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THE saint DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

Edited by LESLIE CHARTERIS

The Secret Murderer
by ARNOLD BENNETT

The Owl Hoots Twice
by SAX ROHMER

Dead Dames Don't Dial
by THEODORE STURGEON

Murder in Hollywood
by RAOUL WHITFIELD

Johnny Pringle, Detective
by WALT SHELDON

THE UNESCAPABLE WORD

A NEW SAINT NOVELET BY LESLIE CHARTERIS

SOME OLD, SOME NEW — THE FINEST IN MYSTERY FICTION

KING-SIZE PUBLICATION

I HAVE commented several times in these introductions on how the urge or yen to write a crime story seems to be contagious. I can now add the observation that it appears also to be habit-forming. For example, it was only in last March's issue that Theodore Sturgeon, a doyen of science fiction writers, busted out for the first time in this magazine with a murder story. And now here he is again with another brand-new mystery, DEAD DAMES DON'T DIAL. If this goes on, to continue the alliterative mood, we may get Stuck with Sturgeon. Which would be no Stigma, either.

Our other improbable contributor this month is Arnold Bennett, whom the more ancient of you may remember as one of the most important novelists and playwrights of the first quarter of this century. While not exactly an egghead, he was always considered in the category of what are called Serious Writers, which means that he was sometimes a little dull. But there is no heavy wading in THE SECRET MURDERER, a splendid piece of storytelling with an ironic double twist, as modern as anything that might have been written today.

We have previously featured several very original mysteries by Walt Sheldon staged in Japan. Now he is back in more familiar settings, but no less original in his treatment, with JOHNNY PRINGLE, DETECTIVE. In this new story, I have got to tell you, Johnny Pringle is a kid. I'm not ordinarily much interested in fictional juveniles; but this one is different.

Sax Rohmer should need no introduction, but this month he has to be different too, in THE OWL HOOTS TWICE. No sinister Fu Manchu this time, no eccentric Morris Klaw—just Scotland Yard and a normal but interestingly reticent hero. That's how they fool you.

Anyway, MURDER IN HOLLYWOOD, by Raoul Whitfield, is strictly the tried and true tough Black-Mask style novelet which you have learned to rely on from this veteran of the Golden Age of pulp magazines.

I just had a letter from an old friend and privileged critic who is unhappy about the way I often slip into the editorial "we" in these ramblings. "In your case," he says, "not only is 'I' permissible, but as a Saint fan I'd say it was mandatory." Well, I dunno. But anyhow, *we* didn't write THE UNESCAPABLE WORD. I done it.

Leslie Charteris

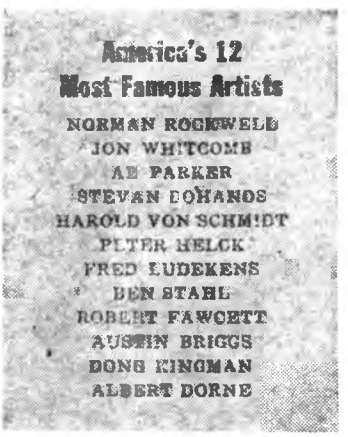
We're Looking For People Who Like To Draw!

by Albert Dorne

FAMOUS MAGAZINE ILLUSTRATOR

DO YOU LIKE TO DRAW? If you do —America's 12 Most Famous Artists are looking for you. We want you to test your art talent!

Too many persons miss a wonderful career in art—simply because they don't think they have talent. But my colleagues and I have helped thousands of people get started. Like these—



Don Smith lives in New Orleans. Three years ago Don knew nothing about art—even doubted he had talent. Today, he is an illustrator with a leading advertising agency in the South—and has a future as big as he wants to make it.

John Busketta is another. He was a pipe-fitter's helper with a big gas company—until he decided to do something about his urge to draw. He still works for the same company—but as an artist in the advertising department. At a big increase in pay!

Don Golemba of Detroit stepped up from railroad worker to the styling department of a major automobile company. Now he helps design new car models!

A salesgirl in West Virginia who liked to draw got a job as an artist, later became advertising manager of the best store in Charleston. A married man with three children—unhappy in a dead-end job—switched to a great new career in art. Now he's one of the happiest men you'll ever meet!

How about you? Wouldn't you like to trade places with these happy artists?

We want to help you find out if you have the talent for a fascinating money-making art career (part time or full time). We'll be glad to send you our remarkably revealing 8-page talent test. Thousands of people formerly paid $1 for this test. But now we'll send it to you *free*—if you sincerely like to draw. No obligation on your part. But act at once. Simply mail the coupon provided below.

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Paul Harvey Hails New Way For Deaf To Hear Clearly Again

NEW YORK CITY (Special)—A sensational new discovery in the miracle science of electronics that helps the hard-of-hearing hear clearly again was hailed by Paul Harvey, famous news commentator, on his American Broadcasting Co. broadcast Sunday night.

Harvey revealed that this new discovery helps even those suffering a severe hearing loss to hear again with unbelievable clearness. It is so revolutionary it makes vacuum-tube hearing aids obsolete. Nothing shows in the ear except a tiny, almost invisible device.

"This new invention changes the lives of the hard-of-hearing overnight," Harvey said. "I've seen it happen to someone I know intimately."

Harvey urged his listeners to find out how this amazing discovery can bring new happiness and success to their loved ones who need better hearing.

To acquaint readers of this magazine with this new way to hear clearly again, a fascinating book with complete facts will be sent free, in a plain wrapper. No cost or obligation. Send your request on a postcard to Electronic Research Director, Dept. B-100, Belton Hearing Aid Co., 1227 Loyola Avenue, Chicago 26, Illinois.

the unescapable word

by . . . Leslie Charteris

The research project was labeled super-secret. But Templar had no patience with secrecy between a murdered man and his killer.

"IN SPITE OF everything I've tried to say," Simon Templar complained once, in a reminiscent vein, "I keep falling over people who insist on thinking of me as a sort of free-lance detective. They've read so many stories about private eyes that they simply can't get the picture of a privateer. And when they do get me hooked into a mystery, they always expect me to solve it in about half an hour, with a couple of shiny clues and a neat speech tying them together, just like the wizards do it in those stories—and it's no use trying to tell 'em that what cracks most cases in real life is ninety-five per cent dull and patient work . . .

"But there have been a few hallowed occasions when I was able to do it just like a magazine writer. And I can think of one that was practically a classic example of the formula. It even has the place where you could stop and say 'Now, dear stupid reader, you have been given all the facts which should enable you to spot the culprit; and if you can't put your finger on him and give a reason which proves you aren't only guessing, you should be hit on the head with the collected

THE SAINT SOLVES A MURDER WITH A CODE EXPERT'S INSIGHT IN A NEW MYSTERY NOVELET AS TIMELY AS NUCLEAR FISSION

works of Conan Doyle.' Incidentally, it's also a completely uncensorable cop story—because no matter how much anyone disapproves of the word, it would have been a hell of a lot tougher to solve without it."

This was not long after one of America's most distinguished law enforcers had stirred up a mild furor in a lull between world crises by stating for publication that in his opinion the time-honored word "cop" was derogatory and should be excised from the vocabulary of all police-respecting citizens.

To Simon, when he stopped at sunset at the neat little adobe motel on Highway 80, on the outskirts of a village with the improbably romantic name of Primrose Pass, mainly because it seemed pointless to load an already long day with another hour's twilight driving when he would have to sleep somewhere in the Arizona desert anyhow and was in no hurry to get anywhere anyway, Harry Tanner had not been instantly identifiable either as a Cop or as a Police Officer, but only as a muscular man with a traitorous bulge in front, stripped to blue jeans and undershirt, who was pushing a mower over a small area of tenderly cherished grass in front of the half-dozen cottages arranged like a miniature hacienda. But in the morning, when Simon stopped by the "office" to beg some ice cubes for his thermos, the same individual was turning over the registration cards from the night before and looked at him with the peculiarly and unmistakably challenging stare of the traditional policeman.

"Anybody ever call you the Saint?" the man asked, with a voice blunt and uncompromising enough to match the stare.

"A few," Simon murmured, neutrally.

The other finished pulling on a khaki shirt, buttoned it, and pinned on a badge which he took from his pants pocket.

"My name's Harry Tanner. I help my wife run this joint, sometimes. The rest of the time, I'm the town marshal. Would you be interested in a murder we just had here?"

"If I'm going to need an alibi," said the Saint gloomily, "I can only hope that either you or your wife stays up all night to watch for any guest who might try to sneak out with the furniture. I don't know how else I could prove that I didn't leave my cottage all night."

Tanner's mouth barely cracked in the perfunctory sketch of a smile.

"I know you didn't do this one. I just thought you might help me solve it."

Simon was so astounded by the novelty of the first sentence that he did not even think of his habitual answer to the second un-

til he was sitting in the marshal's battered pick-up and being driven at exactly the posted 25 miles per hour limit through the business center of Primrose Pass, which extended for three whole blocks.

"No point in cutting loose with a siren and getting ever'body all stirred up, when we wouldn't get there two minutes quicker," Tanner said. "I had enough of that when I was a cop in Cleveland, Ohio. That's where I used to read about you, and I hoped I'd meet you, but you never came our way."

"Did I hear you call yourself a cop?" Simon inquired, with discreet interest.

"Yup. Been a cop all my life, practically. They even made me an MP in the Army. Only I always wanted to get out West, ever since I saw my first cowboy picture. So when I happened to read about this town looking for a trained officer, right after I was discharged, it was just what I wanted . . . But don't let the word give you any ideas."

He spun the wheel and steered the truck around a gas station to a dirt road that intersected the highway, with a certain physical grimness which left the Saint confused and wary all over again.

To get the conversation back on more solid ground, Simon asked: "Who's been murdered?"

"Fellow named Edward Oakridge, out at the Research Station, where we're going."

"People always expect me to know everything. It's very flattering, but hard to live up to. What is this Research Station?"

"It's something run by the Government. They got three scientists working out there—or it *was* three, up till now—and they monkey around with a lot of electrical stuff. Had to put in special power lines to carry all the juice they use. But not even the guards out there know what they're researching. I don't know, either—and my own daughter works there."

Simon instinctively checked the reflex upward movement of an eyebrow, but Tanner did not look at him.

"Is she a scientist or a guard?"

"She types reports for the scientists. But she hardly understands a word of 'em herself. At least, that's all she's allowed to say."

"But don't tell me they hired her for a top secret job like that just because they met her in the local drug store."

"No. Walter Rand — that's Professor Rand, he's the head man on this project—happened to tell me one day that they had too much paper work and he was going to have to send for a secretary. Marjorie had a secretarial job in the FBI office in Cleveland when I pulled up stakes, and she'd stayed there. There wasn't anything for her in a town like this when I came here. But her

mother always hated her being so far away, so I asked Rand if he'd take her if she'd take the job. She liked the idea of being near us again, too, and of course her security clearance was ready made."

"It sounds like a lucky break. With this leaning towards cop-dom that she seems to have inherited from you, she'd probably have ended up a full-fledged G-woman if you hadn't rescued her."

"Well, instead of that, she inherits something from her mother that makes her fall in love with a cop," Tanner said d o u r l y. "Hadn't been here a month before she was going steady with one of the guards out at the Research Station. Young fellow by name of Jock Ingram. You'll meet him. He's the one that found the body."

His heavy face, with the eyes narrowed into the glare from the dusty road, invited neither sympathy nor humorous appreciation. He was a man who had spent so many years giving a professional imitation of a sphinx that the pose had taken root.

The Saint lighted a cigarette.

"This murder is starting to sound like a rather family affair," he remarked. "You said there were three scientists. What about the third?"

"His name is Conrad Soren."

"And they don't have any other assistants?"

"No. Whatever they're experimenting with, I guess it's something they can handle between themselves."

"But there are other guards, besides Ingram."

"Yup. Three of 'em. But only one of 'em is on duty at a time. They each have eight hours on and twenty-four hours off, in turn, so none of 'em gets stuck with the night shift all the time."

"And when was the murder committed?"

"That's one thing we got to find out," the marshal said.

The road, whatever its ultimate destination, still stretched ahead in a straight line to the bare horizon; but Tanner slowed up suddenly and made an abrupt turn to a narrower and even more rutted trail that was marked only by a stake with a small weathered shingle nailed to it on which could barely be read the crude and faded letters that spelled out HOPEWELL RANCH.

In less than a quarter of a mile the ranch came in sight, as they rattled around one of those low deceptive contours which can hide whole townships in an apparently empty plain. The Hopewell Ranch was in no such category of size, in fact it consisted of only two buildings: the long rambling ranch house with an attached garage, and a barn-like structure not far from it. A few palms and cottonwoods and eucalyptus trees lent some of the

atmosphere of an oasis to the shallow pocket where the buildings stood, in contrast to the drab sage and greasewood and sahuaro that eked some desiccated sustenance from the arid wilderness around, but it still had a rather pathetically abandoned and defeated air that was in even sharper contrast with its name.

"Fellow from back East built it and tried to raise a few horses, but mostly it was because he had TB and the climate was supposed to be good for him," Tanner said. "Maybe he came here too late, but he didn't last long. Nobody else wanted the place until somebody from the Government came around shopping for a location for these scientists. Seems this was just what they wanted, perhaps because except the way we come from there's nothing but desert and jackrabbits around for fifty miles or more."

The only visibly new feature of the establishment was a conspicuously shiny wire-mesh fence about nine feet high, which contained the ranch house in the approximate center of what looked to be a square of about two hundred yards on each side, with the barn quite close to one corner where there was a steel-framed gate to which the washboard track they were following led.

Tanner braked the truck with its fenders only inches from the gate; and Simon's ears became aware of a thin high squealing sound which he could not quite associate with any of the diverse mechanical protests emanating from the innards of the aging pick-up. Almost immediately a man in a nondescript gray uniform came out of the barn, waved to the marshal in recognition, and came to open the gate. Another man, similarly uniformed, stood in the doorway that the first man had emerged from and watched.

"You hear that noise?" Tanner asked, and the Saint nodded.

"Yes."

"That's the fence. Anything or anyone comes near it, they don't even have to touch it, but it sets up that whining. Acts like a sort of condenser. Nobody could get close enough to climb over or cut the wire without starting it oscillating. It can't even be switched off when they want to open the gate. And it sounds loudest right inside those old stables. That's where the guards live—the Government made it over into living quarters for 'em. And not more than two of 'em are allowed to be off the Station at the same time: that way, there's always an extra man on call besides the one who's on duty. So even if the man on duty wanted to sneak the gate open, for any reason, he couldn't do it without the other fellow hearing it."

"Unless the electricity were cut off altogether," Simon suggested.

"In that case, an emergency system cuts in and also starts up a siren on top of the main building, so the whole place would be alerted."

Tanner let in the clutch and drove through the gate, and stopped again a few yards inside.

"In other words," said the Saint, "this is the old reliable inside-job type of mystery, with the latest electronic guarantees."

Tanner grunted.

"I guess you can call it that, if you want to."

He shut off the engine and climbed out, and Simon stepped out the other door and strolled around to join him. The guard finished closing the gate and started toward them. As soon as he had taken two steps from it, the high-pitched wailing note that had been quivering remorselessly in the air stopped suddenly.

"Hi, Chief," the guard said.

"This is Frank Loretto," Tanner said. "He's the senior guard." With only the necessary turn of his head, he went on: "You were the stand-by man on Ingram's watch when it happened. That right, Frank?"

"Right, Chief."

Loretto was square-built and square-faced, with wiry black hair liberally flecked with white, a hard-looking man with a soft agreeable voice. He studied the Saint curiously with discreet dark eyes; but Tanner either preferred to ignore the invitation to complete the introduction or was unaware of it.

"Tell me again how it happened, Frank."

"Jock relieved me at seven o'clock. Klein had been on stand-by during my watch; as soon as that let him out, he took off for Tucson to see a dentist—he had a toothache all yesterday. Burney had been sleeping: he got up and had breakfast with me."

"That's Burney," Tanner explained to the Saint, with a jerk of his thumb towards the other guard who still stood in the doorway of the converted stables.

"The Professors got here just after eight, as usual, all together —Dr. Soren and Oakridge, in Rand's car."

"They all three board at the hotel in town—I mean, they did," Tanner amplified. "They only come out here to work."

"Jock let 'em in, and then he set off to make his round," Loretto went on. "That is, all the checks every man is supposed to make when he comes on duty. Burney and I sat around and made some more coffee. About nine o'clock, Marj got here in her car, and I let her in."

"Marjorie starts an hour after the scientists," Tanner told the Saint, "because she usually has to work at least an hour after they quit." He shifted his ponderous direction once again. "Okay, Frank, what then?"

"You'd better get it from Jock,

Chief," Loretto said gently. "He called me on the intercom at nine fifty-two and told me he'd found Oakridge dead and he was staying to see nothing got moved. Then I phoned you. Being his stand-by, I had to stay here on the gate. Besides, I'm a cop, too. . . . But Burney went and had a look."

Tanner glanced again at the man in the stable doorway—he was tall and thin, with a sallow complexion and a long pessimistic face—and hitched up his pants stolidly.

"We'll look for ourselves," he said. "See you later, Frank."

He turned and lumbered on towards the house, and Simon followed him.

Something was beginning to nag the Saint's sensitive perceptions like a tiny splinter, and he had to get it out.

"Does everybody around here have some sort of complex about being a cop?" he asked. "I can't remember when I've heard quite so much self-conscious talk about it."

"Right here and now, there's a reason." Tanner looked at the Saint with another of his probing dead-pan stares. "Most cops would say I was crazy to bring you here. I've heard a lot of people say that you hate cops."

"Only particularly stupid cops, and crooked cops," Simon said, answering what sounded almost like a question. "And I've had to do a few unkind things to fairly good cops, who were just too ambitious about adding my scalp to their trophies. But I don't hate them."

"That's the way I got it," Tanner said. "From a cop named Inspector Fernack, of New York. He was our guest of honor at a Police Association dinner in Cleveland once; and your name came up, I forgot how, in a bull session afterwards. I figured he knew what he was talking about."

"That was nice of John Henry," Simon murmured. "I must try to be kinder to him next time I'm in his balliwick. But I still don't get the connection."

"You will in just a minute," Tanner said.

He opened the front door of the house and went in. They stepped directly into the living-room, without any intervention of a hallway. It was a large room which seemed lofty because no ceiling intruded between the floor and the rough-hewn beams and rafters of the roof. There was a broad picture window on the other side framing a panorama of pale grays and olive green that ended in a low line of corrugated purple hills, and a big smoke-blackened stone fireplace at one end. The solid Spanish-derivative furniture, Navaho rugs on the floor, and copper and Indian pottery ornaments, had obviously been left unchanged since the de-

parture of the ill-starred original owner; and it had been kept as a common room for some of the very different breed of pioneers who had infiltrated the Southwest since the dawn of the Atomic Age.

The Professors, as the guards seemed to have aptly christened them—or, at least, the two who were left—were typical of the New Order, which at that time still seemed disconcertingly untypical of the Old. As befitted the priests of a Science separated by multiple walls of electronic computers from the gropings of the dreamy medieval alchemist, they would have seemed much more at home in a small-town bank than stirring a smelly caldron on some blasted heath. The one who bustled instantly into the foreground, forestalling any possible query as to who was the ranking spokesman, was so executive that it crackled.

"Glad you got here at last, marshal," he said.

The way he uttered the words "at last," with bell-like clarity yet with a total lack of inflection, so that the implied censure was unmistakable and yet if challenged he could unassailably disclaim any such intention, was as much a triumph of technique as the way he turned the compliment of giving Tanner his correct title into a subtle reminder of a class difference between them. He was a short rotund man with rimless glasses and a tight mechanical smile and wispy brown hair stretched thinly over the places where it had stopped growing, whose neat business suit was a final incongruity against the décor of the room and the scenery outside.

"Professor Walter Rand," Tanner said introductorily.

Rand shook hands heartily and vacantly, like a politician.

Tanner continued, pointing at the others in turn with a thick uncourtly forefinger: "Dr. Conrad Soren. My daughter Marjorie. Jock Ingram."

Dr. Soren inclined his head stiffly. His costume was almost as inappropriate as Rand's, in a different direction, consisting of unbleached linen slacks and an exuberantly flowered shirt that would have been more at home on the beach at Waikiki. He had a short nose and a long upper lip and a brush of thick straight wiry hair, all of which might have given him a rather simian aspect if it had not been for his large and extremely intelligent eyes.

Marjorie Tanner was a pretty girl with nice brown hair and nice brown eyes and a nice figure. She was not the type that was likely to launch a thousand ships, or even a thousand feet of motion picture film, but she had a wholesome air of being nice to know and even nice to live with. Jock Ingram was a few years older but well under thirty, a well-knit

young man with crew-cut sandy hair and pleasantly undistinguished features but very earnest eyes, the type that most parents of daughters would be happy to see calling. Already they managed to look like a couple; and they looked at the Saint together in the same politely puzzled way.

