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FEAR is the ENEMY

By ALLAN WATKINS

★ *Allan Watkins—in his late thirties, married, one young daughter—is a journalist, mainly writing features and film reviews. Hobbies are reading, writing and music. Sport—none, he admits sadly. "I lament this, but don't seem to have any time. I love travel too, but never seem to get any place important. Am sentimental and temperamental. and friends tell me I have a villainous sense of humour."*

DR. HANNAN raised the wide Venetian blind that covered the two front windows of the dental surgery and stood for a moment in the harsh flood of Australian sunlight.

Another day to live. Another day to work and walk and eat and talk and think, and after that days and days and still more days to come. Thousands of sad and lonely days, to live them hour by hour and then forget.

If only they had not migrated five long years before. If only Richard could have been spared that fatal heart attack, if only she had been content and happy in this strange land. If only the sunlight were not so fierce, so intense, if only she had someone close and dear nearby, to comfort her.

She glanced idly out of the dust-smudged windows, seeing what she had seen every morning for years past, the tidy street awakening now to traffic and the start of business, the red-tiled and the silvery corrugated iron roofs and beyond them, far away, the distant blue of the hills.

I've changed, Dr. Hannan thought bitterly . . .

The surgery door clicked open and the dentist turned.

The man inside the door was tall and thick-set, with dark, heavy features. He was in need of a shave, and in keeping with the high humidity of the summer morning a film of sweat glazed his tense and watchful face.

"I want my teeth fixed," he said flatly. "Right now. I'll pay extra."

Dr. Hannan surveyed him carefully for a moment. "I'm sorry.

That's impossible. But if you care to make an appointment . . . "

" That's impossible, too." The man scowled. He stared at her, at her short brown hair liberally threaded with grey, at the deep and tragic eyes, then down her crisp white uniform to the slim ankles and neat brogues. After a moment's indecision, he reached into his trouser pocket and brought out a revolver.

" This job is urgent," he said in the same flat tone, " and I don't want any trouble, lady. I've been in pain all night. Bad pain. Got a couple of holes that need fixing up."

Dr. Hannan gave an almost imperceptible shrug, unmoved by the man's threatening attitude or the silent eloquence of the gun. She said, gesturing towards the dental chair: " You don't like pain? "

" Who does. Do you? "

" There are different kinds of pain," the doctor went on in her calm, detached voice. " There is toothache and heartache. There is physical pain and mental anguish. Both are bad enough and both can kill, Mr. Webber."

The big man settled himself in the chair and turned to her, his thin lips parted in a mirthless smile. " So you know who I am."

" You've had quite a lot of publicity, Mr. Webber."

" And you're not afraid? "

" Of you? Of your reputation? I would be foolish to underestimate you. Yes, I am afraid. But time is short. You're on the run. Aren't you afraid also? "

The big man laughed. He leaned out of the chair and beckoned her closer. Dr. Hannan approached warily and when she was two paces away from him Webber drew back his arm and slapped her viciously across the face.

" All women talk too much," he snarled. " Now shut up and get on with the job."

Dr. Hannan rocked on her feet. The blood coursed from her cheeks, leaving the stained imprint of his fingers. She was too shocked, too numbed by his brutality to move. Tears of anger and humiliation stung her eyes.

" You'll be sorry you did that."

" Get on with it," he snapped impatiently. " I've got to get going. The pain's driving me crazy. Why do you think I took the risk of stopping in a one-horse town like this? I haven't been able to sleep. It's throbbing away like hell."

Dr. Hannan moved to the dental cabinet. A portrait of her late husband stood on top of the card index box and higher, on the wall, hung the framed diploma of her degree in dentistry. Richard Hannan had also been a dentist; more than that, an adventurer, a pioneer at heart.

" Let's pack up and see the world," he had told her one cold, foggy and miserable London day. " Let's follow the sun."

What would Richard do, she asked herself now, in an emergency such as this? What could anyone do?

She filled a hypodermic syringe with anaesthetic and returned to the patient, silently examining his teeth, charting the mouth and finding three lower molars that no doubt were giving him continual trouble. Oddly enough, in each case the cavities had been drilled clean as if in readiness for fillings.

" You've been to another dentist recently? " Dr. Hannan asked professionally.

Webber nodded, toying with the gun and watching every move she made. " In gaol. This was as far as he got."

" Why didn't he finish the job? "

" He died." Webber grinned. " I used his office for the get-away. Any more questions? "

Dr. Hannan shook her head. " I know all I want to know."

She gave him a block injection of the anaesthetic and felt him flinch whenever she depressed the plunger. She noticed, with contempt, the sweat rise on his tight-lipped face and form shining beads that trickled down his neck under the soiled collar of his shirt. And somehow her own personal fear was banished by the stronger, overpowering emotions of hate and anger.

" You'll have to wait a little till the nerve centres are frozen," she said, " then I'll clean-drill those cavities a bit more and prepare the amalgam. Or would you prefer gold, Mr. Webber? "

Her irony was lost on him. He lay back, the revolver gripped fiercely in one hand, the other white-knuckled hand clutching the padded arm of the chair.

" There shouldn't be any pain at all, Mr. Webber," Dr. Hannan went on. " A pity you are so allergic to it. But don't be impatient. I'll have you out of here in twenty minutes and you can go where you like and do what you like. You must have been quite desperate, Mr. Webber, driving into town in broad daylight, exposing yourself to danger."

" Shut up," he mouthed fiercely, rocking from side to side in the chair. " Shut up, or I'll bust you wide open."

Like the poor prison dentist, Dr. Hannan thought, turning to her dental cabinet again and mixing alloy and mercury with a pestle. Four days out of prison and a death score of three. Not bad, even for a monster like Leo Webber. The prison dentist, a traffic policeman who had tried to stop the escaped convict in his stolen car, and then the horrible tragedy of Webber driving through a group of schoolgirls crossing the road outside their boarding school.

She could visualize it now; the screams of terror, the panic-stricken rush to safety, the screech of wheels and roaring of the engine as Webber ploughed through the children. And after he had gone, the petrified youngsters huddled together on the pavement and the one solitary child lying crushed and mangled in the middle of the road.

Now the monster was here, in her surgery, cowered into a jelly of nerves by a few, quick injections. And after he left the surgery, what then? More deaths to his score? More cold-blooded, inhuman murders?

"Hurry." Webber spat out the word. "Hurry, I tell you."

Dr. Hannan turned, holding the mortar in both hands, aware of the revolver aimed directly at the breast pocket of her uniform and yet still unafraid of him. She countered the dark, suspicious eyes and gave him a brief, enigmatic smile. Then she switched on the unit, inserted a drill into the handpiece and began. She worked swiftly and efficiently, cleaning the cavities and drilling down through the white dentine towards the nerve canals. When this was done, she packed and condensed the amalgam, and neatly finished off each of the fillings with a few deft movements.

The work was done. She stood back close to the cabinet watching Webber as he spluttered and rinsed out his mouth. Then, on a misguided impulse because more than anything else in the world she wanted to be free of him, she lifted the steel index box and flung it at the nearest window.

The glass shattered. Outside in the street someone screamed, and galvanised into violent action, Leo Webber threw his massive body out of the chair and knocked her against the wall.

She fell hard, winded by the blow and wrenching her back against the edge of the cabinet. From the floor where she lay, Webber seemed immense, standing over her with his feet apart and his body trembling with rage.

"Get up," he shouted, dragging at her arm. "Get up and get moving, and if you make any trouble . . . You're going with me now, all the way." He thrust the barrel of the gun viciously at her side, pulled her to her feet and shoved her in front of him across the surgery to the door and from there along the outside passage towards the back stairs.

Rising voices came to her, the staccato pounding of footsteps up the front staircase. But they were too late. She was pushed and jerked and pulled down the metal steps of the fire escape, across the gravel yard at the rear of the building and into a car.

She drew away from him as he swung into the street and sped recklessly out of the town, holding herself rigid, afraid to move, to speak, to do anything that might antagonize him further.

In a few minutes the last houses on the outskirts of the town were left behind and he was driving furiously on the highway that led to the hills. The heat of the day was intensified out here on the plain but the cool stream of wind on her face revived her a little and gradually courage reasserted itself. Dr. Hannan felt enmity stirring in her aching body again, the chill of fear melting away into a strangely inspired strength and confidence.

Today, she thought, might have been like yesterday and the day before and all the other days I've irretrievably lost. Sad days, long and melancholy days, nursing so much grief I thought my heart would break. But no one could have foreseen this coincidence. Of all the ordinary people in all the ordinary towns and villages, Webber had to choose this town and me!

She glanced at him side-on, appraising the sullen features, the craggy chin and heavy brows. He was inhuman, incapable of love, affection or tenderness. A berserk animal, now on the loose from captivity.

Dr. Hannan was suddenly cold with rage. No man had the right to kill, to terrorize, to flout all concepts of law and justice. Someone had to stop him.

Someone had to do it, before the death toll increased. And it was strange how fearless she felt, as if she had known for a long time that this meeting was predestined and inevitable.

Calmly she studied her wrist watch. Surely more than twenty-five minutes had elapsed since they had left the surgery. Her heart beat faster in anticipation. She glanced at Webber again, but there was no change in the grimness of his features. All she could do now was wait.

In an hour they were beyond the range of hills and speeding across the boulder-strewn plain. Traffic was negligible, and the heat of the day was growing more oppressive; even the slipstream was warm now and the static air on either side of the road lay rippled with the brilliance of the sun. Dust spurted back from under the wheels, clouding the dirt road far behind.

Then all at once, as the hands of her watch touched on eleven o'clock, Dr. Hannan reached out to the dashboard, twisted and pulled out the ignition key and threw it casually through the open window of the car. The car jolted.

Webber cursed and jammed on the footbrake and the vehicle skidded to a halt. "You're too smart for your own good," he snarled. "They won't take either of us alive and don't think I'm bluffing."

He grasped her arm, so fiercely that a gasp of pain involuntarily escaped her lips. She shook her head, fighting back a flood of tears. "No. No. You're not bluffing."

" Then why did you do it? " He shook her savagely. " Why? "

" Because I'm not afraid," she cried almost hysterically. " I'm not afraid. You're evil and you'll die. You deserve to die."

" Not me," Webber shouted, leaning roughly across her and swinging open the car door before forcing her on to the road. " I won't die. But you . . . "

He broke off, his face contorted in a grimace of agony, his teeth biting into his lower lip and drawing blood. " I thought you fixed it—this damned toothache! "

" I did," she cried defiantly. " It's the anaesthetic wearing off, that's all. I knew what I was doing."

" I ought to fix you good and proper," he snarled at her.

She backed away. " Then why don't you? I'm not important. Only a woman, a defenceless, middle-aged woman. I'm nobody of consequence; the prison dentist, a policeman . . ."

" You'll be important when the cops arrive," he shouted, striding up to her. " I should have killed you and left you behind . . . God, these lousy teeth—" He pushed her roughly out of his way, bending down low and searching frantically among the dry grass and sandy earth that bordered the roadside. " We've got to find it," he raved. " We've got to find the key."

She was surprised. She had been prepared for more terror, more physical violence—perhaps even for death. Not this confusing, uncertain change of character. Until she saw his face bent over the tussocks of grass, saw the sweat trickling down his chin, his mouth working soundlessly in frustration and rage and . . .

Pain, she thought. Yes, he's sensitive to pain, he's frightened of it. That's his weakness. I'm glad it's hurting. I want it to hurt so much he'll never forget it. Never.

Suddenly, out of the silvered haze that lay above the plain, she heard the faint echoes of a police siren.

Dr. Hannan straightened up, a small weary smile of triumph lighting her damp and dusty face. " They're coming for us, Mr. Webber," she said quietly.

Without a word he grabbed her hand and hustled her from the roadside, across the broad expanse of dead grass towards a giant cluster of rocks, a quarter of a mile away. The big sky overhead throbbed with unrelenting heat. Nothing stirred out there on the flat desolate wilderness except themselves. The ground was scarred and pitted with hidden outcrops of stone constantly stubbing their feet.

Halfway to the rocks Dr. Hannan stumbled and fell to her knees. She could scarcely breathe. An agonizing stitch knotted in her side.

"Get up," Webber shouted, kicking at her. "Get up, I tell you."

He raised his arm ready to strike and in that instant an unspeakable torment flared up inside him. He swayed off balance, his arms and legs strained and twisted in frenzy. Fire blazed in his head and every nerve and sinew and muscle in his body exploded in searing pain.

Webber went crazy then. He tumbled back, cutting his hands on the sharp rocks; he got up again, screaming, moaning for air.

" You," he cried. " You, you . . . " He lifted the gun still gripped in his hand and aimed and fired, but the bullet missed Dr. Hannan by a yard. Then the gun dropped out of his grasp and he clasped his hands to his head and rocked it back and forth, up and down, tearing at his face, tugging at his hair, still screaming, still raving.

" I'll get you. I'll get you." He lunged towards her and stumbled and the lost moment was all she needed to break from the hypnotic spell of his torture and escape. She ran back wildly towards the road, to see the police car and uniformed men hurrying towards her, to hear the bark of their revolvers, one, two, three, four sharp and final sounds and to know that Webber had died as he had lived.

She was lying in a patch of grass when they reached her, too ill and exhausted to lift herself. The young constable bent over her anxiously, noting in one compassionate glance the dirt and sweat and tears coursing down the woman's pallid face. " You're all right now," he said gently. " There's nothing to fear."

She looked at him mutely and tried to answer. But the words were silent. I drilled his teeth down to the nerve canals, she said soundlessly. Then I packed them tight with alloy and mercury. He went mad with pain when the anaesthetic wore off. I knew he'd go mad. I knew—he was afraid of pain. It was only a matter of time, but he didn't know that. I gambled with time. I tried to be brave. I tried to prove there were people who could still defy him and care less of themselves than . . .

" What are you trying to say? " the constable asked gently. " Did he hurt you in any way? "

She tried to rise, shaking her head. " I'm Dr. Hannan," she told him. " He didn't hurt me. I was lucky. Lucky—"

" Dr. Hannan! " the young constable repeated with a frown as he helped her to her feet. " Hannan. Hannan . . . " He gave her an odd look. " It's too silly for words, I know, but—are you related to that young schoolgirl Webber mangled in his car? "

She leaned against him, shielding her face from the pitiless glare of the sun and trying to control her tears. " My daughter," she answered, so softly he scarcely heard her. " My little girl, my only child . . . "

Armchair Detective

★ *George Langelaan, fiftyish, was born in Paris. The son of a newspaperman, he has been a newspaperman himself for over thirty years, and during that time has covered most scandals and catastrophes—major and minor—without getting himself fired too often! His own son is an artist who works mostly for films, theatres and magazines and has provided the illustration for this—his father's latest—story.*

TOM DELONE was our neighbour, and naturally he had been the first to enter our house after Mary discovered Tweeny's empty cot. Tom had the whitest teeth imaginable; even dentists were dazzled and film stars hated having him around, for when he flashed his smile the press cameras had a tendency to go off in his direction. Tom was in the police force.

The way Mary had called him had made him run. Although he had only just come in from night duty—with two dark patches of blue where a beard might possibly grow if he were to stop shaving for a few weeks—he still looked fresh.

" Tweeny! Are you sure, Mrs. Palmer? I mean he couldn't have just . . . No. All right, in that case there's no time to lose."

Pushing his hat back over his head of short cropped curls, he had picked up the telephone and dialled the station. Mary stood by, trembling but dry-eyed, as Tom explained that a baby had been kidnapped.

" I'll hang around until the others get here. They won't be long, Mrs. Palmer. Grandpap didn't hear anything, did he? " he asked, slapping my shoulder.

" No," answered Mary. " He didn't move. Besides, he's so old and getting so stiff now that he can no longer get upstairs. He sleeps down here."

" Still a good dog, though, aren't you, Grandpap? " said Tom,

By GEORGE LANGELAAN

shaking me in my big armchair by the fire and making me wince because of my rheumatism.

We lived in what had once been a select residential district, before people started moving out. The stuccoed houses of our road were still quite respectable, and their tenants took pride in keeping them clean and trim.

I was still sniffing gently, trying to analyze a vague smell, an unusual smell, when Tom's friends chased it away by opening and closing the back and front doors half a dozen times. But it was only after they had been upstairs, opened and closed more doors and windows, that they finally came into the sitting-room. One of them raised his hat slightly, to scratch his pink head.

" Have you any reason to suspect anyone, Mrs. Palmer? Have you any enemies? Has your husband any, do you know? " asked the eldest, walking up and down as though he was on a beat.

" No, of course not."

" Where is your husband? What does he do? "

" He is an officer in the navy and at present he's away at sea."

" Who lives in this house, Mrs. Palmer? "

" Yvonne, a little French maid who has only been here a few weeks, my mother, Tweeny of course—and Grandpap who is so old and full of rheumatism that he hardly ever leaves that chair. He's getting on for fourteen . . ."

" What makes you think it was a kidnapping? "

" What else could it be, officer? " said Mary's mother. " Tweeny is just seven months and although a remarkable child in many ways, he is quite unable to run or fly away."

" Where were you when . . ."

" Look, young man, no one ever got sunstroke in this house, so you can take your hat off."

" Look here, lady . . ."

" That is precisely what I am doing and it could not be worse without a hat, or do you keep a little bird under it? "

With a growl, the policeman threw his hat down on a chair.

" Where is this maid of yours? We must talk to her."

" She is crying her eyes out and she can only speak a very few English words."

" Dan, go and wipe her eyes—you're good at that—then make her cry some more with your French," ordered the shorter of the now hatless men. " Now, Mrs. Palmer, what would a kidnapper want from you, have you any idea? "

" There are two possibilities," answered Mary quietly. " They might have a buyer for a baby the age of mine—there is such a market, it seems. And then we've just inherited quite a lot of money from an uncle of mine."

" Who knows about that? "

" All the readers of the Gazette for one thing—there was quite an interview and a picture of Mary with Tweeny in her arms," snapped Mary's mother.

" Well, if it's a ransom they want, you'll soon be hearing from them. I'll have your telephone put on a permanent recorder." He went over to the instrument and dialled a number. When he had given the necessary instructions his colleague came downstairs.

" Well? "

" She says that in her country they would have had trained dogs."

" Did she also explain how the guillotine works? "

" Sounds like good advice to me," said Mary's mother.

" Yes, maybe," said the detective, mollified. " All right, ask for the dogs. You never know."

Both men were helping Mary's mother sort out photographs of Tweeny when Doctor Brendon came running across the lawn and fairly bounced into the room.

" Who are you? " asked the detective, getting up.

" Who—who are you? " stammered Doctor Brendon.

" Police inspectors, doctor," explained Mary. " Something terrible has happened."

" So it's true, then. About Tweeny? . . . I just had a phone call—"

" Who from? What about?" snapped the policeman.

" I—I don't know who from. A woman who said that Tweeny was safe, and that I was to come over here to say that you would be getting instructions about the amount to be paid, and how it would have to be paid."

" Oh, doctor, who was it?" cried Mary, breaking down at last.

" Why were you called?" asked the policeman.

" I have no idea. Perhaps the kidnappers knew that you were already here."

" And they would use you as a link? Mmmm . . . What's your phone number, doctor? We'll have it watched."

" And never hear any more! No, no . . . we were probably wrong in calling you," said Mary hysterically. " Doctor Brendon, tell them I will give them all I have, but they must not hurt my baby."

" But the lady did not say whether she would call me again. What shall I do about it?" he asked the policeman.

" Give me your telephone number."

A minute later, the policeman was talking to a post-office engineer. Then he turned to the doctor.

" Where did the call come from, any idea?"

" No. No idea."

" What time did you say it was?"

" Oh . . . about ten minutes ago, I suppose. I came right over."

The policeman said something, waited a while and finally hung up. " Funny," he grunted. He was about to light a cigarette but he put his matches away when he caught sight of Mary's mother glaring at him. " They say you haven't had a call yet this morning."

" How do they know? I'm on automatic."

" Yes, I know," said the policeman dreamily.

" Suppose they do call me, or get in touch with me again, what shall I do then?"

" Take the message."

" But how shall we know that we are in touch with the real kidnappers?"

What a fool the man was, I thought, glancing up at him. Fancy worrying about such idiotic details. He had not even glanced at me on coming in, but that had not surprised me. Doctor Brendon had never liked me.

" Leave that to them. They'll have plenty of ideas."

" Don't you think I'd better ask them for something to prove that they really have Mrs. Palmer's child?"

" Yes, ask for anything you like," said the policeman, annoyed and gazing out of the window.

" Something that you can identify, Mrs. Palmer," said Brendon. " One of Tweeny's socks, or one of his shoes . . . What do you think? "

A station wagon came down the road, swerved off and ran into the turning by the side of our house.

" Here are the dogs," said the policeman.

There was only one but it was a beauty all right: a big Alsatian hound, followed by a short, whiskered, grey-haired little man holding its leash. He smiled at me when the dog came up to me, wagging its tail. " Here, Chuck," he said, going to the other side of the table, and Chuck reluctantly obeyed.

There was again that vague smell, the same strange smell I had noticed before. Doctor Brendon had come round to my side of the table in the middle of the room, and I chuckled inwardly at the thought that he was perhaps afraid of Chuck. Then in a flash I knew!

Not only did I now know the smell but I also knew why he had talked of Tweeny's shoe. And that fool of a police dog just sat on its haunches, looking at me and wagging its tail!

There was no time to lose. Mary had run upstairs to fetch one of Tweeny's blankets for Chuck to sniff, and I knew that the doctor was not going to stay here much longer. I had no choice: rheumatism or not, I would have to act. I would have to act definitely and with certainty. There must be no slip-up. I knew that the pain would be unbearable but I would have to go through with it.

Tightening my jaw, I stiffened for action and the pain made me wince. I hadn't far to go—but it wasn't just a matter of getting there. Once there, I would have to hang on until I had it out. I could feel the hair stiffening on the back of my neck, and my heart was beating much too fast as, with a snarl, I jumped.

" Grandpap! Let go! " screamed Mary as Doctor Brendon turned and tried to tear his coat out of my jaws.

" Here, make your dog let go! " he shouted, tugging desperately at his coat.

But I had it all right. I could feel it firm in my jaws. Come what may, I would have to hang on until the pocket had been torn open.

I groaned when he hit me over the head, but that was his undoing; for as he hit me a second time, swinging me right round the room, Chuck sprang up with a low growl and grabbed his wrist, and before Chuck's owner could call him off we had him down between the table and the armchair. To be quite

truthful it was Chuck who got him down, but although we fell and rolled I never once let go of that pocket and what was inside it.

Of course, all I could do was snarl like mad and hang on, tugging with painful wrenches of my neck and shoulders, hoping against hope that the pocket would tear. I was beginning to feel very sick when at last one of the policemen came to my aid.

" What have you got in that pocket, doctor? " he asked, and I knew I could let go.

" Why . . . nothing," said Doctor Brendon, shaking all over.

" Let's see," said the policeman, digging his hand into the pocket and dragging out Tweeny's shoe.

Like lightning, Tom had grabbed hold of Doctor Brendon's arms.

" Quick, where's Tweeny? "

" Don't . . . In the back—"

" Where? "

" —the back of the car."

" Go round and see," said the detective, but Mary was already half way round to the doctor's house.

It was some time before two other doctors got Tweeny awake, and it was not until then that Mary and her mother came down to cuddle and cry over me. They hurt my poor aching muscles, and I had to groan piteously to make them let go. Besides, they both smelt so outrageously—the same smell I had noticed earlier that morning, and then again when it was floating all round Doctor Brendon. Tweeny was fairly reeking with it, and it hung around the house for days. I gathered later that it was the smell that had put Tweeny to sleep.

" Grandpap, you wonderful, wonderful dog," sobbed Mary all over me.

There was a wonderful cushion in a chair by the piano, a great yellow velvet cushion . . . Nothing like trying, I thought. Getting gingerly off my armchair—my paws ache something terrible whenever I start to walk—I went to the door of the next room and scratched. Mary opened it immediately, of course—she was in a mood to open anything. Glancing up at her and putting plenty of dramatic appeal into my right eye—the other one is blind—I went to the chair where the cushion is and very gently, ever so gently, tugged at the corner.

" Grandpap, you want Mum's beautiful cushion. Oh, you dear, wicked old dog! " she sobbed, and as I followed, wagging my tail slowly for even that is painful, she took the cushion, put it on the big armchair by the fire and helped me climb on to it!

IVORY REEF

By P. M. JOLLEY

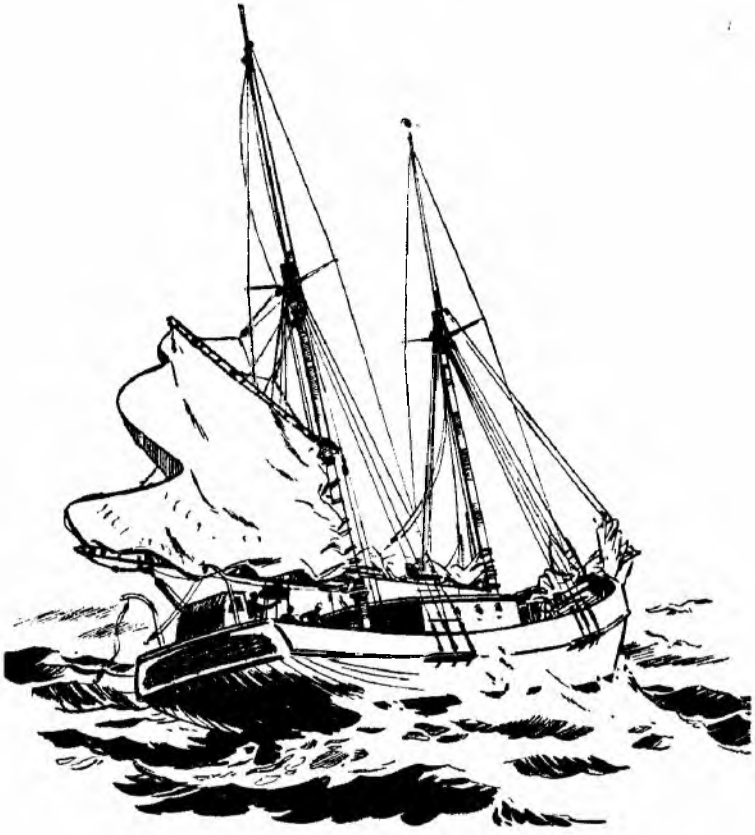
THERE was nothing left of the world, it seemed, but the glittering, ever-moving waters and the gigantic arch of sky, now filled with the unbearable brassy light of the noonday sun. It had been like this for an eternity of time, only the burnished brilliance giving way to the unfathomable stars as night punctuated day.

Surging imperceptibly on the wide breast of the Indian Ocean, the frail, bleached dinghy lay like a helpless inverted shell, the hands which had endeavoured to guide the rudder long since stretched in agony on the burning planks beneath. There were three men in the boat, or the semblance of what had been men. Two were dead, their shrunken corpses stiff and rotting; the third had not the strength to heave their bodies overboard. He lay, scarcely more than a skeleton himself, glazed eyes in blistered face staring, staring at the hot emptiness, brain too dulled to want or hope or pray.

The boat drifted on, borne only by the swell, and the sea mirrored the sky's bright light in dazzling facets of fire.

But over the rim of the melting horizon, the high, curved prow of a ship came lifting, great sail barely filled by the slackening trade wind. It was a dhow, proud as the race which manned her, as she ploughed down from the ports of India and the Arabian Peninsula to the clove-scented isle of Zanzibar, the emerald jewel of the tropics.

The dhow captain gazed ahead of his craft, standing as his father and forefathers had done before him, his brown hawk eyes raking the seas. Away across the dancing waters a speck, a foreign dot, held his eye. He speculated idly, as the slow minutes increased his vision, but the truth was far from his



mind. Such things are seen perhaps once in a lifetime of peaceful voyaging . . .

Since he was fifteen, when he stowed away on an East bound oil tanker, Clive Halliday had lived the kind of life that most men dream about. He had wandered practically the whole length of the African coastline, taking an amazing variety of jobs and—unlike the general run of drifters—performing them well. For what he lacked in the way of a longer education was made up by a quick wit, an engaging manner and a personable appearance.

When he finally came to the fifty miles of lush green that made up the island of Zanzibar in the fullness of his thirtieth year, he was free-lancing for a Cape Province newspaper. He was accepted without question by the small white population, and his long leisure hours spent on the exquisite beaches were filled

with vague speculations as to his next venture. Among his somewhat shadier acquaintances were a tall, lanky, bearded man named Hugh Myles, and a short, stocky seafarer known as Toby Woods. Hugh Myles was the modern equivalent of a beachcomber; life held little for him except a slow descent into the fuddled realms of drink and poverty. But liquor made him loquacious and entertaining, and Clive enjoyed his tales of treasure troves and piratical aspirations.

Toby Woods earned his living mainly as a boat builder, and supplemented it by hiring himself and his cabin cruiser out to tourist fishermen at exorbitant prices. He had a streak in his blunt, practical nature that hankered after the fame and fortune of some adventurous scoop, which was why the tale of the Ivory Reef appealed to his unromantic mind.

It was by no means a new tale, of course. For years men had speculated on the reef, and many had even gone there, always returning with a report of ill luck, superstitions, and in a few cases not returning at all.

The matter was brought up one evening as the three sat in an Arab drinking house.

"I tell you," Toby Woods said earnestly, "of all the tales you hear of hidden treasure, there's only one on the market for me. And that's the Ivory Reef."

"The Ivory Reef?" Hugh Myles stared at the other almost in disbelief. Whisky had not yet blurred his senses. "They say only madmen attempt that. But perhaps if I had the boat, the men, the equipment, and the money—"

"What's this Ivory Reef?" Clive Halliday demanded. "Whenever I hear the place mentioned there's either an uncomfortable silence or someone changes the subject. Is there a hoodoo on it?"

"Everyone reckons there is. Oh, the place and the ivory have been confirmed time and again, but so far no one has managed to lift it—always some disaster has wrecked the expedition. Everyone knows its position—it's easily visible, for the coral pierces the surface of the sea in places, and you can see the surf breaking. This reef used to be practically in the path of the northward sailing dhows in the slave trading days when they were returning home laden with slaves and ivory from the mainland. It was a tricky stretch of water, and many a dhow in some freakish turn of wind ripped out its bottom on that reef. It's rumoured that the amount of ivory that found its grave on that coral stretch constitutes a fabulous fortune—for the fearless man who can lift it."

"Why fearless?" Clive asked.

Toby refilled his glass. " A lot of bunkum, that's all," he scoffed. " People get so weighed down and possessed by all the crazy superstitions that hang round the place that they've lost sight of reason. All you want is a seaworthy craft, a crew who don't know where you're going, and at least one European who rates as a diver."

" I don't quite follow—why the European diver? "

" Because if you rely on African divers you'll never get the stuff up. But if you've someone to chivvy them around, show them there's nothing to be afraid of, maybe they'll work."

Clive lit a cigarette slowly. " I've done quite a bit of skin diving. I'd take that side on, any day."

A light of interest sprang into Toby's eyes, and he leaned forward, gazing at the other intently. " And I'd take on the navigation—and the care of the boat and crew."

Hugh laughed, breaking into the sudden electrical tension. " And I'd go just for the hell of it! "

The three looked at one another, wildly surmising the possibilities. They drank far into the night, laying schemes, seeing the bounds of their fortunes swelling as the stars advanced in the sky. It was the beginning of weeks of preparation.

Clive provided the greater part of the capital required, and Toby traded his cabin cruiser for a schooner, fitted with an auxiliary engine. Hugh, whose extensive knowledge of Arabic and Swahili was invaluable, engaged a crew of four Africans with an Arab mate, and two native divers. Clive acquired an aqualung, which was indispensable for lengthy spells on the sea-bed. He felt exhilarated at the prospect of at least an adventurous trip if not the dreamed-of sudden riches. It was he, however, who brought up the legal question of treasure trove and the disposal of it into usable cash.

Toby had looked at him. " Easy," he had said, with such a world of meaning that Clive was silenced, if not exactly satisfied.

