard that you let him escape it'd be curtains for you, Leclerc!"

Leclerc turned on the other man, snarling viciously.

"Well, he didn't escape, did he! You heard that shout. I got him good, and he's on his way to the bottom right now. Come on, get this crate round to the pick-up point!"

The launch sped away into the darkness, on its way to pick up the two men who were already approaching the barnacle encrusted hull of the old freighter.

Caine was left alone, alone and floating in the icy cold water with a copper-nosed slug in his right shoulder, and his two hands tied tightly together so that he was unable to swim. All he could do was to lie on his back, floating, and hope that someone would find him and pick him up before he froze to death.

Once a motor boat passed close in the darkness, and for a moment Caine was tempted to open his mouth and shout for help. He snapped it tight just in time. He couldn't be certain that the boat wasn't the launch carrying the dope smugglers. If they were to find him still living they wouldn't miss a second time.

It seemed to Caine, alone and in the filthy water of the Marseilles harbour, that hours must have passed before any other craft came near him, and when the round stemmed bows of a small fishing boat came ploughing through the waves, he was much too cold to do anything but lie helplessly . . . and pray to God he was spotted.

Someone shouted loudly, someone else answered, and then the tiny boat hove to alongside.

"There is something floating in the water, mon père. Mon Dieu, I think it is a body!"

"Then better to leave it where it is, mon fils. That sort of job is for the police, not us."

"Father!" The shout was urgent. "It's a man, and I don't think he is dead!"

"Eh, what is that? If he lives why doesn't he swim then, or shout to us? Here, give me that boat-hook. Let's see if we can't pull him alongside!"

Caine felt the iron hook bump over his body, and with his last remaining ounce of strength he lifted his bound hands and fastened it through the belt of his seaman's jacket.

Then he was being drawn through the water to the side of the fishing boat. As he bumped against the low gunwale, willing hands were waiting to pull him up and over. He sagged down between the thwarts, and when he opened his eyes the pale face of a youth was staring down at him.

"Merci, mon ami," Caine whispered weakly. "I was just about done for."

An older man, the boy's father, pushed him to one side, and pulled at the rope binding Caine's wrists. When they came free the British agent lifted them, and as he did so a white hot knife of pain shot through his shoulder.

"Sacré bleu!" swore the fisherman. "You have been hurt, mon ami. There is blood on your coat!"

"Yes," Caine agreed, and winced as the agony shot through him again. "Look, m'sieur, I'm grateful to you for fishing me out of the water. You've saved my life, I realize that, and I won't forget it. Now I want you to do something else for me. Take me ashore immediately."

The fisherman frowned.

"I was on my way home, I and the boy. I didn't think I - "

"Here . . ." With his one good arm Caine felt around in his jacket pocket, and came out with a roll of notes. An agent always needed plenty of currency on his person for the unexpected emergencies, and this was an emergency. He peeled off a dozen notes and pushed them into the Frenchman's gnarled hand.

"There's a thousand francs, m'sieur. More than you'll earn in a week's fishing. Take me ashore at once!"

Man and boy stared wide-eyed at the money that had been thrust upon them. Then the father turned, and nodded his head slowly.

"I didn't think you talked like a sailor, and now you don't even act like one. But for a thousand francs I don't care who you are. Jean, get to the tiller, and make for the nearest pier!"

Caine smiled.

\* \* \*

Ten minutes later, Caine was ashore. He shook hands gratefully with both the father and son, then walked along, oblivious of the stares of the few dubious characters still abroad in the small hours of the morning.

In a narrow street he hailed a taxi. The driver took one look at the bearded, drenched-to-the-skin, bloodstained man who wanted to hire him, and shook his head.

"Too late, m'sieur," he growled. "I'm on my way home."

Caine flashed money in front of his face.

"Look, I'm not out to hurt you. I've got plenty of cash of my own. I don't need yours. Now take me as fast as you can to the headquarters of the Police Judiciare!"

Again a mind was altered at the sight of money. The driver threw open the rear door, and grinned widely.

"Police Judiciare it is, m'sieur. Jump in. We're on our way!"

Half an hour later Caine was back inside the Marseilles police building. The same sergeant was still on duty who had been there on Caine's earlier visit.

This time the sergeant didn't hesitate or make any comment on Caine's terrible physical appearance.

"Commissaire Capello, m'sieur?" he inquired. "Go right on up to his office. The commissaire has been waiting all night for you to return. He told me to let him know as soon as you arrived."

"You do that, sergent," Caine nodded. "Meanwhile I'll go up. I know the way."

Capello was waiting for him on the stairs. Apparently the desk sergeant had described the bearded man's strange appearance, and the commissaire was anxious.

As soon as they were in the office, the commissaire was on the phone to the police surgeon.

Then he told Caine not to worry, that the surgeon would be arriving in five minutes to fix up his hurt.

"Thanks," Caine said. "It's a bullet. It'll have to come out tonight."

Capello raised his eyebrows expressively.

"You found your smugglers then, M'sieur Caine?"

"I found them," Caine said grimly. "And found out what their game is, too. I know now how the narcotics are being smuggled in the *Freetown*. Your detective was quite right."

"Tell me about it," Capello urged.

Speaking now in his natural, precise English, Caine told the French policeman exactly what had happened to him that night from the time he entered *Le Chat Noir* down on the waterfront to the moment when he was dragged helpless out of the harbour by the fisherman and his son.

When Caine ended his story the commissaire rubbed his jaw reflectively, and said: "The *Freetown* sailed at midnight, but I suppose we could get her back here with the evidence you have."

Caine raised his hand restrainingly.

"No, don't do that, m'sieur," he told Capello. "That way we will lose everything. If the smugglers here in Marseilles think you are wise to their game they won't try it again, and you'll never catch them. Leave things as they are, and when the *Freetown* once more docks in Marseilles you can have men ready to take them red-handed.

"For my part I want the *Freetown* to continue her voyage uninterrupted to New York. I hope to be standing by when she berths, and to be on hand when the men at the American end of the line come in to take possession of the narcotics."

Capello shrugged his shoulders.

"But they will come in any case, M'sieur Caine. They won't know the drugs have gone until they swim down to remove the containers."

Caine nodded.

"Yes, but they aren't the ones we're really anxious to get hold of," he explained to the commissaire. "What we want are the wholesalers in New York, the swine who take delivery of the filth, and then distribute it. If the swimmers find out the containers have been removed before they get there they'll take fright, and get out fast. The big fellows who are waiting for delivery will get tired of waiting, and then fade out. That way we won't get our hands on them. No, I think it will be best for us all on both sides of the ocean to leave things the way they are. That way we may all end up lucky."

The French police surgeon made his appearance at that point, and after examining Caine's wounded shoulder, announced that

he could remove the bullet at once if Caine would accompany him to the hospital.