The marshal, however, had again conveniently forgotten to complete the other side of the introduction.

"Let's see the body, Jock," he said bluntly.

"Yes, sir."

The young man in uniform headed towards an open arch in the wall opposite the fireplace. It was the end of a corridor that ran lengthways through the house, with doors on each side and another door across the far end. Ingram led the way past two doors on the right and opened the third room.

It faced the same view as the living room, and had obviously once been a bedroom, but it had been stripped of all household furniture. Instead, it held a work bench littered with an assortment of small tools, an engineer's drawing board under the window, a bookcase with rolls of drafting paper and other stationery on the shelves, and the body.

The body lay on the floor near the middle of the room, belly down, the head turned to the right so that the left cheek rested on the bare floor. Of all the workers in that converted Western setting, Edward Oakridge, even in death, looked the least out of place, for he wore a plaid shirt and blue jeans secured by a tooled leather belt, although he had not gone so far as to wear cowboy boots but had his feet in comfortable sneakers. He was a short burly man, and what could be seen of his face had some of the same neanderthal ruggedness as his physique. His head was completely hairless, so that the blood-clotted wound slightly above and behind his right ear could be plainly seen; but even more conspicuous and more gruesome was the screwdriver handle that stuck out at an angle from his powerful neck, directly over the jugular vein.

It was the latter wound which had done the most bleeding, to form a pool on the bare tile floor. Into that pool of ghastly ink the dying man had dipped a finger, and with it he had traced three capital letters close to his face, which spelled a word. And as he gazed down at it, the earliest of the Saint's perplexities was answered.

The word was: COP.

"Now I get it," said the Saint at last. "Why didn't you tell me, Harry?"

"Jock told Loretto and Loretto told me when he phoned," Tanner said. "But that was double hearsay. I hadn't seen it myself."

He squatted to make a closer

examination, and Simon leaned over to confirm it.

"Somebody hit him when he wasn't looking, with something with a sort of cornered edge," Tanner said. "It may have cracked his skull, but it doesn't seem to have crushed it in. The murderer wasn't certain that that killed him either, so he stuck the screwdriver in his throat to make sure."

"There's a soldering iron here on the work bench with what looks like blood on the tip," Ingram said. "The guy could've put it back down there when he picked up the screwdriver."

They went over and looked, without touching.

"But Oakridge still wasn't quite dead," Simon said slowly. "He came to again for a few seconds, before he passed out for keeps. He couldn't even yell, with that thing in his gullet. But he tried to leave a message."

Then all three of them sensed the presence of Professor Rand in the doorway, and turned before he spoke; but it was the Saint who was the objective of his busy bright eyes.

"Are you from the FBI?" he inquired.

"He's assisting me," Tanner pre-empted the reply calmly. "But the FBI have been notified. They're sending a man from Tucson."

"Then wouldn't it be better to leave everything undisturbed till he gets here? After all, this establishment is under the Federal Government—"

"It may sound crazy, Professor, and it likely is, but this is also inside the town limits of Primrose Pass, which were drawn by some optimist who figured it didn't cost anything to think big. I haven't been told anything by the Federal Government which says I shouldn't bother about a murder committed anywhere in my territory."

"I'm only thinking, marshal, that the FBI will have all the latest equipment, and can probably save you a lot of trouble."

"My trouble is what the town pays me for," Tanner said equably. "But don't worry, we won't disturb anything. You didn't disturb anything, did you, Jock?"

"No, sir."

"You didn't have a chance to wipe up that word on the floor, before you called anyone?"

Ingram's straightforward eyes did not waver, but a flush crept into his face.

"I could have, I suppose. I didn't think of it."

"Did anyone else have a chance to mess up anything?"

Ingram hesitated, and Rand said: "Yes, I did."

He was sublimely unabashed by the reactions that simultaneously converged upon him.

"There was a diagram pinned on that board," he said. "I noticed that it included the fullest

details of—of our most recent advances in—in the problems we have been working on. I'm sorry I can't be more specific. This is such a highly classified project that I mustn't even say what it's about, except to someone with special credentials."

"I don't think that matters to us," said the Saint. "So it's the long awaited Death Ray, or a gizzmo that transmutes red tape into blue ribbons. The only point we're concerned with is, it would be of incalculable value to the Enemy."

"Exactly."

"And it's gone," Simon said, glancing at the uncluttered drafting table.

"That's what I was telling you," Rand said testily. "I removed it, and locked it in my safe. Not knowing who might be brought here by an inevitable investigation, it was my duty to keep it out of sight of any unauthorized person. However, it may be pertinent for you to know that it was there."

Tanner's stolid bulk quivered momentarily with what in any less undemonstrative individual would have been taken for the vibration of a chuckle.

"Well," he said, "thanks anyway for giving us the motive." He gazed woodenly at the Saint. "You want to look around here any more?"

"I don't think so," Simon said, after doing exactly that for several seconds, but without shifting from where he stood. "I guess I've seen all I'm going to. I'll leave the magnifying glass and vacuum cleaner work to the Sherlock squad. Now what about this door here?"

"The bathroom," Rand said.

Simon opened the door and looked in. The room had been used for some minor laboratory work, and there were a dozen chemical bottles on the tile-topped counter in which the washbasin was set. There was another door on the opposite side of it.

"I suppose that goes to another former bedroom?"

"Yes. We're using all the rooms. As a matter of fact, I was working in there myself from about eight-fifteen on."

Simon tried the handle.

"It's locked."

"I'm afraid it will have to remain so," Rand said, with a tightening of his thin lips. "Except to the FBI, or someone properly authorized by the Department of Defense. The same applies to the other rooms where we have—er—experimental assemblies. However, if you'll step outside, I'll tell you all that you need to know."

They filed out into the corridor again.

"The door at the end used to be the master bedroom; now it's our main workshop. The room you were just in, as you saw, is

a drafting and general utility room." Rand was leading them briskly back along the passage. "Then the room you were asking about, which communicates through the bathroom. Then this"—Rand opened the door nearest the living room—"used to be the den. We use it as an office, and for some of our paper work. Miss Tanner works here."

It was a completely unremarkable room, to all appearance, except for being somewhat overcrowded by a secretary's desk, typewriter stand, and filing cabinets which had been added to the normal furniture.

"The other doors are just a powder room—storage closets—linen closet, and so on," said Professor Rand, dismissing them with a flick of his hand, and led the way back through the arch into the living room where Soren and the girl were still waiting.

"In fact," Simon observed, "this must be one of the smallest Defense establishments in the country."

"It isn't a factory," Rand said severely. "It's purely a Research Station. And the—er—device we are working on is quite small. But I assure you, its size is in no proportion to its importance. I think I can say that without betraying any official secrets."

From Harry Tanner came the kind of subsonic rumble that might have been emitted by a volcano that was trying not to erupt.

"Official shinplasters," he said obscurely. "What I'd like to know, Professor, is how you expect me to investigate a murder without investigating anything around it."

"What I've been trying to tell you, marshal, is that I don't expect you to. That is no slight, but—"

"But you think I'm just a dumb village cop, eh?"

"I know your record, marshal; but I'm sure you don't claim to have the same facilities here that you had in Cleveland."

"That's right," Simon interposed quietly. "And we probably don't even need them."

All of them looked at him in a puzzled but guarded way, irresistibly drawn by an elusive quality of assurance that emanated from him, but uneasy as to what it might portend for any of them individually. Tanner in particular had a shocked and resentful expression, as if one ally that he had counted on was deserting him at the first shot.

The Saint lighted a cigarette as if he were quite unaware of being saddled with so much responsibility, and went on: "After all, there might be a clue anywhere in the house. Perhaps in the kitchen. I'm sure Professor Rand wouldn't object if we searched the kitchen. But if we aren't looking for anything definite, I'm

damned if I know what we're likely to find. The clue might just as well be a bottle of Escoffier Sauce as an electrode. . . . And the same with the fingerprint routine. There doesn't seem to be any possibility that this wasn't an inside job. Therefore everyone on the Station is theoretically suspect. But so far as I know, everyone on the Station could have a legitimate excuse for having been anywhere or touched anything."

"Except the cops," Soren said.

He had a very deep voice that reverberated disproportionately from his narrow chest, and a meticulous way of articulating every syllable that made him sound rather like a talking robot.

"Beg your pardon, sir," Ingram put in. "The guards are supposed to check all rooms, twice in each watch, at night and on weekends or whenever there's nobody working."

"Okay," said the Saint. "So no fingerprints mean a thing, anywhere, except maybe on the soldering iron or the screwdriver—and you can bet the murderer wiped those."

"Precisely," Rand agreed, but in a somewhat defensive way, as if he wondered what his concurrence might be letting him in for.

Simon took a long drag at his cigarette and half-sat on one corner of a sturdy antique table.

"That brings us," he said, "to the next standard routine: alibis."

There was a brief silence, until it became apparent that he was waiting for answers.

"Klein 'll have the best one," Ingram said. "He left the Station soon after seven, to drive to Tucson."

"So I heard," Tanner confirmed. "And Loretto and Burney sat chewing the fat after you started your round until you found the body and called 'em. So they rule out each other."

"Unless they were in cahoots," Soren said, with the punctilious enunciation that gave such an odd effect to his choice of vocabulary.

Tanner said, with studied reasonableness: "All these guards must've had the hell of a checkup by the FBI you're so sold on, before they qualified for this job. Sure, any security system can slip up. But for it to slip twice on four men is mighty long odds for me to swallow. I'd rather see if ever'body else has an alibi first. Like you gentlemen, for instance."

Professor Rand made a little sound that was almost a polite snort.

"Really, marshal, if you think the guards were so carefully checked, you can imagine the kind of clearance we must have had, to be actually working on this project."

"I remember a scientist named Klaus Fuchs," Simon murmured, "who went over to the Russians with stuff that's supposed to have

cut down our lead in atomic weapons by five years. Why shouldn't you give the marshal your alibis—if you have any?"

There was another, more searching pause.

"I suppose I had better come clean," Soren boomed at last. "I have none. Oakridge and I were working in the main workshop. He went to the drafting room to check some specifications on a final drawing, and I went on with what I was doing. But of course, you have only my word for it."

"When I came in," Marjorie Tanner said, speaking for the first time in a clear impersonal voice, "I went straight to the office and went on with some typing that I hadn't finished yesterday. But I couldn't *prove* that I stayed there."

"I heard the typewriter," said Rand. "But I couldn't swear that it never stopped. For that matter, I couldn't prove what I was doing myself. While Soren and Oakridge went to the main workshop, I had something to do in the other room where I told you I was. But I haven't any witness."

"And anyone," said the Saint, "could have gone up or down that corridor, from any room to another, without being seen and probably without being heard."

Tanner threw Simon a grateful glance of restored confidence.

"There you are," he said. "It sets up four possible suspects, including my own daughter."

"You needn't be quite so generous, marshal," Rand said, with scarcely veiled sarcasm. "It'd be hard to make anyone believe that Miss Tanner committed murder in the horrible way that we've seen. And there's still only one of us who can be called a cop."

Tanner turned heavily to the young man in uniform.

"Well, Jock," he said, "if you don't have an alibi, you're no worse off than anybody else."

"I don't," Ingram said steadily. "After I left the gate, I made the round of the fence. I didn't hurry—there wasn't any reason to. Then I went most of the way around again the way I'd just come—that's a trick we pull sometimes. Then I came up to the house and checked the emergency light plant and batteries. Then I went in the kitchen and got a coke—"

"We keep soft drinks and stuff to make sandwiches for lunch in the icebox," Marjorie Tanner said, telling it to the Saint.

"Then I came in and talked to Marj for a few minutes. That was about nine-thirty. I stayed five or ten minutes—"

"It was near fifteen," she said.

"Then I walked out around the house, and I happened to look in a window and saw Mr. Oakridge on the floor, and I came back in and found he was dead."

"So for ten or fifteen minutes, anyway, you two got alibis for each other," the marshal said.

Simon shook his head.

"Don't let's kid ourselves, Harry," he said, with genuine regret. "You know as well as I do that that doesn't mean a thing. No autopsy is going to fix the time of death as accurately as that."

"I am not sore," Soren said, with measured resonance. "We all know how it is between Miss Tanner and this guard. We can only sympathize with Mr. Tanner's natural instinct to give his prospective in-law every legal break."

"But not with trying to cover up for him," Rand said, his eyes snapping hard and bright behind his glasses. "I've tried to be patient, but I'm finding it more difficult all the time to understand your reluctance to concentrate on the most obvious suspect. I'll tell you frankly that from the moment we saw the circumstances of the murder, Dr. Soren and I have felt it our duty to drop everything else and keep this young man under our personal surveillance. If you're so anxious to take a hand in this investigation, I suggest that your first and most useful contribution would be to take him into custody."

"If I'm investigating, I'll do it my own way," Tanner growled. "I saw that word COP, too, but I didn't see any proof Oakridge wrote it. Somebody else could of dipped Oakridge's finger in the blood and done it."

It was a weak try, and they all knew it. Rand simply clamped his lips tighter, in an expression of pitying impatience. Soren condescended to consider it more respectfully, his lustrous eyes peering up intently from under lowered brows, but he finally said: "I would not have tried to frame him like that. A clever killer would feel safer if everyone could be suspected. Why narrow it down to only one—who might have been the one to have a perfect alibi?"

"That's pretty good criminal thinking," said the Saint, with the detached appreciation of a connoisseur. "I'll take it a little further, for what it's worth. I think the murderer's instinct would be to get away as quickly as possible—at least to be somewhere else when the body was found, even if he didn't have an alibi—"

"Then how can anyone have this stupid idea that Jock did it," said the girl quickly, "when he *found* the body?"

"There are exceptions," Soren said, not unkindly. "He is one person who might have thought he could get away with it."

"With what? Writing something on the floor that would only point to himself?"

For a moment everything sagged into the vertiginous hiatus which can yawn before the most brilliant minds in the presence of

a feminine lunge towards total confusion.

Simon took a final pull at his cigarette, and chuckled. He put it down, and said: "Let's stay on the rails. With that screwdriver still in the wound, Oakridge would have taken a few minutes to bleed as much as we saw externally. Of course, the murderer might have had the nerve to stand there and wait till there was enough blood to write with; anything's possible. But let's try the things that are easier to believe first. Assuming that Oakridge wrote that word, is there anything else he could have been trying to say, besides accusing Ingram?"

Tanner swung around towards Soren.

"Your first name is Conrad, isn't it?" he said. "He could just as well have been starting to try to write that, and his hand slipped—"

"No," said the Saint scrupulously. "It's as definite a P as I ever saw. It could never by any stretch of imagination have set out to be an N."

"But it might perhaps have been an unfinished R," Soren retorted. "And if the C was really a crude L, the finger would be on Loretto."

"No again," said the Saint judicially. "The C is round and positive—almost a complete circle. It couldn't be anything else."

The marshal turned to Rand almost pleadingly.

"Could those letters stand for anything to do with your work?" he asked. "I mean, if they were chemical symbols, or something mathematical . . ."

Rand stared at him without any softening, but visibly forced himself to give the suggestion a conscientious mental review. Then he glanced at Soren, who responded only with a slight blank shrug.

"No," Rand said, turning back to Tanner more stonily than ever. "I'm sorry — absolutely nothing."

Tanner took a compulsive lumbering step in one direction, then in another, not going anywhere, but rather in helpless stubborn rebellion against the inexorable walls of logic that were crowding him closer on every side except one. But his resistance was beginning to have some of the tired hopelessness of the last minutes of a beleaguered bull.

Ingram's and the girl's glances met, in a simultaneous reaching towards eath other of complete unison.

Ingram looked up again and said: "Thanks for trying to give me a fair break, sir. But neither of us want you to get yourself in dutch for me. Go ahead and arrest me, if you think you ought to. I'll prove I didn't do it, somehow."

The girl reached up and took his hand as he stood beside her,

and said: "I know he will, Dad."

Simon slid another cigarette into his mouth and struck a match. Inwardly he was approaching the same state of baffled frustration as the marshal, even if his purely intuitive inability to visualize Jock Ingram as this kind of murderer was perhaps even greater; but no one could have guessed it from his cool and nerveless exterior. That aura of unperturbed relaxation was the only authority he had to keep everyone answering his questions, but he intended to exploit it to the last second—even though he still seemed to be groping in unalleviated darkness.

"Just one last little detail before we call the paddy wagon," he intruded. "I said there couldn't be any argument that Oakridge wrote the letters C-O-P. But from the position of his hand, and the fresh blood on his finger—it looked to me as if he'd dipped it again after he wrote the P—I'd say there were good grounds to believe that he was trying to add something more when he passed out. Now, I don't imagine he wanted to say that everything was copacetic, or put in a dying plug for the Copacabana. But can any of you think of anything else beginning with the same letters that has anything to do with this project here? Have you done any experimenting in a place that could be called a copse?"

"No," Rand said promptly.

But in spite of themselves, they could all be seen gazing into space and trying out tentative syllables.

"Cope," said the girl. "Copious. . . ."

The words died forlornly, inevitably.

"Copper," Ingram said; and immediately r e d d e n e d. "I mean—"

"The metal is used in most electrical work, of course," Soren said kindly. "It has no unusual significance in what we are doing."

"Copra?" Tanner said.

"A coconut product, I believe," Rand said witheringly, "which, without asking for any official clearance, I can say that we do not use."

"Copy," Soren said.

There was a moment's breathless hush.

Marjorie Tanner's hand tightened on Ingram's fingers, and her father's baggy eyes began to light up; even Rand pursed his small mouth hesitantly.

"But after all," Soren said, with sadness in his sonorous bass, "if poor Oakridge was worried about a copy, even of a vital diagram—we have all thought of that motive. He was not telling us anything."

The room sighed as a multiple of separately inaudible deflations.

"Copulation, anyone?" flipped the Saint.

He should have known better than that. The silence this time was deafening.

"I really think we're entitled to know the name of your new assistant marshal," Rand said at last, with the smoothness of a wrapped package of razor blades; and Simon decided that the marshal had carried him long enough.

"The name is Templar," he said. "More often called the Saint."

He had seen all the conceivable reactions to that announcement so often that they were seldom even amusing any more. This time he only hoped they would be disposed of quickly.

"Did you know this, marshal?" Rand was the one who finally cracked the new stillness, in a voice of shaky incredulity.

"Yes, Professor," Tanner said.

"And knowing it, you brought him here and let him pretend to be your assistant?"

"Yes, sir."

"The FBI will be very interested."

"I don't think it'll surprise 'em much," Tanner said, with the first real satisfaction he had permitted himself. "When I was calling Tucson, I thought to mention that I'd got a fellow named Simon Templar registered at the motel. It turned out the FBI man I was talking to had had something to do with clearing Mr. Templar for some special work during the war. He said if I could get the Saint to come out here with me it wouldn't hurt anything, at least."

Simon let an embryo smoke-ring disintegrate at his lips as he paid Tanner the salute of a half-surprised, half-laughing flicker of his brows, and hitched himself with the flowing movement of a gymnast off the table where he had been perched.

"And for the record," he said, to put all the cards down together, "I don't think Jock Ingram did it either."

"Indeed." Rand had been shaken, but flint sparked behind his prim scholarly eyeglasses. "According to your analysis, then, you must think it was either Dr. Soren or myself, because that's what you've reduced the list of suspects to."

"Maybe I do," said the Saint cheerfully. "It wouldn't make any difference if it were reduced to only one suspect. In detective stories I've noticed they like to confuse you with a lot of possibilities, but in real life it isn't any easier if you only have two alternatives, I mean to pick the right one honestly, for sure, and so that you can make it stick—not taking a fifty-fifty chance on a guess, or flipping a coin."

He made a slight arresting gesture with his cigarette to forestall the interruptions he could see formulating.

"Let's reconstruct the crime. It

doesn't seem difficult. Oakridge went into that room and caught somebody doing something he shouldn't. According to Professor Rand, there was a very important drawing on the board. Very likely someone was photographing it. Not copying"—he gave Soren a nod of acknowledgement—"because that would be easier for this Someone to explain away. It had to be so blatant that Someone knew that his goose was cooked the minute Oakridge got out of the room to tell his story. So Someone picked up the nearest blunt instrument, a soldering iron, and hit Oakridge on the head from behind as he started for the door.

The position of the wound on his skill confirms that. Then, wanting to make sure that if Oakridge wasn't dead he would die quickly, and without being able to talk, and not wanting to do it by hammering away at his skull until he smashed a hole in it—which, if you'll take my word for it, is a messy and uncertain business for a guy who isn't a very muscular and physical type —he shoved a screwdriver in through his jugular vein and his throat."

Simon angled a hand towards Ingram, who stood rather stiffly but unfalteringly at a kind of attention beside Marjorie Tanner's chair, but with her fingers still firmly locked in his.