Hugh was the only one of the three who presented any kind of problem. His offering to the expedition was of the slightest, both practically and materially, and his drinking habits and long tongue were a constant menace to their enterprise. For it was essential that their destination be kept secret, as the slightest hint would have been enough to upset the hired crew and to have raised many interested eyebrows amongst the European population. Clive and Toby took care to flatter Hugh's moods.

They arranged to sail in mid October with the following wind, when the heat and humidity were not too great. The reef, Toby estimated, was about ten days' voyaging distant.

The day they set sail seemed full of good omen. There were few people on the wharf to watch their departure, and they slid quietly away from the golden sands. The clear, turquoise waters creamed back from their bows, and they headed north-east into the vast blueness of the Indian Ocean, their small, compact ship well loaded with provisions, their crew singing the monotonous, lilting song peculiar to the African.

Nothing disturbed the serenity of that first outward-bound week. Warm golden days followed nights of cool moonlit beauty, and Clive, when the others chafed impatiently and took to hugging their whisky below decks, preferred to remain above, enjoying what was to him an almost idyllic existence.

On the twelfth day they sighted the reef.

It lay like an incongruous drift of snow where the water churned white and sprayed over the irregular, jagged teeth of coral that thrust upwards from the sunken barrier. Clive caught his breath when he first saw it, visualizing suddenly and clearly the terrible threat it offered to a ship off course in bad weather, a waiting trap of boiling sea and hidden menace.

They dropped anchor, and in the rapidly fading light Clive peered into the stretch of water that lay between the ship and the reef. It was limpid and undisturbed, and he could see a surprising distance down to what appeared to be a sandy bed, shadowed intermittently with coral atolls. Conditions seemed perfect for diving, and they retired that night confident and hopeful.

But it was not until the third day that a wreck was found. They had worked their way slowly along the reef, Clive diving fruitlessly time and again while daylight lasted.

On the day of their discovery, the dawn was clear and brilliant, and the entire ship's company assembled on deck at first light to watch Clive and two African crew set off in the small dinghy towards the reef. Clive looked very fit and bronzed as he sat there in the stern, his aqualung strapped to his back, pulling on his flippers and settling the short knife in his belt. He would not have changed places with a soul alive at that moment.

Within a few yards of the reef, Clive climbed over the side and dropped into the water, pausing at the boat's edge to adjust his face-mask and take hold of his torch. He swam a couple of strokes in the pure, clear water and then dived.

A world of pale green and gold opened before him, the great reef of coral presenting a cliff-like face of incredible beauty. It was pitted and fretted into a thousand tiny caverns of pink and cream and every shade of red from deepest crimson to lightest mauve, with flashing shoals of tiny, irridescent fish weaving their

sinuous way. Clive glided slowly down, fascinated as always by the loveliness of this silent world, and gradually he made out the shelving bottom of the sea bed.

He swam down and on, following the side of the reef, and almost before he was aware of it he was alongside the first wreck. The great hull loomed in front of him, its battered ribs giving it the appearance of the picked carcass of some sea monster. He swam slowly round the wreck, and found a place where the coral had torn a splintering gash in the hull. He hacked at the rotting wood until he had made a hole large enough for him to enter. It was dark, and he switched on his torch.

He was in the hold of the dhow, and the shell encrusted crates and boxes made a sinister world of weaving shadows. He kept a sharp lookout for the tentacles of a lurking octopus, or the dreaded shape of Tchewa, the giant rock cod that hugged the dark caverns of the sea. Most of the crates had burst open, and with a swift lurch of his heart Clive recognized the creamy glint of great tusks, intact, and as far as he could see undamaged.

He groped around the littered hold, and half buried in the silted sand on the floor he came across a crude pair of iron pliers—pincers that were used to bind together the ankle fetters of slaves. Amongst the spilled pile of tusks, Clive discovered one of a manageable size—he estimated it to be about twenty-five pounds—and he dragged his two finds back to the broken bulkhead. The sand suddenly clouded behind him, and through the golden mist reared the python-like spotted head of a giant moray eel, the twin rows of needle-sharp teeth exposed in its cruel mouth. Clive, feeling at once oppressed and stifled in this tomb of a ship's skeleton, left his booty at the mouth of the hole and entered the blessedly light water beyond. He began to surface rapidly.

A shadow momentarily darkened the sunlit waters about him, and he saw the huge body of a ray glide past with its almost ungainly motion. He swam on, wishing briefly that Hugh had been fit enough and energetic enough to have accompanied him—the sea is a lonely place for man.

Surfacing, he signalled to the boatmen, and when they reached him he dived once more, wasting no time in loading his tusk and pliers into the basket, then once more he ascended through the quiet waters.

Toby and Hugh listened avidly to his description of the wreck. They decided that the African divers should go down that afternoon, and work at hauling the tusks one by one to the basket. One white man was to take turns in the dinghy, together with an African.

Toby elected to take the first two hours in the boat, and Hugh and Clive remained on board the schooner, watching operations from the deck.

The two native divers had been carefully briefed by Clive, but despite the white man's uneventful descent, they had looked solemn and disturbed. Superstitious fear sat hard on their black, unsmiling faces as they reluctantly descended from the dinghy into the shimmering green waters.

The basket had been released with the divers, but the minutes dragged slowly by without the anticipated signal on the ropes to indicate that it was loaded. In the full afternoon heat in the exposed dinghy Toby mopped his face.

Suddenly, two yards away, a black head surfaced, and with a wild look round the native swam with desperate speed towards the waiting boat, followed within seconds by his companion. Clive and Hugh could see the panic on their faces, their eyeballs rolling, their mouths quivering with horror. They fell aboard the dinghy and began to yell and gesticulate. Without waiting for instructions from Toby the oarsmen began to pull hard for the schooner. Toby shouted orders to return, but it was a waste of effort.

On deck the entire crew listened open-mouthed to the two divers. The three white men looked at one another grimly. Hugh strode forward and seized one diver by the shoulder, forcing the man to look at him.

" Silence! " he roared in Swahili. " Now what is this stupid tale you're spreading? "

The diver's dark face became heavy and sullen. He shook his head.

" We do not go down there again, bwana. It is an evil place, and the spirits of the dead guard it. Everyone knows it is bad luck to disturb them. When we entered the wreck and began to search for the teeth of the elephant we found instead a skull. It rolled towards us and we swam away, for to touch it would have meant death. We do not go down again. We want to go back home before we are cursed."

Hugh lashed them with the scorn of his tongue, and threatened a thousand and one curses on their heads if they did not obey orders, but he knew he was beaten. A look of obstinacy crept into the face before him, and he saw the same expression reflected on the others. He ordered them below, then turned to Toby and Clive.

" Unless you can think up a big enough bribe or weave some white man's magic, we've had it. They've got the fear of the devil in them, and the rest of the crew are infected too."

Toby's expression was savage. " To be beaten by a lot of ignorant cowards! I'll get that stuff up from the bottom of the sea, if it's the last thing I do."

" It will be, too— " Hugh gave a sudden grin " —if you try to force their hand. I tell you, we've had it."

Clive spoke thoughtfully. " I could load the stuff gradually, but it would be a darned slow business. It would mean one of you in the dinghy to work the basket, and the other on board the ship to keep an eye on things here. And it's unwise to split our forces in the face of the crew's uncertain temper. But it's all we can do."

Toby nodded, though Hugh looked dubious.

" Tomorrow," Toby stipulated, " we'll be able to judge whether that's practical or not. We can certainly do nothing now."

The three went below. The evening passed uneventfully, though the atmosphere on board was charged with tension and a kind of uneasy wariness.

Clive, before finally going to his bunk, went on deck for a last look round.

The moon was full, and the ship rode peacefully at anchor. The reef lay quietly, the spray barely shaking its phosphorescent fingers over the white coral, and strangely smooth, the deep waters stretched to the wide horizon.

On deck, a tiny glow of fire from the watchman's brazier made the only pinpoint of colour, and Clive could see the Arab mate, whose watch it was, huddled Eastern fashion in his blanket. He turned away, comforted by the serenity of the night, and ten minutes later he was sleeping with a less troubled mind.

But over the rim of the sea, the great purple cumulus were massing, rank upon splendid rank, and behind them the fresh monsoon wind tugged impatiently . . .

The morning stillness was broken by a long, wailing cry of horror from an African throat. Clive dragged on his clothes, his ears still ringing from that horrible cry. Toby was before him on deck, his square face set grimly. He turned on Clive's arrival, answering his unspoken question.

" It's the Arab mate. He's dead. Murdered, with his own dagger in his throat. He was the only one of the crew who didn't believe in this hoodoo nonsense, and I was half hoping he would exert his influence on the rest. I'd like to know which of these scoundrels did it. Now, of course, the story's spreading that he was killed by the spirits of his ancestors who lie below, in vengeance for disturbing their grave. We'll never convince them

it was plain murder. I'd like to clap the lot of them below, but we need their labour, and well they know it."

Clive stared at the pathetic figure stretched on the planking, remembering the peaceful scene of the night before.

"Poor devil," he muttered.

It was a morning fraught with the still, uneasy calm that preludes a breaking storm, both in the slow advancing rain clouds that curtained the sky beyond the reef, and in the unnatural quiet of the native crew.

Later in the morning the head diver approached Toby. It was clear, he said, that the spirits were angry, and that they would only be appeased if Bwana Halliday returned to the sea those things which he had robbed from the grave below. Then they might be free to return home in safety, but if not, and if the ship remained here another night, they would undoubtedly all be dead by morning.

Toby listened with a tightening mouth. He had lived in Africa long enough to know the impossibility of making a native understand the Western outlook on superstition—magic, in their eyes, could only be combated with stronger magic. Yet he was loath to accept defeat, and determined to make a last effort.

"There is no curse except that which you have brought upon yourselves," he told the native sternly, "by disobeying orders. Resume your work without fuss or it will be the worse for you."

The man shook his head obstinately. "We do not go down."

"Then you will certainly receive no pay for this trip. Go."

The African, his face expressionless, left at once.

The three white men had a hurried consultation, and decided to make the effort of diving for the ivory themselves, even if their attempts were limited by the unusually early but fast approaching rains. Clive insisted that his small tusk and unique pliers should accompany them in the dinghy—he had no intention of losing them to a native's whim.

Watched by the silent crew, Clive and Toby drew away from the schooner and pulled towards the reef, where the white spray formed a livid splash against the heavy purple sky. Clive peered into the waters uneasily. Visibility was poor, and he felt dubious of their success. He climbed out of the dinghy and held on to the gunwales a few minutes with his hands. Toby let the basket into the water and smiled encouragement at Clive. There were beads of sweat on his forehead.

"Good luck," he said.

Clive was about to go down when his glance took in the schooner. His expression made Toby turn and stare. The crew were preparing to sail!

They had obviously planned to make their getaway while there was only one white man aboard, and already the anchor was up and they were about to unfurl the sails. Clive scrambled into the dinghy and he and Toby started to row frantically back.

Ignoring Hugh's orders to cease, the crew worked feverishly, oblivious of his helpless rage. The head diver seized a lump of wood and began to advance upon the white man. The Africans started to yell their approval in a frenzy of fear and rage.

Hugh, hopelessly outnumbered and unarmed, saw the murder in their eyes and flung himself overboard, swimming with the frantic speed of a man to whom delay meant death.

He was hauled into the dinghy, his breath coming in great, painful gasps, as the first drops of rain fell. Within minutes the rain was a grey, blinding sheet over the sea, pierced by yellow streaks of lightning, and the waters began a turbulent, white-capped motion. The schooner was lost from sight and the noise of the storm drowned all sound. The sky darkened; the following wind whipped the breaking waves over the reef into crashing monsters of danger.

They pulled away from the reef, bailing as they went, for the heavens and sea combined to pour their waters into the frail, tossing craft. Their plight was grim, so they decided they must attempt to board the schooner under cover of darkness. However crazed the crew were, they would not try to sail until the storm eased off. But the strength and fury of the elements crushed their hopes.

The schooner had been swung to and fro by the wind, sails useless, and her engines, which would have saved her, silent. As the storm increased in violence, she plunged out into the heaving waters, rolling helplessly before the wind. Through the drenching dark of rain, the three white men watched appalled as she spun a wavering course, drifting ever nearer to the boiling cauldron of the reef. The only man, other than themselves, who had sufficient seamanship and knowledge of her simple engine to have saved her was the dead Arab mate . . . Then they heard a long, splintering crash; she was spewed sideways on to the coral, and she crumpled in half like a crushed matchbox.

There was no hope of survivors. In the fast-increasing gloom of approaching night, they could see that nothing remained.

They were alone, completely and utterly alone, with only the infinitely small, infinitely frail boat between them and the fury of sea and sky, and the ocean stretched, mile after empty mile, beyond them.

It was many years later that Clive Halliday, prematurely grey

and still bearing marks of his miraculous escape from lingering death, faced me across the comfortable living-room of his London flat. He was reasonably well off, having been paid a considerable sum by a leading newspaper for the remarkable story of his adventure. But there appeared to be a listless, vaguely dissatisfied air about him.

I looked at the gleaming, yellowed tusk which lay on his desk, and picked up the crudely shaped iron pincers, turning them over in my hands.

" You saved them, then? "

The ghost of a smile touched Clive's tired mouth.

" They serve as a constant reminder—if I needed any."

I looked at him sympathetically, not understanding.

" The Ivory Reef's one place in the world you won't visit again, anyway."

Clive Halliday sat up, a sudden glint of animation in his eyes.

" The Ivory Reef? I tell you, there's a fortune, a wealth in ivory just waiting, asking to be lifted. It's a gift." His voice warmed with enthusiasm and he leaned forward eagerly, a changed man. " Now if I had the men and a ship . . . "

" That's him!"

★ *John Moore is the author of the Brensham trilogy*—Portrait of Elmbury, Brensham Village *and* The Blue Field—*and of many novels including* September Moon *and* (*his latest*) Jungle Girl. *He also writes short stories, film scripts and books about the countryside* (Man and Bird and Beast, *his new one, appears this month*). *He was a Fleet Air Arm pilot in the last war, married an Australian Wren, lives on the side of Bredon Hill near Tewkesbury. No children, many cats. Hobbies: fishing, shooting, butterflies, wild flowers, keeping pigs, growing auriculas and driving very fast motor cars!*

Aunt Effie

By John Moore

YES, they do look a bit like graves, don't they? Each of the mounds is six feet long and four feet wide exactly. Aunt Effie told me that was the size the experts recommended. She put 'em side by side for tidiness' sake, I suppose; but don't they make a depressing view from the sitting-room window? There were twenty-five of them when I took over. I've levelled off twenty-one. Twenty-one and a quarter, to be precise. The next owner can damn well finish them.

Oh . . . You think I ought to make a job of it before we offer the place for sale? Take that armchair, then—it was Aunt Effie's favourite—and please don't interrupt me for the next ten minutes. Then we'll see if you want me to . . . After all, you were Aunt Effie's lawyer.

You must have known about her little eccentricities. That's all they were, until about five years ago. How shall we describe them? An over-enthusiasm for causes? You'll remember when she was a British Israelite; how she never gave us any peace about the Pyramids; and how she libelled that doctor when she was an Anti-Vaccinationist; and the trouble she got into at the Blackshirt rally in 1938.

When I was going through her papers last Sunday, I began to count up the various organizations she was Vice-President of. There were more than fifty! I doubt if Aunt Effie ever refused to join anything. She subscribed to the British Field Sports Society because she favoured traditional country pastimes, and to the League Against Cruel Sports because she was sorry for the fox.

In 1945, just before the Election, she gave ten guineas to *each* of the three political parties; to the Conservatives in gratitude for Winston Churchill, to the Liberals because they seemed down and out, and to the Socialists because her favourite nephew was standing as a Labour candidate. That was me.

All this was mere eccentricity, of course, and rather charming too. I used to dine out on that political story. One thought of Aunt Effie's little ways as quaint and endearing until—let's see, it must have been in 1953—she first began to go in for compost.

You wouldn't think it possible to work oneself up into a state of crusading zeal about rotting vegetation; but before long—as you know—Aunt Effie was possessed by compost, monomaniac about compost, utterly convinced that all the physical and spiritual ills of the age were due to the use of artificial manure. She'd discovered the Cause above all Causes which she'd been looking for all her life.

See those pamphlets on the table—*Good Health and Humus*, *Earthworms versus Chemicals*, *You Are Being Slowly Poisoned*? Aunt Effie wrote those, and had them published at her own expense.

When you come to think of it, this Cause was bound to make a special appeal to her, because it was contrary to scientific teaching (and she was cussedly against dogma always), it was concerned with health (hers was beginning to worry her), and it seemed to offer a recipe for a longer life (which at seventy-four she felt much in need of). Above all it held out the temptation of trying to reform the whole world, a chance which she'd been seeking since she was twenty.

When I was Junior Minister at the Min. of Ag. and Fish., she wrote me about ten thousand words a week to prove how the wicked farmers were murdering us all by putting phosphates and potash and nitro-chalk on the land. And as if I didn't hear enough talk in the House, she'd lecture me for hours whenever I came down for a week-end. I visited her quite often, for I was fond of the old lady—at least I had a kind of reluctant respect for her. I wonder who invented the fiction that Edwardian maidens were frail, timid, and liable to swoon at the least alarm? That

generation produced some of the toughest females in the history of our race, not forgetting Boadicea.

" I bit my first policeman," Aunt Effie used to say, " upon my twenty-first birthday." She was a militant suffragette, of course.

Aunt Effie regarded *our* generation as a namby-pamby lot. " Spiritless," she'd say. " Soft. And no wonder, when almost everything a person eats nowadays is contaminated with those damnable, stomach-rotting, brain-destroying chemicals . . ." She would shake a finger at me. " The whole trouble with the world today is that *motor cars don't make manure.*"

Then she would start talking about the dog carts, gigs, traps, hansoms, broughams and carriages of her youth. Alas, the only hoofs she ever heard nowadays were those of the milkman's pony, and though from time to time she would dash out into the lane with a shovel and a bucket, the pony's contribution to her vegetable garden was meagre indeed. For the most part she had to rely upon her compost-heap, made of lawn-mowings, hedge-trimmings, leaf-sweepings and what not.

But one heap six feet by four was quite inadequate for her needs; before long she had five, all in a row, looking like those " Ancient Barrows " which they mark in Gothic lettering on the ordnance map. At the head of each was a little wooden board nailed crosswise on a peg, on which she'd inscribed a date—STARTED January 10th, 1953—and so on.

It takes a vast amount of vegetation, I'm told, to make even a small heap of compost. Aunt Effie was always complaining that she could never lay hands on enough. She went forth every day with basket and secateurs, and with that abominable Pekinese dog snuffling on the lead behind her, seeking suitable material in the lanes and hedgerows.

The basket proved too small, so she took to carrying a sack; then two sacks; then three sacks, which she loaded into a rubber-tyred handcart.

At what point does the eccentricity of one's elderly relatives cease to be something one boasts about? For that matter, at what point does eccentricity merge into madness? I daresay even the Law has a job to decide that sometimes. Take the case of my Aunt's Pekinese. The poor asthmatic creature died of exhaustion one very hot day, and I must say it shocked me when she told me she'd put *him* on the compost-heap. And yet it was logical enough; for as she pointed out, he had to be buried somewhere.

So did the hens.

These moping miserable White Wyandottes, which always

had featherless behinds, were dying off unaccountably when I spent a few days here in 1954. Their breast-bones were nearly through the skin; and looking back, I'm inclined to think Aunt Effie *starved them to death*, not deliberately, but because she could no longer bring herself to part with any household scraps which might conceivably be turned into compost. At the time I supposed that some disease was killing them. " That's bad luck," I remember saying to Aunt Effie, when I met her carrying two scrag-necked corpses down the garden path. But she was swinging them almost jauntily and there was a glint in her eye.

" Never mind, never mind," she said. " They'll go back where they came from."

" Where they came from? "

" Into the good ground, my lad: where you and I came from and where we'll go back to one of these days, to turn ourselves into green grass for the cows that'll give milk to the next generation. ' A man may fish with the worm that hath eat of a king, and eat of the fish that hath fed of that worm.' Remember your *Hamlet*; and *Ilkley Moor*? "

As she marched off down the path towards the compost-heaps, she glanced back over her shoulder and said:

" Feathers contain more nitrogen than anything else, they say."

I began to wonder, then, whether she was quite—

Yes, 1954. You had the same doubts? She wanted to leave all her money to some Anti-chemical-fertiliser Society? And you dissuaded her? Thank you very much.

It was that autumn she decided to grow her own corn.

She'd been troubled for a long time in case the bread she bought from the baker was made of flour ground from wheat which had been fertilised and dressed with " poisons." I had given her the address of one of those firms which supply wholemeal flour from corn grown on compost specially for the benefit of crackpots like Aunt E.; but that wasn't any use. " Aha, that's what they tell you," said Aunt Effie. " But *how do we know they are telling the truth?* " and her sly look gave me another moment of dismay.

" I've arranged to plough up the paddock," she said.

It is astonishing what the determination of an old lady can achieve. She hired a man with a tractor, who ploughed the four-acre field behind her house. In due course she broadcast the seed, and the following summer she harvested it personally with a billhook, thrashed it with a flail she'd bought from an antique-dealer, ground it with an ancient quern, and set her long-

suffering old maidservant, Patience, to knead the flour into dough and bake it in a special oven which the local builder had put in for her.

Patience had put up with Aunt Effie for forty years; but at last it seemed hers became exhausted, for the next time I visited Aunt Effie, I found her baking the bread herself. "Patience has gone," she said, and I wasn't altogether surprised. The kitchen, that midsummer day, was as hot as a bakery; the bread which Aunt Effie gave me for tea was the colour and consistency of very stiff porridge. It was full of gritty bits which stuck in my teeth.

"Health-giving food grown on uncontaminated soil," Aunt Effie smiled. "Aerated by God's creatures, the worms."

It was the soil she meant, of course, not the bread.

But the cornfield, she explained to me, demanded more compost even than the vegetable garden had done. She was buying sawdust now from a timber mill nearby—it rotted excellently—and she was putting all her old newspapers on the heaps, all her old clothes, and blankets, anything cotton or wool, anything *organic*—nylon wasn't any good. "I put a pair of old stockings on one of the heaps and six months later they were still there; they don't rot, you see."

Monomania is terrifying, isn't it? Her budgerigar had just died, she told me.

"Never mind, he'll soon be pushing up the wheat-stalks."

It was then that I thought it time for you and me to have a talk together. I called at your office, you remember, but you'd gone home. I had to get back to London, and there were long sittings over the Finance Bill, and in the hurly-burly I forgot all about Aunt E. until you rang me up to say that she had died.

Well, she asked for it, didn't she? Apparently she'd just bought a patent scythe, and although the weather was very hot she was trying it out on the nettles round the edge of her cornfield. She was seventy-nine, and doubtless the effort was too much for her old heart.

Poor old lady. I couldn't help being touched that she should have left me the house, and all her money as well. It's a pleasant old house; and as you know, I did think of settling down here permanently.

I went so far as to make a start towards getting the garden tidy. I couldn't get any help for love nor money; so I sweated away with a shovel and a wheelbarrow, levelling off those heaps. It was good exercise for me—I don't get much when the House is sitting.

But I didn't enjoy it, even at the beginning. The very sight of the mounds depressed me; they looked as if they were just waiting for the tombstones to make the picture complete. And that dripping shrubbery behind with its dark hollies, and more hummocks where the herbaceous border should have been, and everywhere an autumn smell of mould and decay!

I told you there were twenty-five heaps when I started. Goodness knows how many Aunt Effie had demolished and carted to her field where the winter corn, by the way, is coming up in patches, because it was broadcast instead of being drilled. Aunt Effie had persuaded herself that wheat from broadcast seed was somehow healthier than wheat planted in the modern fashion. Isn't it sad how the *avant-garde* of yesterday become the reactionaries of today? Ah well: one's arteries harden, I suppose. Did I tell you I wasn't altogether happy about the way the Party's going? Bit too Left for me.

But about those compost-heaps. I tried to do one every afternoon. They don't look very big, but I reckon there's about ten tons of soil in each of them. It's a slow job, but I worked my way along the row steadily, beginning with the oldest which of course are the ones which are most rotted down.

Even without the inscriptions on the boards I could almost date them by the skeletons—those White Wyandottes, you know, and Chiang Kai-shek the Pekinese. Like a geologist dating strata by the fossils!

I became quite good at comparative anatomy. In the next heap to Chiang Kai-shek's I found another skeleton, which reminded me that it was a year or so since I'd seen Aunt Effie's marmalade cat.

He was in the twenty-first compost-heap. I started on the twenty-second . . .

I wonder whether you'd like to come out and have a look? Well, I think you'll have to. You were Aunt Effie's lawyer, and you've been acting for me, and I particularly don't want to be involved in anything unpleasant. I believe I may be going to Another Place shortly. Keep it under your hat, though.

Come along then. It may turn out to be quite explicable and ordinary. I expect we'll be having a good laugh about it in a few minutes' time.

It's just that my spade—er—exposed the toe of a nylon stocking. Nylon doesn't rot, you know. Well, yes, it looks to me as if there might be *something inside it*. And it has occurred to me that Aunt Effie didn't say, "Patience has left." She said, "Patience has gone."

CARTOON BY MENDOZA

"I don't wish to appear indelicate, but is it house-trained?"

EYE WITNESS

By Holly Roth

IT was a few minutes past five. Talia stood beside her desk and looked idly out of the window. Janet Furman, who shared the glass box of an office with Talia, had left for the day, as had almost everyone else. And Talia would leave in a minute. From her window high up in the block, New York looked shimmeringly beautiful and thoroughly unreal, and she would have liked to linger to enjoy the view. But unless there was a rush copy job it would not be normal to linger. Talia intended to be normal.

She turned to tidy her desk. She would walk home, and that would be pleasant. Her previous job had meant an hour's travelling each way . . . She shied away from any thought of her previous life.

New York at five in the evening seemed the most fascinating place on earth. And at the end of the walk was the most satisfying place on earth—her home. Two quiet rooms. A view of the Hudson, if you held your head at just the right angle. It was extraordinarily delightful . . . freedom.

She hesitated over the papers strewn across the desk. Ideas for copy had progressed only as far as a few adjectives and vague associations. She would have liked to take the research material home. She would have liked to work during the evening in her quiet apartment . . . but the other copywriters rarely did that, and Talia wanted to be like the others. She swept the papers into her centre drawer, closed it, and picked up her handbag.

The phone rang.

Talia frowned. The call couldn't be for her.

But it was. "Miss Cory?" The voice was vaguely familiar and quite high. A man or a woman? A man, she decided.

★ DRAMATIC NEW THRILLER EXCLUSIVE TO SUSPENSE

" Natalia Cory? "

" Yes. Who—"

" Natalia Eileen Cory? "

Talia looked across the graveyard of desks. Her voice was flat as she said, " Yes."

" This is a—friend. Not exactly that. Sort of an old almost-acquaintance. From Des Moines."

Talia's mouth tightened. She said carefully, keeping her

voice under control, " I have no friends from Des Moines."

" Now don't tell me you don't know Des Moines." There was an insinuating note in the high-pitched voice.

" I said I have no friends from Des Moines."

The voice chuckled; the pitch made it almost a cackle. " Now, you may be right about that. You just may be right. Well, *I* know you from Des Moines." He waited.

Talia kept her lips as tightly closed as if the man could see her.

He didn't like the silence. He said, " Still a snob, eh? . . . I'm coming along to your apartment to see you. Tonight."

" I won't be at home—"

" Oh, yes, you will. At eight o'clock. Be there. Unless you want a lot to happen. Eight o'clock."

And she was listening to a dead line.

Talia sat down slowly.

She rested her impassive face on a hand that showed no sign of a tremble and looked out at the view she had so enjoyed but that she no longer saw. Then she thought it out.

At a quarter past seven, Talia went out to her front door. She opened it, moved towards the stairs, leaving the door ajar. Then she changed her mind, went back, got her keys out of her handbag, locked the door. As she walked down the stairs, her face was even tighter.

She went to the door of the apartment beneath her own, hesitated, and then knocked firmly.

A man's voice called out, " Just a minute." In less than that a tall man opened the door. He stared down at her for a second. Then he said, " Miss Cory! " He sounded pleased. " Good evening, neighbour. Come to borrow some bread? "

Talia smiled, but she felt the stiffness of her lips. " Not exactly, but I do want—"

He interrupted. " Come in and tell me." But he was not quite as friendly as he had been for the first three months she had lived there. The fourth month, the last month, he had given up. And she approved of his present partial reserve. She had snubbed him—politely but competently. It was unfortunate—she had thought him nice. But her privacy—and her self-sufficiency—were even nicer.

Now she was about to give up some of that self-sufficiency. Only a small wedge, but she regretted it bitterly.

He ushered her into his sitting-room. " How's Krause and Kane? " he asked.

" Mr. Richards, a slice of bread does not entitle you to the secrets of my employers, your competitors to the death."

"Ah, you saw through me . . ." He smiled. "Well, what can I do for you? Sit down and relax. A drink?"

It wouldn't do, Talia thought. It was—invasion. Of all the things in the world she didn't want . . . "No, thank you. I'm sorry," she said, and heard her stilted voice but didn't know how to soften it: "I'm afraid I've really come for the bread—in the form of that tape recording thing you told me about some weeks ago."

"Yes, of course. You want to borrow it?"

"I know it's expensive and delicate. I know it's a terrible imposition. I wouldn't ask if—if I didn't—"

"Don't be silly, neighbour."

"I'd like to borrow it for two days. I'll return it by Thursday."

He waved a negligent hand. "Fine. Let me explain the works." He left the room and returned carrying a neat little box. "Now, this is the active roll, do you see? This one is the spare. It turns on here. The tape moves like this. To erase, you reverse. Clear?"

"Yes. Two things: how long will it record and how near must it be to the sound?"

"One hour. For distance, twenty feet is possible, ten is better."

That should do it. "That will be fine. Thank you."

"Sure you won't have a drink? Coffee, perhaps?"

She saw his curiosity and considered a lie. But his pleasant non-committal face and his dark, candid eyes made it unthinkable. Talia stood up. "No, thank you," she said. "I'd like to stay for a little while"—she hoped the honesty came through—"but I've got a—a date."

And that was true enough.

By a quarter to eight she was ready. For the next ten minutes she sat, unmoving, without thought.

At five minutes past she heard the sound of the ascending lift. She went into the bedroom and turned the switch on the tape recorder and put the box behind the door so that it was near the crack of the partly open door. Then she went to the front door and opened it.

The figure outside was shorter than she and very thin. She realized that she had interrupted his preparations; he had a handkerchief folded into a large triangle in front of his face, and his arms were raised to tie it behind his head. The eyes above the handkerchief stared strainingly at her and she saw that he was shocked, probably because she had so nearly caught him unmasked.

She had a moment's desire to laugh—this undernourished

little man was not the figure of terror her frightened imagination had conjured. And then she saw the eyes, and the menace—all the menace that had existed in her imagination, and more—was there. The eyes had enormous pupils and a peculiar lack of focus, and when he spoke his reedy voice did nothing to lessen the threat. He said, with a flat lack of intonation that sounded particularly odd in the high voice, " Push this door nearly shut. Right away! "

She obeyed, almost as a reflex action. The voice came round the edge of the door: " Now turn off the lights in there."

She moved across and switched off the lamps. The room was still surprisingly well lighted by the glow from the streets outside.

The door opened and quickly closed.

He said, " Sit down," and she sank on to the couch.

The small man did not remove his hat. The broad brim and the handkerchief combined to make an amazingly effective shield. She could see nothing but the narrow strip of face that contained the unnatural-looking eyes. With only those straining, staring eyes as a guide she couldn't begin to place the man. But perhaps she didn't know him?

He said, and there was venom in every high quavering note, " You're the kind that comes out on top. You kill a man, and what happens? You get away with it and come out on top."

He paused. " Now I'm going to even things up a bit—I'm going to take some of your money."