"Fine," Caine nodded. "The *Freetown* doesn't reach New York for ten days. I'll rest up here in Marseilles for a few days, and then take a plane for New York. That way I'll be in plenty of time to arrange something with the Bureau of Narcotics."

## 5

*Caine Sets A Trap*

FOUR days later, John Caine left Marseilles by air for the States. He carried his right arm in a sling although he was sure he could do without it now. The removal of the bullet Leclerc had put in him had been easy enough, and he was able to leave the hospital within twenty-four hours. To prevent stiffness he had exercised his arm constantly, and it now felt as good as new.

At Kennedy Airport, New York, Caine was met by Bureau of Narcotics head, James Spooner, and as soon as the broad-shouldered figure of the English agent was seen coming through customs, Spooner hurried forward to greet him.

"I got your telegram, Caine." He looked with concern at the right arm in its white sling. "Hey, what happened to you over there in Europe?"

Caine smiled.

"I got in the way of a bullet I'm afraid," he replied coolly. "Nothing to worry over though. My arm's as good as ever it was."

Spooner led the Englishman out to a waiting car.

"I gather you hit pay dirt, Caine, with regard to the smuggling out of Marseilles. Tell me about it."

As they sped through the skyscrapered streets, Caine related his story to the Narcotics man.

From time to time Spooner interrupted to ask pertinent questions regarding the operation, and all important details were tucked away in his filing-cabinet mind for future reference in dealing with the drug smuggling traffic.

"No wonder we never found any stuff aboard the *Freetown*," he said at last. "Stuck on the hull below the water line, eh? Well how d'you like that. These guys are getting smarter all the time, Caine."

"Yes, and we're going to prove ourselves smarter," Caine told him grimly. "Listen to me, Mr. Spooner. I have a plan of my own for catching them on this side of the Atlantic. The wholesalers as well as the pick-up boys."

Later, in Spooner's office, Caine outlined his plan in great detail. When he was finished the American Federal man looked doubtful.

"I don't know, Caine. It sounds all right, I guess, but it could be hellish dangerous for you. If those boys find out what you're doing at any stage of the game, they'll kill you."

"I realize that there will be a certain amount of danger," Caine agreed. "But I am prepared to accept that. Unless we do as I have said, we stand a good chance of not picking up the wholesalers, and they are the ones we want, remember. The small fry are relatively unimportant. The ones we want behind prison bars are the big boys of the Syndicate."

Spooner compressed his lips.

"Okay, we'll play it your way, Caine. It's been your show from the beginning so we can hardly refuse your request to be in at the end. You think your shoulder will be all right?"

"It's all right now," Caine assured him.

"And this underwater caper? You done anything like it before, Caine?"

"Oh yes. I took a course at Gibraltar with the Royal Navy three years ago. Just before I had to go into Spain on a job that might have involved frogman activities."

"Okay," Spooner rose to his feet. "I've booked a room for you at the Astoria. Stay there and take care of that arm. When the *Freetown* docks we'll be waiting for her."

\* \* \*

And they were.

When the rusty Liberian freighter reached New York, and berthed in the East River the Customs men were waiting for her as usual. With the dope gangsters probably watching everything that happened it wouldn't be wise to discard the usual search even though they knew they weren't going to find anything.

The captain clucked his tongue, and shook his head deplorably as the uniformed customs officials left the *Freetown* empty-handed as they always did. Narcotics indeed. When were these crazy Americans going to realize that there were no narcotics



aboard the *Freetown* – that there never had been, and never would be?

That night, when darkness fell, men were waiting patiently in a fast police launch close to Pier 36 where the *Freetown* was tied up. They were almost out of sight of the ship, and couldn't be spotted from the middle of the river.

The fairyland lights of Brooklyn twinkled in the darkness and were reflected on the rippling waters of the East River like a million dancing will-o'-the-wisps. Although night had come there was still plenty of activity with big ocean-going ships passing occasionally from berth to berth, and the fussy hooting of the little New York tugs in the distance.

At last James Spooner in the police launch glanced down at the luminous dial of his watch, and touched John Caine lightly on the shoulder.

"I reckon it's time, Caine," he murmured. "That is, if you still want to carry on with this crazy scheme."

"I still want to carry on," smiled Caine, his teeth gleaming in the darkness of the shadows cast by the pier overhead, "and it isn't a crazy scheme. This is the only way we're going to get our hands on the big boys mixed up in this racket. Are the patrol cars stationed along the waterfront the way we planned?"

Spooner nodded his head.

"Yes. There are thirty of them from eighteen different precincts on this job tonight. One or another of them must be in the locality if and when you make your strike, Caine."

"I feel confident," Caine replied easily.

The United Nations Narcotics agent was clad from head to foot in black rubber – the complete outfit of a professional frogman. On his hip was a sheathed knife, and in a watertight container on his belt was a snub-nosed, ready-loaded signal pistol.

"Remember," Spooner reminded him. "Those cylinders on your back will give you enough oxygen to last for an hour from the moment you turn them on. Keep an eye on the time down there, and if nobody's turned up to collect the drug containers inside fifty minutes re-surface to replenish your air supply. I don't want to have to explain a drowned agent to the United Nations tomorrow."

"Stop worrying." Caine rose to his feet, and clapped the Federal man on the arm. "I can look after myself. I'll be seeing you later on tonight."

He stood poised at the gunwale of the launch while a couple of eager New York cops looked on admiringly.

"Good luck!" whispered Spooner.

"Thanks," said Caine.

Then he jumped over the side of the launch, and hit the black water with a splash.

Below the surface Caine kicked out in the direction of the Liberian freighter. Once he came up to the surface to make sure he was heading in the right direction. Yes, there she was with yellow light streaming from her portholes not more than fifty yards away.

Caine turned over and dived again. Down, down into the murky depths of the East River, swimming strongly, easily, past the weed- and barnacle-encrusted pilings of Pier 36 with a small spiral of air bubbles rising from the valve of the cylinders on his back.

Now the hull of the *Freetown* was directly in front of him – a black, solid mass wavering in the dim green of the river.

Cautiously, Caine moved past the seemingly enormous rudder and propeller, and swam slowly along the encrusted hull, his keen eyes were searching for the four steel containers that had been placed there when the ship was docked at Marseilles.

He wondered what the *Freetown's* skipper would say if he could know now that the yellow-bearded ruffian who jumped ship in Marseilles was even at this moment swimming under the hull in New York's East River.

He probably just wouldn't believe it.

And suddenly Caine found what he was looking for.

There were the metal containers, exactly as he had seen them aboard the launch in Marseilles. Now they were placed at regular intervals along the old freighter's hull close to the bows, quite easy to see.

Caine swam in close and looked at them. He curled his hands round one of them, and heaved. It moved, but not sufficiently to come free. He tried again, this time with his artificial webbed feet braced against the steel hull.