"Now I'll admit that of all of us here, Jock is one of the most likely to beat a man's head to a pulp, if he had enough provocation. But that is exactly how Oakridge *wasn't* killed. And if any of you can visualize this lad in the rest of the part, the essential part, as the master spy who infiltrates a top secret project and photographs the priceless plans—even if, with the best will in the world, you believe he could tell a priceless plan from the blueprint for a washing machine—"

"Please, may I butt in?" Soren said, with his sepulchral precision. "All your deductions are dandy, Mr. Templar, but they are all tinted by your own rather melodramatic personality. You could be passing up a much less exciting reconstruction and motive."

"Such as?"

"I don't like to bring this up," Soren said, looking around with his deeply earnest eyes, "and I would not, except in these circumstances. But most of us know that there were other complications about poor Oakridge. The popular picture of a scientist shows him as a kind of disembodied dedicated priest. Sometimes this is true. But there are exceptions. Oakridge was one. His glands were fully as active as his brains. Not to mince words, he was a wolf. He gave Miss Tanner quite a bit of trouble."

With her cheeks coloring under the glances that could not

help converging on her, the girl said: "Oh, yes, but—"

"But at least once, your fiancé was annoyed enough to warn him."

"I told him to keep his hands off her," Ingram blurted straightly, "or he and I would have to talk it over somewhere outside. But I wouldn't have jumped him from behind like that, like Mr. Templar says it happened."

"I don't think there was any need to bring that up," Rand interposed fussily. "It's true that Oakridge was quite difficult in some ways. Not the scientific type that we're used to in this country. I was strongly opposed to having him on this project at all, as a Russian; but his qualifications were so outstanding—"

"Hey!" Tanner almost bellowed, suddenly. "You say he was a *Russian?"*

Professor Rand blinked at him irritably.

"Yes; but the FBI gave him a full clearance. He escaped into Poland from the Russian army that was invading it from one side while Hitler was driving in from the other—that was before Stalin suddenly changed allies. From there he got away to England and then to America. He worked on the Manhattan Project, which developed the A-bomb. His name was Dmitri Okoloff. He took the name of Edward Oakridge when he became a citizen—from Oak Ridge, Tennessee, where he'd worked."

"You squawk about me bringing the Saint here," Tanner grumbled ominously, "and you had him working—a Russian!"

"Shut up, Harry," said the Saint, with unexpected sharpness. "This is the slob who got murdered. *Not a suspect.* Get it?"

He had drawn all eyes again, but they held him like nails, uncertain and exasperated in diverse ways, but nearly all ready to crucify him. And he felt astonishingly unconcerned.

"Had Oakridge learned English very well?" he asked, with his gaze on Rand like a blue flame.

"Quite well," Rand said. "Without as much—er—vernacular as Dr. Soren. But he was always trying. Except when he got excited. Then he'd blow up and start screaming in Russian."

"Listen," said the Saint tensely. "Oakridge had been conked on the head, and a screwdriver rammed through his throat. He's knocked out with a severe concussion, and he's also bleeding to death. But the human body is awful tough—and from what I saw of him, Okoloff-Oakridge had an extra tough one. His brain recovered from the hit on the head before he bled to death through his gullet. But he knew he was gone, and he couldn't yell, and he wanted to say who did it. He was only an adopted American, but he was going to write

the name of a traitor, if it was the last thing he did."

"You don't have to be so theatrical," Professor Rand said edgily. "We've all seen what he wrote."

"But you couldn't read it," said the Saint. "It never occurred to anyone—including me—until this moment, that he was writing in Russian. Waking up from a crack on the head, dazed and dizzy and knowing that he was dying, he blew up. As you said, Professor. And in that foggy state, he reverted to the writing that was most natural to him. And if this were one of those detective stories, I guess this is where everybody would be asked to take a deep breath and try to beat the Great Sleuth to the sniff."

For enough seconds to be counted, there were no takers. Then Harry Tanner said, almost as if he had been accepting a dare: "Does COP mean something else in Russian?"

"If it does, I wouldn't know," said the Saint. "About all I know besides *tovarisch* and *vodka* is some of the alphabet. But anyone who's ever seen a newsreel or a news photo from behind the Iron Curtain must have noticed a word that's bound to crop up in a lot of their posters, which looks like РУССКИ, and if they had an inquiring mind they could have figured out that it stood for *Russky*. You see, in Russian letters, C is S, and P is R, and if Oakridge had been starting to write, in his way, S-O-R-E-N—"

Tanner and Ingram began to move at the same time, in an oddly synchronized and yet spontaneous way.

Simon Templar eased the ash from his cigarette.

"I could make quite a phony production," he said, "about who felt obliged to suggest the word COPY, and then had to knock it down, and who was so very intellectual about the kind of false clue that a clever murderer wouldn't leave, and who had to try to drag in the angle of Jock and Marj's romance and Oakridge's wolfiness, and so on; but I will feel rather let down if they don't find a Minox camera, or some prototype which the Russians must have invented first, on Dr. Soren."

Soren stood his ground until Tanner and Ingram put their hands on him, and then he started to thunder something incoherent about the Constitution.

They found the camera on him, anyhow.

IT WAS THE kind of evening in Harry Tanner's home that Simon Templar heartily detested, even though Mrs. Tanner, the inevitable plump motherly woman, cooked an excellent dinner.

Marjorie Tanner was very eager and pretty, and held hands a great deal of the time with Jock Ingram, who was very stalwart

and modest and sincere. They would make a dream couple like the ideal Boy Scout and Girl Guide, and he could only wish every blessing on them.

Harry Tanner, bovinely exhilarated and unbent, said: "Anybody tells me you aren't a detective, I'll punch him right in the nose."

"A dying man writes out the name of his murderer, and when someone tells us the alphabet he wrote in I'm just lucky enough to be able to read it," said the Saint sourly. "That should qualify me as an Honorary Cop anywhere."

Not to anyone would he ever admit that far more fragile threads of discernment had started to bring his sights to bear on Dr. Soren before ever an alphabetical coincidence gave him the ammunition to fire a decisive challenge. If any such legend got around, he might never be able to shake off the stigma of being a natural detective.

Among the Contributors to Next Month's SAINT *will be*

LESLIE CHARTERIS,
with "The Unfortunate Financier"

BEN HECHT,
with "A Sort of a Story"

WILLIAM MACHARG,
with "The Vanishing Man"

HAL ELLSON,
with "The Jaws of Darkness"

VAN WYCK MASON,
with "The Plum-Colored Corpse"

OCTAVUS ROY COHEN,
with "The Bridal-Night Murder"

dead dames don't dial

by . . . Theodore Sturgeon

Arresting a killer for a minor breach of the law may backfire disastrously. But with Lieutenant Howell it was a pathway to glory.

IT WOUND UP with a murder, with someone being careless with a knife, and with a wonderful brawl. But it began very quietly, like:

"Get over to Maggie Athenson's," said Brophy.

Howell's eyes opened slowly. "Why?" he yawned. "Do you mean to say she's demanding police protection again?"

"She is," grunted the detective lieutenant. "Get your shoes on. Or do you plan to sneak up on somebody?"

"I thought the chief said the Athenson babe had sent out her last false alarm?"

"Maybe she has. She's pulled three blanks so far, and cost the city a pile of dough. This time she gets nothing whether she likes it or not."

"I thought you just told me to go over there," said Howell. He was small, thin, slow. That is, he seemed slow. There were times—but this wasn't one of them.

"I did, and that's what I mean by nothing."

Stumbling on a murder in the presence of a witness may be the opposite of reassuring, particularly if you're a police officer and the gentleman in question has blood on his hands and no liking for you at all. But Theodore Sturgeon knows precisely how to unravel the most unnerving of police enigmas—perhaps because he is also a top-echelon science fiction writer with an eye for the startling. We predict you'll like this brand new, most exciting yarn.

Howell reached for his other shoe. "Thanks."

"We told her no more municipal bodyguards," Brophy expanded. "We'll send a man anyway. But she won't know it. We'll send a man just in case she really has something to be scared of. Just because we got a homicide law."

"Yeah, but why me?"

"It seems that Sister Maggie has been having business dealings with a character named Cassidy."

"*Careful* Cassidy?" Howell's pale blue eyes popped.

Brophy nodded.

"Well," said Howell. "My boy Cassidy. You're a pal, Brophy. A nice false alarm to trip me into a false arrest. Cassidy trapped an assistant D.A. into a false arrest one time—remember? And he's back chasing ambulances. What do you want me to do—drag Cassidy in here yelling his head off and then find myself changing tires on cruise cars? Who hates me up front, anyway?"

Brophy laughed. "Get on it, Howell. You know Cassidy and you know how he operates. You've never pinned anything on him. But twice already you've stopped him before he could start. Maybe this time you can put him away. It's worth the effort."

"Careful Cassidy," growled Howell. "The guy with fifty-two aces up his sleeve and a clean, clean nose. All right, Brophy. What's the pitch?"

Brophy glanced at the desk. "You know where Maggie lives. That big apartment hotel, the—uh—Cheshire. There's a drugstore across the street, and you can see the entrance easily from there. The harness bull's watching the side and the back of the Cheshire. All you have to do is see if anyone suspicious goes in or comes out."

"An assignment," scowled Howell. "Why couldn't it be a bar? Lend me a cigarette."

With a slightly larger than life-size expression of patience, Brophy passed him a cigarette. "Why do I put up with you, Howell?"

Howell lounged to the door. "Because," he said over his shoulder, "I'm the best man you've got."

"That," said Brophy to the opposite wall, after the small man had gone, "is the truth."

It was a fairly large drugstore, with entrances on two streets. The open bronze gateways of the apartment hotel across the street were flooded with light and easy to watch from a small display window and from any of the long line of telephone booths.

Howell stopped outside, and the street light threw his shadow—shaped like a question mark—on the corner of the building.

An unkind lieutenant once said that Howell's stance was a picture of his state of mind.

There was no one on the street, and no one in the entrance of the apartment hotel. Howell yawned and strolled into the store, and down toward the booths. A clerk kept pace with him on the other side of the counter.

Howell wondered how a man could actually bustle at one point three miles per hour. When they reached the tobacco section the clerk asked if he could help him, sir?

"Yes," said Howell. "Lend me a match."

The match was delivered, while the clerk suspended himself in a sort of racing crouch, awaiting further orders. "Anything else, sir?"

Howell eyed him dourly. "Have you got anything that'll make a fellow relax?"

"Oh, yes, sir!" said the clerk eagerly, springing toward the pharmaceutical department.

"Take some," said Howell.

He ambled back to the phones. One booth was occupied. Howell stopped short—a small change of pace indeed for him—when he saw who was in it. The man came out as Howell watched. He was a big man, wide-faced, smooth; pressed and pleated and expensive. He wore tan, all tan—light tan, dark tan.

"Very harmonious," said Howell. "Whatcha doing, Mr. Cassidy—making a date?"

"Howell," said the other, without enthusiasm, "what brings you out with your shoes on? Been to a formal?"

"To tell you the truth," said Howell, "I was trying to make up my mind over a smorgasbord tray and blew a fuse, so I came in here to get something for my head. I was wondering, to repeat myself, whether you were making a date just now."

"Since you ask me," said Cassidy, "I was trying to. The line's busy."

"Since I asked you, you won't try to make the date. Right?"

"Right," said Careful Cassidy.

"Good," said Howell, and yawned again. "Then I can go home."

"Beneath your tattered, patched pair of heads," said Cassidy, "beats a noble brain. How much do you know about how much, Howell? I mean by that, just where the hell is any of my business your business?"

"What do I know? Let's see," said Howell. "You are very careful about the way you order your food, dress yourself, talk, and work your lousy swindles. You are carrying a gun under your left armpit, which means that you are also carrying a permit for it, which means that I would make a serious mistake if I searched you. You are in this neighborhood because Maggie

Athenson, who is loaded with loot, lives in that minaret over the way."

"Good old Maggie," said Cassidy.

"You were about to commit—ah—no mistakes," continued Howell. "Particularly the mistake of hiring anyone to do important business for you. Since Maggie Athenson changed her insurance of a hundred-odd G's in favor of her estate instead of a beneficiary, and since a business deal with you is backed up by a codicil in her will—"

Now, Howell had not known this at all, but he knew it now—not from any expression on Careful Cassidy's broad bland face, but by its utter absence. It was a long audacious shot in the dark, but he knew his man, and he knew that Maggie Athenson was a natural for just that kind of a fall.

Still looking at the middle distance over Cassidy's wide tailored shoulder, he continued, "And since said deal has mysteriously fallen apart we would be very interested if Maggie Athenson suddenly dropped dead of, say, Twonk's disease."

"What's Twonk's disease?"

"A falling of the armpits," said Howell. "I only know two more things. If you had been able to keep that date tonight—which you obviously won't—you would have a reservation on something which travels high and fast, probably south. Now you're going to have to cancel it."

"What's the other thing?"

"My feet hurt."

Cassidy shook his head admiringly. "You know a great deal for a man who couldn't possibly have any evidence of any kind of any of the things you suggest—except maybe your feet hurting."

"I don't need evidence to know these things," Howell pointed out. "It's a feeling I have—feet and all. Oh sure, I'd need evidence if I was going to prove anything. But since nothing is going to happen now, nothing needs proving. So let's all go home and go to bed."

"A splendid idea. Good night to you, Howell."

"*After,*" finished Howell, "I have made a phone call."

"Oh?"

"Yup. The same one you were making."

"Howell: you're not detaining me?" asked Cassidy hopefully.

"I am not. I remember what happened to that assistant D. A. who played like that. I'm merely asking you to stand by while I have a word with our apprehensive friend Maggie Athenson. We'll both sleep better if we know she's well and happy."

"Good," said Cassidy. "It hurts me to have you suspicious."

"I don't doubt it," Howell said. "Lend me a dime."

Cassidy thumbed a dime out

of his tan topcoat. Howell stepped into the end booth, brushing past Cassidy as he did so. Cassidy was packing a gun, all right.

Howell dialed Maggie Athenton's number. There was a pause, and then the phone burped a busy signal at him.

"Busy," Howell called.

"Still?" asked Cassidy. "Good old Maggie. Chatty as ever. She's probably asking for a boy in blue to camp outside her door."

"She's already done that." Howell reinserted the dime. This time he got a ringing signal.

And got it. And got it.

"Now she doesn't answer," said Howell, coming out of the booth.

"Maybe she's gone to bed."

"Uh-uh. The phone was busy fifteen seconds before I rang. No one's going to move from his phone into his bed in fifteen seconds."

He stood in thought for a moment, his weak-looking eyes on Cassidy's pink face. There was nothing there.

"Look!" Cassidy pointed through the display window.

Howell whirled. A man dived out of the lighted doorway opposite, skidded, pounded up the pavement to a yellow convertible which, in seconds, came to life. It roared and then spun into the street, tail down, tires burning. It breezed through a red light at the first intersection, turned right and disappeared.

Cassidy turned from the sight and began to speak, but the detective was gone. Cassidy turned, swung back, and then saw Howell outside in the middle of the street, shading his eyes against the street-light, as he peered after the convertible. He came back into the drugstore.

"Who was it?" asked Cassidy.

"Later," grunted Howell, and piled into a booth. He left the door open, dialed. "Brophy," he said. Then, "Brophy? Trace a yellow Caddy convertible, Illinois license YD-Sixty-ninety-seven, heading north from here. What for? Passing a red light, of course. I'll prefer the charge. Hold him until I can get there to do it. What? Oh—*that*. I'm on it now. All right."

"I didn't know you could move that fast," said Cassidy.

"Speed is my secret weapon," said Howell. "I smell homicide. Let's go see Maggie, who won't answer her phone so suddenly."

"Must I? I have things to do."

"No, you *must* not. But come on. This can't have anything to do with you.

"Why, sure." Howell thought he was going to smile, but he did not.

They crossed the street and entered the apartment hotel. A man with beetling brows and a heavy jaw stood behind the desk. Howell went to him. The man raised his eyes with reluctance from the book he was reading,

and moaned with a rising inflection, a sound which probably meant, "Yes?"

"Did you see someone run out of here a minute ago?"

The man moaned with a falling inflection. Howell ignored these tonal subtleties and took the accompanying nod for an answer.

"Who was it?"

"A man."

Howell opened and closed his mouth, and behind him Cassidy chuckled. Howell showed his badge. "Where was he going?"

"Out," said the man.

"Can't get a word in edgewise here," said Howell to Cassidy. To the clerk, "Do you know the guy?"

The man shook his head and went back to his book. Howell went on tiptoe, which made him wince, and peered over the counter at the book. It was "Little Women" by Louisa May Alcott.

"Come on, Cassidy," he said disgustedly.

They went to the automatic elevator, and Howell pushed the button marked 12.

"Fourteenth," said Cassidy.

"Thanks," said Howell, pushing the "stop" button and then 14.

"Thanks for what?"

"I wondered if you knew just where Maggie's apartment was but I didn't want to ask you."

"You're real downy," said Cassidy with admiration. "But you could have asked me. I know old Maggie well. And—I have nothing to hide."

"Yes," said Howell, which might have meant anything.

The elevator stopped. Howell let Cassidy lead the way down the hall to an apartment door. He checked Cassidy's hand as it approached the bell-push and, extracting his fountain pen, speared the button with the butt end of it.

"I like your gloves," he said. "Chamois. Same stuff they use to take fingermarks off brasswork."

Cassidy chuckled again.

There was no answer. Howell rang again, and again. He turned suddenly to face Cassidy, but the big man's face was blank and untroubled. Howell squinted at the lock, and took out a bunch of keys, from which he selected three.

"This won't work," he said. "It never does." He tried the first. It didn't. "I'd hate to pull that lacework bulldog downstairs away from his reading. He chatters so." He tried the second key. The door opened.

There was a low, wide living room and a bedroom to the left. In the corner of the living room was a desk. On it were a cradled telephone, a great deal of fresh blood, and what appeared to be a tumble of sticky, red-brown hair.

Howell's breath hissed out. Cassidy said, "Poor old Maggie."

Maggie was not old. However, she would certainly get no older than she was now. She was slumped in the chair, her head on the desk. She had been a handsome woman in her late thirties. Looking down on what had happened to her head, Howell reflected grimly that no one could say she didn't have brains.

"Cassidy."

"Mm?"

"Lend me your handkerchief."

Cassidy raised his eyebrows but handed over the handkerchief. Howell took it in one hand and his own in the other, and gently lifted the phone off its cradle. With his pen he dialed Brophy.

Holding the phone by its two ends, he spoke into it.

"Maggie was right after all. Yeah. Thirty-eight or larger. Yeah. Back of the neck. Not a chance. Him? He has an alibi. Me. Hold him? I can't hold him. Yeah—I'll stick around until you get here with the squad. Right." He hung up.

Cassidy said, "Right under your nose. Hell, Howell, that's a shame."

Howell squinted vaguely at him. "I know. Your little heart bleeds for me. You know what I think you are? I think you're a material witness."

"No, you don't. Look it up in your book. The co-discoverer of the body is not a material witness when the discoverer is a police officer."

Howell sighed. "Lend me a cigarette."

Smiling slightly, Cassidy took out a new deck of smokes. On his keyring was a small knife. He slid the blade out and meticulously slit the bottom end of the cigarette package, knocked it against the back of his hand, and passed it to Howell. The detective looked at it.

"So careful," Howell said. He took a cigarette.

"Well," said Cassidy, "I'll be running along. Tough luck, Howell," he added, nodding toward what was left of Maggie Athenson.

Howell went to the door with him, seeing to it that Cassidy did not touch the knob. "Don't leave town, Cassidy," he said.

Cassidy did smile, this time. He said nothing, and left. Howell opened and closed his hands, looked at them, sighed, and sat down to wait for the squad. And to think.

Two hours later they were back at headquarters. Howell's stocking feet were on the windowsill. Brophy strode up and down the room, mauling the case report by swatting it angrily against the desk every time he passed it.

"No prints — only Maggie Athenson's" said Brophy for the

fifteenth time. "No gun. No yellow Caddy. And just like you said—a will in Cassidy's favor, and papers showing a business deal that Cassidy could have engineered to fail, putting Maggie in debt for almost what the insurance was worth. No proof of anything anywhere. It all points to Cassidy, and you—"

"I'm his alibi," said Howell sleepily. "I know. I'm absolutely certain that he was on his way to knock her off when I met him in the store. Damn it, she was talking on the phone. He got the busy signal and then I did. She'd only been dead a few minutes when we got there, which means she must've been killed while I was talking to Cassidy in the store. The only thing I can think of is that someone just rubbed her out to do Cassidy a favor."

"He hired the killer."

"He did not. Not Careful Cassidy. Listen, Brophy, I know that apple. I know how he thinks. If he was going to do a job like that—and he was—he'd do it himself. I'll tell you one other thing I'm sure of. He's leaving town. The money's going to Halpern—his lawyer, you know—the guy who handled that false-arrest case for him. Unless I'm dead wrong, Cassidy will disappear, his lawyer will collect for him, Cassidy will get the money and we'll never be able to trace him."