" This is very foolish," Talia said evenly. " What you are discussing is called blackmail—"

The high voice reached higher, into a kind of piercing whisper: " Don't you call me foolish, and don't you dare patronise me by telling me ' what things are called '! Do you understand? " There was hate in his voice and killing in his eyes, and Talia realized that she was terribly afraid.

She kept her voice even and tried to keep any intonation, patronising or otherwise, out of it: " What I'm trying to say is that I *don't* understand. In order to blackmail, the other person—the blackmailee—must have at least two things. The person blackmailed has to have a secret worth paying to keep, and the money to pay with. I haven't either."

" You earn a hundred and fifteen dollars a week. You must take home about ninety."

She looked at him blankly. How did he know?

He waited. She said, " Yes."

" Well, *I* don't. So we're going to share things a little more evenly. I want thirty dollars every week. That won't bring me up to ninety, but it'll put me ahead of you."

" But *why* should I pay you? Even a cent? "

He laughed. " Would you like all those innocents in—the place where you work—to know that you are a murderess? "

" No." She swallowed and went on evenly. " No, I wouldn't. But I wouldn't pay anyone anything to keep them from knowing. I might leave my job "—she raised her voice very slightly to forestall his interruption—" but then I'd just get another. Because I do my work well. That's why I'm paid. And if you told the people at the next job, then I'd get another, and so on."

The man got off his chair and walked unsteadily towards her, and she saw that he was trembling with rage. And then he slapped her. He was wearing gloves, heavy brown leather ones. The heavy leather cracking across her face sounded like a shot in the quiet room, a series of shots, as his hand fanned to and fro in a volley of slow, deliberate, stinging blows.

Talia sat as still as the rocking blows permitted, and fought the tears. There was nothing so degrading as physical violence. That was what had made Bart so dreadful. But Bart had never hit *her*, Talia—he had never dared. This little man, half Bart's size, dared, and there was nothing she could do about it. Because in his left hand, inches from her breast, he held a knife.

The light gleamed off its length in a single piercing ray because its tiny width offered little surface for reflection; the knife had been honed until it was not much more than a stiletto. Talia sat still. She had been very contented for months; she didn't want to die. And the little man would undoubtedly kill her.

Then, at last, he backed slowly away to the wing chair, and perched on its edge once more. " Now," he said, and he sounded more relaxed than he had since he entered the room, " you see? There are two reasons to pay me, both good. One is that I'll kill you if you don't." He paused. Then he said, " And the other is that I know something about the murder that no one else knows. *You knew him—because the light was on.* Didn't you? "

No, Talia thought, I don't think I knew him. But the light *was* on.

The man smiled, and his eyes crinkled at the corners. He must be very happy, she thought numbly. That must be a real smile.

" So I don't even have to warn you about staying away from the police." He stood up. " I'll phone you. I'll tell you how to pay me the money. I won't be seeing you for some time, but later—after I've taught you your place—we're going to become very good friends. Intimate."

The front door closed behind him.

The uniformed policeman behind the big desk nodded at a

stairway. "Lieutenant Cort will see you. Second floor at the end of the passage. Room two-ten."

She said, "Thank you," and went up the stairs.

The door of the room was open, and a heavy-set man in shirt sleeves sat at a desk, his head bent over a mass of papers.

The man looked up, then in one hasty movement he stood up. He said, "Miss Cory?" His voice, even in those two short words, was beautiful. He had a pleasant face, despite a network of wrinkles—premature wrinkles, she decided.

"Yes. And you are Lieutenant Cort?"

He nodded. "Come in, please. Sit down. And let me take your case."

She instinctively hugged the box closer to her knees. "I'll put it here by the chair, thank you."

"Right. Now, shall we start from the beginning? And may we have it taken down?" He added quickly, "You don't have to submit to that if you don't wish to, but if we decide we can help you I won't be permitted to do so until I have a statement. So it would save you from going through it all over again."

She nodded. "Certainly. I've come to make a statement."

"Right. Start with your full name and address, Miss Cory."

She gave him that. He nodded. "And your age?"

"Twenty-five, nearly twenty-six."

"All right. Go on."

She went on: "On January twenty-first, I came here from my home town, Lafayette, Iowa. It's a small town, almost a suburb of Des Moines. Before I left—on December twenty-third—I shot and killed my brother, Bartholomew Cory."

The wrinkles in Cort's face twitched. It was too expressive a face, she thought. It would distract her. She raised her eyes and fixed them on the wall above him. She would forever afterwards remember the green paint on that wall.

"If you want details you can telephone Des Moines. Briefly, it was like this. My brother came home at three in the morning. Slightly after that, they decided. He had forgotten his keys so he climbed in through the dining-room window. He was drunk. They established that. It wouldn't matter, it wouldn't be—pertinent—except that it accounted for the odd noises he was making. Like an—animal. He didn't sound like himself when he finally spoke, and I warned what I thought was an intruder to stop or I'd shoot. He continued to hurl himself through the window at me—so, well—I shot him. There was a—an inquiry; the jury agreed it was an accident." She looked briefly back at the lieutenant. "That was that, I thought. But last night a man came, threatened me, demanded money."

Cort said gently, " Well, now you must tell me about that."

" He phoned me at my office—an advertising agency on Fifth Avenue." She gave an exact report of the conversation. " So—"

" He didn't ask your address? "

" No."

" Your phone number is listed? "

She frowned. " No, it's not. I preferred—"

" Well, we'll discuss it later. He came at eight? "

" At five minutes past. Have you an electric point in here? "

He stared at her, but only for a second. Then he looked down at the box. He said softly, " Well, well," and a new set of muscles came into play in his expressive face.

She hadn't played back the recording the night before. She hadn't been sure how to do so and was afraid she might accidentally reverse and erase it; she had been too tired; and she had been, before her four hours' sleep, afraid to relive the experience. Now she made her mind as blank as possible and listened with almost complete stoicism. She lapsed from rigidity just twice; when she first heard her own voice she felt and showed surprise; and when the cracking sounds came, she winced with each blow. She felt the lieutenant's gaze on her and wondered if he could tell about her face.

He could. When the recording had run its course the lieutenant asked, " Your cheeks—is your face swollen, Miss Cory? "

" Yes."

" Um. Where'd you get that machine? "

" I borrowed it. From a neighbour."

" Um." He shot forward in his chair. She shrank back instinctively. " *Were* the lights on? "

" How—what . . . Yes."

" And you didn't say so? To the police? To the court? "

" No one asked me."

" And you didn't volunteer the information."

It was a statement. She said nothing.

" Um. *Did* you know who it was? "

No amount of rapid-fire questioning could draw a quick answer to that. " No," she said at last, quietly. " In that very last second—I believed I knew. But it was too late then."

" Didn't you like your brother? "

Talia took a deep breath, sat erect in her chair, and said, " That is beside the point, Lieutenant Cort. Ask the police at Lafayette. The blackmail happened here; the—shooting—was in their—jurisdiction."

" Um." He smiled, but it was a pale, frosty imitation of its

predecessors. "So . . . you tell me you were acquitted, Miss Cory. And you cannot be tried twice for the same crime."

She looked at him levelly. "Lieutenant Cort, I was *not* tried for my brother's death. Not even on a charge of manslaughter. There was merely an inquest. I could be charged at any time."

"I see." He stared at her with obvious curiosity. There was some other quality in his face, she thought—admiration? He said, "You realize, I imagine, that your statement here is not privileged? It was—courageous—of you to come here."

She looked quickly at him. A compliment? Or a threat? She said nothing.

Cort spoke briskly. "Now—this visitor of yours. Description, please."

She shook her head. "Almost nothing." She explained about the hat and handkerchief. "He was short . . . Thin. Slender. No shoulders to speak of."

"The voice seems high. Could it have been a woman?"

It was a new thought and she gave it time. Then she shook her head. "Perhaps. I don't think so."

"Colour of eyes?"

"I don't know."

"But you saw them."

"Yes. But there were no lights on. I think they were colourless. Perhaps grey."

"The same applies to the colour of his hair?"

She nodded.

"Suit?"

"His suit was grey, I think. Yes, it was grey. Shabby. Not well pressed." She wondered if he didn't believe in the man at all. Her description certainly wasn't very convincing.

He leaned forward. "Listen to me, Miss Cory, carefully. There are several noticeable oddities. Let's take the matter of identification: this person seems vaguely familiar to you—am I right? But you can't identify him. Yet he knows"—he ticked off the points on his fingers—"your middle name, your address, your salary. It sounds as if he must work with you. Does that suggest anything to you?"

The idea was shocking. "I am new in my job. I have no real friends in the office yet." She struggled to explain. To him, and to herself. "No matter how calmly I seem to take it, the—the business of my brother's death was—shocking to me. Just as—as in a major operation, the whole body is jolted—well, my mind was jolted. And my habits. My—everything." She looked up at him, and he nodded. "So my relationships at the office are not—not quite normal. I speak to and am friendly

with my superior, Mr. Long, my office-sharer, Janet Furman, one of the telephone operators, the dispatch room clerk, one man in the art department . . . a few others." She lifted a hand and let it drop.

" I understand. Now we come to the second connection: He also sounds like someone you should be able to identify from the past. He *said* he was from Des Moines, and seemed to be using the name of that place loosely to mean your town, Lafayette. You knew many people in Lafayette? "

She struggled with that. Then she said, " A number very well, but of course I knew a lot of people just by sight, as one does in a small town."

" Then what you're saying is that you rule Lafayette people neither in nor out of your speculations, but you rule your office out."

" Not exactly, but—well, more or less."

He leaned across his desk. " At the end of our interview I'll take certain standard steps. For instance, I'll have a check made on possible known offenders. That will be a routine police step, and pretty hopeless. This person is very vindictive about you, very personal. But with the information I have, I cannot see any way to go out and *find* this man. He probably comes from, has an association in, knows, has a connection with Lafayette, Iowa. Enough to know details of your life. Enough to know that—the lights were on. If you will let me question you—? "

" You *have* been questioning me. I *have* let you."

" You forewarned me that the shooting was not in my jurisdiction."

" Oh. About that. But that is irrelevant."

" I don't think so."

She felt helplessly caught. She could not live in a world in which the little man wandered freely—with a knife like a stiletto—looking for her. Neither could she relive that night, with its multiple horrors. The lieutenant watched her.

She said, " Ask your questions."

" Right. Who was in the house that night? "

" Everybody. That is, Molly, Bart's wife; her mother; Janie—my little niece; and my father."

" But *you* dealt with what was supposed to be an intruder? "

" Yes." Her surprise was obvious. " I dealt with everything. My father is very old. Mrs. Bolling, Molly's mother, was—is—an invalid. Janie is only four."

" And your sister-in-law? "

" Molly is timid, nervous. Frightened."

" All right. Now, what happened? "

" Well, we heard the noise and—"

" Who's we? Everyone? "

" Just Molly and I."

" It woke you? "

In Lafayette, no one had asked that question. She said tonelessly, " We were up."

" Were you usually up at three in the morning? "

In Lafayette they had accepted a whole set of contradictions without mentioning their existence. She was fully dressed—so she was up; it was three in the morning so her senses were blurred with sleep—and the inference was that she had been dragged out of bed; it was three in the morning, so of course the lights were out—and the inference was that she was wandering about in the dark. In Lafayette someone had said, " Night before Christmas Eve. Must have been wrapping presents, eh? " Whichever of the kind people it had been—and until that Christmas, Talia had not fully realized just how many kind people there were in Lafayette—whoever it had been had not waited for an answer.

She said woodenly, " No."

" But you were up that night."

" Yes."

" Well, Miss Cory, why? "

There was a little pause and then he said, " Miss Cory, don't tell me they never asked you that question! "

" No. They didn't."

He stared at her, his face unreadable. It was a homely face, but a very nice one. He was probably a very nice man. She hoped that he would not be the one who would make her life forever unlivable. Then he said something strange: " They must think a great deal of you in Lafayette."

Yes, she thought numbly, perhaps they had. She felt the tears coming and with an intense effort of will she pushed them back. " I was up," she said coldly, " until about one-thirty or two because Molly was up. Molly was upset. Molly was . . . " How did one describe Molly, who certainly wasn't mad but whose fears and weaknesses and clingings sometimes pushed her very near to the border? How to describe Molly, product of her mewling mother and vicious father, in a few well-chosen words? Talia found just one word: " Molly was hysterical," she said frigidly.

" Why? "

" She got—gets—like that. That night she had decided that because Bart was out late he was drinking and that as a result he would—hit—her when he came home."

" And would he have? "

Talia looked back into the distance and discovered something. " Because she so clearly expected him to, he probably would have."

" I see. So you were up until one-thirty or two, you said, with your sister-in-law. And then? "

" Then," Talia said woodenly, " the phone began to ring."

" In *Lafayette*? "

Talia looked at him and then accepted the humour. It even helped. " You're quite right. People do not telephone at two in the morning in Lafayette. But—he often telephoned."

" And who was this person who telephoned in the middle of the night? "

" I don't know."

Cort nodded as in confirmation of a thought. " What did he say? "

" Unrepeatable things. Over and over again. Almost every night. If I rang off, he telephoned again."

" And why didn't you tell the authorities? "

" You don't understand small towns," she said tonelessly. ' They run on the principle that where there's smoke, there's fire. The voice talked constantly about ' my lover,' and said—unrepeatable things. They would have tapped the phone, and some of them would have repeated some of those—delicious bits of scandal, those—titbits . . ." She came back from Lafayette and said, " That's why I was awake at three o'clock."

" And your sister-in-law? "

" She had been asleep for a little while. But the noise woke her. She called down over the banister."

" And then went with you to investigate? "

" And then went back up to her room." Talia's face was wooden.

" I see."

But Molly couldn't help being what she was, and it seemed unfair to leave it there. Talia said, " After all, there was Janie. She had to protect Janie. She had Janie upstairs with her."

" I see," he repeated. She thought that perhaps he *did* see. Then he said, " And you went into the dining-room and shot the man. You thought it was the owner of the voice on the phone? "

" Yes. Exactly. That is . . ." She stopped.

" At the very last minute you saw it was your brother."

" Yes." He had a kind face, but it was also perceptive. She sat and looked directly at Cort. " I tortured myself for a long while about that. The voice had said he would come one night. And he—detailed—what he was going to do, the same things, he

said, that 'my lover' did. So I was upset, very upset—and there is the whole answer.

"When I realized it was Bart, I was just about to fire the gun. I tried to lower it, to point it towards the floor. But I couldn't do it in time. I was just too late."

She paused, and then surprisingly, smiled faintly. "While I'm getting it all out, there is this, too. You were right in your assumption that I didn't like Bart. He was a mean man, a bully. And he was largely responsible for my being—caught. In Lafayette. Bart was—well, for instance, my father wanted to go into a home, an old people's home, on the other side of Des Moines. A lovely place in lovely grounds. Papa is eighty-two, and he wanted the companionship of people of his own age, and the care that he needed but didn't want to burden me with. But Bart wouldn't let him go.

"What was in Bart's mind was the house. The house was Papa's, of course, and to get into the home, everyone has to sign over his property. It makes perfect sense—they take care, very good care, of you until you die. Bart said Papa should give him the house and *then* apply to the home for entrance. Papa wouldn't do that.

"Multiply Bart's treatment of Papa by a hundred other such things and you know what Bart was like."

"Um. Well, thank you, Miss Cory. This will all help—"

"I don't see how," Talia commented, out of honesty and a small bitterness at having been forced back to Lafayette.

"No?" Cort's wrinkles co-operated to form a vivid question mark. "Well, almost every evil springs from a preceding evil. The smallest situations find their seeds in situations that preceded them. Life, all life, is a chain. Now—there is something particularly odd about that recording. That voice in Lafayette—was it a very high voice, Miss Cory?"

She stared rigidly at him. "I couldn't tell. He always whispered."

"So?" His face was kind.

"It could be." She thought about it. "But this man, yesterday, he didn't say obscene things!"

"No, because now he's gone into action."

Talia felt cold.

Cort rose. "Thank you, Miss Cory. We'll keep in touch."

Talia stood up very slowly. She reached for the tape recorder, but Cort asked, "May we keep that for a while? You can pick it up this evening."

She nodded.

"I probably won't be here. Just ask for it at the desk."

She nodded again.

" Thank you, Miss Cory. And—try not to worry."

She was dismissed. As she walked down the stairs, she thought, *Not worry?*

It was only a little after ten o'clock when she reached the office. Most of the copywriters arrived at ten o'clock anyway; but Talia *did* normally get in at half-past nine, so her lateness was noticeable. When she caught Janet looking at her swollen face she answered both unspoken questions with one explanation. " I went to the dentist this morning," she commented in Janet's direction.

" Oh, you poor soul! " Janet's pleasant contralto was full of sympathy.

Half an hour later Talia struggled up out of piles of reports and caught Janet's eye. The eye looked hastily away, but it had been filled with curiosity. It occurred to Talia then that one rarely came away from a dentist with *two* swollen cheeks—and curiously reddened cheeks, at that.

She made no further explanations. Charles Neilson, who should have been in the art department, manufactured a reason to drop in on her, and commented, " Gained weight, I see." Mr. Long took a second look. Even Billy, the dispatch-room clerk, on his interminable rounds of empty-the-outgoing-box and fill-the-incoming-box, looked sideways at her each time he entered their glass-partitioned room.

She escaped at five minutes to five, to Janet's obvious astonishment; Talia was usually the last one out of the office. She bought a fresh roll of recording tape, then she stopped at the police station and collected the tape recorder.

Back in her apartment she replaced the roll of tape with the newly purchased one, closed and latched the machine, and carried it down the flight of stairs. But her knock on Jim Richard's door brought no response. She wearily descended the stairs to the caretaker's apartment, explained that Mr. Richards would call for it, and left the recorder with him. She also got a scrap of paper from him and wrote a note to Jim Richards, telling him where the recorder was and thanking him. She put the note in his letter box and went back up to her apartment.

The next morning her swollen face had subsided and her cheeks were no longer red, but she looked worn, thin, and tired.

She existed through the day. If her drawn face, her increased remoteness, her total silence, drew surprised glances, she was almost unaware of them. Once a glance from Mr. Long (who was kind even if he did wheeze and did pursue her with an

embarrassed shyness that was catching) succeeded in piercing her numbness. But it didn't penetrate far. She assumed he was surprised at her lateness in presenting at least some rough copy, and forgot it, him, and the copy.

In the late afternoon she was visited by an achingly familiar sensation. In Lafayette, in the early hours of the morning, Talia had increasingly often awakened to an oppressing sense of impending horror. In the office that day the feeling came upon her with a force greater than she had ever experienced before. She looked up from her papers and through the glass partitions. There was nothing to see, just the usual people and their dimly repeated images, the usual desktops, with their usual clutter.

At five she tidied her desk and left the office. But the feeling of dreadful expectation travelled with her through the congested streets to her home.

The elevator seemed to move very slowly. She wanted to go to bed. Perhaps she could escape through sleep. Perhaps.

She finally reached her floor, opened the door of the elevator, and then stood in rapidly diminishing light as the elevator started its way downwards, depriving the dark landing of the glow from its interior. The landing lights were out.

She stood still for no more than a second, and then her mind became acutely active and aware.

She took three long, entirely silent sidesteps along the wall, moving towards the far side of the landing. Was she imagining danger where none existed? But the lights simply could not have burned out, because there were three of them. She could not take a chance. Better to feel silly later than to walk into nameless horror just to prove her bravery to herself. And then she heard the sound, the sound of breathing. *And he was coming nearer.* He had, of course, seen her clearly when the elevator door opened; she had not seen him because she had been moving from light into darkness.

Now, in the darkness, she could see something. For a second she peered intently towards the right, and then, quickly, she dropped her eyelids until her eyes were almost entirely shuttered. What she had seen was a reflection of the little man's eyeballs. They had seemed luminous, she remembered.

She moved round the wall with big silent, careful steps. If this went on, they would go round and round forever.

Through her slitted lids she caught repeated glimpses of his shining eyes, increasingly clearer, increasingly nearer. She didn't understand how she could see them. To reflect light, there had to *be* light— And then she felt a terrible, convulsive fear. She realized that she would eventually pass the stairwell

leading down, and there was a faint, an almost imperceptible glow coming up from the floor below. It was not enough to light the landing or to define her outline when she was flat against the wall as she now was, but there was light enough, just enough, so that her figure would make a greater darkness as she passed it.

But if she could pass that area of faint light safely and quickly she would come to the stairs going up to the roof, and she would climb them.

Would he know and follow? Probably, she thought, very probably. But one had to try . . .

Jim Richards' voice sounded up the stairwell, puzzled and apprehensive. He said, " Miss Cory? " There was a moment of utter silence. Then Richards said again, more urgently and more loudly, " Miss Cory! "

She had darted to the stairs leading to the roof. She put her foot on the first step and heard the cracking sound as her heel jammed against the riser, and so she gave up silence entirely. She shouted, " Go back, Jim! Go back! He has a knife! " Then, on the second step, she fell.

She hit herself full on the chin, and in the moment that followed she was deafened by a roaring in her ears. Then she heard the steps, the pounding footsteps, and a scuffling. She tried to push herself upwards, but as she placed her hand flat on the stair a foot came crushingly down on her knuckles. And through the pain she knew she must get up to help; to catch him; to end the nightmare for ever. Her other hand went out with lightning speed and grabbed the ankle that was flashing past her.

The man fell heavily, and she was aware almost at once of her mistake. The ankle was that of a big man, the weight that fell against her was that of a big man, and above her she could hear the receding footsteps. She knew that she had tripped the wrong man.

She twisted round on the step and sat up—it was surprisingly difficult; she must have fallen harder than she had realized. She blinked away a blackness and said, in a voice that sounded distant, " Jim, are you hurt? I'm sorry. Are you—" She stopped and looked down. Beside her hand, there was a glow. The faint light reflected off the long knife, and Talia gave up her fight, sank back into the inner blackness.

She was lying on her couch. Her head ached. She moved it gently to the left and discovered Jim Richards. The knife was in his hand and his thumb was running lightly along the blade.

He looked up and said, " He left us a souvenir." He waved the knife, then put it on the table beside him and came over to

the couch. He stood quietly for a moment, looking down at her, and then he asked gently, "Head hurt?"

Her voice sounded strained. "I'll be all right in a moment."

He sat on the edge of the couch, at its foot. "I heard the elevator, and then the door opened up here, and closed again. There should be two more sounds after that—your own door closing, and one step as your heel clicks across the floor there before you step on to the rug." He pointed at the floor.

"Because it was all subconscious, I wasted a minute or two, before I thought it out, defined what was missing. I got worried then. Immediately. Because of the recording."

Her lashes had been lying on her cheeks. They went swiftly upwards and she stared into his dark eyes. "Recording?"

"When I collected the machine last night, I checked it. Force of habit with mechanical gadgets. One roll was in backwards. I turned it, and then tested the machine. I heard your voice. Then I ran the tape. Forgive me—" He paused. "No, I'm glad I listened. It explains you." He smiled faintly. "Explanation was even good for my ego. I had been wondering if *anyone* could be as thoroughly repulsive as you seemed to find me."

"But I changed the tape," Talia said numbly.

"You must have changed the unused tape . . . What are you going to do with that—that record of viciousness?"

"I took it to the police. They made a copy."

"Good girl!" He looked surprised, but it faded slowly into something else. "Courageous," he said. "Wise."

"You, too, interpreted the business about the 'lights being on'?"

"Too?"

"The policeman, a Lieutenant Cort, understood it immediately. I explained to him. Shall I explain to you?"

"Not unless you wish to." The colour had faded from his face, and his eyes were very kind, very warm.

"I do wish to," Talia said and smiled faintly. She pulled herself up against the cushions, and then she told him the story. She found it easier to tell this second time, and she told it differently, not limiting herself to the bare facts, but permitting herself some interpretation and explanation. But no apologies. She had none; what had happened had happened.

When she had finished, Richards' first comment was a repetition of Cort's, but he said it with less surprise and more warmth. "You may not realize," he said, "how revealing their treatment of you is. They—the authorities and the people—did everything they could, it seems, to make it easy for you. Such a reaction

doesn't spring up, all uncultivated and untended. Knowingly or not, they must have been seeing your position, sympathising with you, for many years."

Talia had not thought of that. Now she nodded.

" And after the inquest? "

" We—cleaned up. That sounds . . . " She waved a hand. " There is no better way to explain it. We were not only the loose ends of a tragedy; we were the dregs of Bart's rule. We had to be—tidied up. It was surprisingly simple—each of us simply followed our wishes. Papa went into the home and transferred the house to them, of course. Molly and Janie went to Molly's brother and sister-in-law. Bart left seven thousand dollars' insurance; I had insisted on insurance, but he had lied to me, after all. It was supposed to be fifteen thousand. Still, in Lafayette . . . Molly's brother and his wife are nice, sensible, unimaginative. He owns a department store there, and Molly can be useful. I think she'll be "—she paused—" if not happy, at least content. The baby will be infinitely better off. Molly's brother has no children, and Janie is very lovable.

" Mrs. Bolling went to stay with her sister, and I came here. I had been a copywriter in Des Moines for the branch office of a Chicago firm. They offered me a transfer, but I wanted the break to be complete."

Richards asked, " And this—this ' little man,' you still don't know, can't remember, who he is? "

She shook her head. " If you had asked me that question this morning I'd have pointed out that I can't be sure there is anyone to know or remember. But this afternoon . . ." Her voice trailed away.

" Something happened? " The alarm in his voice was so intense that she looked quickly at him and then as quickly away.

" Yes. No. It's hard to explain and it sounds ridiculous. Just that a feeling I used to have—a warning, almost—came back to me. That man's phone calls used to bring it on; today I was warned again. It's just a feeling, of course."

" Feelings can be important."

She said, " And although his voice is still not really familiar, something he said is the same. When he left here he explained he wouldn't see me soon and—and then made some threats."

" I remember." His pleasant mouth tightened.

" Well, the man who whispered used to do that. He'd talk and talk and then he'd say he wouldn't ring again for some time. But he'd ring very soon. Today I knew it would be the same. That he'd come back almost immediately."

Richards got up, walked over towards the wing chair, and

stood with his back to her, looking down at the knife. He said, " Well, the police are the next step. That knife has to be turned over to your lieutenant."

" Yes. Of course. But not now. In the morning. I'll go in on the way to work."

" Tell you what." Richards sounded brisk. " Suppose you let me do it. They'll probably want to talk to me anyway, since I was involved. Then I'll meet you for lunch and tell you what they say. All right? "

" It's an imposition—"

" As long as you don't object, it's not an imposition, but a settled fact. Good. Now, about tonight. Does your feeling of—invasion—extend to me? If not, I think I'll camp on your couch."

The feeling of invasion did *not* extend to him. She examined the realization with surprise. But it would be too much to accept. " I'll be all right," she said slowly. " There's really no need—"

" Same answer as before. As long as you don't object, it's not a matter of need, but a settled fact." He smiled.

She slept well. When she awoke she found that she had overslept by fifteen minutes, and knew immediately that Richards had left.

The knife had gone from the table and there was a note in its place. It started without salutation, and she wondered if he didn't know what to call her. " Miss Cory " would have seemed foolish; " Natalia " was rather overwhelming. He said,

I am not at my best by the dawn's early light, and anyway I want to catch your cop before he goes out. I'll meet you at twelve by the desk in your entrance hall. (I'd like you to think I'm omniscient, but truth is we have a client in that building.) I do *mean twelve—not five seconds later—because I know a wonderful place to eat that has two flaws—five hundred other people know it, and it has eight tables. I'll make a reservation, but they won't hold tables. Twelve! Jim*

If you need me for any reason at all, don't hesitate to ring me.

She didn't need him, but when her phone rang a little before eleven, she felt an instant glow of pleasure. In the second that it took her to put her hand out she thought: Perhaps I *am* telepathic.

Richards said, " Thought I'd better warn you that we're having company for lunch. Your pal."

" Lieutenant Cort? "

" Yes. Why didn't you warn me about his voice? "

" His voice? " She fumbled for his meaning and added, " You mean that it's so beautiful? "

" I think he's beautiful altogether."

She said, " *Your* voice . . . You sound different."

" I am, as they say in books, jubilant. Look, Natalia . . . " He paused.

" Talia."

" Ah, that's lovely. Well now, look. Lieutenant Cort is sounding like Caruso singing a paean of joy. And his ugly mug is all upward lines. He liked you, Talia. And he's very proud of himself for having done police work by remote control. It looks as if you didn't do it, you see."

" Didn't do it? " she repeated. Then her voice rose: " *Didn't shoot Bart?* "

A silence fell around her and she realized how loudly she had spoken. She turned slightly in her chair and saw through a haze that Janet and Charles and Billy were staring at her. So was Mr. Long, who was standing in the doorway.

There had been bedlam in her office, and the cessation of sound apparently became noticeable to Richards, too. " What's going on there? " he asked.

As she looked at the four, they quickly went back into action. Mr. Long went out of the door and the other three resumed their moving-day gestures, which seemed to consist largely of loud conferences.

" Moving desks," Talia said into the phone. " Please. What— I don't— Can't you explain what—"

" I shouldn't have shocked you like that, but I didn't want you to spend even one more hour . . . Apparently they were so fond of you—they trusted you so implicitly in Lafayette, that their only idea was to get the matter over with. So they looked at the bullet and said, ' Ah, a bullet.' You said you had fired, they found a lump of lead, and that was that. But when Cort talked to them he asked if there'd been a carpet, a fitted carpet. There had. He suggested they examined the floor, and they did. And what do you think they found? A bullet, neatly embedded in the floorboards. A bullet from your brother's service gun, the one you fired. You lowered it in time."

" But why "—in the unreality of the moment her mind could grasp only the simple, immediate facts. Take one thing at a time, she told herself, and started with the first: " Why did the lieutenant even think of such a thing? "

" Because you were told the lights were on."

" The lights on? "

In her bewilderment her voice rose and she felt the little stir

behind her. I must keep my voice down, she thought dimly.

" My dear, there's nothing subtle about that. Cort saw it immediately, I saw it immediately, anyone would see it immediately. The only reason you didn't was that you were so utterly convinced that you had shot your brother. But—how did the other man know about the lights *if he wasn't there*? You see? So they're going to—to find out about the angle of the bullet, and re-examine it to determine its make, things like that. No matter what, only one shot was fired from the gun you held and that was in the floorboards. They've checked the rifling marks. See? "

No. Not quite. But enough to . . . " Oh, good heavens," Talia said with insane inadequacy. " Oh," she said. The single syllable seemed to fill the room, the phone system, the world.

" Yes," Jim Richards said. " Good heavens." The glow reflected from him back to her.

" Thank you." She was caught tightly in the grip of inadequacy. She tried again: " *Thank* you."

Richards seemed to find it adequate. " We'll thank Cort," he said, " at twelve."

Talia slowly put down the receiver and then turned in her chair. Welling up in her was the desire to tell someone, anyone, to shout the news. She wouldn't, of course. But she substituted a smile for the unsaid words.

Janet looked at her over an armful of dusty folders. " Wow! " she said simply. " That must have been quite a conversation."

Neilson said, " I'll say." He looked at Talia with admiration.

Janet said, " Billy, wait! " The dispatch room clerk was tugging at a filing cabinet. " You can't move that alone! Anyway, the telephone thing on the side of the desk is on too short a wire. We can't move the desk any farther."

Billy said, " The telephone man is in the building, Miss Furman. I saw him. Shall I get him and bring him up here? "

Neilson said, " Good idea. And then we can move the desk and filing cabinet this afternoon." He smiled at Talia and went out, followed by Billy.

Janet said, " Seems unfair of *me* to take advantage of his overpowering passion for *you* to get *my* desk moved. But no one feels like that about me."

" Don't be silly," Talia said vaguely, and smiled brilliantly at Janet. She would have liked to have sung, to have danced . . . A few days before she had been congratulating herself on freedom, on the uneventful evenness of her life. She had asked no more than to keep that contentment, but now she had been given—so much more. She turned back to work, and found that she was teeming with ideas. She would say— She picked up a pencil . . .