He jerked hard, and the container came away free in his hands. Under the water it weighed hardly anything at all. The British agent carefully replaced it on the ship's hull where it stuck with a metallic clang. . .

There was nothing to do now but wait for something to happen.

## 6

*The Wholesalers*

C AINE checked the large watch on his wrist, and discovered to his astonishment that he had been down under the water for almost three quarters of an hour.

There was no sign yet of the Syndicate frogmen coming to pick up their precious heroin, and Caine realized that he couldn't afford to stay on watch any longer.

His supply of oxygen would be coming to an end in ten minutes at the most, and he had no choice but to return to the police launch to pick up a fresh supply.

Anxiously, Caine swam away from the *Freetown* and Pier 36. He was afraid that the enemy would come for their drugs whilst he was away from the ship, and the whole vigil would have been for nothing.

The Commission on Narcotics wouldn't take kindly to his having allowed the crooks to get hold of the dope when it would have been simple for police frogmen to go down and remove the containers at their ease.

Caine surfaced beside the launch, and Spooner was at his side instantly.

"Anything happen?" he wanted to know.

Caine shook his head, spattering the American with drops of water.

"Nothing yet, but the containers are down there, all in a neat little row like soldiers on parade. Quick, I want two fresh containers of oxygen. The villains could turn up at any time!"

Sixty seconds later Caine was back under the surface, and heading back to the *Freetown* as fast as he could swim. When he reached his destination he was anxious to find out whether the limpet containers had been removed during his absence.

No, they were still in position. He was in time.

Half an hour passed, and Caine was feeling a little worried. What if they didn't intend to pick the stuff up tonight? But no, that was foolish. Of course they would want to get their avaricious fingers on the stuff as quickly as possible. Possession of heroin was the basis of their whole rotten but lucrative business.

The water rippled somewhere out there in front of the *Freetown's* anchor chain. It looked as though things might be

beginning to liven up. With a prayer in his heart, Caine allowed himself to sink slowly down through the muddy water until he was below the freighter's keel.

Two men swam into his line of vision. Both were dressed as he was himself in black rubber suits, and carrying double cylinder packs on their backs. They were making straight for the bows of the *Freetown* without any hesitation, and from his position of hiding John Caine tensed himself for action.

Down here, even though he was in the middle of New York, he was all on his own. The battle that must be fought, he must fight and win alone. Tonight, in a short while now, a man was going to be hurt – might even be killed. Caine had to ensure that that unfortunate wasn't him.

He made no move as the two frogmen approached the freighter's hull, swimming easily, professionally, through a shoal of small fish, until they spotted the steel containers magnetized to the ship.

Now they turned their faces to the dirty hull, and did exactly as Caine had done when he first found the drug containers. They braced their feet against the metal hull, curled their hands round the limpets, and heaved with all their might.

At first try, both men achieved their objective. The containers came free, and Caine watched through slitted eyes behind his goggles as the two pulled large satchels round onto their chests and fitted the containers inside.

Then they attacked the other two. Again there was no great difficulty with freeing the containers. These also vanished inside the satchels. Then one of the frogmen reached out, tapped his companion lightly, and received a wave in reply.

Both swam away from the *Freetown's* hull, and Caine immediately kicked his long legs out behind him. He followed them at a safe distance, gradually closing in on the one nearest to him, and all the time hoping he wouldn't be spotted before he was ready to disclose his presence.

Neither of the two dope smugglers was aware of the tail they had until Caine suddenly made a fast forward movement, coming up under the kicking feet of the man in the rear. His hand reached upwards and he caught the smuggler's ankle in a grip of steel.

Startled, the smuggler kicked out with his foot, and then finding that whatever had him was still holding on, he jack-knifed over towards his heels . . . and saw Caine holding on to him.

The first frogman was by this time out of sight in the dark

depths of the East River, which was exactly as Caine wanted it. Whatever was to follow was between the two of them, without any outside interference.

With dark eyes glaring out from behind heavy goggles, the smuggler pulled a knife from his belt, and made an immediate slash at Caine's face.

Underwater movements are of necessity slower than in the open air, and Caine had plenty of time to duck his head as the thin blade descended so that the knife passed well above him.

He now released his grip on his adversary's ankle, and brought his own weapon into play. The two men swam cautiously round each other with no other audience than the goggle-eyed fish to applaud their actions.

Caine was content to let the other man make the first move – as long as he didn't try to swim away after his companion – and this the smuggler seemed eager to do.

He came swirling in at Caine with his knife hand out in front of his body, and at once the narcotics agent turned over on his side. As the smuggler passed him by, Caine reached out and grabbed the menacing knife wrist. The smuggler struck out at him with his free hand, and as he did so, Caine thrust hard.

His knife bit home into the man's shoulder, and came away red with blood. A thin cloud of scarlet popped out of the wound and spiralled surfacewise. Caine was well content as he circled behind his wounded opponent. He caught him round the throat with his arm, and forced his neck backwards. The smuggler let go of his weapon which sank slowly into the thick mud at the river bottom.

As the helpless man floated with him, Caine methodically dropped his own knife, which was now unnecessary, and transferred his hold to the vital flexible pipes supplying oxygen from the cylinders to the smuggler's mouth.

A quick wrench and it was all over. A wide stream of bubbles rose from the disconnected pipes, and the man in his grasp struggled in panic. Both were surrounded by a cloudy red mist of blood now, and Caine knew that there was nothing more to be feared.

All the man could do was to rise to the surface, and make his painful way ashore at the nearest point. With a bit of luck he would be picked up by the police who were stationed all the way along the waterfront, and even if he wasn't, Caine felt sure that there was no fast way he could contact the big wholesalers of the Syndicate to let them know that something had gone wrong.

The Syndicate boys were much too cagey to allow their hired underlings to know about such things as how to make contact. If there was any contacting to be done they did it and no one else.

Before he released his hold on his prisoner, Caine snatched the satchel from his back containing the dope containers. It wouldn't do to arrive at the waiting smugglers' launch without the precious cargo from the *Freetown*.

He didn't even wait to watch his defeated opponent's rise to the surface. Although the underwater battle hadn't lasted more than two minutes, the other frogman would be swimming on steadily for the launch awaiting him. Caine had to make up lost time fast. The other man was his guide.

\* \* \*

He kicked out hard, taking deep lungfuls of oxygen, carrying the satchel awkwardly over his shoulder. As he swam he was looking about desperately for the other man, and in the end it was the enemy frogman who found him.

Obviously the man must have discovered that his companion wasn't close behind him the way he was supposed to be, and had turned back to find out what was wrong. It was a good thing he hadn't come on the scene when Caine was engaged in his fight, or it might have meant the end of the plan, and John Caine with a knife sticking in his back.