"Didn't you say he carries a rod? Let's get a look at it."

"Are you kidding? He'd like nothing better. Believe me, any time Cassidy holds out a chance like that, it's bait. It could be bluff, but it's probably bait. If we move in on him and search him, we'll find him clean as a whistle. No, Brophy—you can't handle Cassidy like anyone else. He doesn't move until he's sure of his loopholes.

"If we do the obvious thing with him, just once, the least that will happen is that he'll get off without a scratch and leave a couple of much-advertised damn fools behind him. The worst that can happen is as bad as you can dream up. Anyhow, I don't want to play with him. It's what he wants. Somewhere there's a chance to close on him and get rid of him for good. Somewhere . . ."

"It says in the books that every murderer makes at least one mistake," said Brophy, sententiously.

Howell snorted. "Not Careful Cassidy. He figures every least little angle. He does everything like that. Lend me a cigarette."

Brophy sighed and passed over his tattered pack. Howell took it absently, looked at it. Suddenly his eyes went round and he sat bolt upright. Brophy stared aghast at this completely unusual phenomenon—Howell with his back straight.

Howell threw the cigarettes on the floor, shoved his feet into his shoes, and without waiting to lace them, galloped out of the room.

"Hey! Come back here—" Brophy stopped, helplessly, and listened to the slithering pound of Howell's feet as it diminished down the short flight of steel-bound wooden steps. "Either that guy gets real bright or he makes sense," he muttered. "Never both."

Brophy picked up the cigarettes, lit one, and sat down to wait . . .

Howell burst into the drug-store and skated to a stop down the smooth floor. The clerk faced him across the counter. "Yes, sir," he said briskly.

In spite of himself Howell glanced at the clock. It was four a.m.

"Do you stand at attention when you sleep?" he asked. "No one should be that wide awake at this time of the morning. Listen—remember when I was in here before?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

"Did you notice that big man in brown I was talking to?"

"Yes, sir. He came in just a minute before you did. He seemed to be in a hurry. He went straight to the phone booth."

Howell grunted. He fumbled in his pockets. "Lend me a dime. While you're about it, lend me *two* dimes."

"But, sir, I can't afford to—"

"You're the guy always wants to do something for someone! Come on," snapped Howell, extending his hand.

"Very well," said the clerk stiffly. "But this comes out of my own pocket."

"All right, all right. It has your heart's blood on it. Gimme."

Howell took the coins and ran to a booth. The clerk watched wall-eyed while he dialed a number, listened, put the receiver down on the shelf, and, leaving it there, stepped into the next booth. There he put in the second dime, dialed, listened again, put this receiver down too, uttered a wordless shout and ran out.

The clerk waited until his lower jaw stopped swinging, shut his mouth with an effort, and went to the booths. He hung up the two phones. Each returned a dime. He stood looking out into the night with slightly glazed eyes, his lips set in tight lines.

A few minutes later, Howell strode into the lobby of the Cheshire House. The brutal-looking character stood where he had been before, his eyes on his book.

"You," said Howell.

The man turned his face up and followed it reluctantly with his eyes. "M-m-m?"

"That big man who was with

me before. Did you ever see him before?"

The man nodded.

"Tonight?"

The man shook his head.

Howell hesitated, thinking rapidly. The man took the opportunity to go back to his book.

"Hey," said Howell suddenly.

The man started at the crackle of his voice, stamped his foot and said, "Goodness gracious, can't a fellow get a moment's *peace*? What is it now?"

"Well, smash my tea-tray," said Howell. "I only wanted to ask you if that big man could have gone out of here without your seeing him."

"Of course he could. Don't I have enough to do without watching every single human *soul* who goes in and out of here every *minute*? How can I answer the telephone and make out cards and hand out keys and write down morning calls and answer silly stupid questions and watch everyone who comes and goes too? What do you think I *am*?"

Howell stepped back a pace from this tirade. "We won't go into that," he said. He turned away, paused, said, "Try *The Bobbsey Twins at the Circus* next. It'll kill you," and raced out.

In the corridor of a lush apartment house uptown, Howell stopped and regarded the wide unpaneled slab of a door. Soundproofed, he thought. He sighed, and pressed the buzzer. Nothing happened immediately. He waited patiently, not ringing again. Finally the door opened a crack.

"Who is it?"

"Howell."

"Ah," said Careful Cassidy. "I half expected you. Come in."

"Thanks," said Howell.

Cassidy closed and locked the door behind him. "Drink?" he asked.

"Nope." Howell, holding his breath, lounged through the foyer and instead of continuing into the living room, turned sharply left into a bedroom. As he expected, there was a packed suitcase in the middle of the floor and another one open on the bed. Drawers and a large clothes-press were open.

Howell made no comment, though Cassidy was obviously waiting for one. The detective silently and forlornly slumped into a chair.

Cassidy said, easily, "Mind if I go ahead with my packing?"

"Gosh no," said Howell. "Don't let me stop you."

Cassidy smiled at that, and went to the open suitcase. "What's on your mind? Did you get the guy with the Cadillac?"

"Nope. I was wondering if you had a lead, Cassidy. Any lead. You knew the woman."

"I'd like to help," said Cassidy with his mouth.

"She left you a pile of dough,

Why should someone do you a favor like that?"

"It's fate, Howell. Why do some people win sweepstakes?"

"Brophy would like to see you, Cassidy."

"I'd like to see Brophy, too. A nice guy. But I have to catch a five-thirty plane."

He turned from the bed and went to get some shirts from a drawer. When he turned back there was a .38 Smith and Wesson in Howell's slack hand. Cassidy put the shirts in the suitcase with exquisite care.

"Howell," he said in a soft, almost affectionate tone, "you wouldn't play it like that, would you?"

Howell looked across and up at the big man, then at the gun in his hand. "What's the matter, Cassidy? Jumpy? This thing doesn't work. I just wanted to look at it."

Calmly he broke the gun, shook out the cartridges, and tossed them over onto the bed. He raised the gun, still broken, and sighted through the breech end of the barrel at a lamp.

"Can't figure it out," he said idly, and put the gun down on the end-table. "Lend me a cigarette, Cassidy."

"Some right there on the end-table," said Cassidy. "Help yourself."

"I don't see 'em."

"I could've sworn I left a full pack there. Here—I have more." From one of the bureau drawers he withdrew a carton, got a pack from it. Out came his keys, and the little sharp knife. Carefully he slit the pack, knocked it on the back of his hand, and tossed it to the detective. "You can keep 'em."

"I will. Thanks. Now let's go down and see Brophy," said Howell.

Cassidy regarded him thoughtfully. "You're kidding."

"No, I'm not. You're under arrest."

"What for?"

"Let's say for breaking the law."

"That's childish, Howell. Don't ask for that kind of trouble. I specialize in it."

"I'll take my chances. If you are that sure of yourself you'll come along. Call your lawyer first if you want to."

Cassidy looked at him and then at the suitcases. "You tempt me," he said sincerely. "But I've got a plane to catch. I won't call you, Howell. Better forget it. But it was a nice try."

Howell moved his shoulders deeper into the chair cushions. "You're under arrest," he said again. "You'll come with me, and if you resist you'll take the consequences."

He half closed his eyes—and under the lids saw Cassidy's gaze flick to the revolver on the table and then to a large box of bath talc in the open suitcase.

"I'm taking that plane," said Cassidy.

Howell and his chair immediately pitched forward. The detective pulled in his head like a turtle, and his round shoulders struck the floor as he got his feet on the seat of the chair. As he rolled forward and felt his spine on the floor, he snapped his body and legs straight. The chair catapulted, bottom side first, over the bed and into Cassidy's chest.

Howell completed his forward roll, tucking up tight until his feet were under him again, and dove into the same trajectory as the chair had taken. He struck Cassidy just as the big man had fought clear of the chair, and they all crashed to the floor together.

Howell's left hand found the angle between Cassidy's neck and shoulder. He sank his thumb agonizingly behind the collarbone while with his right hand he cupped Cassidy's chin and slammed the big man's head against the floor.

Cassidy roared like a wounded bear and brushed Howell off with one sweep of a thick arm. Howell did not resist, but let himself roll and checked himself squatting on the tips of his toes, with his arms wide and his hands lightly on the carpet on each side, ready, catlike, to leap in any direction including up.

Cassidy leaped on him, aiming a murderous kick. Howell went down like a high-speed photograph of a Moslem at prayer, and came up under the kick with his hand on Cassidy's ankle. Holding it, he stood up.

Cassidy's momentum carried him around in a beautiful half-gainor and the big man landed resoundingly on the back of his head. Howell let go and the huge body collapsed and lay twitching. Breathing too hard to swallow, Howell went around Cassidy to the bed and fell on the powder-box. He twitched off the cover, dug his hands into the talc. The gun was in there, all right—a .38 automatic. As his fingers closed on it Cassidy hit him from below and behind.

Howell flicked his wrist and sent the gun flying across the room. Cassidy's arms closed around his thighs. He flung himself recklessly sidewise and smashed the powder-box into Cassidy's face.

Cassidy uttered a terrifying, retching gasp as he inhaled a large lungful of the powder, released Howell's legs and began clawing at his face as he reared back on his knees.

Howell stood up. Cassidy's head came just to the level of Howell's hollow chest, just a little lower than the ideal place for a punching bag. Howell took very careful aim, hauled off and landed an in-line, steam-driven powerhouse punch that

collapsed the big man like a balloon.

Hauling the heavy hulk next to the bed, he sat it up, pulled the hands together behind it, and handcuffed them after passing the cuff chain around the leg of the bed. Then he went to the phone.

HALPERN, the lawyer, had sharp eyes, profile, teeth and trouser-creases. He sat next to Cassidy in the night-court, fussing soothingly over his blackly furious client, Across the aisle Howell lounged and Brophy jittered.

The judge fined a frightened-looking man twelve dollars for throwing a bottle at his wife, after assuring him that his bad aim had saved him a lot of money, and called up the next case. Halpern leaped to his feet.

"Your Honor, I submit that my client has been falsely arrested on vague and negligible charges. I demand that he be immediately released, that the case be thoroughly investigated, that the offending officers be disciplined, and that the municipal government give him restitution for the battery, indignity, and anguish which he has suffered."

"Who is the arresting officer?"

Howell climbed wearily to his feet. From his pocket he extracted a pack of cigarettes. "These yours?" he asked Cassidy.

He handed them to Halpern. Halpern and Cassidy huddled over them for a moment, whispering. Finally Cassidy gave an affirmative grunt.

"Opened by you?" pursued Howell.

Cassidy said, "I always open 'em that way. So what?"

Howell took the pack and slouched with it to the bench. "If your honor will read the small print on the side of the package . . ."

The judge looked strangely at Howell, took the pack, adjusted his bifocals and squinted at the cigarettes. ". . . manufacturer of the cigarettes herein contained . . . complied with all the requirements of law . . . every person cautioned not to use either this package for cigarettes again or the stamp thereon again, nor to remove the contents of this package without destroying said stamp under the penalties provided by law in such cases."

"That was ground for the initial arrest, Your Honor," said Howell. "Since I did not know the penalties referred to, I relied on my own judgment to bring this man into court so that the court could determine the treatment of such a case. You will notice that the package is slit open at the bottom, and the stamp is untouched."

"Trivial!" screamed Halpern. "This is a civil complaint, not a criminal one. I ob—"

"I'm not finished," said Howell mildly.

"Proceed," the judge said to him.

"Mr. Cassidy resisted my arrest," understated Howell, "and in the course of doing so unearthed this—" and from his pocket he took a bulky object wrapped in his handkerchief and put it on the bench—"this thirty-eight automatic. I submit this as direct evidence to my charge of the murder of Miss Maggie Athenson.

"You will find that a ballistics test of this gun will check with the bullet which killed Miss Athenson; that the gun is registered in the name of Mr. Cassidy; and that a skin test of Mr. Cassidy's hands will reveal that he has fired a weapon within the past eight hours. I shall present further evidence when I have had an opportunity to write up a full report."

A paling Halpern turned to a dough-faced Cassidy and slowly raised his hands, palm upwards, in one long, eloquent shrug.

Back at headquarters, Howell said: "Brophy—lend me a cigarette."

Brophy handed over the pack, resignedly. "What was with the telephone gimmick?" he asked.

"One of those simple little things no one ever bothers to tell you," grunted Howell when he had his cigarette going. "Cassidy had a very shrewd idea that a dick would be around, but out of sight. He'd goaded Maggie into asking protection before and he knew that when it was refused a man would be around anyway. Maybe he even knew it would be me. He always did have fun playing with me.

"What he probably did was to force Maggie at gunpoint to ask for the protection. When she hung up he killed her, went straight across to the drugstore, staying out of sight of that panty-waist at the hotel desk, and dialed her number. So the phone rang and rang and rang.

"When I came into the store he left the booth, *leaving the receiver off the hook,* and conned me into calling the same number. He very neatly shunted me into another booth when I called her. Since the phone was already ringing, I got a busy signal instead of a ring, and assumed she was on the line.

"It works—I tried it on my home phone. Then when I went back to dial her again, Cassidy just reached back into the other booth and hung up that phone. This time I got a ringing signal that nobody answered."

"I'm damned," breathed Brophy. "But—how did you ever shake him loose from the gun?"

"That," said Howell, and shuddered. "I had to play that just so. I had him on a charge—that cigarette-stamp thing. It was flimsy as hell, but it was a legal

angle he hadn't figured on. If I could get him to headquarters I could get a skin-test."

"But how did you know you'd find the gun?"

"Oh, the gun had to show! I broke mine, and then told him he was under arrest. He had the murder gun, and he was certainly going to take it with him when he lammed, so he could get rid of it. Once my rod was out of the picture, he had to figure on using his if it came to using one at all. Only thing was, I had to play it so that he'd locate the gun for me but wouldn't get a chance to use it. Otherwise where's your skin test?"

Brophy groaned. "Too close. You're out of your mind, Howell."

"Not me," grinned Howell. "I can go home now and sleep easy without worrying about guys who like to slap false arrest charges on hard-working bulls."

The phone rang. Brophy picked it up. He grunted twice, laughed briefly and said, "Okay. I'll tell him." He cradled the phone and looked up into Howell's face with an indescribable expression.

"That," he said, "was the desk. They just brought in the guy in the yellow Caddy. He's an insurance man. Accident insurance. He moved into the Cheshire yesterday afternoon. He listens in to the police wavelengths and gives his clients on-the-spot service in accidents."

Brophy chuckled. "He used to work for the city. He holds a Police Emergency card and can run through any red light when he's on a case. He used to be an assistant D. A. and was broken on a false arrest charge and for five years now he's been wanting to do it to someone else. Who do you suppose he's going to sue now, and for what?"

Howell said, mournfully, "My feet hurt."

string of pearls

by . . . Robert Bloch

The Ranee's pearls shone with a thirty-grand luster. How could Sweet William have known they were executing a *danse macabre?*

JERRY GIBSON was sitting at the bar when she came in. He turned to stare at her. Five minutes later he was still staring.

"Exquisite, isn't she?" said Sweet William. "So tall, so slender. She carries herself like a sword sheathed in white silk."

Sweet William talked like that when he was a little high, and Jerry was used to it. Besides, what he said was true. She was a luxurious hunk of fluff, with black hair and eyes to match, and the kind of figure that made you want to whistle, except that your throat went dry when you looked at her.

Only that wasn't what made Jerry stare. He was looking at her throat, and what was around it.

It wasn't exactly a necklace and it wasn't a pendant, because it was drawn up tightly—just a string of perfectly matched pearls.

But such pearls! Ten of them, almost the size of marbles. They shone brightly under the light,

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Even the sternest conceivable code of ethics must assume that Justice occasionally goes to sleep, or adjusts her blindfold crudely. But Robert Bloch seems determined to stay on guard. Indeed, we can hardly imagine an evildoer who would care to have Mr. Bloch for an executioner. The distinguished author of THE SCARF *is too genuine an artist to mar an entertainment with the slightest hint of moralizing. But as this exciting mystery so chillingly attests, he can make crime's remunerative aspects seem as unappealing as a yawning coffin.*

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and so did Jerry's eyes. He did a little quick appraisal job. Say five banners apiece, at least, if they were perfect—and genuine. Nobody could touch them without breaking the string up, so the best he could get might be three for each. But three times ten still added up to thirty—thirty thousand dollars.

And she was wearing other stuff, too: an emerald ring and a fancy gold bracelet with smaller emeralds set in it. No use figuring on them, though. Emeralds were out of style, and you just had to take whatever a fence would cough up for them.

But there was probably more stuff where this came from. Maybe Sweet William would know.

Sweet William knew, all right. He sat down at the bar next to Jerry and nodded. "Just got in yesterday," he murmured. "The Ranee."

"The what?"

"Ranee, old boy. Female of the species. Male title, Rajah. Only in this case there is no Rajah. Deceased. Suicide, last year—Rajah of Gwolapur. You must have read about it."

Jerry shook his head. How could he have read about it? They didn't print that kind of news in the *Racing Form*. But trust an operator like Sweet William to be up on such stuff. That was his specialty—moving in on rich widows, and rich women who wished they were widows.

They watched the Ranee of Gwolapur as she settled herself at a table. It was quite an interesting setup, because she had a lot of help. Two little characters in turbans were doing a brother act for her—pulling out the chair, taking the menu from the waiter and holding it so that she could look it over without unladylike haste.

"Her servants, huh?" Jerry asked.

Sweet William nodded. "Loaded," he said. And then, as his eyes narrowed, "Stacked, too. This might be interesting. I wonder if the oriental taste includes poetry?"

"I saw her first," Jerry said. "I got a right."

"The pearls?"

"What else?"

Sweet William put his head down and talked softly, so the bartender wouldn't hear. "Child's play," he said. "Crude, too. This calls for the delicate touch, old boy. *Finesse.*"

Jerry scowled. "You got a one-track mind. You want to *finesse* everything in skirts. Me, I'll settle for the loot."

"You misunderstand. I'm thinking of the same thing. But we differ on ways and means."

"I'll handle the ways and means," Jerry told him. "I saw her first, remember? I'm gonna case this job good, find out if she keeps the stuff up in her

room or puts it in the safe. Then—"

Sweet William dug his fingers into Jerry's arm and the two of them dummied up until the bartender passed down the line. Then he shook his head again.

"It would never do," he said. "Not here, old boy. Too plushy. There'd be a proper row. Suggestions in order? Deal me in. You know how I function. The subtle approach. I'll get the gumdrops for you. May take a bit longer, but no fuss. Clean. And we'll cut the cake two ways."

Jerry thought it over. Sweet William was right. Pulling off a caper in a big resort hotel was enough to make you sweat. With the fix in and the gambling wide open, the management kept its own stable of hoods. And they were on the lookout for loners like Jerry Gibson. They didn't like any funny business because it knocked their good name. So even if he got the pearls his way, he'd be certain to have the hoods on his tail as well as lots of law.

"Rough show, old boy," Sweet William said, like he was reading his mind.

Jerry bit his lip. It added up. Ten to one, the doll kept her ice stashed in the safe anyway, and he'd never get it there. He'd have to jump her or those flunkeys she kept around. Plenty rough, all right. But Sweet William would just move in and take over, without any trouble. He could do it, too; Jerry had seen him operate before. A real smoothie.

Jerry swallowed the rest of his drink. "All right," he said. "You got yourself a deal."

Sweet William started to smile, then stopped. Jerry saw that he was looking over at the table again.

"Perhaps not," Sweet William said. "We have company for dinner."

It was true. The Ranee wasn't alone any more. A tall, gray-haired man had just joined her. He was sitting across the table, smiling and talking, and from the way she smiled and talked back it looked as if neither of them worried much about using the same toothbrush.

In a minute the Ranee said something and the two flunkeys bowed and went away.

Jerry decided to do the same thing. He and Sweet William walked outside together.

"How dumb can you get?" Jerry asked. "It's crazy to figure a queen like that floating around without a jack in the pack. We'll have to do it my way after all."

"Cool's the word, old boy. Let me check on the gentleman first. Tomorrow morning, right off. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have an engagement."

Jerry let him go. He knew what Sweet William meant by an engagement. He needed another

fix. That was Sweet William's little problem—he was on the stuff. Once he'd told Jerry that if it wasn't for the fixes he'd be sitting pretty in Hollywood right now. And Jerry believed him. Sweet William wasn't a liar—just a hophead blackmail artist who lived off women. Jerry could trust him.

And he would, until tomorrow.

Meanwhile, there might be some action at the tables.

There was, too. Jerry had a good night and he went to bed happy. Funny thing, he kept dreaming about the Ranee. Not about the pearls, but about the dame herself. In the dream she wasn't even wearing pearls.

It was a good dream, and when Jerry woke up he found himself envying Sweet William. Or the gray-haired gent who had already moved in.

He got up early, before lunch, and was just going to phone Sweet William's room when the character knocked on the door. He was all togged out in gray flannels and he looked great.

"Good morning, merry sunshine," he said.