Janet said, " It's five to twelve, Talia." She was standing in the doorway.

Talia came abruptly out of her surprising absorption. " Heavens! " she said. " That gives me three minutes to wash and make up."

Janet waved and left. As Talia took up her bag and started towards the door, the dispatch room clerk appeared in the doorway. He said, " Miss Cory please, I couldn't find the telephone man."

" Oh," Talia said, skirting the desk, " that's all right, Bunny. Janet will have to—" She stopped. After a controlled second she said, " I mean Billy, of course."

" It doesn't matter. That you finally recognised me. After all, you knew me a long time so it was possible—just barely possible—that you might see me one day."

Talia looked up. A boy— No, a man. He must be just about her age. But how would anyone ever guess it? She said, " You're different . . . your glasses—"

" You mean that horn-rims make such a difference? You never used to see me anyhow."

" You wore—" Recollection came to her. " Silver rims." And the pale eyes behind the thick glasses had always looked very small, looked very small now. The glass, she thought numbly, must be the reducing kind. Like the wrong end of a telescope. And glasses would account for the reflection she had seen on the landing the previous night. Perhaps light *could* reflect off eyeballs—she didn't know. But it certainly would reflect off glass.

" I'm flattered." The sarcasm had a cruel bitterness.

" And your hair, your hair was—" She tried to remember. It had been not brown or fair, but colourless. Colourless, like Bunny Williams himself, and long and thin, lying limply on his head.

" I dyed it. I don't know why I bothered. You wouldn't have seen me if I had worn a placard. If I'd called myself to your attention—if I'd slapped your face from side to side. Hard." He took a step forward and she saw his mouth. She had never noticed his mouth before—but she had never really noticed him before at all, not as Bunny Williams, nor as Billy, the dispatch room clerk. He had a tiny round mouth, like a rosebud. " You never saw me at all, did you? Not at school, not in the street. Not even when I once made a fool of myself by asking you to go to a picnic."

Had he done that? She had no memory of it. " I never went out with anyone—"

"A girl like you? Don't try to tell me that. I never knew who he was, your lover, but I knew I'd find him, and so I watched and waited, and then when I thought I had him—when I saw him crawling in through that window, I was so *sure* I had him—and then it turned out to be that big bully of a brother of yours. And the man I was waiting for got away. So I'll take *you* from *him*."

There must be something she could say. If she could divert him— "Then," she said, "you really shot Bart by mistake." That was a madness, but the little man *was* mad. Perhaps if she could talk in his terms—"They'll understand that it was a mistake. They'll—"

"You never saw me. Never knew me. Not in the street. Not on the telephone. I came to your back door with groceries once, and you said, 'Are you the new delivery boy?' And you didn't know me at all. But you'd known me at school. You'd smile at all the others, laugh and joke and talk to them. But you never saw me." The little rosebud kept opening and closing . . . She took a step backward.

He took a step forward. "Doesn't matter now, you snob. And it doesn't matter what you look like any more. You're never going to snub people any more. I've put it off too long; now I'm going to take care of you." He moved round Janet's desk, and Talia found herself beside her own desk, her back to the window. There were thirty-four storeys of air behind her.

He said, "You have my best knife—"

She spoke quickly, "You can have it back. I'll bring it in tomorrow."

When the little rosebud smiled, it curled and opened a trifle. Talia felt her stomach turn in revulsion, and nausea rise. "No," he said. "You won't bring anything anywhere tomorrow. And anyway, I have another." And he had. He held his hand low in front of him, and there was the knife. She looked through the glass walls. Would no one see? Would no one—

"It's the lunch hour," Bunny Williams said. "All those high-paid snobs get out of here before twelve and they don't get back until after two. *I* go at exactly twelve-thirty, and I get back at one-thirty, in time to punch the time clock. Did you know there is a time clock in the dispatch room?"

"No. I— You can't get away with this, Bunny. There are three girls out there. Behind you. Just look. And Mr. Long's door is open. He's still in there."

"I'm not turning my head. I'm not turning my head from you. It's so unusual to have you look at me—straight at me—seeing me—that I'm going to enjoy it for a minute. Then . . ."

He gave the knife a tiny wave, and the rosebud curled at its edges.

"But why?"

"Lots of reasons. I'll remove you from *him*. Was that him on the landing last night? And then, anyway, I've got to, now. They're not going to do it for me, now. I heard you talking on the phone. 'Didn't shoot Bart?' you said. So I know that they finally decided to stop looking at you, smiling at you, touching, patting you—everyone could always look and smile and touch and pat. Except me. But you weren't there any more so they look at something else. The bullets, I suppose. So now I've got another reason. No one's going to do it for me, so I've *got* to do it. And anyway, I can't let you out of this office because you know me now. *How* did you know me? What finally made you see me? Tell me. Then when you're gone and there isn't anyone alive to prove to me all the time that I'm nothing, and I start to be something, then perhaps I can make the most of it —whatever it was that made you know me. What made you know me?"

Talia stared at him. He wasn't very near her yet. If she ran . . . But there was no quick way round that big desk.

"How?" he said insistently.

"How? Oh, it was just—just the way you said, 'Miss-Cory-please.' In school you used to say 'Miss-James-please' and 'Miss-Worth-please.'"

He took a step forward and she pressed her back against the windowsill. For some reason, it had been wrong to tell him. The thin little face before her, the small staring little eyes, the horrible, curled little mouth—all had twisted with a terrible hate. "So you remembered me because I was humble, is that it? Perhaps if I'd crawled on my belly up your back steps with your groceries *then* you'd have known me?"

She shook her head numbly and forced her eyes away from the contorted face.

And there, as her eyes stared beyond his head, was Jim. And Cort. They were almost up to the doorway. Cort shook his head violently, and she looked quickly back at Billy's face.

It was smiling. "Don't bother," he said. "I won't look round. There's no one going to come. Why should they come? I'm just the little messenger boy, talking to the big lady. And when I stick this knife in your throat, no one's even going to notice. Then I'll wipe it on your blouse and just walk quietly out of here. Who'll think of me? Who *ever* thinks of me? You see what you did when you made me so unimportant? You took care of *yourself*." He laughed, a little high, throaty giggle. "You see what—"

He stopped and his eyes shifted to her left. Why? she wondered. There was nothing beside her but thirty-four storeys of air. But . . . a window separated her and him from that air. And then she knew what he was looking at. The window was showing him a reflection—the reflection, however dim, of the two men behind him, who had reached the door . . .

He swung violently round to his right and as his hand went out to help him keep his balance the knife whistled past her breast, an inch away.

There was a second of dead, still silence. The two men were just inside the open door, standing side by side, facing the desk. It was the same as it had been on the landing, Talia thought. They were going to run round and round the desk like—like the Marx Brothers.

She felt hysteria rising . . .

Jim broke the stalemate. He leaned down and put his hand flat on the desk and then, in a flashing movement, rose into the air. The vault would bring him down within a few feet of Bunny. And Bunny still had the knife. She took a step forward. But she had no weapon, no . . .

Talia stood still, Jim landed, and Bunny moved. He moved forward to her left. But he *can't*, Talia thought in that interminable second. The window . . .

He rose in the air, only an instant after Jim had done so, and, like Jim, he went feet first. Through the window thirty-four storeys high . . .

Talia felt a terrible shuddering, as if the trembling of her knees had infected her whole body, and then Jim took two steps forward and put his arms round her—round her head, rather than her shoulders. She moved forward into the darkness of his shelter. He said, " Don't look."

No one spoke, no one said anything, and then as splinters of glass detached themselves and dropped away there was a diminishing little series of tinkling sounds, as if the wind had blown across a Christmas tree and the ornaments had moved gently together.

She stood in the darkness, thankful for the darkness.

The sounds arose. Voices. Movements. A babble began and through it, quite near, she heard Cort's beautiful voice. He said, " She's all right? He didn't touch her? "

Another voice, even nearer, beside her, round her, a voice without Cort's rolling resonance, but somehow even more beautiful, said, " She's all right. I'll take care of her."

And he would.

MOMENT of HAZARD

By NICHOLAS DEE

IT is not always easy to find the person you are meeting in a small town: cars and lorries pass, people bob in and out of shops, humanity seethes like the scum on boiling marmalade. But there was no difficulty in finding Colonel Pevensey Jones.

First he shot out of a small door labelled Coal Order Office with such violence that lumps of coal might have been expected to come whizzing out after him. Next he pursued a travelling fish-van vehemently down the main street and plunged about in its piles of pilchards, mounds of mackerel and heaps of herring. Then, puffing a little, he made for his tractor which was parked outside the Post Office.

Paul Hansler, who had been watching his friend with affectionate amusement for the last five minutes, now stepped forward and greeted him.

"Ah, Hansler!" the Colonel said. "How delightful to see you, my dear fellow. Here we are then, splendid—I'll just tie the fish on, and the rest of the things can go under here. Now, is there

room for you beside the steering wheel, or would you rather go in the trailer with the pigs? "

Hansler looked at the tiny trailer, hardly larger than a card-table, in which four sizable gilts nosed each other, and elected for the tractor.

" I'm so glad you were able to come," shouted the Colonel, as they shatteringly breasted the steep ascent out of the town. " Because I've a problem that's just up your street."

Hansler by gestures indicated himself willing to help so far as lay within his power. It was impossible to conduct a conversation above the noise of the engine, and he relapsed contentedly into silence, gazing about him.

The morning was still young—he had come down by the night train—and a clear frosty light hung over the landscape. They had drawn away seawards from the town and presently Colonel Pevensey Jones drew up his tractor outside a white-washed cottage. It was solidly built, low, and seemed to cling to the ground. Fuchsias were blowing wildly in the garden, and from the outbuilding came gusts of piercing squeals and a strong smell of pigs.

" Haven't fed 'em yet," grunted the Colonel. He unhitched the trailer and dexterously tipped the new pigs into a hurdled pen by the farm gate.

" You go in and meet Betty—shan't be long," he shouted over his shoulder, and stumped off.

The Colonel's sister, when she opened the door, was a slight shock. Hansler knew, of course, that she was Elizabeth de Reszke, well-known cookery expert, with a dozen books and countless articles to her name, but he had expected something more homely. A medley of French adjectives swam into Hansler's mind—svelte, soignée, chic, suave—as he became aware of Miss de Reszke's elegantly curved black silk and pearls.

She was amiability itself, showed him to a delightful little bedroom and then waved him back to a log fire and a fragrance of coffee.

" *How* good, *how* kind of you to come all this way just to see us poor rustics," she said over the white bone-china.

" Oh, but it's the most enormous pleasure," he replied truthfully, sipping his coffee and glancing round the book-lined room. Its uneven floor was covered with Persian carpets in beautiful faded pinks and blues. " The air down here is so wonderful, too —really electrifying."

" Electrifying? " She turned her bright eyes on him. " You find it so? It brings out your innermost self? That is most interesting."

Yes, he discovered on reflection, that was precisely what he had

meant. The air down here stimulated a part of him which he had thought long dead; the buried writer, who, exiled from his own land and robbed of his own language, had sunk deeper and deeper into silence. In this clear air, Hansler once more felt the wish to take the manifold world and make it his by putting it on paper.

The moment drew out, and he could hear the muffled sputter as a piece of log broke off and fell into ash. He could not withdraw his gaze from hers, and her eyes were as brilliant as drills, with a point of light in the centre of each.

" You must be admiring my contact lenses," said Miss de Reszke. Without any change of expression she put her hand to her right eye and rapidly manipulated her fingers; there was a flash as of a glistening teardrop, she held out her hand and he saw something small and bright in the soft palm.

Hansler was speechless, but before his silence began to be noticeable there was a stamping and a clattering in the scullery as the Colonel came in.

" Shall we have lunch, Betty? " he said. " I thought I'd take Paul up to Treloe this afternoon."

" Oh, it would be a pity to do that on such a lovely afternoon," she said smoothly. " I'll get my car and take you both for a drive."

Paul smiled at her and made some reply. There was a most uncommon attraction for him in this woman. She had a galvanic quality about her and he felt that if he laid a finger on the black silk of her dress, a spark would run up his arm.

After lunch—it was a delicious meal—they went for the promised drive, and Hansler abandoned himself to the enjoyment of complete terror. Miss de Reszke was a skilful driver and slung her car through the narrow winding lanes at a speed which would have meant instant death at many a blind corner if they had met anything coming the other way—but fortunately they never did. Paul made no attempt to conceal his feelings, and she laughed at him, her eyes and teeth shining. The Colonel sat in the back, silent, preoccupied; once he leaned forward, looking into a field as they passed, and said, " Kelvin's got his boar, then."

" He's a brave man to run it outside—unless it's very savage," his sister said, turning her head for a brief glimpse.

After the drive the Colonel took Hansler to see his pigs, which were housed in modern concrete compartments. Hansler admired the arrangements. " You always keep them inside, then? "

" Have to, my dear chap. Animals round here get savaged if they're left out."

" But by what? "

" Hard to say. Some beast, outsize badger or a wild-cat,

maybe. There are a few in the British Isles still. And this is an odd countryside, you know—lot of witchcraft about, and there's a headless chap comes to meets regularly, can't stop him, though he's a devil of a nuisance, always fouling the hounds. Matter of fact the problem I want your opinion on is along those lines."

"I don't deal with the supernatural, you know," Hansler replied doubtfully. "I'm a psychiatrist, not an exorcist. But of course I'll help in any way I can."

"My turn now," said Miss de Reszke, meeting them outside the piggery. "Come and see my collection of wishbones."

Hansler was puzzled but obediently followed her into her study where, sure enough, she had a series of cases, lined with indented blue velvet, which contained many hundreds of wishbones, scrupulously polished.

"Heavens! What a lot of chickens you must have roasted!"

"Yes, *mustn't* I?" she answered with a gleaming smile.

Hansler could not resist putting his arm round her and running a hand down the smooth, black-silk curve of her back. It arched a little under his hand, and her smile widened, just perceptibly. They stood together for a moment, and then she glanced at her diamond watch. "It's getting late. I must go and change."

"Paul?" called the Colonel from the kitchen. "Care to come and watch for the green flash?"

"Yes, of course. What is it?" asked Paul, following him out of the back door.

They had a view of the folds of land interlacing away to the cliffs, and the silver line of the sea beyond. The wind had dropped, and the sun was on the point of setting.

"The green flash?" Colonel Jones said, steadily watching the golden disc as it sank. "It's something that happens just after the sun goes down—flash from the horizon. Don't know what causes it."

"Have you ever seen it?"

"No, never. But one goes on hoping, you know."

The last sliver of brightness dropped from view, without any revelation. Hansler shivered in sudden chill.

"Goose walking over your grave," remarked his host. "Or more likely a fox or a wolf in this country. Come along in. A peg of whisky before dinner will do us good."

To Hansler's surprise the table was set for two only and a cold meal was laid out.

"Betty never has dinner," the Colonel explained. "Does her writing in the evenings, you know. I never disturb her."

"Oh—when she said she was going to change I thought she meant for dinner," said Hansler who had put on a clean shirt and

tie. He could not decide whether he was relieved or disappointed.

" Change into writing things, I daresay she meant."

The meal was rather silent. Afterwards the Colonel said, " If you don't mind going out again, we could drive up to Treloe and have coffee there."

Hansler said he would be delighted, and the Colonel went to fetch the tractor. The noise it made was deafening.

They rode inland up steep lanes to the moor. At the foot of a grass track the Colonel stopped his engine. " We'll walk up and I'll tell you about Diana as we go."

" What is Treloe? A village or a farm? "

" It's a farm—a smallholding. Diana came down to these parts not long ago. I've been able to give her a bit of help and advice—it's lonely for her up there and since this trouble came on her it's not been easy."

" What trouble? " asked Hansler as the Colonel paused.

" Well, it seems to be a kind of poltergeist. Things fly about, you know, and bump, and it's really damned inconvenient. Do you think you would be able to help her? "

" I shall have to see her first." Hansler's tone was decided. " Sometimes these things are caused by outside agents, sometimes not. It all depends on the person."

The Colonel nodded.

It was too dark by the time they reached Treloe for Hansler to receive anything but a vague impression of stone walls and some small, low buildings clustered together. There was a fresh moorland smell, the chill of stone, and a powerful atmosphere of antiquity. The place might have been a druid ring or a circle of monoliths, and Hansler was not surprised, when the Colonel had tapped at the door and they had entered, to find the flickering uncertainty of lamplight and the primitive smell of peat-smoke.

His eyes smarted, and for a moment he could not plainly see the girl who had let them in. When he did he was appalled at her gaunt, mournful beauty. Her straight lips and pointed face had an air of resolution which was belied by her eyes—haunted, desperate eyes which plucked at Hansler's sensibilities almost unbearably.

" Don't you find paraffin lamps rather dangerous, with a poltergeist in the house? " he asked.

" They call it a boggart round here," replied Diana, taking an old tin coffee-pot off the fire. " Yes, I do, but of course there's no electricity on the moor."

The Colonel's eyes, when they rested on Diana, were anxious. " Have you had much trouble today? " he asked.

" All the mirrors fell down—I haven't an unbroken one in the

house now—and all those books you lent me suddenly flew out of the window into the paddock."

The girl's voice was rough with strain and Hansler noticed that her hands were shaking. He looked round him expectantly, but nothing stirred.

"Things often seem to keep quiet when the Colonel's here," Diana said.

"Aren't you afraid," Hansler said, "all by yourself up here?"

"Oh, no. I have a gun. But I haven't told you," she said, turning to the Colonel. "They're coming to inspect my farm tomorrow. I've been told that I'm not working it properly."

"But that's monstrous," said the Colonel furiously. "What's wrong with the place?"

"It's the drainage. I've put in a lot of pipes but they always break and leak. Also my milk production is terribly low because it almost always gets spoiled. If I have to leave here I don't know what I shall do."

"*I'll* come up and talk to them."

"Will you? Will you really?" Her face lit up. She and the Colonel smiled brilliantly at each other and Hansler had an idea. But I'll sleep on it, he thought.

There was a heavy thump against the front door, as if some large body had been flung against it, and the two men looked at Diana inquiringly.

"I don't know what that is," she said frowning. "It's not the boggart. Some animal's been prowling round the place lately—I've heard it howling."

She took her shotgun from a corner, pulled up the window-sash a couple of inches, thrust out the barrel, and fired. The sound of the explosion was deafening inside the cottage and the room filled with blue smoke.

"That usually scares it away," Diana said, leaning the gun back in its corner.

"Well, we really should be going, I'm afraid," the Colonel said. "You lock yourself up tight. Sure you'll be all right? Wouldn't like to come back with us?"

She shook her head. "I have to milk Henrietta and Lucy at six. I'll be all right." But her eyes darkened as they pulled on their gloves. Glancing past her, Hansler saw the grandfather clock suddenly hitch itself, stand on tiptoe as it were, and fall forward on the granite flags with a thunderous crash. The other two were horribly startled; the Colonel kept wiping sweat off his forehead as they helped Diana to lift the clock back into place.

"Really, my dear, wouldn't you like us to stay with you?" the Colonel asked dubiously. But she shook her head and almost

pushed them out of the door. They heard the clock suddenly begin striking as they went down the track.

The Colonel seemed withdrawn into himself and made no remark. Paul thought he saw a large animal—perhaps a dog—bounding along on the other side of the hedge, but it did not come near them.

All was silent when they reached the cottage, no light showing and only a faint squealing and scuffling from the piggery. They went straight to bed.

It was warmer next morning, with a mist drifting in off the sea. Hansler, having slept on his idea and still finding it a good one, decided to waste no time. " The solution to that girl's problem is simple," he said, meeting the Colonel in the kitchen before breakfast. " Of course it's falling in love that brought it on—that and this very peculiar climate."

" But who's she fallen in love with? "

" You, of course. So you'd better marry her."

A blaze of happiness lit up the Colonel's face—it was exactly as if he were a fluorescent tube and someone had pressed the switch.

" In love with *me*? I'll go up there after breakfast."

He sat down in his chair as if he had not the strength to stand, and presently he wiped his eyes a little.

Hansler was satisfied with the result of his suggestion. Glancing round, he saw that Miss de Reszke had entered the room.

" Have you fed the pigs yet? " she asked her brother lightly.

" Good heavens, no—I forgot all about them." He jumped up and they heard him whistling, loud and sweet, in the scullery as he pulled on his boots.

" You must have an interesting practice, Mr. Hansler," said Miss de Reszke, smiling.

" No more interesting than your life, I'm sure," replied Hansler gallantly. But he was aware of a slight doubt, an uncertainty about the real feelings concealed beneath her amiability, and for a moment almost wished that he could invent a forgotten appointment and return to London.

There was a tremendous bang as the Colonel flung open the back door again and came bursting in.

He went to the telephone and started dialling. " Pig Department? Give me the Inspector, please," he said. " That you, Curtis? Pevensey Jones here. Confound it, Curtis, twenty of my sows have been killed—all had their throats torn out. That beast somehow scratched a hole in a breeze-block wall and got into the piggery. You'll have to come along and view the carcasses. Right? As soon as you can, yes."

He turned round, still quivering with rage. " The *effrontery* of it! " he said. " It was a deliberate insult, I'm sure of it."

" How sickening for you, my dear," his sister said sympathetically. " I always wondered if those breeze-block walls were *really* very strong."

The Colonel gulped down his coffee in silence. Then he said, " Betty, will you do something for me? "

" Of course."

" I promised Diana I'd go up there this morning and talk to this Committee for her. I shan't be able to go now—have to wait for Curtis. But you could go—you'd be just as good. And it's quite simple—just tell them that I'm going to marry her and take over the farm—they've never taken exception to *my* methods."

" Quite simple," she repeated. " Yes, I see." She showed no surprise, but inclined her head a little, the half-smile curving up into her cheeks again.

" Mr. Hansler had better come, too," she added.

" Yes, Paul, you go along, my dear fellow—the business here this morning will be a bit grisly, anyway. Tell her I'll be up this afternoon."

" We'll go through Losthope," Miss de Reszke said, as she got out the car. " I've a little shopping to do—I must match this green silk and buy some new gloves."

The errands in the shops of Losthope took longer than Hansler had anticipated. In spite of Miss de Reszke's decided manner, it was some time before she had made up her mind about the exact shade of green. Then choosing the gloves was a difficult problem —should they be warm, fur-backed ones which would wear well, or something thinner, suitable for the warmer weather? Hansler was fascinated by the sight of her hands snugly encased in the fur; he leaned on the counter beside her.

She turned her head slowly and gave him a measuring, friendly look.

" Just fancy my brother wanting to marry Diana," she said. " Who will look after me? You must come and give me good advice from time to time, Mr. Hansler."

" There's nothing I'd like—" he began.

" But now, if you don't mind, I must go in here and do some trying-on of a kind which I can't ask your advice about—"

With a brilliantly confidential smile and gesture she vanished into a green-curtained cubicle.

Paul sat down patiently on a little frail-stalked chair to wait, but at last she reappeared, exclaimed in contrition, and insisted on giving him a cup of coffee to make amends. " It won't take a moment."

He followed her rapidly-gliding figure into the café, where she engaged him in a long inquisition about his work.

" My dear," she said, suddenly interrupting herself and glancing at her watch, " you *have* kept me talking. We must hurry or we shall be too late for that poor girl."

He prepared himself for another of her lightning drives, but she said that the steering was giving trouble, and took the long climb up the moor with great care.

" Wait a moment," Hansler exclaimed at a cross-roads. " Wasn't that Diana on a motor bike? "

" Nonsense, my dear, what an imagination you have. She *has* a motor cycle, to be sure, but we know that she's at home seeing the Committee, so it couldn't possibly be her, could it? "

Hansler was not certain, and he sat silent and frowning as they crept, in bottom gear, up the last length of track.

At first they thought that the place was totally deserted, and then, round at the back, they came on three little men, identical in glasses like owls, prodding thoughtfully at a piece of broken drain which protruded from the ground.

" We've come to tell you that Colonel Pevensey Jones is taking over the farm from Miss Grieve," said Miss de Reszke, approaching them. They blinked at her, startled, at a loss.

" We are afraid you're too late, ma'am. Miss Grieve has already left. She's selling up. Of course, the farm may be put up for auction and the Colonel can buy it then, if he likes. Now if you'd come up here a couple of hours ago—"

" There," said Miss de Reszke, " how unfortunate! Now you see, Mr. Hansler, where you've put us with your dilly-dallying. Can you tell us where Miss Grieve has gone? "

" Can't say, miss. The young lady seemed rather upset. She got on her motor bike and went off down the hill."

" I see," said Miss de Reszke reflectively. " We had better go back and tell my brother. He will be upset, I'm afraid."

" *Gone?* " said the Colonel. " Which way did she go? "

" Towards the north coast, I think," Hansler answered miserably. The Colonel gave him a withering look, then began to pull on his boots.

" Where are you going? "

" Going to find her, of course—you can stay and look after the pigs till I get back, can't you, Hansler? There's a chap coming to concrete the wall." The Colonel hurried off, and a moment later they heard the stuttering roar of the [illegible] starting.

" Well," said Miss de Reszke. " I'm [illegible] here to keep me company."

She gave Paul an enigmatic look, and he smiled back uneasily. The house seemed empty without the Colonel's bouncing figure, and he was relieved to be able to spend the afternoon helping the bricklayer to reinforce the piggery wall.

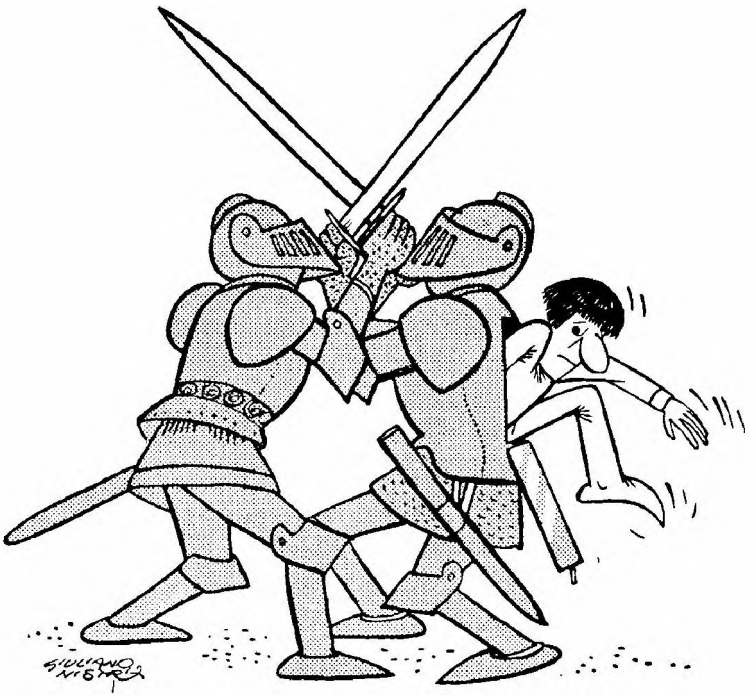
It was nearly sunset when they had finished.

Hansler strolled up to the top of the garden, thinking affectionately of his friend. Where was the Colonel now? Had he found Diana, was he perhaps with her on a summit of the moor, watching, like Paul, for the sun to go down?

Gradually the dark line of the sea inched across the golden sphere until there was only a segment left—a line—a crack . . .

Then up from the horizon, sudden and clear, leaped for a second a green beam which flickered once like the sword Excalibur and vanished again. Hansler turned, stumbling in his excitement, and hurried back to the house. " Betty? " he called. " I've seen his green flash! Oh, do you suppose he saw it too—? "

He opened the door of her study and then stood still, frozen, in the doorway. From the middle of the room a large grey wolf looked back at him with pale and brilliant eyes.



It added up, it all added up—someone was trying to kill him . . .

COUNTERSPY

By KELLEY EDWARDS

IT was a routine operation. He fumbled with the thin spline as he fed it into the test hole, awkward because of the thick rubber gloves, uncomfortable in the heavy white overalls and tight mask. His assistant stood by, waiting with the radiation monitoring man and his instrument, looking grotesque in the heavy clothing that protected them from radioactive contamination.

The spline stiffened in his hand and buckled. It had contacted the sample, deep in the heart of the massive atomic pile, and its tip had engaged the lip of the sample. He waved his hand and the assistant began to reel the spline back into its protective drum. He fumbled a rag around the spline as it snaked out of the hole, wiping off the tiny particles of dirt and grease that the pile had made radioactive.

Suddenly, without warning, the end of the spline leaped from the pile, pulling the release tool with it, the thin sample trailing behind.

The sample and release tool fell to the concrete floor. Then the three men spun and ran awkwardly away from the deadly thing on the floor. Next they were clumping down the stairs, putting concrete walls and floor between them and the sample.

When they reached the landing, he stopped and pulled the mask away from his face.

"What happened, Jack?" he asked his assistant. "Didn't you fasten it in?"

Jack pulled his mask away from his face with trembling hands.

"I locked it in, Ralph," he said. "Something must have gone wrong with the locking mechanism."

Ralph slid out of his gloves, careful not to let his hands touch

the outside of the rubber. He dropped them in a cloth hamper marked with a red " Contamination " sign.

" We can probably get it from the top of the pile," he said slowly. " Jack, see if you can find the twenty-foot fingers and reach down from the top." He took a deep breath of air and let it out gradually. " We were lucky that time," he said. " That was a graphite sample. It might have been the cobalt."

As he talked his mind was putting items together—tools that failed, warnings that weren't given. It added up, it added up.

Someone was trying to kill him.

Ralph dropped into a chair and his hand trembled as he lit a cigarette. The man behind the desk watched with cold grey eyes, missing nothing.

" Somebody's wise, Sutherland," Ralph said. " Somebody is trying to kill me."

" They don't kill people, Thaling, unless there's a good reason. If they found out you're working with us, they'd just shy away from you. They wouldn't *kill* you."

Ralph leaned forward. " How do you know what they'd do? If a man's a spy, he's dangerous."

" They won't tip their hand by getting involved in a killing." He paused. " Unless you've spotted *them*," he added softly.

" Well, I haven't. But too many things have been going wrong. Release tools just don't fail. I got a look at it after we'd cleaned up the mess. Somebody had taken a file to it."

Sutherland leaned forward, suddenly, startlingly. " Who is he? " he barked.

" Who? "

" The agent. You must know, or they wouldn't be trying to bump you off."

" I don't know who he is. If I knew, I'd tell you."

Sutherland leaned back and looked at the ceiling. " We've got the whole chain now, except the man here who's actually getting the information." He lowered his eyes. " You're going to find him for us. He's trying to kill you, and the only way you'll stay alive is to find him."

" Suppose he kills me first? "

" It's up to you to see that he doesn't."

Ralph stood up and put both hands on the desk, leaning over. " Listen, Sutherland, I'm a physicist. I know nothing about counter espionage. I like my job, I want to go on living. I'm not going to get myself killed by some fanatic. Understand? "

" Apparently *you* don't understand, Thaling. This man, whoever he is, is going to get you if you don't get him first. As

long as you stay here it has to look like an accident. If you run away, we'll find your body somewhere with some secret documents on it and the newspapers will have a first-rate story—with you as the hero. These fellows play for keeps." He smiled. "So do we."

Ralph got back to his office just after noon. Jack, his assistant, and Fred Adams, the technologist, were eating lunch and glaring at a chessboard. Neither said a word as he came in and sank into his own chair.

"Did you get it cleaned up, Jack?" he asked.

Jack grunted a reply through his sandwich without looking up.

"Where've you been, Ralph?" Fred Adams asked.

"Security. Friend Sutherland. He wanted me to go to Russia and take over their research outfit. He thinks they're doing too well and he wanted me to slow them down a bit. Like I've slowed us down here, he said."

Fred grinned and went back to the chessboard.

Jack smiled. "Resign?"

"No, I won't resign."

Jack grinned and Ralph said, "Did either of you get that high-level chamber hooked up on the rear face?"

Jack shook his head. "I was involved in getting that sample up. I think Fred was asleep most of the morning."

Fred Adams frowned at the chess men without comment.