To indicate a reason for his delay Caine lifted the loose satchel, and it was good enough for his companion. He merely raised his hand, then turned back, and went on swimming unconcernedly the way he had come.

At last the first man rose to the surface, and Caine followed him, taking care not to come too close. The millions of twinkling lights from the shore didn't mean a thing to Caine as his helmeted head bobbed about on the greasy surface of the river, but the other man seemed to know exactly where he was.

He struck out in the direction of a flickering green light, and when they were closer, Caine was able to see that this light was situated in the bows of a low, speedy-looking motor launch in the middle of the river.

As the two frogmen swam in close to the gunwale a dark shape leaned over the side, and asked anxiously: "Everythin' go okay, Mike? No trouble?"

The frogman called Mike shook his head, and handed up his satchel.

“Sure, everythin’ fine, Hatch. Pedro had a bit of a hitch with the satchel on the way back. It musta come loose somehow.” He turned his head to where Caine was also handing his satchel up to a second man standing on the deck of the launch. “How come it fell off, Pedro?”

Caine thought quickly. He was supposed to be a man named Pedro. That sounded like a Mexican. Was he to have an accent when he spoke, or did he talk good old Yankee American like the rest of these hoods?

One little mistake now and he was as good as dead. These people didn’t play games.

Caine ran his tongue over dry lips, braced himself, and hoped he was making the right decision.

“I don’t know, Mike. He just come loose. I hadda pick heem up frum ze bottom.”

A good old Mexican accent. Caine gritted his teeth, and prayed like hell that he hadn’t made the vital mistake.

Nobody noticed anything wrong, however, and the agent breathed easier as the hood who had taken the satchel from him helped him over the low gunwale.

Mike was already aboard and making for the cabin forward with a raincoated man who was carrying the satchels in his arms. There were two more of them on the deck aft – hard-faced, tight-lipped men, typical of the type employed by the all powerful Syndicate to do its dirty work. No doubt they were both armed, and Caine was sadly conscious of the fact that he wasn’t – apart from the signal pistol hidden in the waterproof container on his person.

As he was going down the steps into the cabin the frogman, Mike, called over his shoulder: “Yuh comin’ down, Pedro fer a slug?”

“Een a moment, Mike,” Caine called back, carefully muffling his voice as much as possible. “I just stay here a while.” He was about to add that he intended to smoke a cigarette, and then he remembered that he knew nothing at all about the person he was impersonating. Could be that Pedro didn’t smoke, or maybe that he only smoked “bams”, the weak type of marijuana cigarette much favoured by Mexicans of the underworld fraternity.

So Caine kept his mouth shut as one of the hoods started up

the engine, and took hold of the wheel. The second man looked down at his wristwatch as the launch shuddered to life.

"Five minutes behind time, I figure, Tony. Yuh better move some, boy. The big guys don't like to be kept waitin' on these jobs."

They took no further notice of Caine sitting on the stern gunwale. No one had the least suspicion that he wasn't who he was pretending to be. The agent hoped it would stay like that until he had a chance of meeting the wholesalers face to face, and arrest them for having illegal narcotics in their possession.

The journey across the night river wasn't long, and nobody came back to speak to the bogus Pedro. The men up on deck had a job to do, and those below didn't give a damn if the Mexican frogman wanted to sit up above in his wet rubber suit.

At last Caine saw the signal from the shore, a light winking on and off at regular intervals. Tony saw it too, and spun the wheel hard over to port.

Hatch grunted: "We still didn't make up that lost time, Tony. Them guys'll give us hell!"

"The hell with them, too!" spat Tony. "Like we do all their dirty work for them, and they make the big money!"

"Better keep thoughts like that to yourself," Hatch advised cautiously. "Little guys what talk against th' Syndicate don't live long."

Tony snarled but took the warning to heart, and said no more.

Caine, sitting on the gunwale, was tense with expectation. As soon as the dope was handed over, he was going into swift action. Maybe he would get killed; there was a big chance that he would, but it was almost worth it, he figured, if these purveyors of death could be put behind prison bars where they belonged.

Tony cut the engine and the powerful launch glided in close to a stone-walled pier where two men were waiting. Caine couldn't see much of them for they were dressed in heavy overcoats as a protection against the biting wind off the river, and both wore snap-brimmed hats pulled down low over their ears and eyes.

"What kept yuh?" one of them snapped angrily as the launch bumped the edge of the pier. "We been waitin' here for the past half hour. You guys think we got nothin' else to do but sit around on our fannies half th' night?"

Mike came up from below with a dispatch case swinging in his hand. Caine guessed that it was full of packets of heroin, the smuggled cargo all the way from the dope ring in Marseilles.



He climbed over to the pier, and handed the case to one of the men. Caine noted that a black car was waiting with its engine ticking over a few yards away under the black shadow of a warehouse.

The man took the case, nodded to his companion who took a wallet from his coat and counted out a wad of notes. Without a word he handed them over to Mike.

"It's all there," the wholesaler told him. The man's voice had a faint Italian accent. "You don't need to count it yet."

Mike stuffed the bills into his pocket, nodded his head.

"Let us know when we're needed again," he said. "You know where to contact us."

The Italian grunted unintelligibly.

Caine watched hawk-eyed as the two men made their way to the waiting car. The one with the case of heroin ducked in behind the wheel, waited for his companion to round the bonnet and join him in the front seat.

Caine watched him deposit the case on the back seat, then light a cheroot.

Now was the moment to act. Another minute and the car would be gone into the New York night. He dived over the gunwale, landing hard on the pier almost beside Mike who yelled at him in surprise: "Hey, Pedro, what th' hell yuh doin'? You gone crazy or somethin'?"

He moved in to block the agent's path, and Caine hit him hard in the throat with the edge of his hand. He couldn't afford to be stopped now. His blow put Mike down on the pier, gurgling and unable to speak.

He raced across to where the car was standing, pulling the signal gun from his hip as he did so. The two Syndicate men sat stupefied as this dark-faced man in the black rubber suit threw open the rear door, and barked at them: "I am an agent of the U.N. Commission on Narcotics. You two are under arrest for being in possession of illegal drugs!"

At the same moment he turned the muzzle of his pistol skyward and pulled the trigger, sending a hissing cartridge high into the air where it burst in a shower of many coloured streamers . . . as a signal to the waiting patrol cars stationed along the waterfront of the East River!

## 7

*Racing With Death*

“WHAT th’ hell yuh tryin’ to do?” raged the man behind the wheel of the car. It seemed as though he hadn’t understood what had happened – it was all being done so quickly. “What’s wid th’ fireworks?”

The pier on which the black car was standing was now as light as day with the blazing signal hanging overhead in the sky.

On the launch, the men who had retrieved the narcotics from the hull of the *Freetown* didn’t know what it was about either. They stood on the bobbing deck staring open-mouthed at the sky.