"What's so good about it?" Jerry wanted to know. "You been checking up on the Ranee's boyfriend, is that it?"

Sweet William nodded. "Precisely," he said. "No trouble at all. Sylvan Lemo. Formerly of Athens. Shipping interests. Here on a sabbatical, as it were. As nearly as I can determine, he spent part of it in the Ranee's suite last night."

"So what's so good about that you should hold up an applause-card?"

"Farewell appearance, old boy. The gentleman checked out at midnight. Bag and baggage. In fact, he did a bunk."

"Bunk?"

"Didn't pay his bill."

"Hey!" Jerry stood up. "You think he maybe got to her first? Maybe it was a phoney name, and he had the same idea—"

Sweet William put his hand on Jerry's shoulder. "He didn't get the pearls, if that's what's worrying you. She's still wearing them this morning."

"How do you know?"

Sweet William grinned like a skunk eating bumblebees "I saw them when we had breakfast together."

"Brother! You're not handing me a line—"

"Quite the contrary. She is the recipient. I happened to bump into her in the lobby and strike up an acquaintance. By the way, she speaks English beautifully. Does everything beautifully." Sweet William backed towards the door.

"Hey, where you going?"

"I've a luncheon engagement with the Ranee."

"You sure move fast."

"That's the specialty of the house."

"What you want me to do?"

"Nothing, old boy. Absolutely nothing." Sweet William was serious now. "You understand the situation. From now on I don't know you. We don't speak to one another, or call one another."

"But—"

"I'll see to it that you get a progress report. And it won't take long. Trust me. This is the best way."

Jerry nodded.

But when Sweet William left, he went over and sailed a pillow across the room. Hell of a note. He was going to have to sweat it out alone while Sweet William had all the kicks. Did he understand the situation, like Sweet William said? Damned right he did—meaning, Sweet William couldn't afford to let a babe like this Ranee think he knew a ratty-faced little scrut like Jerry. It might queer the act.

A beautiful doll like the Ranee didn't have anything to do with ratty-faced little scruts, or even people who associated with them. In her book, he stunk.

"All right," Jerry told himself. "All right. Take it easy."

Or rather, sit tight, and let Sweet William take it easy. And when he took it, they'd cut up the loot and then there'd be plenty of moola. Enough moola so that Jerry could go out and buy himself a doll—a tall, ritzy-looking doll with black hair like the Ranee who would think him the playboy type. Or at least, she'd pretend she thought so, as long as the moola held out.

But damn it—

Jerry got hold of himself and went down to the bar. Two drinks later he was ready for the track. Going out he saw Sweet William coming in, steering the Ranee by the arm. She wasn't wearing the pearls now, but the two stooges were right behind her.

Jerry stared, but nobody stared back. Sweet William didn't even notice him. He was busy talking to the Ranee, and she was looking up at him and smiling and showing her teeth, and they were almost as good as the pearls. Jerry wondered what it would be like to feel those teeth digging into a guys shoulder and—

The hell with it. He went out to the track.

He stayed in the bar out there after the last beetle crawled in, and met a couple of dealers he knew from K.C. They went out to eat and ended up in a joint on the highway. Highway was right: Jerry was plenty high when they finally poured him into the hotel along about two a.m.

He flopped right on the bed without shedding his threads, and sort of passed out. But he dreamed about the Ranee, and

her teeth and her eyes and her white arms reaching—

Jerry woke up at noon and it was rugged. A shower helped. He went downstairs, hoping to bump into Sweet William, but no dice.

By the time he finished eating it was too late to go out to the track, and he didn't feel like it anyway. He went into the bar and sobered up on beer.

It must have been almost five when somebody tapped him on the arm, and it was Sweet William. He didn't sit down.

"Only have a minute," he said. "Meeting the dear girl for dinner, you know."

"How's it going?"

"Splendidly, old boy. Couldn't be better. She's crackers over me, absolutely. Last night—"

Jerry didn't want to hear about last night.

"What about the deal?" he asked.

Sweet William wasn't even listening to him. "Would you believe it, she's on the stuff, too. The genuine. *Yen shee gow.* Smokes a pipe. You've never had a bang until you've tried the pure quill. Of course, the orientals were always great ones for opium. How she manages to maintain her supply I don't know, but I'll find out tonight."

"Is that all you're going to find out?" Jerry couldn't help sounding off.

"Of course not. I've been trying to get to you all day, but I couldn't shake off Her Highness. And those two attendants of hers watch me like narks. Bit of a problem, getting her alone. When she's gone they keep their eyes open, let me tell you."

"Bodyguards, huh?"

"In a manner of speaking. But don't worry—I'll get rid of them tonight."

"You got plans?"

"Don't underestimate me, dear boy. Certainly I have plans. The time is ripe for a bit of a rendezvous in her suite. She'll see to it we're alone, I'm sure. Then we'll pad down a bit, with a pipe or two for company. The pipe sets her off; she's a proper caution, then. And so am I."

Sweet William smiled reminiscently, then sobered. "But tonight I'll indulge in a bit of duplicity. I won't really hit the stuff. When she's out, I'll take up a collection."

"Are you sure the pearls will be there?"

"I'll make sure. Usually she keeps them in the safe—you were right about that. But they'll be around her neck tonight, until I remove them. By the way, there happen to be eleven of them, not ten. You miscounted, old boy. But I forgive you since it's in our favor."

Jerry frowned. "Okay, then what?"

"Then we travel. In your car, naturally. We throw them off

the scent. Nothing could be simpler. I'll check out now. You check out before midnight. Drive around to the parking lot of the Golden Wheel. Look for me about two at the latest. I'll have a cab drop my luggage in the lobby checkroom and you can pick it up. No sense chancing someone seeing the baggage going into your car. Right?"

"Right."

Jerry wanted to say more, but Sweet William was gone. And now there was nothing to do but wait. Wait and sweat.

He waited and he sweated through supper. Then he went out and took a walk around. No sense drinking—not if he was going to drive tonight. They'd have to at least clear the state line by morning before holing up in a motel.

He walked around until eleven or so, then went back to the hotel and checked out. He got the car and took it over to the parking lot and sat there. Just sat there, waiting and sweating.

Waiting and sweating was bad enough, but thinking was worse. Funny thing, he wasn't thinking about what might go wrong with the deal. Sweet William could swing it all right, and there was no sense in getting antsy over something he couldn't help either way.

What bothered him was thinking about the Ranee. The Ranee and Sweet William together, alone up in her suite. He wondered what they were doing and then he knew what they were doing and that was the worst part of it.

So he tried thinking about something else. He tried wondering what went with a dame like that. Husband committed suicide last year—was that the story? Guy must be nuts, killing himself when he had a dame like that.

Maybe she hit the pipe too hard, though. Maybe she was too much for him to handle. Maybe that's why she went around now, alone, moving from Miami to Vegas to Reno to Colorado Springs—the Big Circuit—picking up guys and getting her kicks on the way. Funny she hadn't been taken before. Asking for it, really. Unless those two stooges of hers protected her.

If that was the way it worked, then perhaps Sweet William would run into trouble. But no, no use figuring like that. Got to trust Sweet William. He'd get the pearls.

Wait and sweat.

Jerry glanced at his watch. Holy hellsmoke, two-thirty! And where was the joker?

He tried to hold it down, tried to bury it in his mind, but it kept popping up in other places—his stomach, for instance. His stomach began to jump up and down. At three o'clock he was ready to flip.

Maybe the two little guys, those servants, were knife artists. Sweet William might be up there with a shiv in his back. You couldn't trust foreigners anyhow. He'd wait another half hour, and then—

And then it was three-thirty, and no Sweet William. So what could he do? He couldn't barge up to the Ranee's suite and knock on the door. But maybe he'd better go back to the hotel and check.

So he went back, and he checked.

The clerk on the desk was very polite. Yes, Mr. Henderson had left, about ten o'clock.

It was funny to think of Sweet William as "Mr. Henderson," but the rest wasn't so funny. Because while the clerk was explaining that no, Mr. Henderson hadn't left a message, somebody bumped into Jerry at the desk.

He looked around and there was one of the little guys—one of the Ranee's servants.

"You wish news of Mr. Henderson, sir?" he asked.

Jerry could hardly understand him, but he understood enough to nod and listen close.

"It is as the clark says. Your friend goes away, in his car."

"His car?"

"I know. I assist him with his bags."

Jerry nodded again. There was nothing else to say to the little character. He went away, and Jerry walked over to the lounge and sat down.

Sweet William was gone. Sweet William the joker, the guy who was so sure he'd get the pearls. Well, that's exactly what he'd done—and how easy it had been! Set Jerry up to wait for him, then skip out with a good four or five hours' start.

Almost six hours now, and no telling which direction he'd taken off in. There'd be no way of catching up with him. It was a clean getaway. So clean the Ranee probably didn't even know about it yet; the little guy in the turban didn't sound upset. Hell, the trick was so slick Sweet William even had him carry out his bags!

Jerry had to hand it to the joker. He wished he *could* hand him something, right now. Playing the Ranee for a mark was one thing—but playing him, too!

But there wasn't a damned thing he could do about it. Not a damned thing to do, now. Except to get his own bags, check in again, and try to figure out what could be done tomorrow.

All at once Jerry was very bushed. He needed a drink, and remembered the pint in his bag.

So he went up to the clerk, got himself a room again, let the bellboy haul in his stuff, and then he was set. The pint helped. He sat on the bed and drank it straight, drank it fast. Every time he felt like cursing Sweet Wil-

liam he shoved the old bottle into his mouth. It was almost light when he fell back across the bed and passed out.

It was almost dark when he woke up again. No hangover, but then he'd slept the clock around.

Jerry got up, shaved, dressed, and went downstairs. He was hungry, but the rage in his stomach kept him from eating. A drink would be better. Damn it, there must be something he could do to copper his bets. He'd counted on those pearls. He'd counted on a lot of things, including that lousy, double-crossing—

He was just walking into the bar when she stopped him.

"I beg your pardon," she said.

He'd never heard her voice before, and it did something to him. It made his stomach churn faster, but not with rage, not with hunger, not with thirst.

The Ranee was standing there in the corridor leading from the bar, and she was smiling at him.

"Aren't you the gentleman who was asking for Mr. Henderson last night? Ghopal spoke to me about it."

Jerry didn't know what to say. If she was trying to get a lead on her missing ice, he'd better dummy up fast.

Then he blinked. He'd been so busy watching her smile he'd never looked at her throat.

And she was still wearing the pearls. There they were! She had on the ring and the bracelet, too. And matching earrings. So Sweet William hadn't snatched the loot after all.

Jerry smiled. "Why, yes," he said. "We had a business matter to discuss."

"I happen to know where Mr. Henderson is," the Ranee told him. "He had an urgent call yesterday evening — something about an appointment in the city. But he told me he expected to be back before six. In fact, we had a dinner engagement."

It sounded phoney as hell. But there was just an off-chance it might be true. Sweet William was a smoothie; he always had a couple of deals cooking. Could he have gotten a fast blast from town and scooted off to take care of it? There was no way he could have gotten in touch with Jerry beforehand, and maybe he was too smart to leave a note that would tie them together later.

So he'd checked out and planned to come back tonight. It was worth thinking about, anyway. And meanwhile, the Ranee was still here. The Ranee and that necklace, or whatever it was, with the big pearls. Big pearls, big eyes, big—

"I was on my way in to dinner," the Ranee was saying, "in hopes that your friend might join me later."

"Good idea," Jerry said.

"How's about us waiting together?"

It was crude, and he could have kicked himself, but she didn't seem to mind. That smile of hers hit him hard. Maybe he'd been underestimating himself. She didn't seem to object when he introduced himself, and then they were sitting together and the two stooges were going through their routine with the chairs and the menu.

They poured the champagne, too, and it was easy to talk, and pretty soon Jerry didn't give a damn whether Sweet William showed or not.

What the hell, he could handle this. Sweet Willaim wasn't the only one who could work the rich-bitch racket. Just because he was a smoothie, and easy on the eyes, that didn't mean guys like Jerry Gibson were good for nothing but that wait and sweat routine. Come to think of it, worse-looking guys than him managed to get places with the broads.

And he was certainly getting places with this one. The way the champagne hit on an empty stomach, he was talking a blue streak. And here it was—must have been—nine o'clock already, and they were still sitting here, eating and living it up. She was telling him all about Gwolapur, and how she and the Rajah used to go on shoots—which meant tiger-hunting, with elephants, just like in those movies—and about how she missed all that.

Then they talked about traveling and about how beautiful she was and what a shame it was that Sweet William had stood her up, and somehow he let it slip out how much he admired her ice. Of course he didn't call it ice, and she didn't get sore. She just said she had a lot more of it up in her suite. And would he like to see the collection?

That's when Jerry sobered up.

Here he'd been running off at the mouth, letting himself get half-crocked, and all the while he should have been figuring angles.

Now, when his chance came, he wasn't ready. He'd have to watch himself.

But he wanted to go up to the suite, all right. It would be a good chance to case the setup. He wouldn't pull anything off tonight, anyway—just take a look around. If he played it close to the chest he might be able to come back. And next time he'd have a plan.

So he stood up and she stood up and the turbans pulled out the chairs, and they took the elevator.

The elevator hesitated after the twelfth floor and for a second Jerry was afraid they'd stop at thirteen. Not that he was superstitious or anything, but he just didn't like thirteen. But of course that was a lot of malarkey.

Hotels didn't have thirteenth floors any more. The elevator left them off at fourteen.

Then he was in the suite. There was a plush layout for you—big rooms, all dim lights, and lots of fancy cloths hung over the furniture and draped on the walls; she must have brought the stuff with her. It looked like one of those harems you see in the movies.

Funny smell, incense or something. Jerry remembered what Sweet William had said about *yen shee gow,* and it was funny to think of this gorgeous dish being a hophead. But then it was funny that she could go for him, too; sitting him down on one of the big sofas and bringing him a drink with her own hands. Because the two servants had disappeared.

They were all alone in the dim coolness, and the drink wasn't strong. He knew he could take it without feeling it. He could take anything, he could take her if she just moved a little closer. The way she smiled, and her soft voice going through him, and talking to him about how lonely it was to live like this, traveling from place to place with nothing but memories—

Then Jerry saw the guy standing in the corner and he wanted to jump. He was big and black and he had six arms.

The Ranee laughed at him. "Do not be afraid," she said. "She will not do you harm."

"She?"

"The statue. Durga, the goddess of our household. Kali."

Jerry stared at the statue before leaning back again. She had six arms, all right, and looked plenty mean. There was a string of white things around the statue's neck, and it took Jerry less than five seconds to make out what they were. Little ivory skulls. Human skulls. A hell of a necklace.

Thinking of necklaces made him think of the pearls. The Ranee was sitting next to him now, and something about the way she rested her head on his shoulder told him he could take her in his arms, if he wanted to. If he wanted to? Just feeling her near him, feeling the whiteness and the redness and the blackness all blending in heat and perfume was enough to stone him. But before he reached out, he had to look at the pearls.

There they were, resting against her throat, moving up and down—big and round and perfect. Eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve of them.

Twelve?

He'd counted ten, and Sweet William told him there were eleven. But that was before Sweet William went away.

There were ten the first day, and then the gray-haired man had gone away. After that, there were eleven. Then Sweet Wil-

liam went away, and now there were twelve—

She must have seen him jump, and he tried to smile and cover it up. He said, "You've got a better taste in jewelry than that statue of yours, if you don't mind my saying so."

And she smiled too, and said, "Kali is the goddess of the Thugs, you know. Each skull represents one of her victims."

Jerry stood up. She didn't try to hold him.

"The Thugs are stranglers, you know. They kill as a sacrifice. The cult was supposedly stamped out many years ago, but it still has its devotees. My late husband was a believer. He chose me as a bride because he looked upon me as a reincarnation of the goddess. Quaint, isn't it?"

Jerry looked at the necklace. She was close enough for him to make a grab for her, so he wasn't afraid. Besides, the servants were gone.

"So you killed him, huh? And you've been going around ever since, knocking guys off and adding to your string of pearls. That's what you did to the Greek, and to Sweet William. You're crazy as a bedbug."

The Ranee laughed. "How utterly absurd!" she said.

"Like hell it is," Jerry said. "You just got me up here because you were scared I'd kick up a fuss if Sweet William didn't come back. And maybe you had some loony idea of making me number thirteen in your necklace. Well, let me tell you—"

But Jerry Gibson never got a chance to tell her. Because all at once the servants were back, and one of them was holding his arms and the other one was w r a p p i n g something tight around his neck, something that squeezed and squeezed.

Jerry's eyes began to bulge. The last thing he saw was the string of pearls around the Ranee's neck. It wasn't really a necklace, of course. He knew that now.

It was more like a choker.

crime on the footplate

by . . . Freeman Wills Crofts

With careful planning murder can be made to look like an accident on a speeding train. But accidents can hang a man.

THE AUGUST DAY was stifling as the 11:55 a.m. express from Leeds beat heavily up the grade on its way northward to Carlisle. It was still passing through a country of trees and fields, farms and homesteads, cottages and gardens. But soon these would fall behind and it would come out into fresher air on the bare slopes of the Pennine foothills. Then would come the summit and the heavy collarwork of the trip would be over. From the summit the run down to Carlisle would be easy and rapid.

On the footplate Driver Deane sat watching the line ahead and occasionally casting an eye over the faceplate, with its maze of dials and guages and handles. For Fireman Grover, on the other hand, this was the busy time of the run. With a heavy train on a grade like this, firing was practically continuous.

The engine, while a splendid machine, was one of the older types. The cab was more open than is now usual, having no

Few fictional sleuths have Superintendent French's genius for combining an aggressive resourcefulness with a painstaking laboratory approach to crime. So successful is he in both respects that he seems at times almost indistinguishable from an actual inspector from New Scotland Yard. We usually find him in the midst of the fray, but occasionally he simply opens Mr. Crofts' casebook, and lets a dark crime enigma unravel itself. He does so here, in a chronicle of retribution well calculated to make your hair stand on end.

side windows, an advantage on this day when the heat of the sun vied with that pouring from the steel endplate of the boiler. It was fitted with small doors at each side between engine and tender, and was driven from the right hand side of the cab.

All seemed well with the train, yet all was not well. On this footplate, as in the great world beyond, human passions were aflame. For many weeks a criminal hatred had been festering in Fireman Grover's heart. He had not expelled it while he could, and now he was held in its grip. On this very run and before they had gone a dozen miles further he intended to murder his driver, William Deane.

The story of the madness which had overtaken him was commonplace enough. Some three months earlier he had visited his driver's Leeds home on railway business. There he had met Deane's wife and had immediately fallen for her. He had contrived further meetings and soon he had learnt that his ardor was reciprocated.

Rosie Deane was a well-meaning young woman who had made an unwise marriage. She had had an unhappy home and accepted Deane, who was many years her senior, as a means of escape. But she had not deceived him. Admitting the truth, she had added that while she liked and respected him, she did not love him, though she would do her best to make him happy. Deane had not hesitated and the marriage had taken place.

For several years she had kept her word. But during this time Deane had suffered an increasing disappointment. He had believed that his wife would gradually come to love him, and when he found that the very opposite was taking place, he grew bitter. He became sharp-tongued and suspicious. Rosie resented it and her feeling came out in her behavior toward him. Relations between the two went from bad to worse.

It was then that Grover had appeared. His love gave him insight and he soon became aware of Rosie's unhappiness. Hatred of Deane grew fanatical when he realized that the man was at once the cause of her misery and the bar to its alleviation.

The thought of murder had not at first entered his mind, but as he brooded, the idea became more and more insistent. He began to consider methods, and when he found one which would infallibly eliminate Deane while guaranteeing his own safety, the driver's fate was sealed.

One of Grover's friends was a male nurse in a mental home and the two had frequently discussed inmates and work in such places. Among other things

Grover had learnt that a certain harmless drug was used to calm patients if they became over-excited.

His friend had told him about a dose of this being given to the wrong man, with the result that for some time he had become moody, depressed and ill-tempered. Grover had not forgotten the story and now proposed to use the information.

During a spare hour in London when they were on the St. Pancras link, he had changed into his ordinary clothes, which he had taken up in a parcel, and with some trepidation had asked for a small quantity of the drug at a busy chemist's. He needn't have worried. The assistant apparently considered the purchase normal and showed no special interest. So much for his first item.

His second depended on the fact that Deane wore a short beard. The man had been a good deal reticent about it, but Grover had learnt that it was to cover a deep scar on his chin. After getting the drug, Grover had gone on to a theatrical supply shop and bought a false beard of the correct color "to amuse the kiddies."

In the security of his room he trimmed it to the shape of Deane's, and practiced putting it on until he could do it quickly and without the aid of a mirror.

His third and last essential was to choose a suitable run for the crime. It must be through sparsely populated country, where observation of what took place on the engine would be unlikely. Also as much time as possible was desirable between block posts. This climb up the bleak Pennine foothills exactly met the conditions.