"I guess if you want anything done around here you have to do it yourself," Ralph said. He got up, glancing at his watch. It was twelve twenty. The discharge was due to start again at one o'clock, so he had time to get his job done on the rear face before the gleaming, deadly uranium slugs came tumbling out of the tubes.

He called the operations supervisor to get permission, then walked over to the pile building. As he was putting on his protective clothing the radiation monitoring man stuck his head in the door and grinned.

"Haven't you had enough for one day? Or are you going to kill yourself for good this time?"

Ralph's head snapped around and he looked at the man, a cold fear finding his stomach. But the grin was real. He grinned back.

He pulled on his overalls and went out, around the massive, hulking pile to the entrance to the discharge face. The green light was on over the door.

He climbed the steps, turned, climbed again. He opened a door marked "30 foot level" and locked it open. He knew

that the green light on the door below had turned to red, and that a bell was ringing in the control room. Four large red lights also went on in the elevator on the other side of the pile, and an interlock opened a circuit so that the charging machine could not be operated. He would not care to have the uranium coming out of the tubes when he was there.

He reached in the pocket of his overalls and pulled out a small plastic cylinder. When you wanted to measure the intensity of radiation in that area, a large chamber was a waste of time.

The leads for the chamber had been installed by one of the instrument mechanics. He found them, their ends neatly taped, lying on the floor of the balcony. He looked down. Thirty feet below him lay the placid, protective water of the great basin. Directly below was the balcony at the twenty-foot level, and the tubes of the great pile, twenty feet away, spread in every direction.

As he worked he turned over in his mind all that he knew about the spy—the unknown who was his deadly enemy. He had seen photostats of the data this man had stolen, and they showed that the man knew what he was doing. This was not the work of an amateur. Operating data, records—all these things, the important things, and nothing more. Nothing unimportant.

He finished making the connection and started to rise when blackness cut him off from his mind. He tried to raise his head but the pain of repeated blows slapped it down again, beating at him and making him sick. He struggled to his feet, and clung to the railing of the balcony. After a while he could see. He stumbled awkwardly to the door and pushed it. It was locked.

As the pain subsided fear became more real. Someone had locked him in here with death, a painless death of fierce radiation from the discharged slugs. He pounded on the door as sweat broke out on his body.

A loud-speaker blared: "'C' elevator to control room. All clear to discharge?"

The operator would be looking at the lights now, but they would all be green. The door was closed and the light would be green.

He screamed, "No! Wait! I'm back here! Wait!"

He knew it was no good. The only microphone was on the rear-face elevator, and whoever had left him would be sure it had been turned off.

Ralph looked down at the pile. He could count five tubes which had the caps off so the slugs could come out, all in a row. Five, every one lethal. They were going to kill him five times.

He crouched back into the doorway, hardly breathing, his eyes on the tubes below him. He had calculated, one time, how

long a man could live if he were on the rear face of the pile during a discharge. He couldn't remember now whether it had been three seconds or thirty seconds. He remembered, inanely, telling Jack that any answer on radiation intensity was good if it was within a factor of ten.

Jack! Jack knew where he was. Jack Darron and Fred Adams. No one else. Only the radiation monitoring man had seen him, and he didn't know where he was going. Jack, then. Or Fred Adams.

He looked down, trying to judge whether he could drop to the balcony below. There was just a chance.

A chuff, and the first slug slithered out of the tube below him and hung for an instant before it fell its silent, turning way to the water below. One after another they fell. He crouched back from them, keeping as far away as he could, trying not to realize that he had maybe just another few seconds to live.

Then he saw it. He looked again to make sure, but he was right—they were the wrong size. They were too long. All the slugs falling below him were empty cans, dummies—radioactive, but not as lethal as the fiercely radioactive fission products generated in a uranium piece. He still had a chance.

" One down, four to go," the speaker above him announced.

He pulled open his overalls and unbuckled his belt, almost tearing it off in his haste. He buckled it around the lower bar of the railing and without testing its strength he dropped, hanging on to the belt. It slipped through his hands, wet with sweat, and then it was gone and he was falling towards the deadly water below, his head spinning as he reached frantically for the railing. He caught it with an arm that sprang sudden pain but he held on, his body hitting against the concrete of the balcony. He pulled himself up and over, panic-stricken, then got to his feet and ran for the door, throwing his weight against it. It was locked.

The tube to be discharged was just at the level of his eyes now, but it didn't matter. When you were that close a few feet didn't make any difference. He couldn't bring himself to look at it, to see the slugs spinning down past him.

He remembered the interlock suddenly and fumbled in his pocket for his knife. The latch of the door, he knew, had the interlock connection on it. He pulled the knife blade out and jammed it into the latch. It didn't move. He jabbed again, fiercely, not looking over his shoulder at the tube, sweat making the knife slip in his hand—and he saw the slugs had stopped.

" What are you doing? " the speaker blared above him.

He clung fiercely to the knife, holding his life in his two hands against the interlock.

" Well, go up and see," the speaker said.

He held the knife there, his hands numbing and beginning to hurt, until he heard someone on the other side of the door.

" Let me out! " he yelled.

There was a scrabbling, then silence. The man had found the door locked, and had gone back down for the key. Maybe. Maybe he hadn't heard. He pushed frantically at the knife.

Suddenly the door opened, and he fell through it, his knife clattering along the floor.

The control room operator stood over him.

" Thaling! " he said. " What are you doing? Were you in there when they discharged that last tube? "

Ralph managed to nod his head.

" You were lucky it was a dummy tube." He helped Ralph to his feet. " Come on out of there now. Take off your shoe covers. You'll track contamination all over the place."

Mechanically, Ralph slipped the canvas covers off his feet and dropped them into a hamper.

" I've got to go back to the control room and tell them they can start again. Will you be all right? " Ralph nodded dumbly.

Jack Darron, he thought, Jack or Fred Adams. They might have told someone else, but probably not.

He walked down the corridor and down the stairs, his feet dropping on each step heavily as he walked. He stopped at the bottom and, from force of habit, stood on the Radiation checker and thrust his hands into the openings. The dials were standing still, not moving. The machine was jammed. He had picked up a load of contamination on his hands that was jamming the machine.

He held his hands out from his body, backing through the door in order not to spread the invisible contamination. A wash basin, set off by itself, was marked with the red and yellow stripes of contamination. He worked the pedals with his feet and the water came. A powder dispenser dropped yellowish grit into his hands.

Ralph washed his hands methodically, dried them on a paper towel, then started all over again. The second time, he went out and put his hands in the counter again. They were clean.

He's gone too far this time, he thought. Now I can find him. The contamination had to come from the corridor floor; the only other thing he had touched was the door and it was kept clean. But the balcony floor wasn't—that was why he had worn shoe covers. Whoever had hit him had tracked the contamination out into the corridor. All he had to do was find the man with hot feet.

The tall radiation monitor was in his office when he walked in. Ralph pointed to his cheek.

"I think I've picked up some curd on my cheek. Will you check it?"

The man picked up an instrument and passed it around Ralph's face. He glanced down at the meter. "Yes," he said. "You picked up a good dose."

He picked up a sponge and a can of powder, dumped powder on the sponge and motioned Ralph over to the sink.

The cleaning took quite a while.

"Had any other customers lately?" Ralph asked.

"Some guy in Transportation had it all over his pants." He chuckled. "We had to take them away from him."

"Nobody in Technical?"

"No. Surprising, isn't it?"

Ralph left the office, thinking, *He's still got it on his feet. One of them will have it on his feet.* He turned suddenly and went back into the office.

"Can I borrow your instrument for a while? I'd like to check on something."

"Can't do it. Against the rules."

"I know that. Can I borrow it?"

The tall man grinned. "Sure. Just don't bust it up."

Ralph turned the instrument to "wait" and headed back for the corridor that led to the rear face of the pile. When he got there the red light was on. A brief survey of the concrete around the door was all he needed. He had come this way.

He followed the invisible footprints down the corridor, stopping occasionally to take a reading. They led past the washroom and out of the door that led from the pile-building. He lost them in the gravel outside.

He went into the operations office and dialled a number.

"Sutherland? This is Thaling. I've got him. How soon do you think you can get over here?"

"Who is he?"

"I don't know yet, but I will in about five minutes. Stop Adams or Darron from leaving the area. And bring some help."

"Don't get excited, Thaling. I'll be there in twenty minutes."

"I'll meet you at the gate."

Fred Adams was the only one in the office when he got there. He set the instrument down carefully on the floor.

"Get it done?" Adams asked.

"Yes. Where's Jack?"

"He went over to the pile building a while ago. Why the snooper?" He pointed to the instrument.

"I had a little contamination on my hands and I thought I might have left some around the office."

He released the probe and waved it around the floor.

He moved over to Jack's desk, around the chair and the floor; there was a little on the floor. He moved over towards Adams, waving the meter around his desk, past his arms, down his legs and around his feet. It went off scale.

Ralph didn't see the blow coming until it was almost on him and he rolled with it, but it caught him just the same, blurring red as he tried to see. Then he was on his hands and knees and things began to clear.

Adams was gone. He stumbled to his feet and saw him through the window, running in a long, easy jog. He disappeared into the guard shack in front of the pile building.

Ralph hurriedly dialled a number.

"Control room? This is Thaling. Fred Adams just went into the pile building. Stop him. He's a spy. Got it?"

"Some other time, Ralph—I'm busy."

"I'm not kidding—stop him. He's dangerous."

"Sure," the man said, very slowly. "Just take it easy. Shall we drop an atomic bomb on him?" He chuckled loudly.

"Listen," Ralph said slowly, intensely. "This is Thaling, of Technical. Put the supervisor on or I'll come over there and tear you apart."

"O.K., O.K.," the man said. "Don't get huffy."

The phone clunked as the man set it down and he could hear a muffle of voices. Then the phone was picked up again.

"This is Cease. What's all this about a spy?"

"This is Ralph Thaling, Walt. It's on the level. Fred Adams—you know him, our technologist—it sounds silly, I know, but it's true. He's in the building now. I don't know what he'll try to do, but you've got to stop him. I'll come right over. If you find him, hold him."

"Is this a joke, Thaling? If it is, you'll never forget it. I'll promise you that."

"Walt—believe me—just get Adams. And hurry!"

"O.K.," Cease said.

Ralph dropped the phone on to the cradle and shook his head a little to clear it. Then he grabbed up the phone again and dialled.

"Guard house, Smith speaking."

"Smith, this is Thaling—Technical. Sutherland from Security will be coming through the main gate pretty soon—"

" He's here now. Want to talk to him? "

" No. Just tell him Thaling called, and to meet me at the pile building."

He dropped the phone and started for the pile building, running.

Cease saw him as he entered the control room.

" Oh, there you are," he said. " Now what's all this about Adams? He isn't in the building."

Ralph felt a pang of fear touch him. " You haven't found him yet? "

" We've been over the whole place and he isn't here. Are you pulling my leg, Thaling? I told you—"

" Will you shut up? " Ralph yelled at him. " He knows we've found him. He can't get away now. But he can still hurt the pile—he knows all the weak spots."

Cease looked at him uncertainly. " Where would he go? "

" Where would you go if you wanted to put the pile out of commission? "

" Here," Cease said, " or—"

They turned together and looked at the lighted panel that showed what doors were open.

" He's in the heat exchanger," Ralph said suddenly.

" How do you know? "

Ralph kicked himself mentally. " He asked me once where the most vulnerable spot for sabotage would be. I told him the heat exchangers."

" That was big of you," Cease said. " He can't do too much, though. He can't get at the sodium system through the shielding tank, unless he wants to kill himself."

" I told him that, too," Ralph said softly. " He can drop an ice-pick through the trap at the top of the water tank and pick it up with the mechanical fingers you use for remote maintenance, and jab holes in the inner tank and the sodium tubes at the same time. When you heat up the tubes you'll get molten, radioactive sodium into your steam system and the shielding tank. It'll blow, and you'll have hot sodium all over the place."

Cease looked at him incredulously. " You told him all this? "

Ralph nodded. " But we can still get him. We could drain the shielding tank."

" And leave the sodium unshielded? Are you trying to kill us all? "

" You can evacuate that side of the pile. As soon as he sees the water come down past the viewing plate, he'll know what's happened. He'll come out."

" O.K., we'll do it," Cease said. " But he won't come out."

" Why not? "

" Tolerance radiation with that shielding half down is less than a second. Lethal dose in about two minutes. It takes the tank ten minutes to drain, full open. He'll be dead by the time he sees the water level."

Ralph turned as Sutherland came in. Ralph told him what had happened while Cease was barking over the intercom.

" You weren't very bright to tell him all that," Sutherland said.

Ralph said nothing.

" How long has he been in there? "

" I'd guess—maybe ten minutes."

" And how long would it take before he would be ready to start punching holes? "

Ralph swallowed uneasily. " About ten minutes."

Sutherland's cold eyes glinted. " Then he's about ready to start now. He's got to be stopped."

" We can't get at him. The door is solid steel."

" You told him what to do. You figure out a way to stop him."

" Can you reach him on the intercom, Walt? " Ralph said.

" I tried that," Cease said. " He's jerked it out. Probably smashed all the other instruments in there, too," he added unhappily.

" I hope so," Ralph said suddenly. " That all takes time. There's a ventilator over the door, isn't there? If I get a ladder, I can talk to him from up there."

" Yes, and you'd get a fine blast of radiation, even through the steel, as we drain the tank. Nothing doing."

" Let me try," Ralph said.

Sutherland looked at him for a moment.

" All right. Get Rowan to help you."

He climbed the aluminium ladder awkwardly, carrying a wad of cotton in his left hand. He reached the top and tried to see in, but the ventilator was offset to shield against radiation. He put his mouth close to it. " Adams! " There was no answer.

" This is Thaling. Come on out of there. You haven't got a chance. They're draining the shielding tank. You'll be killed. Do you hear me? "

He listened carefully. He thought he heard a scraping of feet, but he wasn't sure. Then he heard a metallic thump. Adams had opened the trap door at the top of the shielding tank. He heard a splash, and he could see in his mind the small piece of metal dropping into the tank. Sounds told him Adams was

climbing down now, to get at the mechanical fingers. He would pick up the pointed metal and begin punching the holes.

" Listen to me! They'll be starting any minute now. The whole side of the pile has been evacuated. You haven't got a chance! Maybe you don't believe me. I've got a couple of radiation pencils here. I'll drop them through the ventilator, and you can read them. Then you'll know I'm telling the truth."

He pushed the pencils wrapped in cotton into the ventilator. " Can you get them? "

He waited for a moment, then he heard a muffled reply.

" No."

He pushed his hand into the opening and could just feel the cotton with the tips of his fingers. Behind him an intercom muffled, " The tank valve is open. Water coming down. Get out of there, Thaling! "

" Listen, Adams. They're stuck. Just a minute."

He fumbled in his pockets futilely for a minute, looking for something to push into the ventilator. He pulled his key ring out and jerked the clasp of the chain, breaking it, then held the end of the chain between his fingers. He threw the keys and key ring into the opening. They struck the cotton softly. He pulled them back with the chain and threw them again. They struck metal with a clank.

" Thaling, if you don't get down, I won't be accountable for your safety. Get out of there! "

Ralph ignored the intercom, straining to hear through the steel door. " Did you get them, Adams? "

He thought he heard a shuffle, but he wasn't sure. " Look at them, Adams. If you stay in there any longer you'll be killed. Look at them, Adams! Look at them! "

The intercom spoke again. It was Sutherland's voice. " Come out of there, Thaling."

Ralph could see, in his mind, the lowering water level that bared the deadly sodium. The gamma flux would be enormous, filling the air with silent invisible death, ripping and chewing his cells apart as he stood on the ladder.

" Adams! " he screamed at him. " Look at the pencils! You've only got seconds left! Get out of there! Get out! "

The ladder swayed as he grabbed the edge of the opening, screaming uncontrollably into it, " Get out! Get out! " The frustration and confusion seized his mind as he screamed, stretching seconds into lingering, maddeningly slow hours. Almost without realizing it he was off balance and falling as the opening door smashed into the ladder and toppled it, his balance gone and his arms flailing as he struck the concrete. Then he

was on his feet and running, running away from the steel door and into the safety of the corridor beyond.

He stood for a long time after he stopped running, his breath coming in short, painful gasps and his legs weak and almost uncontrollable. He leaned his back against the corridor wall and breathed, his thoughts washed away by pure relief.

" Thaling? " a voice said. It was a radiation monitor. "Where've you been? They got Adams. You did a good job on him—he was almost babbling. We checked the pencils you threw in to him. He's going to be a very sick man."

The monitor paused, waiting for a reply. Ralph just looked at him, breathing through his mouth, not thinking.

" You better come along to Medical," the man said. " I don't think you've got too much to worry about, but they'll want to watch you." He paused a moment.

Ralph swallowed noisily, then tried breathing through his nose.

" Did they get him? " he said.

" Who? "

" Adams."

" I told you that. They got him. I said that a minute ago."

" I hope they kill him," Ralph said. " I hope they hang him."

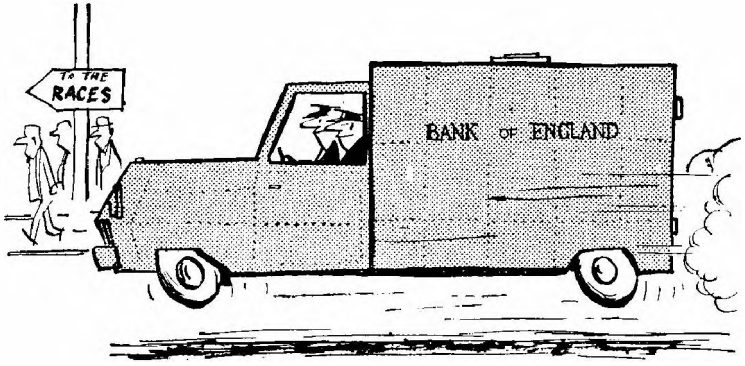
" Oh? " the man said uncertainly.

" I'd like to kill him with my bare hands," Ralph said.

" Come on, now. You'd better get over to Medical."

" All right," Ralph said. " Whatever you say."

They went down the long, concrete corridor together.



★ *Joseph Commings—author of crime stories, mysteries and Westerns—believed the only way to get a thing written was to sit down and write it, and he did just that in the North African battles in World War Two. Now he believes firmly in preparation, reads several research books before starting even a short story, often plans for months before writing one word. Exhaustive research on our part has failed to reveal whether or not this is a true incident in the life of Cagliostro !*

The Cardinal's Candles

By JOSEPH COMMINGS

HE called himself Alessandro Cagliostro, Grand Cophta of Egyptian Masonry, Prince of Scoundrels, and King of Liars. He could lie in six languages, and he lied so strongly that he believed what he said from the force of saying it.

He strolled through the streets of Eighteenth Century Paris like a turkey-cock, babbling to all he met. He walked alone, this time, for he had left his short, dark, bright-eyed wife Lorenza in Rome. While he pranced by in his shoes *à la d'Artois* he was watched by dark nocturnal men from out of the shadows. Every step he took was fraught with peril. He had spoken out against the Jesuits and now even the papal nuncio regarded him as an enemy of the Church.

It is not surprising, then, that when Cagliostro returned to his lodgings that evening he was seized by a captain of the French Life Guards.

Cagliostro's eyes were full of indignant fire. He spoke in a ringing, sonorous voice. "Where are you taking me?"

" To Monseigneur le Cardinal! "

Cagliostro was escorted to a gala coach with footmen in scarlet and gold liveries. They sped through the countryside to the episcopal palace at Versailles.

On the way, the captain of the Life Guards conversed with Cagliostro, telling him of the Cardinal's mysterious illness which had baffled the physicians and which was now supposed to be due to secret poisoning.

Cagliostro sat stout and round-faced in the swaying coach. He said: " If that is the case, Captain, I will readily discover the presence of a poison, if one exists. Please tell the Cardinal that if he really suspects he's being poisoned, I can free him of it."

The captain was lost in thought.

Cagliostro continued: " Tell His Eminence that I'm incapable of taking any revenge for the insult done by arresting me."

The captain's saturnine face broke into a smile. " I promise," he said.

They arrived at Versailles. The palace, Cagliostro noticed, had been completely rebuilt after the recent fire. It had cost three million livres. He was taken in through the *porte cochère* and lodged in one of the rooms, which was guarded by soldiers. Weary from his journey and the events of the day, he threw himself on a bed and fell asleep. During the night he was aroused by a man wrapped in a heavy cloak and bearing a dark lantern. He saw it was the captain.

" Make haste and get ready," said the captain. " The Cardinal wishes to speak with you. Your reputation as a physician is well known to him. I mentioned your proposal to him. His Eminence trusts you."

Cagliostro grinned with his superb white teeth and thanked the captain. But he did not hurry. He paid careful attention to his hair in powdered knots drawn up in a net, his frill of shirt, his coat of sky-blue silk braided along the seams, his flowered waistcoat, his stockings studded with lapis lazuli buttons, his rubies and diamonds sparkling on his fingers, and lastly his musketeer hat with a white plume.

After a brief walk through corridors, the captain handed him over to a chamberlain. They passed through several elegant apartments until they came to a velvet-covered door, which the chamberlain opened. He drew back a heavy crimson *portière* and beckoned Cagliostro to enter.

Cagliostro found himself in the Cardinal's cabinet, a gloomy room lighted by candles, which shed but a dim light. Religious pictures covered the walls. By the side of a small work-table stood a lofty *prie-Dieu*, over which hung a finely carved ivory crucifix.

In the dim light Cagliostro saw a little man seated in a vast armchair. The little man, in a scarlet silk dressing-gown, made impatient movements with his almost luminous hands. On his head he wore a cap with a shade for his eyes. His small feet were wrapped in ermine pelts to keep them warm. His staring face was ashen pale and the cheeks were sunken over the bones.

Cagliostro swept off his plumed hat, advanced slowly, and bowed.

"The Great Cagliostro?" said the little old man in a hoarse whisper. Even the Cardinal could be awed.

"At Your Eminence's service," said Cagliostro with proper reverence.

"They tell me you've lived at Mecca."

"I've been there for three years. I spent my childhood in the city of Medina in Arabia. I had an apartment in the palace of the Muphti Salahaym. I have been instructed in Eastern languages. Shall we converse about the pyramids of Egypt?"

The Cardinal coughed. "Not at the moment, Monsieur le Comte. I am sorry to see you here as a prisoner. But do not regard yourself as one at the present."

"Had I not been arrested," said Cagliostro smoothly, "I should not have had the happiness of seeing Your Eminence."

"I hear much that is satisfactory about your learning. Although in another respect you are said to be a dangerous man. Why must you trouble yourself with ecclesiastic affairs?"

"The Jesuits?" said Cagliostro. "We have our differences, Your Emneince."

"Leave them to the clergy. You should devote yourself to medicine. What have you heard about my condition?"

"Nothing beyond the supposition that Your Eminence has been poisoned," said Cagliostro.

"What are your views?"

"I would prefer to discuss the symptoms with your physician-in-ordinary, to speak with certainty, but since he is not present, I must conduct an investigation myself."

Cagliostro was noting the Cardinal's wasted and grey looks. Rising, he produced from his pocket a small red book from which he read aloud in an unknown tongue. He cried out: "Oh, Great Architect of the Universe, help me to accomplish this work." He then took a survey of the room, examining every ornament and object and sniffing suspiciously. The Cardinal followed every movement with inquiring haggard eyes.

"Well, Monsieur le Comte," he said at last, "what do you think?"

"I think most certainly," said Cagliostro with conviction, "that Your Eminence has been poisoned!"

"Holy Mother, have mercy on me!" cried the Cardinal. He would have fallen on his bony knees to pray, only he was too weak to do that without help.

"I must speak with your physician-in-ordinary," said Cagliostro swiftly. "But I can promise Your Eminence that recovery is certain. We still have time."

The Cardinal trembled in his huge chair. "How have you come to this conclusion? My friends dine with me out of the same dish. Do you notice anything on my body?"

"Your Eminence, it is not so much your body that is being poisoned, but the atmosphere of this room!"

"How can you tell, when I feel nothing of it?"

"Your Eminence has grown too accustomed to the poisonous exhalation to notice it."

"Where does this exhalation come from?"

Cagliostro moved about. Followed by the wondering eyes of the Cardinal, he lifted each candelabrum and placed it on the table before the prelate. He brought twelve lighted candles together.

"See the strange exhalation that rises from these candles?" said Cagliostro. "Do you notice the peculiar colour of the flame?"

"The light is vivid," remarked the Cardinal, "but does not seem to me to be extraordinary."

"Do you not see a fine white mist rising which is not found in ordinary candles?"

Cagliostro looked around. "I have come fresh into this room. I perceived a curious smell as soon as I entered. See the fine, quickly ascending vapour?" He pointed at the flaring candles. "Look also at the crust which the vapour has deposited on the ceiling above."

The Cardinal's haggard eyes glanced upward and strained into the gloom. "I see it all and bow to your sharpness, Monsieur le Comte."

"Does Your Eminence burn these candles everywhere in the palace? Or only in Your Eminence's bedroom?"

"These candles," said the Cardinal slowly, "have the gold band around them. They burn only in this apartment."

"There is the cause of your sickness," exclaimed Cagliostro. "Shall I prove to Your Eminence that these are impregnated with a subtle poison?"

"Which poison?"

"Arsenic."

" Prove it at once."

The chamberlain was summoned and commanded to bring in a turnspit dog.

While waiting, Cagliostro carefully shredded some candle wick and mixed the shreds with meat in a dish. The dog was shut up in a cupboard with the dish of meat.

Cagliostro consulted a watch from which a chain hung with a porphyry seal. He delayed the final diagnosis till morning to find out the effects on the dog.

By dawn the animal was found dead.

While Cagliostro conjured up an antidote for the Cardinal, the latter cried out: " Who could have done this to me? "

Cagliostro asked slyly: " Who gave you these candles, Your Eminence? "

" They were delivered here by the pater-procurator of the Jesuits. He told me they were consecrated candles."

Cagliostro almost winked. " That's your answer, Your Eminence."

" He shall be arrested at once! " cried the Cardinal.

" First," said Cagliostro soothingly, " your medicine. Your recovery is of prime importance."

Needless to say, for saving the Cardinal's life in so spectacular a manner, Cagliostro was thanked fervently for his services, was given a pension of five hundred livres tournois a year for as long as he lived, and last, but certainly not least, was returned to freedom.

At a later date Cagliostro, safely away from the Cardinal, was dining with the beautiful Marchioness d'Auz, and he related the incident.

" Amazing how you discovered the arsenic," said the marchioness.

Cagliostro sniffed through his broad turned-up nose. " Not so. I had enough arsenic in this ring to kill a bull." He fingered a Borgia ring on his middle finger.

" I was going to take it myself, if there was no other escape. But I saw my chance with the candles, sprinkled some of it on them to change the colour of the flames, and put some of it in the dog's food too."

" But what *was* wrong with the Cardinal? "

" Nothing but advanced old age. But nobody wanted to tell him that.

" So, my dear d'Auz, by pretending to save the Cardinal's life, I saved my own . . . I don't call myself the King of Liars for nothing! "

★ *Alonzo MacTavish believed that the time, the place, the opportunity and the woman seldom occur together. And his fans will remember that however many times during his brilliant and illegal career he came up against Dr. Theodor Klaat, it was always the latter who got the headache.*

The moral of this story is that it doesn't matter how well you know women—and Mr. MacTavish certainly knew women—there is always the chance that one day you'll be wrong . . .

Truth is Never Acceptable

By PETER CHEYNEY

ALONZO, dressed in a very nice dinner jacket, a carnation and a charming smile, with hope in his heart and exactly four hundred and eighty francs in his pocket, sat smoking an expensive cigarette in the lounge of the Hotel Imperial at Nice, wondering if fortune would consent to smile.

Fifteen minutes before, he had witnessed the somewhat grandiose arrival of Dr. Theodor Klaat and, for once, the sight of his old-time enemy brought a certain satisfaction to the heart of Alonzo.

Klaat was a jewel thief—a remover of expensive baubles—second only to Alonzo himself. His technique was nearly as successful. Blowing a smoke ring and watching it sail through the lounge, Alonzo asked himself whether the arrival of Klaat did not prophesy a little activity with a financial ending.

That Klaat had arrived in Nice for his health was not possible. It was a certainty that he had a scheme, and another certainty that Alonzo's balance might be multiplied and Klaat once again confounded.

The page boy, tipped with two hundred francs to report on the

room number, luggage and general atmosphere of Dr. Klaat, approached Alonzo. He informed him that the doctor had checked into suite 62b on the second floor, that he was accompanied by a secretary, and that a young lady who had been anxiously awaiting his arrival was now in close conference with him.

The boy went off, giving place to another page boy who handed MacTavish a sealed envelope. Alonzo opened it and grinned. It was from Klaat:

Dear MacTavish,

I saw you when I arrived. I'm not here on business. I'm taking a rest after a heavy season in Buda. A proposition has just been put up to me that looks good and of which you, with your amazing dexterity for sticking your nose into other people's business, might take full advantage. It's not the sort of thing I care to handle, but it's in your line all right.

You will agree that I am, at least temporarily, burying the hatchet.

Yours, Theodor Klaat.

P.S.—The lady is in room thirty-one on the first floor. Drop in and get acquainted with her and the business.—T.K.

Alonzo smiled. This opening gambit had all the clumsy ear-

marks of the Klaat technique. MacTavish had not the slightest doubt that some sharp scheme was afoot, something in which he was to be the unconscious assistant who was left holding the bag while Klaat got away with the shekels.

He got up, lit another cigarette and strolled over to the lift. On the first floor he wandered down the corridor until he found No. 31, knocked, listened for the reply, and went in.

She was sitting in an armchair in front of the window, looking out over the bay, and holding a slender cocktail glass in one hand. She was of medium height, with a charmingly rounded figure, big blue eyes and amazing blonde hair.

Very attractive in a quiet sort of way, he thought. Nice and quiet and undistinguished—just the sort of girl that Klaat would use as a " come-on." He gave her one of his most radiant smiles.

She smiled back a little wearily.

" Mr. MacTavish," she began with a touch of American accent, " I expect that you are surprised to hear from Doctor Klaat that I wanted to see you. I can only hope that you are not going to be at all shocked at my request."

Alonzo allowed his smile to become whimsical. " Nothing you could do would shock me, madame," he said. " On the contrary. Now shall we talk over this little business? "

" Please help yourself to a cocktail and sit down. I won't waste much of your time. I will tell you my story, and then you can say whether you are prepared to collect the five thousand dollars that I have in my handbag waiting to be earned."

Alonzo, a cocktail in one hand, the whimsical smile on his face, waited. Everything about this job had the hallmarks of the doublecross: the arrival of Klaat, the note, the lady, the business-like air and the five thousand dollars to be earned.

" I would like to collect five thousand dollars," he murmured.

" Very well," she said. " Then I must tell you that I am desperate. I am Princess Cheruinoff—I was Maple C. Hardaway of the Oklahoma Hardaways until I married Cheruinoff last year, and I'm going to be Maple C. Hardaway in six months from now, after I've divorced that lousy Russian false-alarm that somebody persuaded me to marry. You got that? "

" Princess," said Alonzo, " I got it."

" O.K.," she continued, helping herself to another cocktail. " Well, if you'll take a look out of the window across the bay, you'll see my yacht. I said *my* yacht, although the way I've been treated aboard that lugger is just nobody's business. Cheruinoff has been on a spree for the last six weeks. The only time he was sober, he was so surprised he fell overboard. I wish they had sharks in these waters," she ended up wistfully.

She took a large gulp of cocktail. " All yesterday that Barbary ape was chasing me around the boat with a .38 automatic," she went on. " He was so drunk that he didn't even know I was me. He doesn't really mean anything; he just gets that way, but I'm getting rather tired of it."

Alonzo nodded sympathetically. " It must be an exhausting process."

" You're telling me! " said the princess. " Well, the trouble is that he knows I've been planning to get away from him, and tonight I managed to do it. Some fishermen were passing under the stern in a rowing boat and I shinned down the stern cable and got a free ride to shore. Then I went to see the chief of police here."