“Don’t try to start moving!” Caine warned the two drug traffickers grimly. “The police are on their way here now. You can’t get away!”

The full significance of what was happening dawned in the minds of the two men.

With a curse the man behind the wheel threw her into gear, and stepped down hard on the accelerator. At the same time his companion whipped a blue-barrelled automatic from the pocket of his overcoat, and pointed it at Caine’s head.

The launch was already on its way out. If there was going to be any trouble, they didn’t want to know. On the foredeck Mike was cursing fluently, and demanding of heaven and hell to tell him just what had happened to that nut Pedro.

The black car jerked forward as the driver hit the pedal, and it was this that saved John Caine’s life as the second man pulled the trigger of his gun. The bullet went wide of its intended mark, and Caine was able to lean forward and grab at the man’s wrist before he was rebalanced enough to take another shot.

Already the wail of a police siren could be heard above the rest of the waterfront sounds, and as the car raced round the far corner of the warehouse, two Police Department prowl cars came lashing round the other end.

Whilst one went in pursuit of the fleeing dope traffickers, the other screeched to a tyre-burning halt on the edge of the pier, and two plain-clothes men piled out of the rear door.

Both were carrying rapid-fire guns, and without the least hesitation they opened up on the retreating launch.

After the first burst one of them yelled after the fugitives: "Turn her round and come back here before we let you really have it. You don't get any more chances!"

Tony at the wheel was nursing a shattered elbow, and calling down curses on the big guys of the Syndicate. Mike pushed him to one side, and spun the wheel to obey the orders from the pier.

There was nothing else to do. Refusal to turn back would mean a hail of lead they couldn't avoid. It was better to be a live con than a dead drug smuggler.

\* \* \*

Meanwhile, Caine was having all his time cut out to handle the man with the gun in the speeding car. The crook at the wheel was holding grimly to a prearranged route, hunched low in his seat, and snarling out good advice to his companion as how to deal with the no-good, stinking, lousy cop.

Good advice indeed, but the man with the gun wasn't able to do much in the way of following it. Caine had his wrist in a grip of steel, and no matter what he tried, he was unable to shake himself free.

And above all the cursing, the groaning and the struggling, the sound of the police siren was with them all the time.

Caine's opponent suddenly clenched his fist, and smashed savagely at the agent's face. Without releasing his vital hold, Caine ducked backwards allowing the punch to ride across his cheek, and when the crook was off balance he pulled him forwards over the back of the seat, and almost into his lap.

As they both rolled off the back seat Caine was uppermost, and now he used his unexpected advantage to finish the man off for good. He drove his knee mercilessly into his opponent's crutch. The thug lifted his head screaming; Caine let him have it with every ounce of strength he could muster.

His knuckles drove into the gunman's face, mashing his lips and nose to a red pulp. As the man went limp beneath him, Caine wrenched the automatic from his nerveless fingers, and clambered from his knees.

The driver was still hunched low behind his wheel, his foot hard down on the accelerator with the bright lights of Broadway flashing past on either side in an endless blur of speed.

Gasping for breath, Caine leaned over the back of the seat and put the barrel of the gun to the man's head.

"Stop this car!" he hissed coldly, "or I'll blow your head right off your shoulders!"

Although pale-faced and shaken, the dope trafficker had guts – Caine was forced to admit that.

"Go ahead and shoot, copper!" he rasped. "You won't come out of it any better than me. This heap's travellin' some, and if we hit somethin' solid, they won't know which is you and which is me when they come to put the pieces together!"

Caine had to agree he was right. Still keeping his gun on the driver, he glanced over his shoulder through the rear window. The police car was still there behind them with siren screeching and lights glaring.

The black car rocketed round a corner almost on its nearside wheels alone, and it was then that Caine made up his mind. The way this thug was driving, it was likely they were going to end up being killed in a crash anyway, so what did it matter if he shortened the agony?

Once more he pressed the muzzle of his gun to the Syndicate man's head.

"You going to stop this car?"

"Nuts!" snarled the hood.

"All right, you asked for it. We should spend many happy hours beyond the pearly gates discussing your foolishness."

He reversed the weapon in his hand, offered a brief prayer up for his own survival, and struck hard at an imaginary spot behind the drug trafficker's right ear.

The man slumped sideways without a murmur, and immediately Caine dropped flat behind the front seat. Hastily he shifted the limp body of the man he had knocked out so that it rested on top of him. Then he clenched his teeth hard, and waited for the inevitable pile-up.

It didn't take long to happen. The black car, completely out of control, swerved wildly across the street, scraping the fender of a passing truck. It hit a lamp standard with an ear-splitting screech of tearing metal, then turned round and round on the sidewalk before finally toppling over on its side in the entrance of a third-rate news theatre.

\* \* \*

The crowd was gathering round the wreckage when the police car ground to a halt and men came piling out of the doors. Two

uniformed cops drew their guns and pushed the crowd back while three others, one of whom was a member of the Bureau of Narcotics, ran to the twisted heap of steel and rubber, and wrenched open one of the battered doors.

"God!" breathed one of the detectives. "This guy at the wheel didn't stand a chance in hell. He's spattered all over the wind-screen!"

"How about the limey?" one of the others wanted to know. "Is he okay?"

"I don't know, I can't even see him!"

Somebody had phoned for an ambulance, and now it could be heard coming down the street.

The detective pushed himself into the wreck over the ripped-up body of the driver.

"Hey, give me a hand here. Caine's lying underneath one of the other guys!"

His companion eased himself into the wreckage, and together the two detectives managed to pull Caine out of the car on to the sidewalk.

One side of his face was bruised, and there was a shallow cut over one eye. Apart from that he seemed to be all right, although a little groggy from the impact of the smash.

Among the wide-eyed crowd of onlookers being held back by the police, the voice of a small boy piped up: "Gee, look maw. It must be Superman!"

Indeed, as he stood in the glare of the lights of the news theatre, still dressed in the black-rubber frogman suit he had used in the East River, John Caine did resemble something different from the average policeman to be seen in New York.

A patrolman, examining the other occupants of the car, turned to shout: "The driver's dead, but the other guy in the back's still alive."

"A pity," observed one of the detectives dryly. "Them people don't deserve to live. Did you get 'em with the stuff?" he asked Caine anxiously.

"I did," Caine nodded. "You'll find it all on the back seat of the wreck."

After treatment in hospital, Caine was allowed to leave, and the next morning saw him sitting in the office of Supervisor James Spooner of the Treasury Department's Bureau of Narcotics.

The American was smiling happily as he handed a cigarette case across his desk to the British agent.

"Well, that's another case successfully ended, thanks to you, Caine. The guy in the car's going to find himself behind bars for a long time to come."

Caine lit his cigarette.