Grover had prepared for the crime by drugging the driver over a period of weeks. Before taking their engine out Deane went round it, oiling moving parts and looking out for defects. During this time Grover was alone on the footplate, working at the fire. To slip a daily few drops of the drug into the other's can was simplicity itself.

When by experiment he had learnt the right amount to use, he was overjoyed with the result. Deane reacted perfectly, growing more bitter and morose, while his temper became a byword among the men.

Some six weeks later Grover decided to strike, and now this was the run which was to free Rosie and open a new chapter of happiness for himself. On the previous day he had given Deane a specially large dose of the drug, and the effect had been clear to all.

They were approaching what might be called the last outpost of civilization, the little town of Sleet, for it was here that the railway left the green, well-

cultivated valley and entered on the open moor.

As they labored through the small station, the powerful beat echoing from the buildings, Grover began firing. By the time his task was finished they had passed the signal cabin and sidings. That all was well on the footplate would have been noted by the signalman. Now they were out in the open. On these bare slopes figures stood out clearly. Grover glanced carefully around. There was no one in sight.

He laid down his shovel and picked up a heavy spanner which he had secreted in the coal. Stepping over to Driver Deane, he bent down. "I think I hear a blowing gasket," he shouted, for the noise was considerable.

Deane sat still, obviously listening. Grover immediately brought his spanner down with force on the man's head. Deane made no sound. He remained for a moment motionless, then pitched slowly forward. He fell on his knees against the end of the boiler, his head and trunk rolled slightly back, and he sank down into a shapeless heap in the corner of the cab.

Grover was breathless and trembling, but he forced himself to stoop and examine him. That Deane was dead there could be no doubt, for the top of the head was driven down, though owing to the cap the skin was not broken. Moreover the body's position was admirable. It had to be well forward, so as to be screened by the cab from the next signal cabin, and also to leave space on the congested footplate for the act by which Grover intended to secure his safety.

Haste was now the prime essential, for before they reached the next station, Ottershaw, already less than two miles distant, he must be ready to put on his act. Quickly he adjusted the false beard, checking its position in a mirror from his pocket. Then he twisted up his cap to the angle Deane affected and glanced ahead through the cab window.

They were just passing the Ottershaw distant signal, off as it always was. As they approached the platform and signal cabin Grover began dancing, waving his arms and singing drunkenly. While he did so he kept a keen eye on the cabin, some twenty yards back from the main line across the sidings. What happened thrilled him. His plan was working out.

He saw the signalman stare at the engine, then swing round and pick something up, slide open his window, lean out, and begin frantically waving a red flag.

For Grover it was a moment of sickening anxiety. If the guard saw the flag and applied the brakes, only the most speedy

and skillful action could save him. He continued to dance lest someone else should see him, but in a cold sweat of fear.

The advanced starting signal had gone to danger in front of him, but he took no notice of it. It was only another attempt of the signalman to attract the guard's attention. As they left it behind without an application of the brakes, Grover experienced a relief so intense that he feared his nerve would crack. Then he rallied himself fiercely. Though the worst was over, the job was not finished. The least weakness and he was as good as hanged.

Haste again was the ruling factor. He tore off the beard and threw it into the firebox, making sure with his mirror that no trace remained. Then came a horrible part of the affair. With the flat of the spanner he struck a heavy blow on his own left shoulder. It hurt so much that he feared he had fractured a bone. So much the better, he told himself grimly.

He dropped the spanner and threw himself forcibly down against the tender. Then taking off his cap, he knocked his head back against the steel plating, again and again until he could endure no more.

Struggling unsteadily to his feet, he glanced once more through the cab window. In a little over a mile they would reach Grammond block post, a signal cabin without a station. At the cabin he was sure they would be checked, as the Ottershaw signalman would certainly have wired on: "Stop and examine train." This, and the fact that the post was approached by a wide left-hand curve from which the cabin and signals could be seen for nearly a mile across the bend of the valley, were features of his plan.

A few seconds later they entered on the curve. Yes, there were the signals—all at danger. Things certainly were going as he had hoped. He had only to carry out one remaining essential and the whole ghastly affair would be over.

Once again he glanced carefully around. Here also no spectator was in sight. He now stooped and pulled off Deane's cap, to make sure it would not fall in the wrong place. Then seizing the body beneath the armpits, he dragged it painfully back to the rear of the footplate. The doors between engine and tender were shut, and using all his strength, he laid the body over the left door, with the head and trunk hanging down outside and the legs within.

He was just in time, for the body was scarcely in position when they passed the Grammond distant signal. Now was the moment! He heaved up the legs and the body shot out,

crashed on its head on the ground, and rolled on partly down the embankment. The cap he dropped at the same moment. Then gasping, he staggered back to the faceplate.

By this time they were approaching the home signal and cabin. Grover passed the former without action, intending that his efforts to stop should be seen by the signalman. But just before they reached the cabin the vacuum disappeared on his guage and the brakes went on.

The guard this time had noticed the adverse signal and used his emergency handle. Grover therefore shut off steam, a little earlier than he had intended. Automatically he closed the firebox door and damper and put on the injector, then sank down shaken and trembling on one of the cab seats.

The train ground to a standstill, having overshot the home signal by some quarter of a mile. Grover remained seated where he was. No acting was needed to give the impression he desired, for the shock of what he had done added to the blow on his head had left him really weak and dazed.

He sat on until a flustered guard climbed on to the footplate. Others followed. To them Grover outlined the story he had prepared. Everyone was sympathetic. He was helped to the platform, his head was bandaged, and he was sent home by the first train.

That night Grover went over in his mind everything he had said or done. The more he did so, the better pleased he became. His action had been without a flaw. No one suspected. No one *would* suspect. His story was good. He had only to stick to it and all would be well.

Next day the police called for a fuller statement. They began by cautioning him. "We have to do it, you know," they told him. "Matter of form mostly."

Grover nodded. He had heard that this was their custom. Then he repeated his story: again and again he had polished its every detail. "Deane had been a bit queer for a few weeks," he explained. "He seemed to have something on his mind and was getting worse. You could hardly speak to him about anything. He'd snap the head off you."

It was a good beginning. To the police the statement had already been attested by many witnesses.

"On this trip he was worse than ever," went on Grover. "I was beginning to wonder if I could get a shift to another driver. I signed to him shortly after we left Leeds that the Riglett distant signal was on, and he went off the deep end with a vengeance. He wanted to know if I thought he was blind. It didn't occur to me then that

his mind was affected, but it settled mine for me. I decided I'd ask for the change."

The police made encouraging sounds.

"After a while he quieted down. He just sat there and looked ahead the same as usual. Then when we got to Sleet the thing happened. I was firing going through the station, but just after we passed it he turned and threw up his hands and began laughing fit to burst his sides. It was sort of uncanny, his roaring with laughter that way. But it didn't seem funny to me. At first I didn't interfere, then I asked him what the joke was. That really set him off. He jumped up and yelled at me. He looked sort of wild.

"I knew then that he was mad and I don't deny I was scared stiff. Suddenly he let fly at my head. I twisted and got it on my shoulder. It knocked me back and I hit my head against the tender. Then he went off his rocker completely. He began to sing and shout and dance about the footplate while I lay there half stunned."

Grover's belief that the police would have had confirmation of this statement from the Ottershaw signalman was not misplaced. They begged him to continue, and he did so with increasing confidence.

"I can tell you, gentlemen, I was in a terrible predicament. We're not often checked by signals on this run, but you have to be prepared for it. If we got a check he wouldn't stop and I couldn't.

"Then I eased myself up on my elbow and stared out over the cab door. We were on the big curve coming into Grammond and you can see the signals a mile away across country. They were against us. Well, I had the train to think of as well as my own life, and I hadn't much time to do it in.

"I don't know whether I was right or wrong, but I gripped a spanner out of the box, and when Deane turned his back I moved forward and hit him over the head. I meant just to knock him out, but it didn't quite do that. He staggered against the door and overbalanced. Before I could catch him he was out over it."

For this also there was a reasonable amount of corroboration. The signals *could* be seen as described, and they *were* against the train. The place where the body was found worked in with the time element of the story, and Grover bore the bruises which it demanded. Yes, it was a good tale and had confirmation on nearly every point. Grover's self-satisfaction became impressive when the police thanked him politely and withdrew.

He got his first shock, a terrible numbing shock, when the

inquest was adjourned. Then for several days nothing happened. But one night the police returned. They were abrupt and businesslike. Stunned and incredulous he heard the inconceivable words, "Arrest . . . charge with murder . . . anything you say . . ."

"THE CASE of Grover illustrates what I have so often said," declared Superintendent French. "Few people can carry out a complicated crime without making some silly error which gives the whole thing away. One of my trainees, Inspector Cairns, had the case in hand and during a visit to Town he discussed it with me.

"He told me that his preliminary investigation convinced him that the affair was murder and that Grover was guilty. For Grover did what I've just mentioned. He made a mistake. It was trivial, but it knocked the bottom right out of his story.

"Cairns wisely said nothing about it and went on with his normal investigation. From the doctor he learned of a debilitating drug found in the remains, which if taken regularly could have accounted for Deane's morose temper. But he could not prove that the prisoner had administered it. He found out about Grover's friendship with Rosie and the purchase of the false beard. All highly suggestive items of course. But they stopped just short of proof. If it hadn't been for the oversight, Grover might have got away with it.

"And what was the oversight? I'll tell you. He had not examined carefully enough the position into which Deane had fallen. The driver's shoulders and arms were clear of the boiler, but Grover had been in such a hurry that he had looked no further. On the dead man's leg was a huge scorched wound. Some ghastly experiments showed that at least six minutes' contact with the hot steel would have been necessary to produce it.

"This gave Cairns something to think about. When the train was passing Sleet Deane was alive and well: the signalman had seen that conditions on the footplate were normal. Therefore the man could not at that time have received this crippling injury. Some eight minutes later his body fell from the engine near Grammond. For six of those eight minutes therefore he must have been lying with his leg against the boiler. But during that time a bearded man was dancing on the footplate!" French shrugged. "Well, I ask you?"

the secret murderer

by . . . Arnold Bennett

A gunsmith may have a great many dangerous customers. But seldom two such gentlemen as Lomax Harder and John Franting!

TWO MEN were walking side by side one autumn afternoon, on the Marine Parade of the seaside resort and port of Quangate on the English Channel. Both were well-dressed and had the air of moderate wealth, and both were about thirty-five years of age.

At this point the resemblances between them ceased. Lomax Harder had refined features, an enormous forehead, fair hair, and a delicate, almost apologetic manner. John Franting was low-browed, heavy-chinned, scowling, defiant, indeed what is called a tough customer.

Lomax Harder corresponded in appearance with the popular notion of a poet—save that he was carefully barbered. He was in fact a poet, and not unknown in the tiny, trifling, mad world where poetry is a matter of first-rate interest. John Franting corresponded in appearance with the popular notion of a gambler, an amateur boxer, and, in spare

During his lifetime Arnold Bennett was closely associated with three generations of English writers. He was a close friend of the poet Swinburne, knew Kipling well and was most flatteringly satirized by Max Beerbohm. He wrote many unusual short-stories, and his occasional mystery yarns had a sparkle and a spontaneity rarely encountered even in the heyday of Sherlock Holmes. We challenge you to prove on the evidence that this one wasn't written last week or that its modernity of mood can in any way be reasonably contested!

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time, a deceiver of women. Popular notions sometimes fit the truth.

Lomax Harder, somewhat nervously buttoning his overcoat, said in a quiet but firm and insistent tone, "Haven't you got anything to say?"

John Franting stopped suddenly in front of a shop whose facade bore the sign: GONTLE. GUNSMITH.

"Not in words," answered Franting. "I'm going in here." And he brusquely entered the small, shabby shop.

Lomax Harder hesitated half a second, and then followed his companion.

The shopman was a middle-aged gentleman wearing a black velvet coat.

"Good afternoon," he greeted Franting, with an expression and in a tone of urbane condescension which seemed to indicate that Franting was a wise as well as a fortunate man in that he knew of the excellence of Gontle's and had the wit to come to Gontle's.

For the name of Gontle was favorably and respectfully known wherever triggers are pulled. Not only along the whole length of the Channel Coast, but throughout England, was Gontle's renowned. Sportsmen would travel to Quangate from the far north, and even from London, to buy guns. To say: "I bought it at Gontle's" or "Old Gontle recommended it," was sufficient to silence any dispute concerning the merits of a fire-arm. Experts bowed the head before the unique reputation of Gontle.

As for old Gontle, he was extremely and pardonably conceited. His conviction that no other gunsmith in the wide world could compare with him was absolute. He sold guns and rifles with the gesture of a monarch conferring an honor. He never argued. He stated, and the customer who contradicted him was as likely as not to be courteously and icily informed by Gontle of the geographical situation of the shop-door.

Such shops exist in the English provinces, and nobody knows how they have achieved their renown. They could exist nowhere else.

"Good afternoon," said Franting gruffly, and paused.

"What can I do for you?" asked Mr. Gontle, as if saying: "Now don't be afraid. This shop is tremendous, and I am tremendous; but I shall not eat you."

"I want a revolver," Franting snapped.

"Ah! A revolver!" commented Mr. Gontle, as if saying: "A gun or a rifle, yes! But a revolver —an arm without individuality, manufactured wholesale! However, I suppose I must condescend to accommodate you."

"I presume you know something about revolvers?" asked

Mr. Gontle, as he began to produce the weapons.

"A little."

"Do you know the Webley Mark Three?"

"Can't say that I do."

"It is the best for all common purposes." And Mr. Gontle's glance said: "Have the goodness not to tell me it isn't."

Franting examined the Webley Mark III.

"You see," said Mr. Gontle. "The point about it is that until the breach is properly closed it cannot be fired. So that it can't blow open and maim or kill the would-be murderer." Mr. Gontle smiled archly at one of his oldest jokes.

"What about suicides?" Franting grimly demanded.

"Ah!"

"You might show me just how to load it," said Franting.

Mr. Gontle, having found ammunition, complied with this reasonable request.

"The barrel's a bit scratched," said Franting.

Mr. Gontle inspected the scratch with pain. He would have denied the scratch, but could not.

"Here's another one," said he, "since you're so particular." He simply had to put customers in their place.

"You might load it," said Franting.

Mr. Gontle loaded the second revolver.

"I'd like to try it," said Franting.

"Certainly," said Mr. Gontle, and led Franting out of the shop by the back, and down to a cellar where revolvers could be experimented with.

Lomax Harder was now alone in the shop. He hesitated a long time and then picked up the revolver rejected by Franting, fingered it, put it down, and picked it up again.

The back-door of the shop opened suddenly, and, startled, Harder dropped the revolver into his overcoat pocket. It was a thoughtless, quite unpremeditated act. He dared not remove the revolver. The revolver was as fast in his pocket as though the pocket had been sewn up.

"And cartridges?" asked Mr. Gontle of Franting.

"Oh," said Franting, "I've only had one shot. Five'll be more than enough for the present. What does it weigh?"

"Let me see. Four-inch barrel? Yes. One pound four ounces."

Franting paid for the revolver, receiving thirteen shillings in change from a five-pound note, and strode out of the shop, weapon in hand. He was gone before Lomax Harder decided upon a course of action.

"And for you, sir?" said Mr. Gontle.

Harder suddenly comprehended that Mr. Gontle had mistaken

him for a separate customer, who had happened to enter the shop a moment after the first one.

Harder and Franting had said not a word to one another during the purchase, and Harder well knew that in the most exclusive shops it is the custom utterly to ignore a second customer until the first one has been dealt with.

"I want to see some foils." Harder spoke stammeringly the only words that came into his head.

"Foils!" exclaimed Mr. Gontle, shocked, as if to say: "Is it conceivable that you should imagine that I, Gontle, gunsmith, sell such things as foils?"

After a little talk Harder apologized and departed—a thief.

"I'll call later and pay the fellow," said Harder to his restive conscience. "No, I can't do that. I'll send him some anonymous postal orders."

He crossed the Parade and saw Franting, a small left-handed figure all alone far below on the deserted sands, pointing the revolver. He thought that his ear caught the sound of a discharge, but the distance was too great for him to be sure. He continued to watch, and at length Franting walked westward diagonally across the beach.

"He's going back to the Bellevue," thought Harder, the Bellevue being the hotel from which he had met Franting coming out, half-an-hour earlier.

He strolled slowly towards the white hotel. But Franting, who had evidently come up the face of the cliff in the lift, was before him. Harder, standing outside, saw Franting seated in the lounge. Then Franting rose and vanished down a long passage at the rear of the lounge.

Harder entered the hotel rather guiltily. There was no hall-porter at the door, and not a soul in the lounge or in sight of the lounge. Harder went down the long passage.

At the end of the passage, Lomax Harder found himself in a billiard-room—an apartment built partly of brick and partly of wood on a sort of courtyard behind the main structure of the hotel. The roof, of iron and grimy glass, rose to a point in the middle. On two sides the high walls of the hotel obscured the light.

Dusk was already closing in. A small fire burned feebly in the grate. A large radiator under the window was steel-cold, for though summer was finished, winter had not officially begun in the small, economically-run hotel, so that the room was chilly. Nevertheless, in deference to the English passion for fresh air and discomfort, the window was wide open.

Franting, in his overcoat, and an unlit cigarette between his lips, stood lowering, with his back to the fire. At sight of

Harder he lifted his chin in a dangerous challenge.

"So you're still following me about," he said resentfully to Harder.

"Yes," said Harder, with his curious gentle primness of manner. "I came down here specially to talk to you. I should have said all I had to say earlier, only you happened to be going out of the hotel just as I was coming in. You didn't seem to want to talk in the street, but there's some talking has to be done. I've a few things I must tell you."

Harder appeared to be perfectly calm, and he felt perfectly calm. He advanced from the door towards the billiard-table.

Franting raised his hand, displaying his square-ended, brutal fingers in the twilight.

"Now listen to me," he said with cold, measured ferocity. "You can't tell me anything I don't know. If there's some talking to be done I'll do it myself, and when I've finished you can get out. I know that my wife has taken a ticket for Copenhagen by the steamer from Harwich, and that she's been seeing to her passport, and packing. And of course I know that you have interests in Copenhagen and spend about half your precious time there.

"I'm not worrying to connect the two things. All that's got nothing to do with me. Emily has always seen a great deal of you, and I know that the last week or two she's been seeing you more than ever. Not that I mind that. I know that she objects to my treatment of her and my conduct generally. That's all right, but it's a matter that only concerns her and me. I mean that it's no concern of yours, for instance, or anybody else's. If she objects enough she can try and divorce me.

"I doubt if she'd succeed, but you can never be sure. Anyhow, she's my wife till she does divorce me, and so she has the usual duties and responsibilities towards me—even though I was the worst husband in the world. That's how I look at it, in my old-fashioned way. I've just had a letter from her. She knew I was here, and I expect that explains how you knew I was here."

"It does," said Lomax Harder quietly.

Franting pulled a letter out of his inner pocket and unfolded it. "Yes," he said, glancing at it, and read some sentences aloud: "'I have absolutely decided to leave you, and I won't hide from you that I know you know who is doing what he can to help me. I can't live with you any longer. You may be very fond of me, as you say, but I find your way of showing your fondness too humiliating and painful. I've said this to you before, and now I'm saying it for the last time.' And so on and so on."

Franting tore the letter in two, dropped one half on the floor, twisted the other half into a spill, turned to the fire and lit his cigarette.

"That's what I think of her letter," he said, the cigarette between his teeth. "You're helping her, are you? Very well. I don't say you're in love with her, or she with you. I'll make no wild statements. But if you aren't in love with her I'm wondering why you are taking all this trouble over her. Do you go about the world helping ladies who say they are unhappy just for the pure sake of helping? Never mind. Emily isn't going to leave me. Get that into your head. I shan't let her leave me. She has money and I haven't. I've been living on her, and it would be infernally awkward for me if she left me for good. That's a reason for keeping her, isn't it?

"But you may believe it or not —it isn't my reason. She's right enough when she says I'm very fond of her. That's a reason for keeping her, too. But it isn't my reason. My reason is that a wife's a wife, and she can't break her word just because everything isn't lovely in the garden. I've heard it said I'm unmoral. I'm not unmoral. And I feel particularly strongly about what's called the marriage tie."

He drew the revolver from his pocket and held it up to view. "You see this thing. You saw me buy it. Now you needn't be afraid. I'm not threatening you, and it's not part of my game to shoot you. I've nothing to do with your goings-on. What I have to do with is the goings-on of my wife. If she deserts me—for you or for anybody or for nobody—I shall follow her, whether it's to Copenhagen or Bangkok or the North Pole, and I shall kill her—with this very revolver that you saw me buy. And now you can get out."

Franting replaced the revolver, and began to consume the cigarette with fierce and large puffs.