Alonzo pricked up his ears. This was good. This was very good!

" You wanted protection? " he queried.

" Protection nothing! " said the princess with a smile. " Now I'm ashore, I don't give two hoots for Serge Cheruinoff or any other alcoholic Cossack. But I want my diamond necklace."

Alonzo drew on his cigarette. Now she was coming to it!

" My diamond necklace must be got off that boat," said the princess with spirit. " When Serge finds I'm gone—which will probably be tomorrow morning—he'll feel as pleased as a cat with two tails. He got a nice settlement from my pa when we were married and he'll pull up the anchor and make a quick get-away once he finds that necklace is still in the ship's safe.

" He could get enough on that to keep him in vodka for four generations, and he's wise enough to know that I don't like publicity and wouldn't be able to do anything about it."

She took a bite at the cocktail cherry. " You've got to get aboard that boat tonight and grab that necklace," she said. " And that little job is going to win you five thousand dollars."

" Did the chief of police here advise that, too? " queried Alonzo smilingly.

" He surely did! " she said. " I told him the story—you see, I know him well—and he said that he couldn't do anything officially. He said the thing to do was to get somebody to go aboard while Serge is still drunk, grab the necklace and bring it back to me.

" And he told me the man who would do it. He put me on to a Dr. Theodor Klaat—a jewel crook who pulled in here this afternoon. He said if Klaat would do the job, it would be all right with him, and that I could rely on him to see that Klaat didn't make any funny business about it."

" And Klaat didn't like it? " said Alonzo.

" He didn't like it at all," she replied. " Anyway, he's the wrong type to go crawling up stern cables at midnight. I guess he'd fall apart from strain. But he did say that he'd spotted *you* in the lounge and that you loved jobs like that."

She smiled at Alonzo and brought him another cocktail. He smiled back at her. He watched her as she went back to her chair.

Then he lit a cigarette. But behind the flame of his lighter his eyes were carefully looking her over. Her cream serge suit was immaculate, her little hat, gloves, bag and shoes were absolutely right. Her stockings were sheer, but he was certain that she was *not* Maple C. Hardaway, the Princess Cheruinoff.

Well, who was she? Who would Klaat use for an obvious plant like this? He got it. *She was the princess's maid!*

He grinned to himself. So Klaat was at his old games. It was his invariable method to work with ladies' maids—or even to " put one in " when necessary. They supplied him with information, the layout of the job and the value of the jewels, and he carried on from there.

But this was a bit too risky for Klaat. He wasn't going to chance being caught on that yacht, so he'd thought up a little fairy story as a result of seeing Alonzo in the lounge.

If MacTavish succeeded in getting the diamond necklace off the yacht it would be worth Klaat's while to pay him the five thousand dollars. If he got caught, it would be just too bad.

" What do I do with the necklace when I've got it? " he asked. " That is, supposing I do get it. Do I bring it back to you here? "

" No," she said. " I'm leaving in a quarter of an hour. I'm going over to Monaco to stay with some friends. But I'll tell you what you can do. When you've got the necklace, bring it back here and deposit it with the hotel people. Ask them to put it in the safe. I'll arrange for the bank here to send you round four thousand dollars tomorrow morning. I'll give you a thousand on account now. I'll pick up the necklace later."

Alonzo nodded. " Princess," he said, " do you think five thousand dollars is enough? Supposing Serge caught me on the boat and took a pot-shot at me with that gun of his—I think you ought to pay a bit more, don't you? "

" All right," she said. " I suppose I've got to pay you what you want. I'll give you a thousand now and send round another six thousand dollars tomorrow morning—that's seven in all. But no funny business, Mr. MacTavish. Remember the chief of police here is a friend of mine."

Alonzo looked hurt. " Princess," he said, " how could you suspect *me*? " He lit another cigarette. " When do you suggest I do this big burglary act on your behalf? "

" As soon as you like," she said. " Serge is practically a total loss at the moment, and in an hour's time he'll be so drunk that he won't know if it's Thursday or raining. Three-quarters of the crew are ashore, and if you're quiet and do what I say, you'll have no trouble at all."

Alonzo grinned. " Princess," he said, " I'm your man. I'd do anything for you. Now, a little information about the situation of the safe and one or two other things, and then I'll go to work."

Fifteen minutes and four cocktails later they shook hands. It seemed to Alonzo that there was a little gleam of admiration in her eyes.

" You've got nerve all right," she said. " I'm glad I ran into you. You're a nice change after Serge, even if you don't always keep to the straight and narrow. Maybe," she continued demurely, " maybe when I get back here in three or four days' time we'll be able to see a little of each other. Well, so long—here's the thousand."

Alonzo took the ten hundred-dollar notes. " It's a pleasure to work for you, Princess," he said.

At ten o'clock Alonzo, dark overcoat over his dinner clothes, wandered along the beach until he found a dinghy pulled up on the shingle. He pushed it down into the sea, getting his feet wet in the process, got into it and pulled out towards the Cheruinoff yacht. He had dismissed any idea of hiring a boatman. He was taking no chances.

Twenty minutes later, having approached the yacht by a circuitous route, he pulled in under the stern and sat, oars out, listening. There was no sound to be heard. He made the boat fast to the stern buoy cable and then proceeded to shin up the cable. Three minutes later he was on the deck.

Keeping in the shadow of the deck-house he reached the forward companionway and descended. One of the deck hands, oblivious to everything but the beauty of the night, was singing a love song in the bows.

In five minutes Alonzo had found the Cheruinoff cabin. He tried the door carefully, found it open and went in, then he shone his torch towards the ornate bed where Prince Cheruinoff slept the noisy sleep of the very drunk.

Set into the cabin wall, behind a picture, Alonzo found the safe. He took the slip of paper with the combination written on it, supplied by Klaat's lady friend, and opened the safe.

On the top shelf Alonzo saw the dark blue leather case, picked it up with gloved hands and opened it. Inside, flashing with a half-million-dollar radiance, was the Cheruinoff diamond necklace.

He dropped the necklace into one pocket, the leather case into another, and quietly made for the deck.

At eleven o'clock Alonzo walked into the Hotel Imperial.

Arrived on the main floor, he looked into the restaurant. The cabaret was about to begin, and Alonzo could see, sitting at a table near the wall on the other side of the dance floor, Doctor Theodor Klaat. He smiled to himself.

He waited until the main turn in the cabaret had begun, and when the restaurant lights were turned down and only a spotlight on the chief performer remained, he worked his way round the room until he was near Klaat's table. He signalled a nearby waiter.

" I'm having a little joke," he said. " I want you to take this case over to Dr. Klaat and ask him if it belongs to him. Don't touch it with your fingers. Put it on your tray. There's two hundred francs for you."

He handed the necklace case, with his gloved hand, to the waiter, who took it with a grin, went over to Klaat and whispered in his ear. Klaat examined the case, shook his head and handed it back to the waiter, who brought it to Alonzo on the tray.

Alonzo went straight up to his room, took the leather case from his pocket with his gloved hand and placed the diamond necklace inside it. He placed the case in a neat cardboard box, put it into a stout envelope and addressed the envelope in hand-printed letters to " The Princess Serge Cheruinoff, Hotel Imperial. To be called for."

Then he put on his hat and went out. He took a cab to the Rue Perousse, and dismissing it walked down to the Café Veloute. He ordered a bottle of wine and asked for a page boy. When the boy arrived Alonzo handed him the package.

" Take this round to the Hotel Imperial," he ordered. " Hand it in at the reception desk and ask for it to be placed in the hotel safe until Princess Serge Cheruinoff calls for it. Inform them that it is from Doctor Theodor Klaat."

Immediately the boy had gone, Alonzo paid his bill with one of his new dollar notes and returned to the Imperial. He waited in the lounge until he saw the boy deliver the package at the reception desk. Then, with a sigh, he drank another whisky and soda and went to bed.

He had fixed Klaat all right!

At twelve o'clock next morning Monsieur Edouard Birache, Commissar of Police for Nice, called at the Hotel Imperial and asked to see Mr. Alonzo MacTavish. Mr. MacTavish was at home.

" Monsieur MacTavish," said Birache, " you are, of course, well known to us, because it is our business to know who is staying in Nice, and in your case your reputation is, shall we say, international."

He smiled placidly. " This morning," he continued, " there is a complaint that a very valuable diamond necklace has been stolen from Prince Cheruinoff's yacht *Cigale.* I have already interviewed Doctor Klaat, who we knew arrived yesterday, and he has suggested that you might like to make some sort of statement to us."

Alonzo smiled.

" Monsieur Birache," he said, " I think I can help you. Last night, somewhere about ten o'clock, I observed Dr. Klaat pulling out to the yacht in a rowing-boat. He was obviously up to something and I was very interested. As you know, he and I are not very good friends.

" He returned to the hotel," continued Alonzo, " and a few minutes afterwards a package was delivered and placed in the hotel safe. I imagine that it will be addressed to Princess Serge Cheruinoff. I imagine also that if you examine the case you will be able to ascertain who handled it."

Birache nodded.

" I see," he said. " And you definitely inform me, monsieur, that you know nothing at all about this necklace, that you have had nothing to do with its removal? "

Alonzo smiled.

" Not a thing," he said firmly.

Birache picked up his hat.

" Poor old Klaat," murmured Alonzo. " I suppose this means about ten years for him? "

The police officer smiled.

" Not at all, monsieur," he said. " It means six thousand dollars for him. In removing the necklace from the yacht last night, he was merely carrying out my own idea—the idea I suggested to the princess when she came to see me yesterday. I promised her I would keep my eye on the job.

" This morning, the hotel people informed me that a package had been delivered for her. I have opened it and it is the necklace all right. I telephoned through to Dr. Klaat and he informed me that I was to see you about it."

Birache paused in the doorway.

" But as you so definitely inform me that he alone was responsible for saving the princess's necklace, then, of course, I must see that the six thousand dollars is paid to *him.* Good morning, monsieur."

Who solved

HERE LIES—?

Readers responded magnificently to the second £100 Holiday Competition, "*Here Lies*" by *Manning Coles*, which appeared in the July issue of Suspense.

Most competitors managed to sort out the lies from the truth and choosing the prize-winners was no easy task. But our five judges—GEORGETTE HEYER, MICHAEL GILBERT, TOM TULLETT (Chief of the Daily Mirror Crime Bureau), FABIAN OF THE YARD (Ex-Det. Supt. Robert Fabian) and the EDITOR OF SUSPENSE—all agreed that the **First Prize** of **£100** should go to :

JOHN SEWELL, of Park Road, Bingley, Yorkshire—

for his very full but concisely planned account of the murder.

The winner of the Second Prize of **Bell and Howell's** superb **Model 624 8 mm. Home Movie Camera** and companion **Home Movie Projector** was **Miss J. K. Maxwell** of Lockerbie, Dumfriesshire. Congratulations to Miss Maxwell on her lucid and well-reasoned solution !

We have pleasure in presenting A. Hedges of Bristol with a year's subscription to *Suspense*; B. Francis of London, S.W.15, with two tickets to a performance of *My Fair Lady*; and the Special Mystery Prize has been awarded to Miss K. Cliff, of Kings Heath, Birmingham.

We have sent signed copies of *Blood and Judgement* by *Michael Gilbert* to W. C. Hall, Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent; Miss C. Reddie, Dunfermline, Scotland; J. B. O'Sullivan, Glasgow; E. F. L. Nobbs, Briggs, Lincs.; *No Entry* by *Manning Coles* to K. O. Hurd, Woodhouse, Leics.; Miss K. Philip, Malvern, Worcs.; Mrs. C. C. Casey, Perth, Scotland; *Venetia* by *Georgette Heyer* to Mrs. G. M. Curtis, Pinner, Middlesex; Mrs. J. Rollason, Launceston, Cornwall; Miss A. Morris, Wallington, Surrey; *London After Dark* by *Robert Fabian* to A. Hyde-Clarke, Ipswich, Suffolk; F. A. Watson, Manchester, 14; P. S. Delin, West Norwood, London, S.E.27.

★

John Sewell's Prizewinning Solution

MERTON had called at the house of the late Col. Vyne-Smith, at the request of the widow, and had collected a loaded revolver, the property of the late Colonel, to hand in at the Police Station. Being an ex-Military Policeman, the fact of it being loaded did not trouble him, and he merely placed it in his pocket.

On his way back to the village he comes on Schlacht, Greenacre, and the three young men quarrelling. He does not immediately recognise the German, but it is quite probable that Schlacht remembers him. After sending the three young men about their business, Merton has second thoughts about Schlacht, who has now gone into the house with Greenacre, and returns to Church Corner. Merton certainly did not make his " point " at 11.0 p.m. for Bert was in the vicinity of the call box and stated there was no one about or in the street.

Merton is then in the vicinity of Church Corner and hears the shot fired by Schlacht at Greenacre. Hearing Schlacht shouting, he recognises him, and instinctively draws the gun from his pocket. There is a vivid flash of lightning, both men fire, and Schlacht is mortally wounded.

Immediately afterwards Merton hears the Pole moving about, and keeps quiet himself. Before he has time to do anything more Dupont arrives; almost immediately he leaves and Hambledon and Ricketts arrive.

Merton has now had time to collect himself, and challenges Hambledon and Ricketts. Note that they did not hear him arrive,

although he later informed the Superintendent he had followed them down the road. He requests them to go back to the inn. It would have been more natural if he had asked them to watch the body or to telephone for assistance.

Merton then goes into the house and finding Greenacre in a drunken sleep, decides he has nothing to fear from him. He remembers the open grave and half-drags, half-carries the body there and covers it with earth. This is when Pluto howls. The next day Pluto, when taken out by Hambledon, shows a hazy recollection of these events. Merton now hurries back to the inn to telephone, arriving breathless and looking shaken.

After telephoning, he makes a remark about being told by the sergeant he should not have left the body, but this is not confirmed later by the sergeant. He returns in a very short time to say the body has disappeared. During this time and until the arrival of the Superintendent he could not have searched the house for the body, although he says later that he did so. The time available was insufficient.

The using of his cloak to cover the bloodstains was also partial camouflage. He would have been more likely to use the cloak to cover the body, had he not disposed of it, and it was probably already stained with blood when he carried the body to the grave.

During the night he cleaned the revolver and handed it in next morning in the ordinary course.

The answers to the first four questions were :

1 *In the grave where Magda Greenacre was to be buried.*

2 *After Hambledon and Ricketts had returned to the inn.*

3 *To avoid the bullet being identified with the gun from which it was fired.*

4 *The late Colonel Vyne-Smith's gun.*

★

OVERSEAS PRIZEWINNERS

Correct overseas solutions were received from **K. A. Lewison** of **Nairobi**, who wins a prize of books to the value of Five Guineas for his very well reasoned account ; and from **R. D. Cooper** of **Malta**; **R. G. Ward, Tripolitania ; Miss B. O. Jans, Velp, Netherlands ; E. A. Bonnin, Malmesbury, South Africa**; and **Wang Soon Ling, Malaya**, who each receives a prize of books to the value of Two Guineas.

The time must come when a girl has to think for herself

Treble Chance

By RICHARD LUCAS

THE farmhouse was a low grey-stoned building with windows rounded at the top and with small eyes of leaded glass. It was a style of house peculiar to only a few villages in the most attractive part of the Kentish Weald. Behind the farm were outbuildings, sheds, a large Dutch barn and in one corner a disused oast-house. The village had no manor house and consequently the farm had become the centre of village life, its residents people to be respected. It was, in fact, the tops. And very early on in her life little Mary Smith became interested in the top.

Mary, like all the other girls and their mothers in the village, worked at the farm during her summer holidays. Picking strawberries and raspberries, blackcurrants and gooseberries, turning the hay, gleaning the wheat fields, hoeing rows of beans, then picking again—acres of plums and apples. There was always plenty to be done and as Mary grew up with the work of picking and raking, hoeing and gleaning, she became more and more attractive and more and more attracted . . .

Bill Peters, a tall slow-mannered, slow-thinking person, had inherited the farm from his father, who had died during the war. Mary had been only seven then and Bill, already in his teens, had seemed a grown man. When Mary was sixteen the gap between them had closed and in a distant adoring shy way she fell in love with him.

Bill, with the help of his mother, had managed to keep the

farm going. His mother made a great thing of it. Bill was her precious boy and nothing was going to be allowed to come between him and his farm. The place grew and grew; everything Bill touched was a success but it was not allowed to spoil him—his mother did that. And as the farm expanded it occurred even to Mary's simple mind that Bill Peters must be quite a rich man.

When Mary left school Mrs. Peters decided to take her on as a maid at the house. It was hard work, but for Mary it was enough just to be that little bit nearer Bill. People gossiped, but strangely enough until Mary's twenty-first birthday there was really nothing to gossip about.

Mrs. Peters died the day before Mary's party. It was Mary's first mistake and she realized it immediately. She had not given the thing enough thought. It was a terrible blow when Bill told her that night that he couldn't come to the party and that he was going away for a few days after the funeral. He even told Mary that she need not come to the house any more—at least not before he came back. For a time she wondered if he had discovered anything, but the funeral passed uneventfully and nothing was said.

Bill didn't say where he was going. Six weeks later when he returned to the farm Mary realized that he hadn't known himself. He couldn't have known *anything*, otherwise he would never have married such a stupid woman as Beatrice Balkwill, the new Mrs. Peters. How had she, without a figure or a face, managed to catch poor Bill?

That night Mary sat in front of the full-length mirror in her bedroom looking at her naked body. In the candlelight her face was soft and sweet, her eyes wide and gentle, and her young breasts rose and fell in anger as she realized that she had failed. Beatrice, she thought. God, what a name!

Soon she was installed again at the farmhouse as a full-time maid It was several days before she managed to find Bill on his own.

Mrs. Peters was preparing the dinner—apparently this was something she liked to do. The telephone rang and Mary went out to fetch Bill, who she knew was taking a stroll through the outbuildings, checking on the day's work. She found him in the great Dutch barn contemplating a pile of loose hay. He did not turn when she walked up behind him.

"Bill." She almost whispered the word. "There's someone on the phone for you."

He turned to look at her. Then suddenly she saw the expression in his eyes and her heart beat thunderously. They both stared, and involuntarily she stepped forward. Dusk had settled with that slightly confusing half light; the hay smelled sweet and

felt very soft. She let him kiss her without protest—she believed it was the first time that he had ever kissed a woman willingly. He had been kissed by his mother and forced into love and marriage by Beatrice. Mary did not know how that woman had done it. They lay there for a long time without speaking.

Every August Bill went to London to attend an agricultural conference. It was while he was away that year that Mary decided to act. After all, the inevitable had happened. They both wanted to marry, didn't they?

It was easier than she had anticipated. Beatrice didn't even hear her enter the room. Mary swung the small sack of sand carefully and when at last Beatrice was unconscious Mary dragged her out into the yard, shoved her on to an open trailer, covered her with hay, coupled up the tractor and drove as quietly as she could to the farthest hayfield. It was a beautifully warm moonlit night. The kind of night when you feel like lying on your back in the middle of a field of corn and just staring at the moon and the stars.

In the light of the moon the field looked eerie. Long rows of raked-up hay cast curiously shaped shadows. The great mechanical baler stood silent and sinister on the edge of the field. Mary uncoupled the trailer and then coupled the tractor to the baler. The difficult part was getting Beatrice's unconscious body up on to the top of the baler and pushing it down the hole where that great tooth-edged arm swings down to compress the hay. But somehow she managed, and when everything was ready she drove the tractor and baler round the field just once, then put the baler back in the exact spot where she had found it.

Next she took the trailer and picked up the nine or ten bales that the machine had made. She did not know which one Beatrice was in—quite likely there were little bits of her in all of them. She drove over to the half-built stack in the corner of the field, removed a few bales from the centre, put in the new ones, piled the old ones around them and then drove happily back to the farm and bed.

It was her second mistake.

Bill never guessed what happened. It seemed that his wife just got up one morning and went away. Nobody was very upset.

There was an investigation and Mary repeated to the police her story about having gone to wake Mrs. Peters in the morning and finding her bed empty. She hadn't done anything about it for several days. For all she knew Mrs. Peters had gone

to London to see her husband. After all she, Mary, wasn't mistress of the house. . .

Without a body nothing could be proved and things quickly returned to normal. It was a terrible shock to Mary when Bill told her that if his wife did not appear again they would have to wait seven years before they could legally assume that she was dead. It struck Mary as being all nonsense—Beatrice was dead all right—but it would have been a pity to spoil it all by saying so. Naturally Mary stayed on to keep house for Bill. The whole village took it for granted that she would.

It was while Bill was in London attending the agricultural conference the following year that the County Hygiene Inspector called to make a snap inspection of the farm. Mary decided to show him round the buildings herself. He was a nice man but really rather too efficient. Anyway he seemed to approve—until they reached the milking sheds.

One of the cows was looking restless while being milked and when they investigated they saw that the hay she was eating was stained a rusty red. The inspector noticed that the cow seemed to be having difficulty in swallowing. He thrust a hand into her mouth, groped around for a moment and then dragged out a curious red and white object. The inspector turned a horrible white. It shook Mary too. Fancy poor Bill being married to a woman with false teeth!

The inspector was very concerned when he had got over being sick. He wanted to call in the police at once, but Mary pointed out that there must be some logical answer to the mystery. She persuaded the inspector to stay overnight at the farm.

She was beginning to think for herself now. What with the mistake of filling old Mrs. Peters with weed-killer before her birthday and losing Bill to Beatrice, and then not knowing that she would have to wait seven years for Bill . . . She supposed it would be worth it, though.

Before supper that night she walked round the farm to find old Andrew Clark, who was in charge of the farm while Bill was away.

Andrew told her that he had just started baling the hay in the bottom field. No, they wouldn't be moving the baler. It would stay there all night.

He even told her which stack Bill was going to use for silage—you know, that horrible smelling stuff made of treacle and hay or something. They keep it for years and years in great big bins so that it can really rot away.

Yes, she was learning to think at last. She had to—this man might have false teeth too.

The Man Who Left No Clues

By HERBERT DE HAMEL

PUG DURGAN licked his pencil and scrawled laboriously in a paper-covered exercise book. He then tilted back his chair and rested his head against the painted wall of a cell in the Remand Block; he screwed up his small eyes, and chuckled wheezily.

He owed his nickname to his small size and to a supposed resemblance between his turned-up nose and puffy cheeks and those of a pug-dog; but this was really an insult to the animal since he lacked its bravery, its faithfulness and its powers of affection. By trade he was a scrounger, a sneak-thief, a pocket-picker, a burglar of empty houses, a doer of any evil job that needed cunning and not courage.

The heavy door opened and a warder entered, followed by a stranger. The warder's military bearing annoyed Pug. Bringing his chair noisily down on to four legs, the little man boasted, " Old Isaaks'll make 'ay wiv 'em. They 'aven't enough evidence to 'ang the devil 'imself on! "

"This gentleman is from Mr. Ben Isaaks," the warder informed him.

"I don't want no one *from* Mr. Isaaks. I want Mr. Isaaks!"

The keen-faced visitor laid an attaché-case on the table. "My name is Parken. Mr. Isaaks has forty cases on hand. He's far too busy to take your preliminary statement."

"If I'm to pay for Mister ruddy Isaaks, I *want* Mister ruddy Isaaks."

Parken picked up his attaché-case and walked towards the door. "He won't come till I've seen you, so you may as well get some other solicitor."

"Don't be so 'asty, guv'nor. Will he do the talkin' in Court?"

"Certainly—if he likes my notes."

"Do you want this gentleman to stay or not?" asked the warder.

"Yes, orl right then. He can stay."

"Then I'll be waiting in the corridor."

When the door had been locked behind the warder, Parken perched on the bunk. "What's your trouble? When were you arrested?"

"Last night. And this mornin', still muzzy, I was up before the Beak, with the coppers askin' for a remand in custody for further inquiries."

"That was quick work. What had you done?"

"Only something that might have 'appened to anyone. If I 'adn't been a bit tight I wouldn't've set out to walk all that way. But I'd more'n 'arf sobered up by the time I got there."

"Got where?"

"Stepney. When I'd done what I went for, the bloke stood me one. Soon as I got out in the cold air, my legs went to my 'ead, then suddenly I says, 'Lor lumme, if there ain't the old bus!' You see, I used to 'ave a black and yeller car, and when I see a black and yeller car stuck right under a lamp, I says—"

"Yes, yes—you forgot you'd sold the old bus, years ago—and very naturally got into this one to drive back."

"S'right."

"And the owner had left the door unlocked and the ignition key in?"

"No—but you see, I always carries a spare key or two with me, in case of accidents."

"And you got in and drove off—?"

"I got 'er started up, but I couldn't get the ruddy brake off. Either it or me was too tight, and at that moment, the blinkin' owner turned up."

"How did you explain away that bunch of keys in Court?"

"I didn't try to. I reserved my defence. I thought they'd realize I'd been soakin' and make it a fine."

"Not with those keys on you. And they'd probably checked up on your fingerprints. I don't wonder they held you."

"But I hadn't done nothing. Now, copy out orl I've told you and take it to Mr. Isaaks."

"He'd know you're not worrying over this petty little matter—but over something far bigger."

"What d'you mean?"

"On Monday night a Miss Montrevor was murdered. An exact repetition of the way in which you killed Miss Winthrop, two years ago."

Pug was inexpressibly shocked. "Me—? I never croaked this doll. No, nor that Winthrop one neither."

"We shan't get far with your defence if you deny everything. The police knew you'd murdered Miss Winthrop: and so did Mr. Isaaks. He only just managed to get you off on a technical point." Parken took out some blank sheets of paper and a fountain pen. "Let's have the truth and I'll make notes of what you say. Now then . . ."

"Not so quick with them notes. How do I know you ain't a 'tec. come to try and trap me?"

"Our police don't do that sort of thing." He showed him an unused sheet of headed note-paper.

After examining it, Pug remarked, "Well, it's Ikey's note-paper orl right, but 'e mighta dropped it and—"

"He told me to mention that the man you left the loot with in the Alison Winthrop case was Fred Bunning, of 12, Ratisbon Mews. As he died a week after you were acquitted—"

"I never touched 'im." Pug shook his head solemnly.

"No, he died a natural death. But that left no one except Mr. Isaaks and yourself who knew about him. Therefore, only Mr. Isaaks could have told me."

"Orl right, guv'nor—I can see a candle when it's scorchin' me eyes! But," he continued in an aggrieved tone, "'e ought to 'ave come 'imself. 'E's a lawyer."

"So am I. At least, I was one."

"Struck orf?" asked Pug with no false delicacy. "I like a solicitor what's been struck orf. 'E ain't so fussy over what 'e does."

"You won't find me fussy!" His visitor laughed in self-scorn. "But I can do nothing unless you tell me the whole truth. You wouldn't have wanted such an expensive luxury as Mr. Isaaks unless you'd known why they'd remanded you in custody."

Pug started to spit on the floor but remembered where he was.

" They 'aven't no evidence to 'ook that ruddy murder on to anyone—and they want to keep me 'ere while they frame it on to me!"

" They arrested you because the two murders, as I said, were the same in every detail. If you did do the first one the line of defence, this time, would have to be very different."

Pug sat down on the bed and considered this point. " Ah," he remarked.

" You needn't mind owning up, to me. Actually, you could go out and shout it in the street."

" Could I?" inquired Pug dryly. " You might tell them screws so."

" No one could touch you. If a man has been acquitted on a murder charge he can't be tried for it again—or punished—even if further facts come to light which prove he did it."

Pug stared at him shrewdly. " Very well then, guv'nor. I did do that Winthrop dame in. It weren't my fault. The house oughta been empty at the time—but she'd stayed in with a cold. I had to see she kept quiet."

" And this Miss Montrevor—?"

" Ah! I ain't been acquitted of that, not yet."

" I've read the medical report on that first case."

Durgan glanced at him with suddenly revived suspicion. " You wasn't with old Isaaks on that, then?"

" No, at the time of the trial I was in prison."

" You been in stir? Then you're the chap for me!"

" In both murders a humane-killer was used. The kind in which a captive bolt is driven forward on a strong spring a couple of inches into the head of the animal—killing it instantly and silently. You didn't use it from humane motives, but because the bolt is not left behind for the police to investigate, as may happen when a bullet is fired from a pistol. In each instance, you crept quietly up behind your victim, clapped your left hand tightly over her mouth, and with your right hand pressed the ' killer ' against her temple. Then you pulled the trigger. After the first murder you took what money you could find. After Miss Montrevor's death, you took some jewellery."

" I know nothing about no Montrevors. You've been talkin' a lot about 'umane-killers, but did the busies ever find one?"

" No."

" Then they can't prove I done what I never done."

" Last month Mr. Isaaks had a client—a burglar—and the fool insisted he was innocent. Mr. Isaaks based his defence on that belief. The police brought up a piece of conclusive evidence at the trial, and the man was found guilty."

" That was Buster 'Awkins." Pug nodded his head.

" If only he'd spoken the truth, I'd have got the awkward bit of evidence out of the way before the police found it."

" You'd've done that? " exclaimed Pug Durgan in amazement.

" Why not? " replied Parken bitterly. " I've been to prison, and been slung out of my profession. I can't sink much lower ! "

" Pity there ain't more lawyers like you," remarked Pug with genuine approval.

" Now you can guess why Isaaks sent me instead of coming himself. If I am caught removing evidence, they can only send me to prison again. But if he was caught it'd ruin him. This morning, I attended the inquest on Miss Montrevor. She was murdered at 18 Clariston Mansions on Monday night."

" I 'eard there'd been a murder. I don't know none of the facts."

" I think some of them might interest you. The bruises round her mouth were described in great detail. They were exactly like those round the mouth of Miss Winthrop."

" You said they can't hold that business against me."

" If the police believe you destroyed vital evidence then, they might jump at remanding you directly after Miss Montrevor's death—to prevent you removing any clues on this occasion."

" If I'd done this job, I wouldn't've left enough clues for a flea to spit on."

" Some much bigger ones than that came out at the inquest. I made some brief notes on the evidence. She had a two-roomed flat on the first floor. Bedroom at the back, looking out over a lawn and shrubbery—beyond which was a quiet road, with back-gardens again on the far side. An ideal place for parking a car, by whoever did the job.

" At 11.35, more than an hour earlier than her usual time, she returned from her bridge-club, and was seen by the night-porter. Directly afterwards, a Mrs. Anstruther, who lives in the flat above, heard a faint scream. Knowing that Miss Montrevor had a weak heart, she went down and knocked on her door. Getting no answer, she fetched the night-porter who used his pass-key. They found the dead body of Miss Montrevor. It was still warm."

" Did they? " remarked Pug. " Well? "

" All her jewellery, worth over two thousand pounds, had been stolen. While they were ringing the police they heard a car drive away from the back road. That was at 11.45."

" Well? So what? "

" So let's hope you've an alibi for the period 11.35 to 11.45 on Monday night."

" I 'ave. I spent the 'ole of that night, from 9 o'clock till the next evenin' at 118, Goldfinch Road, 'Oxton."

" Good. And the name of your host?"

" Mrs. Gladys Bindle."

" Did Mr. Bindle see you too?"

" There ain't one."

" Her unsupported evidence won't carry much weight. Did anyone else see you there?"

" I can fix that easy with Sandy 'Iggs."

" How long does it take to get by car from Clariston Mansions to Goldfinch Road?"

" Twenty-eight minutes, as near as don't matter."

" You know the time very accurately."

Mr. Durgan scowled. " What d'you mean by that?"

" Only what Counsel for the Prosecution would mean."

" Lumme! Just shows 'ow careful you 'ave to be, don't it?"

" Allowing half an hour for the journey, and, say, five minutes for garaging the blue saloon car at Hoxton—"

" I never said nothing about no blue saloon car!"

" There were no footprints in the flower-bed under that back window."

" 'Ow the hell could a car leave footprints! Not tryin' to be funny, are you?"