"He should be executed," was his observation. "Goodness knows how many young people he's led into drug addiction over the past years."

Spooner agreed.

"But we can say now that we've stopped the traffic aboard the *Freetown*. They won't dare try that method again now that we know about it."

"Correct," John Caine smiled and rose to his feet.

"You leaving already?" Spooner asked.

Caine nodded.

"I've a plane to catch for San Francisco in two hours' time. There's a job waiting for me. We think the Reds are smuggling narcotics in from China, and I've been detailed to co-operate with the authorities there. I'm overdue on the assignment now."

Spooner watched the departure of the U.N. agent with a confident smile. The war against the drug traffic was never-ending, but as long as there were men – dedicated men like John Caine – to combat the menace, there would be room for hope.

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## *Drop us a line . . .*

We should like to hear from our readers. Comments, criticisms, queries, requests – please do not hesitate to write to *The Editor, Edgar Wallace Mystery Magazine, Micron House, Gorrington Park Avenue, Mitcham, Surrey, England*. It will be your letters that help us to plan ahead, featuring the most popular types of stories by your favourite authors.

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The bridge had a low parapet; the stone walls were now leaping at the two cars. Someone had to give way . . .

# FIRST MAN ACROSS

**Victor May**

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**H**ARRY MARTIN'S eyes narrowed as he realised what the other man was trying to do. The two cars screamed along the road, both heading for the narrow bridge which led them up towards the town of San Perigi.

They had covered about half the distance in the world-famous Mille Miglia race - the annual road race held round a tortuous circuit in Italy. There was more in winning for both the men now battling it out . . .

Harry Martin was driving a sleek blue car, aptly named the Blue Flash by his admirers. His opponent, Val Chenelli, an American with an Italian background, was handling the Red Arrow.

Harry and Chenelli had met at several race meetings, but the trouble had happened the other night. Harry Martin had gone back to take a look at the Blue Flash, to run his hands over the trim lines. The car meant everything to him. It was his life.

A figure had detached itself from the car and hurried into the shadows. Harry had reacted instantly. He had run after the man and grabbed him.

"What were you trying to do, my friend?" he had asked, his voice harsh and challenging.

"Nothing, signore."

"Then why are you here?"

Harry knew instinctively that the mysterious intruder had been trying to tamper with the car.

The little man had at first tried to bluff his way out of the situation, but after Harry Martin had threatened to report him to the police, the fellow had admitted that Val Chenelli had paid him to fix the brakes.

Harry had let the frightened man go. He was nothing. But he had realized that Chenelli had tried to kill him. The brakes had been fixed in such a way that should Harry have jammed them hard on to negotiate a tricky bend, they would have failed, sending both the car and him spinning off the road at well over eighty miles an hour. Death would have been almost certain.

Now there were only the two of them. The road ran straight for a couple of miles, flanked on either side by tall trees. At the end was the narrow bridge which led into a sharp right hand turn before the road climbed steeply towards San Perigi.

The bridge was only wide enough to take one car at a time. Both drivers knew this, yet neither was prepared to give way to the other.

Harry cast a swift glance across to where Val Chenelli was sitting tensed behind the wheel of the Red Arrow. The air was filled with the roar of the exhausts as both cars sped down the straight at over ninety miles an hour. With every second the corner loomed nearer.

Which man would give way first?

Harry Martin gritted his teeth. He wondered if Chenelli was banking on the fact that his brakes would fail at the crucial moment? Chenelli turned his head slightly, his lips drawn back in a sneer. Slowly he edged his car across the road.

Now they were running exactly level, only inches separating their front wheels.

"Pull over, you fool!" Harry shouted at the other. But the rush of wind whipped his words away to be lost in the throaty chuckle of the two exhausts.

Chenelli glanced across again and edged his car closer.

If the wheels locked they would both be killed. Harry could see that Chenelli was hoping to just touch the Blue Flash. At that speed the slightest movement would be sufficient to send Harry off the road. The car would hit one of the trees and end up as a crumpled mass of steel.

Harry Martin pressed the accelerator flat to the boards. He



knew that he should be braking, changing down to negotiate the bridge and the bend that followed.

The bridge had a low parapet; the stone walls were now leaping at the two cars. Someone had to give way.

Then Chenelli's wheels caught the Blue Flash. Harry felt the car slide across the road, tyres smoking against the rough surface. His gloved hands fought for control, the trees coming at him fast. He managed to correct the slide, bring round the tail. Then the car was drifting back across the road once again.

The manoeuvre had given Chenelli the vital lead he needed.

Harry Martin cursed beneath his breath. He was furious at being caught by such a dirty trick and even more angry at the fact that Val Chenelli had deliberately tried to kill him. That was murder!

The bucking car was under control again, as Harry's skilful hands wrestled with the wheel. It was only the fact that he was an expert driver that had saved him from a very nasty crash. That and a little luck . . . He changed down smoothly, setting the car in line for the bridge and the bend beyond. He watched Chenelli through narrowed eyes. The Red Arrow was on the bridge.

"He's taking it too fast!" Harry muttered. "He'll never be able to pull the car round that bend."

Val Chenelli, intent on running his rival off the road, had left it just a fraction too late. Harry Martin could see the smoke curling up from the rear wheels of the Red Arrow as Chenelli frantically braked, trying to reduce his speed sufficiently to get round the dangerous bend. The road, as it left the bridge, curved sharply, flanked on one side by a high bank and on the other by a deep ravine. It was typical central Italian country.

Chenelli's car started to swing madly from side to side as its driver fought for control. But he was fighting a losing battle.

Harry watched fascinated, unable to tear his eyes away from the drama that was happening only yards ahead of him.

The Red Arrow rocked across the bridge, its tail scraping first one side and then the other. Then Chenelli tried to pull it round the sharp bend. The car mounted the steep bank, tilted backwards and skidded across the road. The frail fence that bordered the ravine snapped like matchwood beneath the spinning car.

Harry Martin slowed down, glancing into the depths. The brilliant red car was slowly rolling over and over as it bounced towards the bottom of the ravine. As he watched, his own car moving barely faster than walking pace, the other car hit the

bottom. There was a sudden burst of orange flame as the petrol tank ignited.

Harry Martin felt sorry for Val Chenelli. The man had been a good driver. But he hadn't played fair. But for a stroke of fate, it could have been Harry who had spun off the road. Chenelli had got what he had hoped to hand out to others.

Harry accelerated. There was still a long way to go before the race was won. The accident he had just witnessed would be taken as one of the hazards that racing drivers had to bargain with. Although Harry Martin knew the truth, he would never tell it. Even Val Chenelli with all his ruthlessness had a right to be remembered as one of the great racing drivers of his time.