Lomax Harder looked at the grim, set, scowling, bitter face, and knew that Franting meant what he had said. Nothing would stop him from carrying out his threat. The fellow was not an argufier; he could not reason. But he had unmistakable grit and would never recoil from the fear of consequences. If Emily left him Emily was a dead woman. Nothing in the end could protect her from the execution of her husband's purpose.

On the other hand, nothing would persuade her to remain with her husband. She had decided to go, and she would go. And indeed the mere thought of his lady to whom he, Harder, was utterly devoted, staying with her husband and continuing to suffer the tortures and humiliations which she had been suffer-

ing for years—this thought revolted him. He could not think it.

He stepped forward along the side of the billiard-table, and simultaneously Franting stepped forward to meet him. Lomax Harder snatched the revolver which was in his pocket, aimed, and pulled the trigger.

Franting collapsed, with the upper half of his body somehow balanced on the edge of the billiard-table. He was dead. The sound of the report echoed in Harder's ear like the sound of a violin string loudly twanged by a finger. He saw a little reddish hole in Franting's bronzed right temple.

"Well," he thought. "Somebody had to die. And it's better him than Emily." He felt that he had performed a righteous act. Also he felt a little sorry for Franting.

Then he was afraid. He was afraid for himself, because he wanted not to die, especially on the scaffold. But also he was afraid for Emily Franting, who would be friendless and helpless without him. He could not bear to think of her alone in the world—the central point of a terrific scandal. He must get away instantly.

Not down the corridor back in to the hotel-lounge! That would be fatal! The window. He glanced at the corpse. It was more odd and curious than frightening. He had made the corpse. He could not unmake it. He had accomplished the irrevocable. He saw Franting's cigarette glowing on the linoleum in the deepening dusk, and picked it up and threw it into the fender.

Lace curtains hung across the whole width of the window. He drew one aside, and looked forth. The light was much stronger in the courtyard than within the room. He put his gloves on. He gave a last look at the corpse, straddled the windowsill, and was on the brick pavement of the courtyard. He saw that the curtain had fallen back into the perpendicular.

He gazed around. Nobody! Not a light in any window! He saw a green wooden gate, and pushed it. It yielded, opening on a sort of entry-passage.

In a moment, after two half-turns, he was on the Marine Parade again. He was a fugitive. Should he fly to the right, or to the left? Then he had an inspiration. An idea of genius for baffling pursuers. He would go back into the hotel by the main-entrance. He went slowly and deliberately into the portico, where a middle-aged hall-porter was standing in the gloom.

"Good evening, sir."

"Good evening. Have you got any rooms?"

"I think so, sir. The housekeeper is out, but she'll be back

in a moment—if you'd like a seat. The manager's away in London."

The hall-porter suddenly illuminated the lounge, and Lomax Harder, blinking, entered and sat down.

"I might have a cocktail while I'm waiting," the murderer suggested, with a bright and friendly smile. "A Bronx."

"Certainly, sir. The page is off duty. He sees to orders in the lounge, but I'll attend to you myself."

"What a hotel!" thought the murderer, solitary in the chilly lounge, and gave a glance down the long passage. "Is the whole place run by the hall-porter? But of course it's the dead season. There must not be more than a dozen guests."

Was it conceivable that nobody had heard the sound of the shot? Harder had a strong impulse to run away. But to do so would be highly dangerous. He restrained himself.

"How much?" he asked of the hall-porter, who had arrived with surprising quickness, tray in hand and glass on tray.

"A shilling, sir."

The murderer gave him eighteenpence, and drank off the cocktail.

"Thank you very much, sir." The hall-porter took the glass.

"See here!" said the murderer. "I'll look in again. I've got one or two little errands to do."

And he went slowly, into the obscurity of the Marine Parade.

LOMAX HARDER leaned over the left arm of the sea-wall of the man-made port of Quangate. Not another soul was there. Night had fallen. The lighthouse at the extremity of the right arm was occulting. The lights—some red, some green, many white—of ships at sea passed in both directions in endless processions. Waves splashed gently against the vast masonry of the wall. The wind, blowing steadily from the north-west, was not cold.

Harder, looking about—though he knew he was absolutely alone—took his revolver from his overcoat pocket and stealthily dropped it into the sea. Then he turned round and gazed across the small harbor at the mysterious amphitheatre of the lighted town, and heard municipal clocks and religious clocks striking the hour.

He was a murderer, but why should he not successfully escape detection? Other murderers had done so. He had all his wits. He was not excited. He was not morbid. His perspective of things was not askew. The hall-porter had not seen his first entrance into the hotel, nor his exit after the crime.

Nobody had seen them. He had left nothing behind in the billiard-room. No finger marks

on the windowsill. The putting on of his gloves was in itself a clear demonstration that he had fully kept his presence of mind. And there were no footmarks on the hard, dry pavement of the courtyard.

Of course, there was the possibility that some person unseen had observed him getting out of the window. Slight—but still a possibility! And there was also the possibility that someone who knew Franting by sight had noted him walking by Franting's side in the streets. If such a person informed the police and gave a description of him, inquiries might be made . . . No! Nothing in it. His appearance offered nothing remarkable to the eye of a casual observer—except his forehead, of which he was rather proud, but which was hidden by his hat.

It was generally believed that criminals always did something silly. But so far he had done nothing silly, and he was convinced that, in regard to the crime, he never would do anything silly. He had none of the desire, supposed to be common among murderers, to revisit the scene of the crime.

Although he regretted the necessity for his act, he felt no slightest twinge of conscience. Somebody had to die, and surely it was better that John Franting should die than the lovely wife whom his act had rescued forever from the brute! He was aware within himself of an ecstasy of devotion to Emily Franting—now a widow and free. Strange that a woman of such gifts should have come under the sway of so obvious a scoundrel as Franting.

He would have killed a hundred men if a hundred men had threatened her felicity. His heart was pure; he wanted nothing from Emily in exchange for what he had done in her defense.

A clock struck the quarter. Harder walked quickly to the harbor front, where there was a taxi-stand, and drove to the station . . . A sudden apprehension! The crime might have been discovered! Police might already be watching for suspicious-looking travelers. Still, the apprehension remained, despite its absurdity.

The taxi driver looked at him queerly. He was letting his imagination get the upper hand. He hesitated on the threshold of the station, then walked boldly in, and showed his return ticket to the ticket-inspector. No sign of a policeman! He got into the Pullman car, where five other passengers were sitting. The train started . . .

He nearly missed the boat-train at Liverpool Street, because according to its custom the Quangate flyer arrived twenty minutes late at Victoria. And at Victoria the foolish part of him,

as distinguished from the common sense part, suffered another spasm of fear. Would detectives, instructed by telegraph, be waiting for the train? He dismissed it as an absurd idea.

The boat-train from Liverpool Street was crowded with travelers, and the platform crowded with senders-off. He gathered from scraps of talk overheard that an international conference was about to take place at Copenhagen. And he had known nothing of it—not seen a word of it in the papers! Excusable perhaps; grave matters had held his attention to the exclusion of all else.

Useless to look for Emily in the vast bustle of the compartments! She had her through ticket—which she had taken herself, in order to avoid possible complications—and she happened to be the only woman in the world who was never late and never in a hurry. She was certain to be on the train. But was she in the train? Something sinister might have come to pass. For instance, a telephone message to the flat that her husband had been found dead with a bullet in his brain.

The swift two-hour journey to Harwich was terrible for Lemax Harder. He remembered that he had left the unburnt part of the letter lying under the billiard-table. One of the silly things that criminals did! And on Parkeston Quay the confusion was enormous.

He did not walk, he was swept on to the great shaking steamer whose dark funnels rose amid wisps of steam into the starry sky. One advantage: detectives would have no chance in that multitudinous scene, unless indeed they held up the ship.

The ship roared a warning, and slid away from the quay, groped down the tortuous channel to the harbor mouth, and was in the North Sea; and England dwindled to naught but a string of lights. He searched every deck from stem to stern, and could not find Emily.

She had not caught the train, or, if she had caught the train, she had not boarded the steamer because he had failed to appear. His misery was intense. Everything was going wrong. And on the arrival at Esjberg would not detectives he lying in wait for the Copenhagen train?

Then he saw her, and she him. She too had been searching. Only chance had kept them apart. Her joy at finding him was ecstatic, and tears came into his eyes at sight of it. He was everything to her, absolutely everything. He clasped her right hand in both his hands and gazed at her in the dim, diffused light blended of stars, moon and electricity. No woman was ever like her and the touching beauty of her appealing, sad, happy

face, and the pride of her carriage!

She related her movements; and he his. Then she said: "Well?"

"I didn't go," he answered. "I thought it best not to. I'm convinced it wouldn't have been any use."

He had not intended to tell her this lie. Yet when it came to the point, what else could he say? He told one lie instead of twenty. He was deceiving her, but for her sake. As for the conceivable complications of the future, he refused to front them. He felt suddenly the amazing beauty of the night at sea, and beneath all his other sensations was the obscure sensation of a weight at his heart.

"I expect you were right," she said.

THE SUPERINTENDENT of Police—Quangate was the county town of the western half of the county—and a detective-sergeant were in the billiard-room of the Bellevue. Both wore mufti. The powerful green-shaded lamps usual in billiard-rooms shone down ruthlessly on the green table, and on the reclining body of John Franting, which had not moved and had not been moved.

The charwoman was just leaving these officers when a stout gentleman, who had successfully beguiled a policeman guarding the other end of the long corridor, squeezed past her, greeted the two officers, and shut the door.

The superintendent, a thin man, with lips to match, and a mustache, stared hard at the arrival.

"I am staying with my friend, Dr. Furnival," said the arrival cheerfully. "You telephoned for him, and as he had to go out to one of those cases in which nature will not wait, I offered to come in his place. I've met you before Superintendent, at Scotland Yard."

"Dr. Austin Bond!" exclaimed the superintendent.

They shook hands, Dr. Bond genially, the superintendent half-consequentially, half-deferentially, as one who had his dignity to think about; also as one who resented an intrusion, but dared not show resentment.

The detective-sergeant recoiled at the dazzling name of the great amateur detective, a genius who had solved a dozen famous mysteries and whose devilish perspicacity had again and again made professional detectives both look and feel foolish, and whose notorious friendship with the loftiest heads of Scotland Yard compelled all police forces to treat him very politely indeed.

"Yes," said Dr. Austin Bond, after detailed examination. "He's been shot about ninety minutes, poor fellow! Who found him?"

"That woman who's just gone out. Some servant here. She came in to look after the fire."

"How long since?"

"Oh, about an hour ago."

"Found the bullet? I see it hit the brass on the cue-rack there."

The detective-sergeant glanced at the superintendent, who, however, resolutely remained unastonished.

"Here's the bullet," said the superintendent.

"Ah!" said Dr. Austin Bond, glinting through his spectacles at the bullet as it lay in the superintendent's hand. "Decimal thirty-eight, I see. Flattened. It would be."

"Sergeant," said the superintendent, "you can get help and have the body moved now that Dr. Bond has made his examination. Eh, doctor?"

"Certainly," answered Dr. Bond at the fireplace. "He was smoking a cigarette, I see."

"Either he or his murderer."

"You've got a clue?" asked Dr. Bond.

"Oh, yes," the superintendent answered, not without pride. He displayed fingerprints on the window-frame, footmarks on the sill, and a few strands of inferior blue cloth.

He said: "The murderer must have been a tall man. You can judge that from the angle of fire. He wore a blue suit, which he tore slightly on this splintered wood of the window-frame and one of his boots had a hole in the middle of the sole. He'd only three fingers on his left hand. He must have come in by the window and gone out by the window, because the hall-porter is sure nobody except the dead man entered the lounge by a door within an hour of the time when the murder must have been committed."

The superintendent proudly gave many more details, and ended by saying that he had already given instructions to circulate a description.

"Curious," said Dr. Austin Bond, "that a man like John Franting should let anyone enter the room by the window! Especially a shabby-looking man!"

"You knew the deceased personally, then?"

"No, but I know he was John Franting."

"How, doctor?"

"Luck."

"Sergeant," said the superintendent, piqued, "tell the constable to fetch the hall-porter."

Dr. Bond walked around the room, peering everywhere, and picked up a piece of paper that had lodged against the step of the platform which ran round two sides of the room for the raising of the spectators' benches. He glanced at the paper casually, and dropped it again.

"My man," the superintendent addressed the hall-porter, "how

can you be sure that nobody came in here this afternoon?"

"Because I was in my cubicle all the time, sir."

The hall-porter was lying. But he had to think of his own welfare. On the previous day he had been reprimanded for quitting his post against the rule. Taking advantage of the absence of the manager, he had sinned once again, and he lived in fear of dismissal if found out.

"With a full view of the lounge?"

"Yes, sir."

"Might have been in there beforehand," Dr. Bond suggested.

"No," said the superintendent. "The charwoman came in twice —once just before Franting came in. She saw the fire wanted making up and she went for some coal, and then returned later with some coal. But the look of Franting frightened her, and she backed out again with her coal."

"Yes" said the hall-porter. "I saw that." Another lie.

At a sign from the superintendent he withdrew.

"I should like to have a word with that charwoman," said Dr. Austin Bond.

The superintendent hesitated. Why should the doctor meddle with what did not concern him? Nobody had asked his help. But the superintendent thought of Dr. Bond's relations with Scotland Yard, and sent for the charwoman.

"Did you clean the window here today?" Dr. Austin Bond interrogated her.

"Yes, please, sir."

"Show me your left hand." The charwoman obeyed. "How did you lose your little finger?" he asked.

"In a mangle accident, sir," she said.

"Just come to the window, will you, and put your hands on it. But take off your left boot first."

She began to weep.

"It's quite all right," Dr. Austin Bond reassured her. "Your skirt is torn at the hem, isn't it?"

When the charwoman was released from her ordeal and had gone, carrying one boot in her grimy hand, Dr. Bond said genially to the superintendent: "Just a fluke. I happened to notice she'd only three fingers on her left hand when she passed me in the corridor. Sorry I've destroyed your evidence. But I felt sure almost from the first that the murderer hadn't either entered or decamped by the window."

"How?"

"Because I think he's still here in the room."

The two police officers gazed about them as if exploring the room for the murderer.

"I think he's there." Dr.

Austin Bond pointed to the corpse.

"And where did he hide the revolver after he'd killed himself?" demanded the thin-lipped superintendent icily, when he had somewhat recovered his aplomb.

"I'd thought of that, too," said Dr. Bond, beaming. "It is always a very wise course to leave a dead body absolutely untouched until a professional man has seen it. But *looking* at the body can do no harm. You see the left-hand pocket of the overcoat? Notice how it bulges. Something unusual in it. Something that has the shape of a —just feel inside it, will you? I think you'll be surprised."

The superintendent, obeying, drew a revolver from the overcoat pocket of the dead man.

"Ah! Yes!" said Dr. Austin Bond. "A Webley Mark Three. Quite new. You might take out the ammunition." The superintendent dismantled the weapon. The doctor went on: "Three chambers empty. Wonder how he used the other two! Now where's that bullet. You see? He fired. His arm dropped, and the revolver happened to fall into the pocket."

"Fired with his left hand, did he?" asked the superintendent, foolishly ironic.

"Certainly. A dozen years ago Franting was perhaps the finest amateur lightweight boxer in England. And one reason for it was that he bewildered his opponent by being left-handed. His lefts were much more fatal than his rights. I saw him box several times."

Whereupon Dr. Austin Bond strolled to the step of the platform near the door and picked up the fragment of very thin paper that was lying there.

"This," said he, "must have blown from the hearth to here by the draught from the window when the door was opened. It's part of a letter. You can see the burnt remains of the other part in the corner of the fender. He probably lighted the cigarette with it. Out of bravado! His last bravado! You'd better read this."

The superintendent read:

. . . repeat that I realize how fond you are of me, but you have killed my affection for you, and I shall leave our home tomorrow. This is absolutely final. E.

Dr. Austin Bond, having for the *n*th time satisfactorily demonstrated in his own unique, rapid way, that police officers were a set of numbskulls, bade the superintendent a most courteous good evening, nodded amicably to the detective-sergeant and left in triumph.

"I MUST GET some mourning and go back to the flat," said Emily Franting.

She was sitting one morning

in the lobby of the Palads Hotel, Copenhagen. Lomax Harder had just called on her with an English newspaper containing an account of the inquest at which the jury had returned a verdict of suicide upon the body of her late husband. Her eyes filled with tears.

"Time will put her right," thought Lomax Harder, tenderly watching her. "I was bound to do what I did. And I can keep a secret forever."

johnny pringle, detective

by . . . Walt Sheldon

It's easy enough for an alert, intelligent boy to be a sleuth in the rainbow's afterglow. But not when his own dad goes wrong.

JOHNNY PRINGLE tailed his father that day out of sheer joy of living. That would be hard to explain to a grown-up, and of course Johnny never would have been able to put it into words himself. But it was like this: he was so happy he had to do something real sort of crazy and funlike just to take care of the overflow of all his happiness.

He pretended he was a detective. He liked the detective stories on television, especially now that his Dad was back and let him stay up late in these vacation days so they could watch the television together. He followed Dad down the main alley of the tourist court where they were staying, melted into the shadow of the outside door while Dad dropped his dime and made his phone-call and then, when he heard Dad say, "Okay. I'll be right downtown," he got his really great idea.

He ran back to the car where

When Walt Sheldon retired from the United States Air Force to take up his residence in Japan he announced that the Flowery Kingdom seemed designed by nature to enable a mystery story writer to work undisturbed. Then, as if to prove himself wrong, he continued to crash the best seller lists in a very lively and active manner and—well, we just can't believe that a completely *undisturbed writer could do that. He must have a certain active restlessness, and a zestful, explorative drive. Precisely the kind of restlessness, for instance, that makes a boy's world so revealing in this, his newest, yarn.*

it was parked in the port beside their housekeeping apartment and crawled into the storage space behind the back seat. He could barely keep himself from giggling out loud when Dad climbed into the car and started it, never even guessing Johnny was with him.

There was magic, all right, to Dad's being home again. He wouldn't have even thought of fun like this a month ago. He had been inclined to sulk then and go off by himself and feel like crying for no reasons he could find. But of course he didn't want to cry and so he had to hold himself in. There was a real kind of pain to doing that.

"Johnny!" his mother used to say. "Why don't you go out and play? A twelve-year-old boy shouldn't sit around the house like this all the time!"

His mother was pretty. Johnny thought so, and Dad said so—just about every time he saw her now, he said so. Her name was Ruth and she was about twenty-nine or thirty, which was terribly old, of course, but just the same she was pretty. Dad was even over thirty and he wasn't handsome, not in the way Mom was pretty. But he had a good open face and liked to laugh, and that was what Johnny liked about him.

He could make a laugh out of most anything. When they had met Dad at the bus station he had stared at Johnny in a comic way, first thing, and had said, "Ruth! Who's this young man? A boy friend you found while I was away?"

"It's *me,* Dad! Johnny!" Johnny had shouted, not knowing in that moment whether to laugh or cry, and then his Dad had picked him up and swung him in an airplane spin and hugged him.

"I know it's you, Johnny. I really know. How are you, young fellow? How the heck are you, anyway?"

Johnny had felt his sadness pass almost in that moment. There had been a period while they got used to each other, of course. Maybe a week or two. Naturally it would take time, since he hadn't seen his Dad in almost three years. But seeing him so much now made it a lot easier. Mom was still working as a cashier in the restaurant, the way she had been doing all the time when Dad was away, because Dad hadn't found a job yet.

He said some man in a lock shop had offered him one, but you could hardly live on the salary. Anyway, Johnny didn't worry. They'd be okay pretty soon. Dad said some man owed him a lot of money and he'd collect soon and then they'd have a nest egg. That was a funny thing to say. A nest egg. Johnny had the picture of a huge egg,

about ostrich size, broken, and with all these dollar bills piled in it.

Now, as the car sped downtown, Johnny wondered whether to pop up and surprise his Dad now or save it till later. Maybe Dad would get out of the car downtown and he could tail him some more, he thought. Like they did on the television. He knew how. When the guy you were tailing looked around you ducked into a store entrance or put a newspaper up in front of your face. He wished he'd thought to bring a newspaper.

And after he surprised Dad, Dad would laugh, and then they would ride home together and he'd ask Dad to tell him about South America again. That was where Dad had been the last three years. He told about jaguars and headhunters and the big snakes there. He was really some Dad.

Johnny felt the car swing into a parking place and he lifted his head and peeked. The car was an old-fashioned one and he could just about fit into this storage space that was sort of connected to the rear trunk. Dad kept saying when he collected this money they were going to get a new car. They sure needed a new car. Johnny hoped the new one would have a place for him to hide in, too.

He looked around. He saw that Dad had parked in one of the quiet side streets just off the main part of town. At first he thought Dad was going to get out, but then he saw a couple of men and a woman come toward the car, and he saw Dad open the front door and heard him say, "Hello, Charley. Hello, Oklahoma. How are you, Boots?"

The first man—he must have been Charley — said, "Hello, Fred."