" That flower-bed is four feet wide, and as her window-sill is three feet above the floor, and the room below is nine feet high, the police reckon that a twenty-four rung ladder was used. From the marks on the gravel path beyond the flower-bed they deduce it was a narrow metal ladder; also that it was a collapsible one, shutting up into a package about three feet long by one foot deep by nine inches wide."

" 'Ow did they work that out?"

" There's not a twenty-four rung metal ladder kept anywhere near those flats, and no one could drive at night unnoticed across London with a long ladder on top of his car. To get it inside his car, it must have been collapsible."

Pug stared at him anxiously. " But they can't prove that—how could I carry a great iron ladder and shove it up an' down? I'll 'ave a doctor to say I'm too small and weak."

" I didn't say an iron ladder. They think it was a very light one, made of aluminium or some even lighter metal. One that you could work quite easily."

" I tell you, guv'nor, I've never even 'eard of such a ladder, let alone seen one."

" A Mr. Edward Whitwell—who had been at the same bridge-party as Miss Montrevor, but had left ten minutes after she had—

was walking home along Clariston Lane, the quiet road behind the Mansions. And at approximately 11.45 he saw a man cross the pavement ahead of him—coming from the garden gate of the Mansions—carrying an object about three feet long by one foot deep by nine inches wide. He put it on to the back seat of a waiting car and drove off. Mr. Whitwell wasn't near enough to see the number, but he can swear that it was a four-door blue saloon."

"There's 'undreds of them about."

"But if the police find a blue saloon car with a collapsible twenty-four rung ladder inside it, in a garage at Hoxton, it's going to be a bit awkward for the proprietor."

"Why the blazes should they search garages at 'Oxton?"

"Because that is where you say you spent the night."

Pug's smile was intended to convey an impression of child-like innocence, but resulted only in being sly and furtive. "I didn't say I slept with the ruddy car under my piller, did I?"

"No, but if I were in your place I'd sleep a lot easier if I knew the garage proprietor had taken that ladder out into the country and had dumped it in a river."

"Hold on, guv'nor. The blue car 'avin' been borrered for that job, it ain't in no garage. It's 'idden away where the cops won't find it."

"And what about the dark grey raincoat you had on?"

"'Ere! Who said it was dark grey?"

"Mr. Whitwell did."

"Nosy little rat!"

"Yes, but you don't want the police to find it, do you?"

"You don't think I'd wear a coat I'd mind the cops findin', do you?"

"I still think it'd be safer if I were to remove it from wherever you left it."

"Let 'em find it. I don't leave no clues. I got that coat two days ago at one o' them *Cut-a-Dash* shops. There's 'undreds of 'em about."

Parken shrugged his shoulders. "Very well, if you don't trust me I can't help you much. All I can do is to see Mrs. Bindle and fix up the right times for that alibi, in case the police visit her. If I don't, she'll think they want to run her in for keeping a disorderly house, and she'll swear no one was there on Monday night."

"Yes, glad you thought of that. Tell 'er to say I was there from nine that night to nine next evenin'."

"No; that's just the sort of alibi the police suspect. It's too cast-iron. Now, departing from Clariston Lane at 11.45, you

couldn't possibly reach Goldfinch Road before 12.15. If she swears you arrived there just before midnight, that leaves some fifteen untidy minutes—which is just what a genuine alibi does. All you want to prove is that you couldn't have been anywhere near the Mansions when the murder was committed."

Pug beamed. "Old Ikey 'imself couldn't've worked it up better."

"I wish we could have supported her evidence somehow."

Mr. Pug Durgan leaned forward eagerly and tapped him on the knee. "Sandy 'Iggs!"

"Does he know Mrs. Bindle?"

"Know Gladys Bindle? Not 'arf!"

"They could both say she told him he couldn't stay because you'd fixed up to be there at 11.30. And just before twelve, thinking you'd forgotten, she told him he could stay—and at that moment you turned up. While you were arguing about what time it was you all heard a clock strike midnight."

Pug slapped his leg in an ecstasy of approval. "What a treat! *I* couldn't 'ave worked it all out like that!"

"By the way—is there a clock you can hear, from there?"

"Thinks of everything, don't 'e! Yes—there's a church with one close by. Now you 'urry orf and see Gladys."

"But we haven't dealt with the inside clues yet."

"Not mine. I never leave no clues on a job!"

"You left enough finger-marks to convict you ten times over."

"Never! I always wear rubber gloves on a job. 'Ow could I 'ave left fingerprints? Even if I'd been there, which I wasn't."

"I didn't say fingerprints—I said finger-marks."

"The 'tecs can't trace finger-marks made by rubber gloves."

"Unfortunately, Miss Montrevor wore white gloves."

"What's that got to do with it?"

"Well, she used to wash them, and in order to dry them she'd screwed a slat of wood on to the wooden window-sill. This soon got dirty, so she decided to remove it. She took out the two end screws but the central one had rusted in. She raised the two ends of the lath and broke it in the middle, but also broke the top of the central screw in half. The shank was still sticking up, with the remaining half attached to it—as sharp as a razor on its triangular edge."

"What about it?"

"Mrs. Anstruther told all this, at the inquest. And when the police examined that broken screw under a microscope to see if there were any strands of wool from a coat, they found something far more important—a tiny three-cornered bit of thin rubber."

"I've never 'ad such a thing in my life!"

"When you put your hands on the sill in the dark to climb in, you nicked that little triangle of rubber from the first finger of your left-hand glove, and it stuck to the edge of the screw. And on whatever your hand touched was the mark of that little three-cornered hole—even on the face of the dead woman. And those marks exactly fitted the little bit of rubber they had found."

With dread Pug demanded, "And my fingerprints showed through the hole?"

"Not enough to be identified."

He gave a gusty sigh of relief. "Thank 'eaven for that!"

"But if the police find your rubber glove, and their little triangular scrap exactly fits the nicked out triangular hole in the first finger—"

Pug almost screamed, "They can't! They mustn't."

"You didn't leave the gloves there—and you wouldn't have driven the car in them at that time of night, or some policeman might have been too interested—so you must have put them into the pocket of that dark grey raincoat, for which, at this very moment, the police are searching."

"Yes—that's where they are. No point in lyin' to you now."

"Having worn that coat while you were killing a woman, you wouldn't be fool enough to put it on, next evening, when you left Mrs. Bindle's and went to Stepney."

"Not perishin' likely!"

"And you were arrested before you could go back to fetch it."

Pug's throat was so constricted that he could hardly speak. "If the coppers find that glove I'm done for!"

"Your only chance is for me to go and destroy it."

"You're a sport! Not 'arf a sport, you ain't!"

"Hadn't I better get rid of the two remaining clues at the same time? Your Bindle alibi is a bit too risky to use if the humane-killer and the ladder do happen to be dumped anywhere near Goldfinch Road."

"Don't you worry about them, guv'nor. A pal of mine will 'ave seen to those—and I'll lay as that blue car ain't a blue car any longer!"

"I can see now how it is you've kept clear of the police so long. You cover up your tracks as you make them, and don't leave a single clue behind you." Then he added, with a laugh, "You wouldn't trust even me with the whereabouts of that car and its contents! Of course, you are absolutely right not to."

"Yes," agreed Pug. "That's me. I never give nothing away to no one when I 'aven't got to." Then the unfairness of it all was too much for him. Here was he, one of the cleverest crooks in all London, who had covered up every possible trace of his crime,

and then an unmentionably vile female monstrosity goes and leaves a screw sticking up which tears his glove and splits his case wide open! " Get along as quick as you can, guv'nor! "

" I'll go and get it at once. But Mrs. Bindle won't hand it over to me without an order, signed by you, will she? "

" Lumme, no! Quick—write down what I say, and I'll shove my name under it."

" Fire away."

" Dear Glad, give to bearer, Mr. Parken, my raincoat with all that is in the pockets."

" Right. Now ask her to hand me those jewels you stole, as part of my fee."

" Two thousand pounds' worth of sparklers! No damn fear! I'll report you to old Isaaks! "

" And what can he do about it? Tell the police—? "

Pug thought hard and then forced his unwilling lips into a grin. " I was only jokin'. You deserve 'em an' you shall have 'em. Add on: ' And give 'im the small packet I left with you.' Got it? "

" That may mean that there's a big packet, too. So I'll put down ' packets ' to make sure. O.K.? "

Pug made no reply in words. His eyes narrowed with impotent hatred and fury as he took Parken's pen and splodged his name under the instructions.

Parken put the sheet of paper into his breast-pocket. " When I'd served my sentence Mr. Isaaks was delighted to get a trained lawyer, dirt cheap. I told him there'd be another murder by you —and he said you were a nasty little crook and that he wouldn't touch you with a toasting-fork. Since then, I've been waiting for you to send for him."

" Waitin' for me—? "

" When I was sentenced, I begged my fiancée to break off the engagement—but she stood by me. While I was in prison she was murdered." Parken steadied his voice. " Her name was Alison Winthrop."

Pug got to his feet. " I been acquitted! They can't get me for that, now! " Then, in sudden terror, he gasped, " Ain't you goin' to get those things—and fix up with Gladys—? "

" I am going, now, to do all I promised I would do—but in company with some officers from Scotland Yard."

Pug was sobbing with rage. " Why, you dirty double-crossing rat! And I'd got it all covered up so neat—but for that ruddy screw tearing my glove. If only I'd seen it, they'd never 'ave got me! Oh, why didn't I see it? "

Parken knocked loudly on the inside of the door. " Because it wasn't there. I made up that bit this afternoon."

Suspense presents—

Ed McBain's The Pusher is a tough American police novel with an unmistakable ring of authenticity. From the moment when teen-age Anibal Hernandez is found dead, a rope round his neck and an empty syringe by his side, the story doesn't once lose grip. We warmly recommend this hard-hitting and convincing crime story to all except the squeamish. (Boardman, 10s. 6d.)

"I weigh, not from over-indulgence but from the way God made me, three hundred pounds. The island people know the meaning of my name—the manchenil is a lovely, curiously shaped but poisonous tree . . ." Readers of *Rebecca's Pride* will remember Bolivar Manchenil, the black giant in charge of the island police. In **Donald McNutt Douglass'** second book, **Many Brave Hearts**, the

huge policeman is as fresh and endearing as ever. But certain people don't like Manchenil's all-too-revealing probings. He is promoted and quickly and efficiently moved to another larger island. As chief of police he handles his first case—murder and suicide at sea. This is an unforgettable novel, delightfully told and refreshingly different. (Eyre and Spottiswoode, 12s. 6d.)

When Terry Regan, radio salesman, falls in love with the wife of a cripple and a sadist, the logical solution seems to be murder. The murderer is to be the T.V. set that stands in front of the victim's wheelchair. But there's a hole in most of our foolproof plans and the situation that develops is enough to set the pulses racing. **Shock Treatment** is not the best of all the **James Hadley Chase** thrillers Suspense has seen, but we weren't able to stop reading ! (Robert Hale, 10s. 6d.)

It was entirely by chance that M. Pinaud discovered his first headless corpse. He stood and looked at it, disconcerted ; but not for long. Little mysteries like bodies without heads on railway lines were part of the day's work to Pinaud of the Sûreté. Intuitive, sympathetic, a thoroughly human mixture of man of action and dreamer, he makes a delightful addition to the ranks of fiction detectives. We warmly welcome **Pierre Audemars' The Fire and the Clay** for its difference, and for the genuine excitement of the story. (John Long, 11s. 6d.)

Richard Langley set out for North Africa in search of his erring wife Lena and a quick and merciful divorce. He found instead a whole sea of troubles including an unwanted corpse, unknown enemies by the score and a very dead wife. An ordinary man caught up unexpectedly in intrigue and violence—this is the theme **Michael Cronin** handles well; **Dead—and Done With** is an action-packed thriller of unusual pace and suspense. (Robert Hale, 10s. 6d.)

Surely the most fascinating case in crime history is that of **The Identity of Jack the Ripper. Donald McCormick** presents the facts—and very gruesome facts they are—about the murders, based on statements actually made by witnesses. He spares no details in an attempt to identify the murderer. Was it a man or a woman? Was it an Englishman, an American or a Pole? Mr. McCormick has made some very interesting suggestions and provides a book which is as enthralling as it is ghoulish. This cannot be recommended for bed-time reading but it is certainly one of the most gripping whodunits ever compiled. (Jarrolds, 18s.).

A romantic elopement, a fear-haunted honeymoon journey and a date with death, a grim pursuit of a murderer down the length of France . . . **Gordon Ashe** packs action and suspense into his fast-moving new mystery-thriller **Elope to Death**. (John Long, 11s. 6d.)

THE HAPPY TRAVELLERS

by

MANNING COLES

INVESTIGATING a shooting in Stepney, Tommy Hambledon and his friend Chief Superintendent Bagshott come across the tell-tale tracks of Louis Magid, an elusive and notorious crook with a deceptively gentle manner: "so nice and friendly and then bang-bang." Tommy decides to follow Magid in the hope that he will lead him to the top of an international gang operating in France and known as the d'Alroy Circus.

In Paris, with the help of M. Letord of the French police, Tommy again comes across Magid; and soon afterwards Beppi le Chien, one of his associates, is arrested for stealing a van. Beppi is obviously terrified of Magid, but when he is questioned he produces Magid's address.

The next night Tommy, after making sure the building is empty, searches Magid's rooms. But unfortunately he is seen; he is captured, disarmed and taken to a cellar where he is chained to the wall. Gaston, his captor, explains that when Tommy has been questioned to Monsieur le Chef's satisfaction—and Tommy will have a lot of explaining to do—his body will be placed in a barrel of quick-setting cement and rolled into the Seine, never to be seen again.

The following morning Gaston sets about mixing the cement, and Tommy decides that he has had enough; watching one's own grave being dug, so to speak, is more than he will tolerate . . .

The story continues:

"YES, that will serve," said Gaston, putting his shovel back in the corner. "If a little more is needed one can always make it.

★ An entertaining new Tommy Hambledon mystery exclusive to Suspense ★

Where is my broom-handle? Ah, here. It is, of course, not needed yet."

"Gaston."

"Monsieur?"

"I have heard that when a man is to be executed he is given a glass of rum and a cigarette to calm his nerves."

"Alas, monsieur, I have no rum and monsieur's nerves appear to be completely calm already."

"But the cigarette, Gaston?"

"The cigarette. I cannot see why monsieur should not have one if he wishes for it. I have always been of a generous nature;

monsieur shall have one of my own." Gaston threw him one.

"I have no light, Gaston."

"Of course not, I have monsieur's here."

Gaston came across the room and held the lighter to the end of the cigarette. It was the first time in all those hours that he had come within Hambledon's reach while they were alone.

Hambledon brought his hands up as though to steady the cigarette, flung the chain round the man's neck, put his knee as high as it would go against Gaston's body and pulled with all his strength.

When Gaston finally went limp Hambledon let him fall, took the key of the handcuffs from his pocket and released himself.

"Ah," he said, and went round the cellar in long strides to assure his legs that they were free again. He returned to Gaston and felt for his pulse without result, for the man was quite dead.

"I cannot think that the world is much poorer," said Hambledon earnestly and went to try the door. It was bolted on the outside—these people did not trust even their own gaoler.

Presently someone would come down. If it were Michel or Louis Magid, one glance would tell them what had happened and there would be a fight. A search showed that Gaston was unarmed. Still, there was the shovel, a very useful weapon. Hambledon took it out of the corner and set it ready.

But if the next visitor were someone sent from Monsieur le Chef, it was just possible that he would not know so insignificant a person as the late Gaston. In which case—

Hambledon tore off his own jacket and crammed Gaston into it—he was still in his shirt-sleeves. It was not worth while changing trousers, for a night in that dirty cellar had grimed Hambledon's all over, but Gaston's jacket and cap were of a memorable check so Hambledon assumed them. He then began drawing buckets of water at the tap, pouring them into the barrel and frantically stirring the mixture with the broom-handle. What had Gaston said? Sloppy, very sloppy, then when the body is put in it goes down and the liquid rises to cover it.

He laboured until the sweat poured off him then quite suddenly the mixture went liquid like thick soup. He lifted Gaston from the floor, heaved him up to the rim of the barrel and began to tip him in head downwards, but his coat-sleeve caught on a nail—

Either the man who came wore rubber soles or Hambledon had been too occupied to hear steps on the stairs, for suddenly a bolt shot back and the door opened. Hambledon stepped back against his shovel, but the man was a complete stranger.

"What is all this?" he said angrily. "Who are you?"

"Give us a hand," growled Hambledon, "he's got stuck."

He tugged furiously and Gaston fell in until only his legs remained. "Come on, can't you? If this stuff begins to set—"

With the stranger's help the business was finished, the cement covering all. Hambledon backed against the wall, felt the shovel close behind him and wiped his face on his sleeve.

" That's all right," he said. " Now we let it harden and then we can roll him away."

" You blistering fool," stormed the other man, " is that the Englishman? You were told to keep him safe. We wanted to talk to him, and now you've killed him, you—you—"

" I couldn't help it," whined Hambledon. " He yelled for help and I was afraid someone'd hear so I stopped him and when I'd finished stopping him he was dead, so—"

" Why didn't you call Michel for help? "

" I did, and he never came. What with me calling and him bellowing—"

" It is true," said the man thoughtfully, " that Michel was not there when I came through."

" I expect he's along at the Caneton. Shall I—"

" You'll be sorry for this when I tell Monsieur le Chef, you drivelling nitwit. What's your name? "

" Gaston, monsieur—"

" I've a good mind to hand you over to the police for murder or execute you myself—Magid's away for the day. Don't stand there gibbering like an ape, go and find Michel. Get out! "

Hambledon went.

He found that rain was falling steadily, the sky was overcast and between the high and grimy walls it was nearly dark. He slipped out of the archway and hurried along the narrow streets into a more frequented thoroughfare; what he most wanted was to telephone Letord in case he were set on again, for the whole neighbourhood was unsavoury to a degree. He drew a sigh of relief when he saw the sign of the big red cigar.

French telephonic arrangements are most peculiar to non-French eyes. One does not use coins in a French telephone box, one inserts *jetons*—tokens—which have to be bought as required, therefore telephone boxes are put inside places where one can buy the necessary *jetons*. Tobacco is a Government monopoly and places selling tobacco display a large red cigar-shaped sign which, by inference, also indicates a telephone.

Hambledon dived into the place, which had a tobacco counter by the door and was a café beyond. Gaston's coat pockets held all Hambledon's possessions except his pistol. With his own money he bought a packet of Green Caporals and some *jetons*, and passed on into the café.

He hung up the horrible cap on a coat-rack already loaded with other men's garments, for the place was nearly full, and then stood himself a large cognac at the bar. The proprietor indicated a door labelled " Téléphone " and Hambledon found himself in a small room, dubiously sound-proof.

He rang up Letord's office and found him there.

" Letord, Hambledon here. I can't say much now, but send a couple of your best men to watch that court in the Passage Stinville. There's a man there I want followed." He added details of

appearance and dress. "If he leaves there he may go to the Caneton d'Or to look for a dirty little thug named Michel who has two lovely black eyes. He's not important, but the other man is. I'll come along to you as soon as I can. Goodbye."

He hung up the receiver and stood for a moment in thought. Gaston's jacket was horribly conspicuous, and someone might recognize it. He looked at himself in a small mirror and was horrified; no taxi-driver would receive such a filthy object in a nice clean taxi. He cleaned his face superficially with a handkerchief and selected a long dark mackintosh and a grey felt hat from the hatstand. With the coat-collar up and the hatbrim pulled down he was much more presentable. He strode away into the driving rain and five minutes later stopped a roving taxi.

"Where to, monsieur?"

"Préfecture of Police," was on Hambledon's lips but he checked it. Someone might overhear and remember him if they saw him again. "To the Cathedral of Notre Dame," he said in lofty and austere tones.

"*Bien*, monsieur," said the driver respectfully, and drove away.

When the taxi set him down Hambledon walked rapidly towards the deep archway into the courtyard of the Directorate of Judicial Police. Letord's familiar office was sanctuary; he dropped into a chair with a sigh of relief. Letord took one look at him and offered him cognac.

Between sips Hambledon poured out his story. "Oh, and could somebody return this coat and hat to the restaurant Mère Angelique? I borrowed them."

"You wished to cover up that remarkable jacket? One understands."

Hambledon finished his cognac, took out a cigarette and, in feeling for his lighter, came upon a little packet of book-matches.

"These came from Magid's room," he said, "but I fear they won't help. It only advertises Gitanes Vizir cigarettes." He opened the flap; across the inside of it were scribbled two sets of numbers, one below the other, thus:

1541
1929

"Telephone numbers?" said Letord. "Dates in history?"

"Not with that crowd," said Hambledon decidedly.

"Pages in a book of reference? Item numbers in a list?"

"Any damn thing. You may have it, Letord. Exhibit A. Well, I think I'll go and find a bed for the night. Another two days without shaving and my best friends won't wish to know me—I have a feeling that that may be useful. I think I'll get a bed at Karriotti's in the Rue de Charenton."

"But that's a doss-house!"

"I know. That's what I want. Let us be accurate, it's what I need. I want to sink without trace into the submerged tenth and come up with a new identity and background, Letord. I'll see you in a day or two."

" Just a moment," said Letord. " I had instructions this morning to try to find this d'Alroy Circus, and I am to afford every possible assistance to Monsieur Thomas Elphinstone Hambledon from London."

" Oh, really? I'm very glad you're in the hunt too, Letord, if only because it saves my having to commandeer your police without the faintest shadow of right to do so. I can't think why you put up with me," he added, getting to his feet.

" It must be habit," said Letord. " Take care of yourself."

Two days later Hambledon returned, less conspicuously dressed but a great deal scruffier.

" You were right about Karriotti's, it is not a three-star hotel. Never mind. I managed to park myself in a room for two instead of a dormitory for six—four less to snore at me—and my roommate is quite entertaining. First of all I've had an idea about those numbers on the book-matches. May I see it again? "

Letord took Exhibit A, one packet book-matches hardly used, from the safe.

" Thank you," said Hambledon. " Now then, 1541 and 1929. Suppose we put a full stop in the middle of each, thus, what happens? "

" Times? " said Letord.

" Possibly, yes. Could they be train times, do you think? "

" I should imagine," said Letord, a little blankly, " that it would be even more surprising if they were not the times of some train leaving some place and arriving at some other place, but the choice is painfully wide. Even assuming they are train times at all."

" You know, you and Chief Superintendent Bagshott ought to get on well together. Don't damp me, Letord. Remembering that Magid is in Paris, one of these times could refer to a Paris arrival."

" Or a Paris departure," said Letord.

" Remembering again that Beppi le Chien said that this gang's headquarters are somewhere in the Midi—he mentioned Dijon—one might begin with the Lyon station, don't you think? "

" I might even start with that one myself," said Letord, returning to his desk and his telephone.

" Just a moment. I engage myself in arithmetic. Fifteen-forty one from nineteen-twenty nine is four, no, three hours forty-eight minutes. A place about three and three-quarter hours from Paris—"

Letord was applying himself to the telephone. " They say they will ring me back," he finished, putting down the receiver.

" How did your people get on in the Passage Stinville? I've been avoiding the place."

" Ah, yes. Half an hour after my man got there your tall friend with the bent nose went along to the Caneton d'Or and met a man with two beautiful black eyes, as you said. They sat together for some time before returning to the house in the yard. Still later

that night Magid went in and Michel came out. He appeared to have toothache; he was holding his jaw. Early next morning he went back and this time he was pushing a truck." Letord paused.

"Nothing more happened until after dark, when the three men came into the yard rolling a large cask; they had quite a struggle getting it up on the truck. Magid and Michel went off pushing the truck, while the tall man strolled along behind. My men followed them for a long, very long walk right down to the Seine quays. They went down an alley between warehouses—my men could not follow because the tall man hung back—but Magid and Michel came back a few minutes later with the truck empty. Magid and Michel went back to the Rue Stinville area and the tall man to a small quiet hotel near the Place de la République—"

The telephone rang and Letord answered it. "A thousand thanks," he said finally. "I am most grateful." He replaced the receiver.

"The train is the fifteen-forty one from Beaune to Paris. My friend, you were inspired."

"I have my moments," said Tommy modestly. "Beaune, eh?"

"Now will you tell me," Letord said, "what was in that barrel, and what did they do with it?"

"It's in the Seine," said Hambledon. "There wouldn't be much point in fishing it out, it's quick-hardening cement. You see, they think I'm inside the cement. They copied what I understand to be a New York practice—not among really nice New Yorkers. Only among the murder gangs."

"But Hambledon—I take it there's only cement—"

"Oh no. Gaston is inside. He was getting it ready for me, so I altered the arrangement. Don't look so horrified, Letord. Think of all the trouble I've saved you."

Hambledon's room-mate, Monsieur Victor Dinel, was a tall, stout man of uncertain age with a round face which was pallid for lack of sun and, indeed, of adequate food. He had spiky hair which stuck up all over his head whenever he took off his disgraceful hat. He was cheerful and even-tempered and Hambledon rather liked him. When Hambledon came into their room he was sitting on the edge of his bed putting a new pair of bootlaces into his ancient boots.

Hambledon produced some pieces of bread and slices of cooked ham—not wrapped in paper—out of his coat pocket and began to eat slowly.

"I was lucky enough to find these boot-laces today," Dinel said. "How greatly they improve the look of one's boots. One should be tidily shod, it makes the good impression." He kept on glancing at Hambledon's food as he talked.

"I managed to get this," Tommy said, "would you care to share it? I am sorry there is no paper round it but I was in a hurry."

" On these occasions," said Dinel, naturally assuming that it had been stolen, " it is usually wiser not to wait."

They shared the meal together.

" Tomorrow," said Dinel, " I must take steps to be in funds again. It is annoying to have no money."

" It is, I suppose, the penalty for living in a high state of civilization."

" You cannot be advocating a return to the Robber States of Mediaeval times. I imagine that the only people who managed without money were the Robber Barons themselves, who when they needed a horse or a herd of swine merely took it."

" Whereas if we do that—"

" Precisely. There is no need to labour the point."

" Certainly not," said Hambledon. " I do not care for those sort of references myself." Dinel looked at him with unspoken sympathy but Hambledon did not confide any recent convictions he might have suffered. " In Ur of the Chaldees they had no money but managed with a complicated system of barter."

" Imagine paying for a bottle of wine with a farmyard fowl and being given the change in eggs."

" Not necessarily. One arranged one's affairs through a man of business who held credits upon which one could draw. He charged, of course, a percentage for his trouble."

Dinel stared. " What, in those far-off days? "

" That's right," said Hambledon, who was already wondering whether he was attaching to Ur particulars which really belonged to Babylon.

" And how long ago, in the name of heaven? "

" Oh—what—four thousand years, perhaps."

" *Ciel!* You have, perhaps, been engaged in pre-historical research at one time? "

" No, no," said Hambledon hurriedly. " It was only a popular lecture I chanced to hear—it was warm in there."

" I understand," said Dinel feelingly, " I understand."

The one thing which Hambledon found it most difficult literally to stomach was the standard of food appropriate to his circumstances. He solved the difficulty by going off alone and buying a decent meal at least once a day. That evening he brought home a cooked chicken honestly paid for at a delicatessen shop. Dinel had not returned so Hambledon hid the food in their room and went out to look for him.

He was strolling along quietly watching the passers-by when Dinel dived out of a café.

" Come with me," he said, " for I have had a lucky day. Last night you shared your supper with me so this evening I give you a drink, a 1947 Beaujolais. Come, my friend."

" Thank you, just a glass," said Hambledon, wondering what miracle had occurred. It was plain that Dinel had had a glass or so already; he was what the experts call mellow, but a little more might be too much.

"Today I too have been lucky, Dinel. In our room there is a cold chicken."

"*Grand ciel!* My friend, it is plain that you are a practitioner of the first order. *Magnifique!* Just one more glass . . ."

"Provided that it really is the last—"

"Look, after this you shall have my wallet and then I cannot buy any more. Agreed?"

The wine was paid for and Dinel handed over the wallet, a very nice one indeed, made of crocodile skin and with silver corners. Dinel's principal source of income suddenly became obvious. He was a pick-pocket. They plodded off towards Karriotti's. After a prolonged pause—"Have you also," asked Dinel, "thought of wine?"

"No. One cannot have everything at once."

"But chicken without wine is unimaginable. If you will give me that wallet—"

"Consider," said Hambledon. "Did I not hear Karriotti this morning demanding his rent?"

"Tomorrow—tomorrow I will provide for that. The wallet, if you please."

"No. You will thank me later."

They walked on, but presently Dinel stopped.

"Wait for me a moment." He went in under an archway and disappeared. Hambledon waited, idly looking about him; upon one side of the archway there was a café and a horrible possibility occurred to him. Quite suddenly there was a yell and a rush and Dinel came tearing out, followed by a cook and two scullions, shouting.

"Run," said Dinel, brandishing a bottle, "run!"

Hambledon turned and fled; they ran out of the archway and straight into the arms of two policemen who enfolded them and held them tight. They were arrested, charged with theft, marched off to the nearest police station, searched and pushed into a cell together.

"That chicken of yours," said Dinel mournfully, "when I think of that chicken waiting for us in vain, I could weep. That I should have involved you in this—" He held his head in his hands. "We shall get three months, three, at least."

"*What?*"

"I have, I regret to say, been inside before. And you were found carrying the wallet and it is no use my saying that it was mine, they will not believe me. Yes, I should think three months each. But the real tragedy is that chicken. To think of that Karriotti eating it instead of us!" He sniffed.

"I hid it," said Hambledon absently.

"No use. That Karriotti, he would find a five-franc piece."

In the morning they were roused early, given coffee of a sort and stale rolls, and told that they would be taken before the French equivalent of a magistrate's court at nine. By that time they would

be washed, brushed and as tidy as possible for persons of their natural habits. Here was a piece of soap if they knew what that was for.

They were led out at the appointed time and pushed into a small blue van. They were locked into the back and the driver and escorting constable sat up in front.

For some reason the driver was in a hurry; he turned corners with a verve which shot the prisoners on to the floor time and again. "He is in training to become a taxi-driver," said Dinel gloomily, and at that moment it happened.

The driver came up much too fast to a cross-roads controlled by lights; at the last moment the light turned red and he jammed his brakes on hard. A vegetable lorry too close behind rammed the van in the back, and the van doors gave way. The driver and escort leapt out and recriminations began.

Dinel immediately threw himself down on the floor and groaned loudly, clasping himself round the ribs.

"Dinel, are you hurt?" asked Hambledon anxiously.

"Not really, but if we make a fuss we'll be taken to hospital for a bit. More comfortable than the cells. Groan, can't you?"

A voice outside said something about "the poor devils in the e." and someone lifted out the two dishevelled and moaning victims. They were laid on the pavement to await the ambulance.

By this time a quite large crowd had naturally gathered. The lorry-driver wanted to know what a couple of blazing incompetents dressed up in police uniforms meant by pulling up like that right in front of him without warning; the police inquired acidly what the lorry-driver meant by approaching traffic lights at such a speed that he had to ram a police van to stop himself. The lorry-driver pushed the police driver in the face, the police proceeded to arrest him and the crowd surged round to enjoy the show. Hambledon and Dinel, lying forgotten on the pavement, left off groaning.

Hambledon dug Dinel in the ribs.

"Come on," he said, "now's our chance. Let's go!"

So they vanished round the nearest corner and when the ambulance arrived it found no patients to succour.

Dinel took Hambledon to another doss-house he knew, compared with which Karriotti's was practically the Ritz. Hambledon viewed it with distaste, scratched himself in intelligent anticipation and led Dinel aside.

"Listen," said Hambledon, "you'll have to lie low for a few days because the police know you. I wasn't carrying papers, as you saw, and the name I gave would surprise my god-parents."

"But we must have money, they took it all from us."

"I can get some—"

"Be careful!"

"It is quite safe, it is a little nest-egg I have laid away for a rainy day. The rain, it is here. Stay indoors till I come back."

Dinel nodded and went indoors while Hambledon took a devious route to the Quai des Orfèvres and Antoine Letord.