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## Next month in **EWMM**

**EDGAR WALLACE**

"Bill of Scotland Yard"

**ARTHUR KENT**

"Last Action"

**BILL KNOX**

"The Service Flat"

*- and other stories*



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# TRUE CRIME

**Step by step, police detective and pathologist gleaned the damning evidence from the battered corpse of the girl who'd lived in a wigwam . . .**

## THE WIGWAM MURDER

**re-told by**

**T. C. H. Jacobs**

**A**MONG the many triumphs of scientific detection in which Professor Keith Simpson of Guy's Hospital has played a leading part, the crime known as The Wigwam Murder is a classic example. The grim secrets of "a rag, a bone and a hank of hair" were, by expert reconstruction, revealed in all their grisly horror.

On October 7th, 1942, at 10.20 in the morning, two Royal Marines engaged on field exercises reached the highest point on the gorse and heather-clad slopes of Hankley Common, near Godalming. Behind a mound of earth they were shocked to see a human hand protruding from the base.

They reported immediately to their C.O., who in turn informed the police. Detective Superintendent T. Roberts of the Surrey Constabulary C.I.D. and Superintendent R. Webb in whose division the area lay, were soon on the scene. After a preliminary investigation they decided that this could be a murder case of some magnitude and that the body should not be uncovered until the assistance of a pathologist was available.

The Chief Constable, Major G. Nicholson, agreed and two eminent pathologists were summoned, Professor Keith Simpson and Dr. Eric Gardner, consulting pathologist to Wey-

bridge Hospital. That the police had acted with wisdom was soon apparent.

In addition, the Chief Constable asked for the assistance of the Metropolitan Police, whose services are available to all provincial police forces who ask for aid in major crimes. The following day, Detective Chief Inspector R. Greeno and Detective Sergeant F. Hodges left New Scotland Yard and travelled to Godalming to assist the Surrey police officers.

In the meantime the body had been uncovered in the presence of the pathologists. It had not been buried in a dug-out grave, but some of the sandy earth from the mound had been piled over it and clumps of turf and heather stamped over the earth. Some of this had fallen away, exposing the right forearm and hand, which were dry and mummified by exposure to sun and wind. The thumb, middle and index fingers had been severely damaged by rats. The body, when uncovered, was found to be so heavily infested by maggots that it was obvious it had been exposed to flies for some days before burial under the mound.

It lay face downwards, legs wide apart, the right arm extended, the left doubled under the chest. The clothing was female: a green and white dress with a lace collar, a slip, a vest, brassiere, and French knickers. On each foot was a blue wool sock with red stripes. There were tears in the right sock over the ankle as if the body had been dragged over rough ground. Post mortem injuries to the ankle lay beneath the tears, which suggested that the body had been moved from the actual place of murder.

The cause of death was a severe battering of the back of the skull by some heavy instrument which had caused numerous fractures. Only a fragment of scalp and a wisp of hair remained on the head. It had been a very brutal attack indeed.

The heather on which the body had been lying was still fresh and green, with the blooms just beginning to fade. This, with the extent to which the maggot infestation had developed, confirmed other scientific evidence that death had taken place between four and five weeks previously.

With the Coroner's agreement the body was removed to the laboratory of the Department of Forensic Medicine at Guy's Hospital, where Professor Keith Simpson was in charge. It was placed in a tank containing carbolic preparatory to examination.

While Professor Keith Simpson was working on the body the police were making a comb-out of the immediate neighbourhood, searching for the dead woman's shoes, and anything else which

might help in their investigations – especially the murder weapon. So far she had not been identified.

Four days later, the right shoe was found 330 yards from the place where she had been buried, hidden among the heather. The left shoe lay 25 yards from it. On the bank of a small stream a canvas bag was discovered which contained a rosary and a piece of soap.

Further search revealed a heavy stake of birch-wood, three feet two and a half inches long and weighing two and a half pounds. A number of human hairs were embedded in the crushed and splintered bark. This stake was of the exact diameter, one and three quarter inches, which Dr. Simpson had estimated for the weapon which had caused the fatal head wounds. On examination under a microscope, the hairs embedded in the stake were found to be identical with the hair taken from the fragment of scalp.

This, then, was unquestionably the murder weapon. But it took three more days before anything further of importance was discovered. By this time the search had widened in scope. In a wooded dell some 500 yards from the stream where the canvas bag had been found, a National Registration Identity card and a National Health Insurance card were discovered under drifts of dried leaves.

These cards bore the name of Joan Pearl Wolfe. Near them other articles were uncovered: a portion of an official Army form to be completed by a private soldier about to be married, a green purse, and – something of great importance – a letter addressed to a man who subsequently proved to be the murderer. This informed him in no uncertain terms that she was pregnant and he had to marry her.

The murderer could not have known of the existence of such an incriminating document or he would never have left it intact for the police to find.

At first the police were suspicious that the letter might be a plant. But, at least, it suggested the age-old motive for murder.

Lower down the hillside a silver crucifix was found and evidence that, after the first attack, she had managed to stagger to the place where the crucifix was lost before being struck the final, fatal blows.

Joan Pearl Wolfe was known to the local police as a girl who had been living in the neighbourhood of the Canadian Army camp in a wigwam, constructed Indian fashion, by a French Canadian soldier named August Sangret.

Chief Inspector Greeno interviewed Sangret, but said nothing of the discovery of the body or anything to suggest that murder was suspected, just that the girl had disappeared, and where was she?

Sangret made a clear and apparently frank statement, admitting that he had lived on intimate terms with her in the wigwam up to September 14th, 1942, when she had failed to keep an appointment with him for that night, and he had not seen her since. Worried, because he was fond of her, he had, three weeks later, reported her disappearance to an Army Police sergeant, but not to the local police.

But Sangret made one fatal mistake in the course of his statement to Chief Inspector Greeno. He mentioned a knife which he said he had left stuck in a tree near the wigwam, but which had been stolen by some other person. Why he should have mentioned the knife at all is not clear, unless it was a rather stupid attempt to incriminate another soldier.

The astute and experienced Scotland Yard officer was very interested, but did not, of course, reveal it to Sangret. He was now in possession of the full medical reports. Although the body was in an advanced state of decomposition, the right arm and hand which had been exposed to sun and wind were not. They revealed "protective" wounds, but were of such an unusual nature that the type of weapon used could not be identified and presented something of a puzzle to both police and Professor Keith Simpson.

These wounds had been inflicted while the girl was still alive and active and had been caused when she raised her right arm attempting to ward off blows to her head and chest. Tags of muscle and finger tendons had been dragged out when the weapon was withdrawn. Other wounds in the head indicated a sharp, pointed instrument like a fairly heavy knife. But those on her hand and arm suggested a small, hooked point.