" I am getting inside the skin of my part, as they say. When I turned in here and one of your men looked at me I nearly fled. He had an arresting look, if you know what I mean."

" Would it," said Letord, offering cigarettes, " would it be your conscience catching up with you at last? "

" Conscience? " said Hambledon, genuinely surprised. " Oh, you mean Gaston, do you? That wasn't murder, that was merely rat-extermination. No, I felt like that because I was arrested last night. I will tell you about it," said Tommy, and did so. " Now I have a plausible reason for leaving Paris and taking Dinel with me. Any news of the man with the crooked nose who supervised what he thought were my obsequies? "

" According to the hotel register his name is Jean Artaux of Paris. On the afternoon of the day before yesterday Artaux left the Gare de Lyon by the 13.35. He did not buy a ticket though he showed one at the barrier, therefore he had a return half. He got out of the train at Sens and hung about on the platform. My man was on the point of leaping out as the train started but Artaux jumped in again. Artaux saw him, for at Laroche he vanished completely.

" The train was standing in the station when a north-bound train to Paris came in. He must have stepped across; my men heard doors slam on the wrong side."

" So Artaux was lost."

" Only temporarily mislaid. My man put himself in Artaux's place. What would he do? He would go back to Sens and take the next train from there once more in the direction of Dijon. So my man went on to Dijon and got out there, and when the next train from Sens came in sure enough Artaux alighted. And there my man lost him. It was dark, the platform was thronged, Artaux slipped through and vanished once again."

" So we now have two indications pointing the same way; Magid's train time from Beaune, and this fellow going to Dijon."

" And now would you care to tell me why you are burdening yourself with the company of such as Victor Dinel? Thief, beggar, pick-pocket, idler—"

" He is my alibi and my guarantee, my shield and my background. He is the man who tells all his friends that old Tictoc is all right—"

" Tictoc? "

" I have a watch," said Hambledon, displaying it. " It is true that it does not go but, if you wind it up, it ticks, listen."

" Formidable," said Letord.

" I bought it in a junk-shop but Dinel doesn't know that. It is the last despairing remnant of my family fortunes. Dinel thinks I am an expert at snitching food off market stalls. Can you lend me some money, Letord? "

" I have some money here which belongs to you," said Letord. " I collected your things from your hotel. Of course, if you have not enough I think I could manage five hundred francs—"

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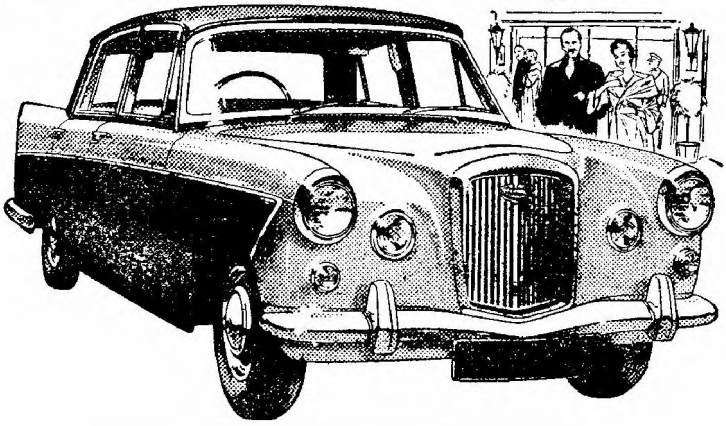

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" Letord, stop! When you said that about five hundred francs it suddenly as it were rose up before me like an enormous pile of money. One can live for a week on five hundred francs."

" Live? "

" Well, continue to exist. Letord, will you warn the police of Dijon and Beaune that the battered old tramp Tictoc is not what he seems but very otherwise? "

" Certainly I will do that. You are going down there at once? "

" I am wandering down that way with my good comrade Dinel. By the time we have been a few days on the road I don't think that even Magid and Michel—if he goes there too—will recognize me."

" You are being careful," said Letord, " and you are quite right."

" I mean to break up the d'Alroy Circus if it takes me a year, and I shan't do it if they spot me. They may keep barrels and bags of cement down there too for all I know."

" Can I do anything else to help? "

" You can sit tight and burn a candle for me at Notre Dame. I'll ring you up if there's anything else."

Hambledon and Dinel travelled from Paris in a lorry belonging to a friend of Dinel's who was driving to Chartres to pick up a load of scrap-iron.

Just before Chartres they let the lorry go on without them and tramped into the town, and as they went Dinel talked about the great Cathedral until even Hambledon was interested and said so.

" Architecture is not everyone's subject," admitted Dinel. " To understand it takes many years of study. Yet, merely to see a building like this one—when you look at the junction of these great angles—"

Dinel dragged Hambledon up to the great church of Notre Dame, describing how the mediaeval craftsmen worked not only for their wages but for their souls' welfare and for the glory of God . . .

" See how the thickness of the pillars is turned at right angles to the nave to admit the utmost light—"

Quite a lot of light, Hambledon felt, was being cast upon Dinel himself; he seemed to grow in stature and authority and refinement.

" You know a great deal about church architecture."

" I was, at one time, considered to have a certain superficial knowledge," said Dinel, but the spell was broken and the energy ebbed from his voice and gestures. " It is lunch-time. Have you any money? "

Hambledon showed what he had, two or three hundred francs.

Dinel shook his head. " Not enough, and I—I have nothing." He looked mournfully away down the slope. Suddenly his face lit up. " Ah," he said, " ah. Wait for me, not too near."

He turned and disappeared from sight within the Cathedral; Hambledon, looking down as Dinel had done, saw only a touring coach drawn up and the passengers climbing out.

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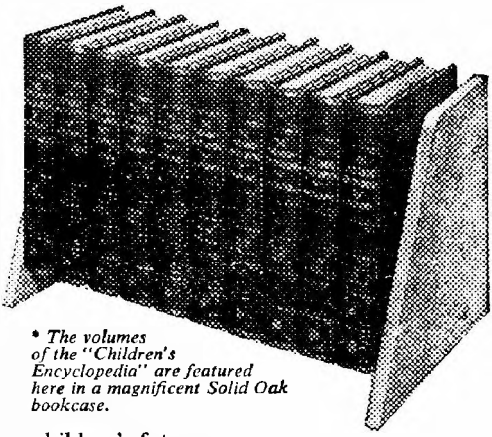

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SUS. 9A

Far below the tourist group shook out their skirts or straightened their ties and looked about them before the toilsome climb up to the Cathedral. Half a dozen sturdy and energetic ones reached the head of the steps before the rest.

" Where does one go in? "

" Try the handle, George, does it turn? "

But the central door remained immovable. Almost at once a man moved out from a door on the left side; he wore a long dark garment and a cloth hat of faintly Tudor aspect. His general appearance was intensely respectable, and it was with surprise amounting to shock that Hambledon recognized Dinel.

" This way, messieurs, mesdames," he said, " this way to come in, please."

" He speaks English, how nice," said some of the party.

" I didn't know that," said Hambledon to himself. " There are quite a lot of things I don't know about Dinel."

" Will you show us round this Cathedral yourself? " asked a stout lady with an umbrella.

" My duty, madame, also my pleasure. All inside together, please. This church dates from the eleventh century and was built by Bishop Fulbert—" Dinel's voice died away inside the building.

Hambledon had some time to wait before the tourists drifted out into the sunlight. " Unforgettable. Those windows—"

" That nice man made it all so interesting, too."

Dinel could just be seen within the doorway with one hand not too obtrusively curved; one by one the visitors, in passing, expressed their gratitude in the usual manner.

When the coach finally moved away, Dinel came out.

" How on earth," Hambledon said, " did you manage to make yourself look so tidy? "

" I knew where the guide would keep his coat, and I borrowed his comb. He is away having lunch, of course. Shall we not do likewise? " Dinel chinked money in his pocket.

They lunched at a small café-restaurant by the river. Madame the proprietress was not at first willing to serve them; she said that they were too late. But she had run a keen eye over their deficiencies of dress and a certain flicker of a nostril suggested that the refusal was really on personal grounds.

Dinel drew himself up and addressed her in superior tones. " Madame. My good woman. It is a mistake to judge men by their outward appearances. My friend and I find it convenient to be dressed in this manner to facilitate some inquiries on behalf of l'Académie Française into the continued use in remoter country districts of words already obsolete in more sophisticated circles. Eh, monsieur le Professeur? "

" Certainly, monsieur le Docteur. Etymological research."

" Precisely. And as regards our capacity to pay "—Dinel brought out a loose handful of assorted currency—" madame need have no fear."

Madame opened the door of the dining-room and ushered them in, and Hambledon added to the picture by making a fuss about the towel when he washed his hands.

Soup, *omelette aux champignons*, grilled chicken, a local cheese and a bottle of Chambertin of a good year: Madame served the meal herself and thereafter left the guests in peace to finish the bottle. When it was done, Dinel stretched out his legs beneath the table and said: "Ah."

"I concur in my learned brother's opinion," said Hambledon. "But this divine repast is going to cost us something, isn't it?"

Dinel became thoughtful. "Let us," he said, "before we leave, take a little turn in the garden."

Hambledon agreed and they strolled out through the French windows. He began to say something but Dinel hushed him.

"It is undesirable to disturb Madame," he said. "She will be tired, she may be having a little siesta."

"But—" began Hambledon.

"This way," said Dinel suddenly, urgently, "quick." He turned the corner of an outbuilding and came face to face with Madame.

"You go!" she began furiously. "You slip out to avoid the payment, you tramps, you—"

"Madame, we were looking for you—"

"Professors, ha! Doctors, ha! You, to collect country words? I tell you some country words," and she did.

Dinel raised his voice. "Madame, please! I will admit to a momentary lapse of memory—"

"Momentary!"

"—entirely due to the superb meal which surpasses anything we have had since last we dined at the Tour d'Argent in Paris. Madame, you cook as one inspired—the little angels taught you!"

She snapped at him again but the snarl had gone out of her voice.

"Let us go back into the house, Madame, and we will put right this painful misunderstanding."

"We will, indeed," she said, "or else there lives, in the little house at the corner yonder, the policeman."

Dinel paid the bill and so courteous was his manner that there was no more talk of policemen or any such unpleasantness. Madame even summoned up a smile. When they were out of earshot Hambledon turned upon his companion.

"Really, Dinel! You, the erudite student of mediaeval architecture, the—"

But Dinel waved him down. "An oversight," he said, "an error. Force of habit induced me to it." He smiled dreamily. "That aura of respectability was once mine by nature. Sometimes it pleases me to return to it, but not for long. It is like a pair of smart and costly shoes—for a while they are a joy to wear, until after a time they begin to pinch, do they not? In an hour they are a discomfort, in two hours an agony. It is pleasant for a change and then—away with it! Let us be easy and comfortable in our old shoes."

Continued on page 133

The Amazing Potentialities of Memory

LITTLE thought when I arrived at my friend Borg's house that I was about to see something truly extraordinary, and to increase my mental powers ten-fold.

He had asked me to come to Stockholm to lecture to the Swedes about Lister and other British scientists. On the evening of my arrival, after the champagne, our conversation turned naturally to the problems of public speaking and to the great labour imposed on us lecturers by the need to be word perfect in our lectures.

Borg then told me that his power of memory would probably amaze me—and I had known him, while we were studying law together in Paris, to have the most deplorable memory !

So he went to the end of the dining room and asked me to write down a hundred three-figure numbers, calling each one out in a clear voice. When I had filled the edge of an old newspaper with figures, *Borg repeated them to me in the order in which I had written them down and then in reverse order, that is beginning with the last number. He also allowed me to ask him the relative position of different numbers : for example, which was the 24th, the 72nd, and the 38th, and I noticed that he replied to all my questions at once and without effort, as if the figures which I had written on the paper had been also written in his brain.*

I was dumbfounded by such a feat and sought in vain for the trick which enabled him to achieve it. My friend then said : " The thing you have just seen and which seems so remarkable is, in fact, quite simple ; everybody has a memory good enough to do the same, but few indeed can use this wonderful faculty."

He then revealed to me how I could achieve a similar feat of memory, and I at once mastered the secret—without mistakes and without effort—as you too will master it tomorrow.

But I did not stop at these amusing experiments. I applied the principles I had learned in my daily work. I could now remember, with unbelievable facility, the lectures I heard and those which I gave myself, the names of people I met—even if it was only once—as well as their addresses, and a thousand other details which were most useful to me. *Finally, I discovered after a while that not only had my memory improved, but that I had also acquired greater powers of concentration ; a surer judgment—which is by no means surprising since the keenness of our intellect is primarily dependent on the number and variety of the things we remember.*

If you would like to share this experience and to possess those mental powers which are still our best chance of success in life, ask B. R. Borg to send you his interesting booklet *The Eternal Laws of Success*—he will send it free to anyone who wants to improve his memory. Here is the address : *B. R. Borg, c/o Aubanel Publishers, 14, Highfield Road, Rathgar, Dublin, Ireland.*

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" There may be something," said Tommy, " in what you say."

They went on, sometimes walking and sometimes getting lifts, sleeping in barns and outhouses, until they came to Dijon in the evening of the third day after leaving Chartres. By this time Dinel's money was becoming exhausted and Hambledon's practically gone.

" Now it is your turn," Dinel said, with some justice. " I provided the last windfall."

Hambledon agreed. He was not anxious about money since once he was in touch with the police they would supply his simple needs. What did look like being a little tricky was establishing contact without Dinel or anyone else knowing.

" For tonight," said Dinel, " we need not be concerned. I have a friend, a good old friend of many years, and he keeps an estaminet. This way."

He turned off the main road and walked by a series of alleys to a narrow street. Here they entered what Hambledon privately considered to be one of the grubbiest cafés he had ever encountered. A large man in a grimy apron came forward, uttered a yelp of delight and rushed to meet Dinel.

" But it is years— Come in, sit down, a little glass of something—"

" I have a friend," said Dinel. " We call him Tictoc. My friend Alexandre."

" Enchanted, Monsieur Tictoc. Come in, please."

Hambledon went in and sat in a corner while Dinel and Alexandre talked across him, exchanging news of people with odd names like Dusty Jean, Phillipe the Rat-trap and Emil Bat d'Af. Presently Alexandre was called away, and Dinel apologized to Hambledon for unintended neglect.

" But you know what it is when old friends meet. During the war, Alexandre and I shared together an active dislike for Germans. Alexandre, however, married a wife who kept him under such firm and salutary control that he is now the proud proprietor of a café. I, on the other hand, maintained my personal freedom."

Alexandre returned with a skinny angular woman whom he introduced as his wife. " Two friends of mine, my love," he said. " Monsieur Victor Dinel and Monsieur Tictoc. They are staying here."

" Are they, indeed? Then they must smarten themselves up a little. They will lower the tone of the place."

Hambledon was horrified at the thought of his appearance lowering the tone of a fourth-rate café.

" We are, indeed, travel-soiled," Dinel agreed. " Soap and water, however, and the loan of a pair of scissors to trim our hair and beards and, chère Madame, you will not know us. We shall then resemble some of the more sophisticated Prophets as they are presented to us in the best stained-glass windows." He raised his glass and bowed to the lady.

" Except, of course," said Hambledon, " that we cannot, in this mortal life, aspire to wear haloes."

" You do not astonish me," she said. " Alexandre, these friends of yours can have the room over the wash-house. It has an outside stair. Excuse me, I am wanted."

She hurried away, leaving Alexandre the prey to obvious embarrassment. " You must excuse," he said. " My wife—she has very high standards."

" Evidently," said Dinel, " evidently. Think no more about it, my dear Alexandre."

Thoroughly washed and superficially tidied, they stayed on at the Chien Enchainé for two or three days. Hambledon had considerable difficulty in shaking off Dinel who, with the touching fidelity of Mary's little lamb, followed him wherever he went. Madame Alexandre had one fine trait—her cooking was surprisingly good; and whenever Alexandre was in charge of the bar, wine could be had on credit. This was not so when Madame presided.

On the night when Madame was in charge of the bar they went to bed early. The moment Dinel was asleep Hambledon slipped out quietly and spent his last few francs telephoning to the Préfecture de Police to make an appointment with the Chef. Hambledon learned with relief that the police had heard about him from Letord, and that they were prepared to help him in any way necessary.

" You are most courteous," said Hambledon. " I come at once."

But Letord had omitted to tell them that Hambledon looked, at the moment, more like an animated scarecrow than a reputable member of British Intelligence. He was stopped by a young constable immediately he stepped inside.

" Here! What do you want? "

" I have an appointment with Monsieur le Chef."

" I dare say, and when he wants you we come and fetch you, see? Now run away."

Hambledon drew himself up and looked the man straight in the eyes.

" Now," he said incisively, " send someone up to tell him that the messenger from Monsieur Letord of the Sûreté is waiting."

Tramps in France can and do tell the most extraordinary tales to further their own ends, but not as a rule in that tone of effortless command, nor do they strain any nerve trying to obtain entry to police stations. Five minutes later he was sitting in the Chef's room.

" I have, of course, heard of the d'Alroy Circus," said the Chef, when the tale was done, " though I should be very surprised to find that they had established themselves in this district. We all know each other, monsieur, especially persons of position and distinction, and I do not think this large organization is run by labourers and artisans."

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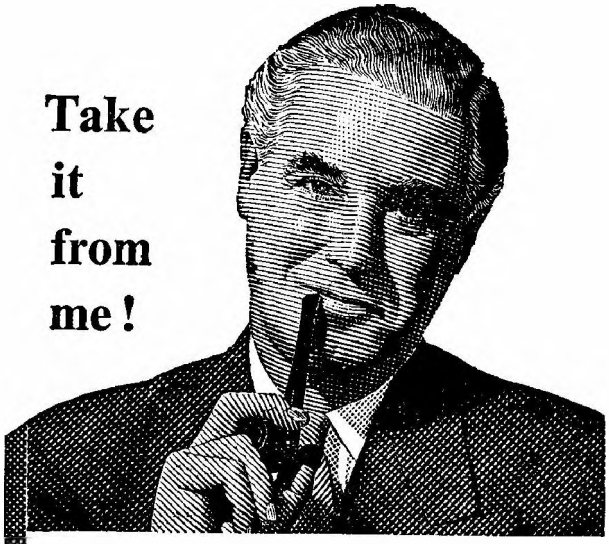

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FLAP B

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"No," said Hambledon, "no. I see your point. If these people are here, their cover must be superb. I am here myself because there are clues leading this way; if I am wrong I go away empty, that is all."

"And in the meantime, how can I help you?"

"If you would allow me to meet your plain-clothes men so that we may recognize each other?"

"That shall be done; I will call them up. Anything else?"

"If I should want to see you again? I cannot be seen strolling in here."

"If monsieur would appear to be a little drunk and have an altercation with one of my uniformed men, he would find himself being conducted to this place. I will give you a card to show in case of emergency." He scribbled a note upon one of his cards.

"Did Monsieur Letord send down any money for me?"

"He arranged a credit, yes. How much would you like?"

"Not too much," laughed Hambledon. "I don't want my friend Dinel to think that I have robbed a bank."

"It might add to your prestige, you know," said the Chief of Police dryly, and counted out notes.

Hambledon made the acquaintance of six or eight men whose faces he memorized with care, after which he was let out by a side door. He went back to the Chien Enchainé and padded silently up to the room he shared with Dinel, who promptly woke up.

Dinel raised himself on one elbow, and the light from a street-lamp outside showed him Hambledon sitting on the edge of his bed counting money. "I have been lucky," he explained. "When I was walking along I found this which someone had dropped."

"Is that indeed the truth?"

Hambledon shrugged his shoulders and Dinel lay back in bed. "I do not quite like this," he said. "Food if we are hungry, yes, but not money, my dear Tictoc. It is a little low, that, to my mind."

"But at Chartres you tried to get away without paying—"

"That was food."

"But this will enable us to pay Madame Alexandre tomorrow."

"It will be very useful," agreed Dinel in a polite voice.

"What else could we do?"

"It is the season of the wine harvest," said Dinel. "We might get a few days' work in the vineyards. I would not mind doing a few days' work for food with wine," he added thoughtfully, and went to sleep again.

"Well, what d'you know about that?" said Hambledon to himself, and followed Dinel's example.

On the following day they endeared themselves to Madame by paying for all they had had since they came to Dijon.

"Magnificent," said Madame, and sniffed audibly.

Later the two companions dropped into a café for a glass of wine. They retired into a quiet corner and sat there watching the people pass by. Presently three men came in together and sat down at a table some distance away. Hambledon's sleepy expression did not

alter, but his heart was singing a happy little song. At last, at last—He had not been wasting his time in Burgundy, for one of them was the tall thin man with a crooked nose, who had called himself Jean Artaux in Paris.

Hambledon listened intently and soon realized that this meeting was for business only; the two men were trying to sell Artaux a wireless set; he was exhibiting reluctance and they were sweetening the transaction by buying him drinks.

As he emptied his glass Artaux looked at his watch. It was plain that he was not intending to stay long. Hambledon refilled Dinel's glass, then uttered a surprised exclamation as an old man passed the window.

"Was that—it can't be! One moment." He rose to his feet. "Excuse me, I thought I knew that man—wait here for me."

"I am quite happy here," said Dinel contentedly.

Hambledon went out, passing behind Artaux's chair.

"It is a splendid Hi-Fi receiver, almost new," said one of them. "Were it not that the case is scratched—"

When Artaux came out a few minutes later, a shabby whiskery figure was looking at cooked food in a shop window. Artaux passed, the figure shook its head sadly and wandered after him.

Halfway down the Rue de la Liberté Hambledon had a stroke of luck. One of the plain-clothes men who had been introduced to him the night before was standing in a doorway. Hambledon, with a cigarette between his fingers, sidled up. "Monsieur, for charity, a match?"

The detective whipped out a lighter. "That tall thin man I was following," said Hambledon, stooping towards the flame, "I want to know where he goes. Thank you, monsieur," he added in a louder voice, and stepped back.

"You're welcome," said the detective, and walked off after Artaux while Hambledon returned to Dinel.

"I thought it was a man I used to know, but I was wrong," said Hambledon. He sighed.

"I was accosted once," Dinel said, filling his glass, "in Lourdes of all places, by a man I had not seen for twelve years. He reminded me that I still owed him two thousand francs. I have never been to Lourdes since."

Much later, when they were making their leisurely way back to the Chien Enchainé, a young man in plain clothes brushed past Hambledon leaving a slip of paper in his pocket. On it was written: *Went by train to Beaune but we lost him outside the station. We do not know him.*

"You were speaking yesterday," said Hambledon, "of getting work in the vineyards."

"Yes, indeed. I made a few inquiries this morning; the *vendange* is beginning already."

"In Beaune?"

"In Beaune, yes. You like Beaune?"

"I like its products," laughed Hambledon.

"Should we, then, move on there? We have, I feel, seen Dijon."

Beaune is a charming town of immense age. Julius Caesar camped there forty years before Christ was born in Bethlehem. It has many wonderful old houses and its churches and museums are full of art treasures. Not for these, however, is this town famous, but as the centre of the culture of those wines known collectively throughout the world as Burgundy.

There are vineyards upon all the sunny open slopes and in every one of them people will be labouring, men and women, young and old and even children. The vines are trained upon wires stretched between posts in thick heavy rows close together; up and down these rows the people move, bent double all through the hours of daylight.

For the first day or so Hambledon thought that the work would kill him. Dinel had done it before and stood up to it better. There was a way to do it, he said, one learned by experience.

The town was full. Dinel and Hambledon slept in a deserted one-roomed cottage. The windows were out and the roof leaked when it rained, but there was a fireplace so they could cook for themselves, and they lay soft upon sacks stuffed with hay in the flickering light of a wood-fire.

Hambledon was so tired on the first two evenings that he almost

forgot why he was there, but on the third day, as they were cutting close to the road, a man came walking past: A tall slim man with colourless hair and skin and oddly wide jaw-bones. Louis Magid, the killer. Ha!

This refreshing sight poured renewed energy into Hambledon; quite suddenly he found himself moving alertly, and he even uttered the bumble-bee-on-a-window-pane noise which passed with him for song. Dinel's eyebrows went up.

" My felicitations," he said. " You have learned how to stoop to this harvest and quite suddenly all is well."

" That is so. You said that I would and I have. Tonight we will go to some café and celebrate, eh? "

" Delightful. And on Saturday we shall be paid."

When they had finished work they went back to the cottage and washed luxuriously in a bucket before the fire. They combed their respective hair, brushed each other's coats and went out together looking positively dignified. They walked along the road which led to the town; on their left the land rose sharply, and near the top of the ridge an ancient stone château looked down from among trees.

" That is a pretty place," said Hambledon. " I do like pepper-pot turrets."

" It is sadly neglected," said Dinel severely. " Those windows have not been cleaned this year and some of them are broken. But it is a nice place, as you say."

" I suppose these vineyards round it belonged to the house."

" No doubt. Now they are very well kept whereas the house is shabby. I assume that they are let or sold."

Near the gate and facing the road was an inn bearing the sign of The Happy Traveller. Dinel stopped and looked at it. " Why should we walk further? "

An hour later, having dined, they were sitting at a table outside, leisurely finishing a bottle of wine. The Happy Traveller had a good deal more custom than one might expect, but Hambledon looked in vain for a face he knew.

Presently a man wandered out with a bottle in one hand and a glass in the other. He was plainly not very steady on his feet. Parties sitting round tables closed up together as he approached, since it was evident that he wanted company. Eventually he arrived at Hambledon's table.

" Don't mind if I sit here, do you? Room for a little one, eh? "

" For the short time we shall be here," said Dinel coldly, " you are welcome."

" Thank you. Have a drink? Oh, you've got some, that's right." He put his glass down on the table and filled it from his bottle. " Not much left, is there? Never mind, can always buy another. Plenty of money. You got plenty of money too? "

" We work for what we need," said Dinel with simple pride. He was, in fact, so puffed up by receiving money which he had honestly earned that he had to tell everyone about it.

" Phoo," said the man, " phoo. Nobody works if they don't have to."

" Drink up and let us go," said Dinel in Hambledon's ear. " I don't like this fellow."

" I'm a very lucky man, very lucky," said the intruder. " Just a bit clever, too, but mainly lucky. When I run out of money I just wait till evening and go for a little walk. Never mind where. Then I come back with some more money."

The man leaned forward across the table, breathing vinously into their faces. "All along of knowing a doctor," he whispered. " You know a doctor ? Yes. Ah, but you don't know the one I know. He's dead but he's still useful, Doctor Petiot. Lots of money—"

" Excuse us," said Dinel, rising. " It is time we retired."

" It is, indeed, getting late," said Hambledon. " We will wish you goodnight, monsieur."

" You run along," said the man in an offended voice. " I'm not coming."

They walked away and left him.

" Not a good type," said Dinel. " A man should carry his wine better than that. What was behind all that talk about money, do you think? "

" It sounded to me as though he were blackmailing somebody, but he was very drunk."

" Blackmail is dangerous," said Dinel.

A few nights later Hambledon and Dinel sat in their hut having supper; that is, they were making coffee and eating slices of dry bread with some of the meat pâté by which Burgundy sets such store.

" You know," said Dinel, eyeing their supper askance, " the thought of that chicken which we had to abandon at Karriotti's keeps recurring to my mind."

" Drive it away," urged Hambledon. " Someone else has eaten that bird long ago."

" No doubt, no doubt. But I still feel that Fate owes us a chicken."

" One of these days Fate will, perhaps, repay."

" She is more likely to do so," said Dinel with sudden energy, " if one of us jogs her elbow."

" Have another slice of pâté."

" Thank you," said Dinel without enthusiasm.

" You are not well," said Hambledon with real concern. " What is the matter? "

" When I was a—when I was a young man and had money, my dear Tictoc, I cultivated my palate—even now when I think of roast chicken my salivary glands awake to a sense of duty. I want chicken."

" Some other day—"

" And I know where there are some."

Hambledon held his peace; there was no arguing with Dinel in an obstinate mood.

They finished the loaf and the pâté and Hambledon produced cigarettes. They smoked in companionable silence until Dinel got up to look out.

" It is a lovely night," he said, " so still, there is not a breath of wind."

Hambledon rose to his feet and shook himself.

" Let us go down to The Happy Traveller and have a little glass of something."

A quarter of an hour later they each held a small glass of cognac. There were several people in the bar and more sitting at the tables outside, but the place was by no means full.

Presently the door opened and two men came in together. One was the man who had been so drunk there before, and the man with him was Louis Magid. Hambledon turned his face away from them.

" That man again! " Dinel said. " I hope that he won't pester us tonight."

" Tonight he has a friend with him," said Hambledon evenly. " And he is no worse than many others we meet who drink a little too much."

" That may be, but he makes my spine creep." Dinel finished his cognac and pushed the glass away. " I shall go back, I think. I am tired. Do not hurry yourself for me."

" I may go for a short walk before I turn in."

Dinel nodded and left.

Hambledon finished his drink and went out but not back to the cottage. He was anxious to see where Magid went, with or without his intemperate companion.

The front of The Happy Traveller was floodlit and so was the car-park at the back. There was a door there by which motoring customers could go out to their cars. Hambledon found himself a quiet nook from which he could watch front and back at once.

Time passed, customers left and the car-park emptied, but there was no sign of Magid and his companion. The innkeeper and his wife came out to close up folding tables, but still no Magid. Windows were closed, doors shut and audibly bolted, the floodlights at front and rear went out suddenly and then the downstairs lights also. The proprietor and his wife had gone to bed, and presently the one upstairs light went out.

" Odd," said Hambledon, " very odd. I suppose there are rooms to let, but why didn't I see another upstairs light go on? "

He slipped out of his retreat and went back to the cottage. He opened the door without noise and stepped into the room. Dinel was sitting by the fire thoughtfully plucking a chicken.

" So you got one," said Hambledon.

Dinel started so violently that he all but dropped the carcass into the fire.

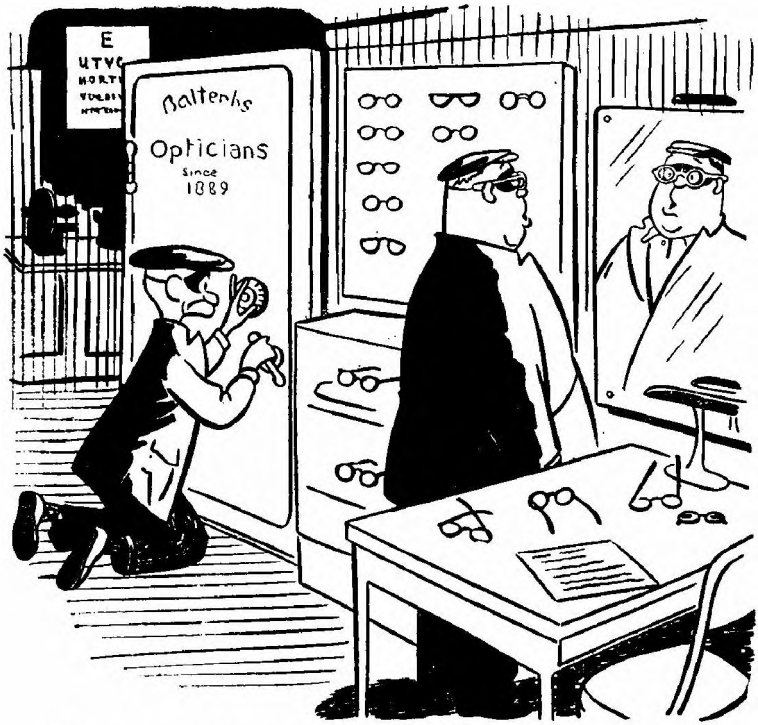
" *Dieu!* How you frightened me! "

"I thought you might be asleep. Why, what's the matter?"

Dinel had struggled to his feet, taken their reserve bottle of wine, and was drinking from it in long gulps.

"I've seen something horrible. You know that man who was so drunk? Yes, well, he's dead."

★ ***The third part of "The Happy Travellers" will appear in next month's Suspense on sale November 27***



"If I ever need glasses, I'll just have to use contact lenses . . ."

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