No such kind of knife was known. If it could be found and the owner identified it would be of great importance to the investigation. It was hoped that such a curious knife might have been seen and recognized by others. August Sangret was, of course, the Number One suspect, but the evidence against him was too circumstantial and no action was taken to arrest him, or give him undue cause for alarm. He was led to suppose that it was no more than an investigation into the girl's disappearance. He was watched, but he made no attempt to visit the mound at the top of the

hill, as he might have done to assure himself that the body had not been found.

But he had made one highly significant remark when he had completed his statement to Chief Inspector Greeno. He said, "*I guess you have found her. Everything points to me. I guess I shall get the blame.*" The chief inspector let it go at that, making no comments. In the circumstances, an innocent man might have made the same remark if he suspected the girl had been murdered. But it wasn't very likely.

In the medical report it was stated that an injury to the mouth and teeth suggested a fall on the face on a hard substance, probably rock, rather than an actual blow from a blunt instrument. Certainly it showed none of the terrible ferocity of the head injuries, where the skull had been crushed and splintered everywhere.

The position of these extensive fractures and a crush fracture to the right cheek suggested that the girl was lying face down when the last and fatal blow had been delivered with such force that the right cheek had been crushed against the ground.

The portion of the Army form found among the heather was identified by Major Gray of the Canadian Army as similar to one for which Sangret had applied and which had been handed to him.

Intensive inquiries among the troops revealed that on August 21st a knife had been found stuck in a tree by a fellow soldier, who had recognized it as belonging to August Sangret. It was not a standard-pattern Canadian Army issue and was of such an unusual type that the finder had recognized it at once, having seen Sangret using it on a number of occasions. He pulled it out of the tree and returned it to Sangret, who accepted it and kept it.

As more and more information was obtained by police questioning among the troops, the evidence against Sangret built up to a certainty . . . at least, in the minds of the police. But before the Director of Public Prosecutions would authorize more drastic action against a Canadian soldier more complete and damning evidence had to be uncovered.

The whole camp knew by this time that it was a murder investigation. Senior officers from Scotland Yard did not personally conduct investigations into the disappearance of a girl like Joan Wolfe if they did not suspect foul play.

On September 14th, the day Sangret had stated that the girl had failed to keep an appointment with him, he had persuaded

another soldier to come to the cricket pavilion to look for Joan. The police had already discovered that Sangret was in the habit of meeting her in an old cricket pavilion. On examination of the building, pencil writing on the wall, made by the girl, revealed both their names and written in such terms that anticipation of marriage between them was clear, at least, to her.

The soldier who accompanied Sangret to the pavilion was struck by his peculiar, nervous manner, so much so that he remembered it clearly when questioned by the police. He hadn't thought Sangret was the type to be worried because a girl had apparently walked out on him. The following day Sangret made quite a show of pretending to search for his lost knife, telling the soldier he thought Joan must have taken it.

From then on, he made a number of statements about the girl to others, one being he had sent her home because she had no clothes. Another, that he had sent her to hospital. Clearly he was anxious to explain both the disappearance of the girl and the knife and to divert suspicion from himself. Like a lot of murderers before him, he overdid it.

Inquiry established that Sangret had washed his uniform and an Army blanket about the time of the girl's disappearance. When asked about this, Sangret denied it. But on examination stains were discovered on the blanket which had persisted despite his vigorous washing. These stains had the appearance of faded bloodstains and were distributed in such a way over the area of the blanket as to be in the exact positions corresponding with the head and right arm and hand of a woman of Joan Wolfe's height and build. The evidence was that this blanket had been used to wrap the body in order to hide it while awaiting an opportunity to bury it. It was during this period that the maggot infestation had occurred.

The case against August Sangret was near complete. Only the knife now remained to be found. This was not absolutely essential, but would nevertheless be very strong supporting evidence if it could be produced in Court. The prospects of recovering it were somewhat remote. Sangret could have thrown it away, or buried it, anywhere in square miles of rugged heathland.

But the police had luck. It was recalled that when Sangret was awaiting the original interview with the C.I.D. officers he had asked permission to visit the latrine. He had left the guardroom not accompanied by the Military Police.

On November 27th, a footbath in the camp wash-house was



choked by an obstruction which had prevented its use for a month or more and had defied the normal means of clearing it. The police had the U-piece removed and a clasp-knife was found to be the cause of the obstruction.

Sangret, when he had left the guardroom had gone to the wash-house and concealed the weapon in the pipe of the bath. The significance of this stupid action was obvious, because at that time only Sangret himself was aware of the importance of that knife.

The long and diligent search was over. Chief Inspector Greeno immediately recognized it as the right knife. It was single bladed, with a can opener and flat, serrated handle and a belt swivel. The part which so interested the C.I.D. officer was the beak-pointed end of the blade, exactly the type of point he had been told to seek by Professor Keith Simpson and which could account for pulling out the muscles and tendons.

When the blade was compared with the head wounds it fitted so perfectly that there could be no shadow of doubt it was the knife which had caused the wounds.

A reconstruction of the crime on the actual spot was carried out by the police with the two pathologists present. From this it was clear that the first attack had been made on the girl with a knife at the crest of the steep slope where the cards and other articles belonging to her had been found.

She had survived this assault and, though severely wounded and bleeding freely, had managed to run down the slope, dropping the silver crucifix on the way. She had been tripped by a military trip-wire laid along the side of the stream and had fallen on her face, bruising her mouth and breaking her front teeth. Half unconscious, she had been unable to rise before Sangret caught up with her and dealt those terrible blows with the birch-wood stake on the back of her head, crushing her face against the ground by the weight of the blows.

The murderer had then thrown away the stake and returned to the wigwam in the woods for the army blanket. He had wrapped her in this and hidden her body in the thick undergrowth until such time as he could find a means of burying her. Military duties kept him in camp for the next three days. Then he had returned to the wood, unwrapped her from the blanket and dragged her up the slope to bury her on the highest point of the heath. Even then all he did was pile earth and heather over her without digging a grave.

Why he should have gone to all this trouble and taken such a

risk of being observed, when he could so much more easily have buried her in the thick woodland, was never explained. No doubt he had some crazy idea in mind that he was shifting suspicion from himself and the immediate area of the wigwam, where plenty of his fellow soldiers knew the girl was living. The man was an odd mixture of cunning and gross stupidity, coupled with an easily roused and violent temper.

The odds are the girl pressed him too hard with her demands for marriage, perhaps threatening to inform his C.O. Sangret lost his temper and killed her. Yet he must have had an idea of marrying her as the army marriage form showed. Unless, of course, he obtained it merely to keep her quiet a while longer, perhaps hoping for a transfer to some other area.

August Sangret was tried before Mr. Justice Macnaghton at Kingston Assize Court, the trial beginning on February 24th and ending on March 2nd, 1943. If the medical evidence had not been so convincing and the police had not been so thorough in their investigation, Sangret might have got away with it. As it was he was found guilty and executed at Wandsworth Gaol on April 2nd, 1943.

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