They all started to get into the car and Johnny ducked back. The woman got in first and the tall man with reddish hair, who looked like a farmer or a cowboy, got in beside her.

He heard his father in the front seat say, "Cigarette, Charley?"

He hadn't had a good look at Charley except to see that he was short and dressed sort of fancy. As for the woman she was real blonde and kind of plump, and he could smell her perfume all the way from where he crouched.

Johnny pretended that he was a detective and that these were mobsters planning to overthrow the corrupt city and buy off the district attorney and everybody. There was a microphone—a bug —in the front seat picking up all their conversation and he was listening on a tape recorder back here. He'd play the recording at the trial where he would be introduced as a surprise witness: Secret Agent John Pringle, who

had been working on this case undercover for some time . . .

"Well, Fred," said a voice up front—that would be Charley's —"this is it. We'll let you in on the mark today. That means you're in from now on."

"Yes, I guess I'm in," said Dad. He said it in a funny, tight sad way, not at all like his usual big joking voice.

"What's the matter, Fred?" said Oklahoma from the back seat. "You gettin' cold feet already?" He sounded like a cowboy when he talked. Maybe he was, thought Johnny, though he didn't wear a big hat.

"No cold feet," said Dad. "I need the score worse than any of you. But I just want you fellows to know—no more jobs after this. I'm opening a little lock shop when this is over and I have the dough to do it. I just want it understood, we don't see each other again."

"That suits us," said Charley. "Only we hate to see your talent go to waste."

They all laughed at that.

Johnny, the government agent, scowled fiercely and twirled an imaginary dial on his imaginary tape recorder.

"It went to waste for three years," he heard his Dad say. "I don't want any more of that. Frankly, if an ex-con could get a better job a little easier I'd do that and start saving for the lock shop."

"I'll bet," said Charley. "Out of sixty-five bucks a week you'd save. By the time you got it you'd be an old man and have arthritis in those talented fingers of yours. Don't worry, Fred, you're playing it smart this way. We need you to open that pete—and you need us to find the place and get in. Makes it handy all around. That is, if you don't get soft and crack, Fred."

What were they talking about? wondered Johnny. A pete was a safe, wasn't it? Was somebody going to crack a safe?

"Don't worry about me," said Dad. "I won't go soft."

"Just see you don't, Fred," said Oklahoma, and Johnny could hear the old seat springs creak as he leaned forward. "Us, we're all pros. I'll clue you, and I ain't so sure I favor workin' with amateurs."

"Fred's no amateur. He's done time," said Charley.

"For a bum rap," said Oklahoma. "Don't forget that. Least that's the way I heard it."

"Sure, sure," said Charley, chuckling. "They're all bum raps. To hear the boys in stir tell it there isn't a guilty man there."

Done time? Bum rap? In stir? *His father?* Realization was engulfing Johnny like green water. He'd fallen in deep water once before he could swim, and the feeling had been like this. *His Dad?*

"All right, Charley," said his

dad. "What's the mark and how do we take it?"

"It's a cinch," said Charley. "Small loan company on a side street. Transcontinental Loan, they call it. No good at night because they're loaded with burglar alarms. Big safe, about as high as a man. I wrote the make down for you. We go in fast, take over the joint and you take the safe. It's in a back room, that's the beauty of it. Any customers come in we give them a tale, and send them out again. No chance of getting ranked. Only the quicker you take that safe the better, naturally—that's why we rung you in on the job. The way we hear it, nobody made the safe yet you couldn't open."

"That's right," said Dad. "One way or another, I can do it."

"The quick way, Fred," said Charley. "And the cool way, without cracking—that's all we are interested in. The meet's at my apartment, one o' clock sharp day after tomorrow. Bel Air Apartments. Name of Johnson."

In the baggage space Johnny fought the green daze that was trying to take him away. He heard his own quickened breath, and felt his heart pound, and wondered that they didn't notice it up front.

Now Boots, the woman, spoke for the first time. "Fred—you really got a kid, like Charley said?"

"Yes, I have a boy. Johnny. He's twelve."

"Must be wonderful to have a kid," said Boots.

Charley laughed. "Her and her ideas! That's a woman for you."

"It's wonderful, Boots," said Dad, "but sometimes it's the toughest thing you ever knew."

"In our business," said Charley, laughing again, "I can imagine."

Johnny stayed still as death as his dad drove the car back to the tourist court. He heard Dad hum tunelessly to himself up front, and wondered how he could do it. His dad—a criminal—an exconvict — a safecracker! The agony of it drained all the emotion out of him and he couldn't even cry. He wanted to, but he couldn't. He wanted to rush up front and start striking his dad. He hated him! Now, all of a sudden, he saw that all the misery of the last three years had been his Dad's fault.

The way Mother had to work and leave him alone so much. The way she was so tired at night all the time, and the way they had to eat so much spaghetti and canned beans and count the pennies. Like the other kids having an allowance and Mom explaining she just couldn't afford it for Johnny. Like her crying that time and saying he couldn't join the Scouts because she couldn't pay for the neckerchief and all that, and she even said she

couldn't come to the meeting and see what it was like—the meeting where the other kids brought their dads. All that. All those years of it. South America, huh! He'd been in prison. *His Dad had been in prison!*

There was only one thing to do now.

The car pulled into the motel and Dad parked it in the carport and got out, still humming. Johnny didn't move at first. He waited until his dad entered the apartment. They had taken this small housekeeping apartment the day he met his dad at the bus station, and had moved from the room he and his mother had been living in.

That smelly, tiny room with its little hotplate and dirty ice box and cooking odors, that was Dad's fault, too. And Dad had been talking about buying their own real house when he collected the money the man owed him. Johnny knew that was a lie, now. Nobody owed Dad any money. Dad was going to rob a safe at that Transcontinental Loan Company to get that money. He'd lied to Mom and Johnny and everybody. He was a crook. He was no good. It was just like not having a dad again.

All right, Johnny would show him.

Dad got his pipe and his magazine and, dressed in his bathing shorts, left the apartment for the patio in the rear to get some sun. He did this every afternoon, and this was what Johnny had been waiting for.

Johnny scrambled out of the car and went into the apartment. He found the old cloth overnight bag. He threw clothes into it, and on top of the clothes his most precious possessions, a plastic pistol and a badge from the cereal company with SECRET AGENT written on it.

He thought once of his mother. His heart felt hollow and tears came into the corners of his eyes, but he shook his head viciously and threw off this feeling. He checked his money—Dad had given him most of it. Three dollars and twenty cents, in a little snap-purse. He almost wanted to leave the part of it Dad had given him but he couldn't remember exactly how much that was, so he took all of it. He lifted the overnight bag, slipped out of the apartment, and headed for the highway.

The cars whizzed by, the shiny cars with their jaws of grinning chrome, and the sun beat down on the concrete, baking little waves out of it, which Johnny could see in the near distance. He swung his thumb and looked hopeful each time a car passed. He knew from the marker sign nearby that he had come almost two hundred miles the day before. He was in ranch country. There were cattle and cottonwoods in the big meadows along

the highway and blue mountains and buttes along the horizon. A buzzard wheeled in the sun over a semi-distant hill.

Johnny felt grimy. His skin was dry. He wanted to get to a creek or a gas station or something and wash up. He had slept in a field last night in the part-shelter of a nest of boulders. He didn't know exactly where he was going. He was heading for some big city somewhere and then maybe he could get a job there. Maybe as a detective's assistant if he could find a detective or somebody who would take him on. He ought to be useful, the way he'd studied about tailing and disguises and everything.

Another big car approached. A big green car—a new Buick. Johnny didn't think this one would stop. It was too shiny and snooty. But he held up his thumb long before it was near and then, to his surprise, he saw it slow down and angle toward him.

The man in the car said, "Hi, kid! Get in!"

Big grinning man—almost sort of like his dad's face, though the man was bigger and darker. Maybe it was just the grin that reminded him. The man wore a big white cowboy hat and a tan shirt and narrow pink-gray riding pants, and he packed a gun belt and a holster. There was a gold star pinned on his shirt.

"Thanks, mister!" said Johnny and got in.

"Where you going, kid?" asked the man as he started the car.

He kept glancing sideways at Johnny and Johnny felt that this man's quick dark eyes could almost look right into his brain—though he knew, of course, that kind of thing was impossible. Johnny told him where he was headed.

"The big city, huh?" said the man. "You live there?"

"No, sir. I'm visiting my aunt." Johnny had made up that story and set it straight in his mind some time ago. He looked at the gun and the star again. "Are you a marshal or something, mister?"

"Nope." The man chuckled. "Just a deputy sheriff. And a part-time one at that. We had a lecture on traffic safety down at the State Police barracks and that's where I'm coming from. I own a couple of gasoline stations in these parts. Name's Hawk Borden. My real name's Clarence, but don't you dare call me that, kid. You just call me Hawk like everybody else."

"Yes, sir," said Johnny. "I mean yes, Hawk."

"Kind o' young to be out hitch-hiking all alone, aren't you?" Hawk Borden glanced at him again.

Johnny had a story for that, too. "My mom didn't have any money for bus fare. She said I'd

have to hitch-hike to my aunt's house. I'm gonna stay there a while. We're poor. My old man's dead, and we're poor."

"Your father's dead? Well, I'm sorry to hear that, kid. What's your name?"

"Johnny. Johnny Smith. My old man was a detective. He died in the line of duty, shooting it out with twelve gangsters. They were holed up in a scary old house and he shot it out with them."

"I see," said Hawk Borden thoughtfully. "Twelve, huh? That's a lot of gangsters. That's more than I ever even met as a deputy sheriff."

"Well, my dad was a real detective," said Johnny. "He met lots. He met a thousand of 'em."

Borden was quiet for a while and seemed to be thinking as he drove. Finally he said, "Your dad must've been quite a man. Tell me, Johnny, you thinking of being a police officer, too, when you grow up?"

"Yes, sir. I'm going to be a government agent."

"Well, that's good," said Borden, taking a hand from the wheel to rub his chin for a moment. "I'm interested in police work myself. Always have been. That's why I give up a little time to be a deputy sheriff. And you know, I've discovered something that makes the best policemen. The secret of being a good cop, you might say."

"What's that, Mr. Borden? I mean—Hawk."

"Well, I've found the only successful cops are the ones who can always stand up and face the music. The ones who never run away from anything. Like your dad, when he faced those twelve gangsters, as you say. Yes, sir, when the going gets tough a real cop or a detective he sticks right with it. Has it out. Brings everything in the open. Says what has to be said. Or if he's got some small punishment coming to him, why, he takes it, and smiles. He knows he's tough enough to take a little punishment. Do you see what I mean?"

"Yes, sir. I guess so," said Johnny. He stared straight ahead and was thoughtful for a spell.

"And another thing," said Borden, glancing at him. "I've noticed the people who can't stick when the going gets tough —the ones who run away— never do make policeman. No, sir. They try sometimes, but they just don't make the grade. Even the ones who were only kids when they ran away from something. It stays with 'em when they grow up. Did you know that, Johnny?"

"Yes, sir. I guess so," said Johnny thoughtfully again.

They drove in silence and presently came to a small crossroads settlement. Borden pulled into a gas station and restaurant and told the attendant to fill his

tank. There was a restaurant next to the gas station and a bus sign on the restaurant.

"Well, what do you know," said Borden. "Here's the bus stop." He looked at his watch. "Ought to be a bus going back to where you came from in a half hour or so."

"Yes, sir," said Johnny and stared at the bus sign.

He felt a strange stirring within him. He almost wished he had the money to take a bus back. He wondered what Mom was doing right now. She'd be at work in the restaurant. Or maybe he'd worried her so much by running away she wouldn't be able to work today. He frowned. He hadn't thought of that.

"I'll tell you what," Borden said suddenly. "I might help you go back and get that stuff you forgot."

"What stuff, Mr. Borden?"

"Didn't you say you'd forgot to bring something? One of your favorite toys, or something?"

"No, sir, I don't think I said that."

"Bet you did forget something, though. Probably something important."

"Well—there's my Mickey Mantle glove. And my model planes. And a couple other things, I guess."

"Well, now, Johnny," said Borden casually, "I could lend you the money to get back home and get them. It's just a few dollars from here by bus. You could send it back to me sometime when you earned it. I wouldn't worry about it."

Johnny stared at him. "You mean you'd just lend me the bus fare?"

"Why, sure! We're friends, aren't we? And we're both sort of in the same business—me being a deputy sheriff and you going to be a government agent. Fact is, I feel like a little rest and I'd even stick around here to make sure you got on the bus all right and say 'so long' to you. What do you say?"

"Gee," said Johnny. He looked at the bus sign again. "I don't know."

"If there was any sort of little trouble at home, a fellow like you—going to be a cop, and all—you wouldn't mind facing up to it, would you?"

"I guess not," said Johnny. He nodded, as much to himself as to Borden. "I guess not."

"Good! We'll put you on this next bus, then, and we'll see the driver gets you back safe and sound. And you might give me your address, so I know where to write to you. Let's see now, I've forgotten what you said your last name was."

"Pringle," said Johnny, forgetting all about Smith. "Johnny Pringle." He gave his address.

"Fine!" said Borden, writing it in a notebook. "Now let's go

in the restaurant and have a chocolate soda or a hamburger or something while we're waiting!"

"Yes, sir," said Johnny. "I was getting kind of hungry—"

To Johnny's surprise both his mother and father were there, waiting for him, when he descended from the bus the next morning.

His mother rushed to him, leaned down and put her arms about him and began to try not to cry. His father stood back a little, looking at him gravely and clumsily. He was frowning as he always did when he couldn't quite think of what to say.

Johnny stared at him over his mother's shoulder and didn't know what to think. One half of him wanted to rush into the strong comfort of his dad's arms, and the other half wanted to run away again.

Nobody asked about his trip until they had returned to the motel and his mother began to make him a big breakfast in the small kitchen. She set hotcakes before him and said, "We'll never be able to thank that Mr. Borden enough. He called me long distance. He guessed you were running away."

"I wonder how he knew?" said Johnny, concentrating on the hotcakes.

"Grown-ups are smarter than you think, sometimes," said Mom, smiling. She poured herself a cup of coffee. "Johnny. Do you want to tell me why you ran away?"

He looked at her, startled for a moment. He shook his head quickly. "I can't tell you, Mom! I just can't tell you!"

His father all this time had been sitting in the corner of the room, smoking his pipe and studying Johnny so closely it made him uncomfortable. Johnny tried not to look at his father. He didn't know what to do about what he knew.

He couldn't call the police—that would be snitching on his own father. He had toyed with the idea of going down to the loan company at two o'clock and pointing his SECRET AGENT pistol at all of them and telling his father to run home—quick—while he marched the others off to jail. But he didn't really think they'd believe his plastic pistol was a real one.

His mother went outside to hang up some wash.

"Johnny," said his father.

"Yes?" Johnny pretended to be busy with some hot cake crumbs left on the plate, so he wouldn't have to turn and look at Dad.

"Johnny, did you run away because we're so poor—because we haven't got a nice home? Was that it, Johnny?"

Johnny shook his head. "That wasn't it, Dad. I don't care if we're rich or anything."

"You don't?" his father said.

"No, I don't care about that."

"Look at me, Johnny. Turn around and look at me."

Johnny turned. His face felt white and his voice was dry in his throat. "Yes?"

"Don't you want to be honest with me, Johnny? I'm your dad. We shouldn't have any secrets from each other."

"I can't tell you nothing! I mean—anything!" Johnny almost shouted it in his agony.

"Then suppose I tell you something first," said Dad, knocking the dottle from his pipe into the ashtray. He looked up again and his eyes seemed to bore into Johnny's. "The night before last when you disappeared, Johnny, and we found your bag and clothes gone, I was sure I knew why you ran away. I was sure it was because we didn't have money and I didn't have a job.

"And I wanted to get a certain big sum of money more than ever, because I figured we needed it to get you back. To make a search and everything, and then keep you when you got back. Do you understand what I'm saying, Johnny?"

Johnny nodded. He wanted to say he understood it real well—better than his father guessed he did—but he didn't.

"I'd told a lie to your mother," said Dad, and he seemed to swallow something as he said this. "I'd said I was getting some money a man owed me. That wasn't the truth. I was going to do something bad to get that money. Never mind what, Johnny, but it was something bad. I suppose it must be hard for a boy to believe that his father would do something bad, but—"

"You're not gonna do it, Dad?" interrupted Johnny sharply. *"You're not gonna do the bad thing?"*

Dad shook his head. "No. I made up my mind when I saw you get off that bus. I knew how much you meant to me, Johnny, and I knew it wouldn't be fair to you. It'd be a dirty secret I'd have to keep all my life, and I wouldn't want that between us." He started to fill his pipe again. "Yes. I'm glad you came back, Johnny. I might have done that bad thing this afternoon if you hadn't."

Johnny rushed to his dad, surprising him. He climbed on his dad's lap, spilling a lot of tobacco from the pouch in his dad's hand, but his dad didn't seem to care. His dad hugged him and smiled.

Johnny did keep a few little secrets from Dad, though. Later that morning, for instance, he tailed him to the motel office and listened in while he made a phone call. He pretended the phone was tapped and that he was a secret agent getting evi-

dence against the spy ring. They were going to steal all the atom bombs in the United States and smuggle them in cheap suitcases to a foreign power. Johnny hid himself just outside the door of the office and listened, frowning his secret agent's frown.

"Don't threaten me, Charley," he heard Dad say. "I'm out, and there's nothing you can do about it. You can't even pull the job without me. Take my advice and pull out yourself—for good. You'll get caught sooner or later and you know it."

The phone receiver cackled metallically and angrily.

Dad laughed. "What am I going to do? I'm going to take that locksmith job. I'm going to take it and pay off a debt I owe—to my kid."

The receiver sputtered again. Dad hung up.

Johnny slipped away from the door quickly. He had to rush the evidence to headquarters now in his jet plane, even though he had been accused of treason and the other agents, not knowing he had been framed, had been instructed to shoot him down at sight. But he'd make it, all right. He never ran away from a situation just because it seemed a little tough. That was what made him the man he was.

A rascally manipulator of stock exchange shares discovers that his pedigree is far too bulky for a marginal plunger—and the Saint sells him a postage stamp that multiplies his woes.

THE UNFORTUNATE FINANCIER

By LESLIE CHARTERIS

in the next issue

murder in hollywood

by . . . Raoul Whitfield

Incompetence or just pure bad luck may hang an extra in the movie colony. But McCoy knew that a hanging can be deadlier by far.

WHEN I WALKED across the worn carpet of the chief's office Stella Burke was dabbing at her cold steel eyes with a pink handkerchief. I grinned at her.

"Don't cry, little girl, don't cry," I advised grimly. "We've got you on only four charges this time."

She swore at me. "It wasn't *your* brains that got me," she snapped. "That little squealer just happened to go to you."

I walked past her, still grinning, and stood by the chief's desk. Madden said: "Hop right out to the *Western Pictures* studio—the big one just off Vine Street. Just got the call. They think it's murder. Take Eddie Rex along with you."

I frowned and Madden said: "What's the matter? Have you got a pain or were you just thinking of Stella, here?"

"We won't have to worry about Stella for eight or ten years," I said loudly. "Mind if I take Jake Reed?"

Of the numerous gifted writers who made the late Captain Shaw's BLACK MASK *a frontier-blazing periodical in the mystery field Raoul Whitfield was perhaps the most resourceful. So ingenious and enlivening and brilliantly motivated were his plot structures, and so skillful his handling of suspense, violence, conflict and character that he seemed at times almost a counterpart of Hemingway in a school of writing that has known its own moments of greatness and will continue to know them. And here he is at his very best, in a fast-moving Hollywood mystery with a smash climax, starring the irrepressible McCoy.*

Published originally as "Murder Again."

The chief battered his large right fist on the desk, and a cup given him by plainclothes detectives in some other section of the country rocked and nearly fell over.

"When I say Eddie Rex I mean Eddie Rex!" he crackled at me.

Stella said with sarcasm: "I hate to think a guy as dumb as him pulled me in."

I shrugged at the chief. "You know how Eddie is around a picture studio. Every extra girl is a Grace Kelly to him, even if she isn't marrying a prince."

Madden scratched his red-topped head noisily. "Take Eddie and get the hell out there before the murderer gets any farther north than San Francisco, will you?"

I told him that I would, turned and went past Stella. She pursed her lips and made an impolite sound. I didn't look back at her.

"Try that in a couple of years and see how your cellmate likes it," I said, and shut the door of the chief's office behind me.

Down the corridor, in the big room, I found Eddie Rex reading a motion picture magazine. Eddie's blue eyes held an anxious expression.

"Come on, Handsome," I said. "We've got a murder job. Make it fast."

I went over to my desk and got the automatic I used now and then for target practice, on the police shooting gallery.

Eddie said: "Where's the body?"

I looked the gun's clip over, found a couple of stray .45's in it, and shoved it in a hip pocket of my gray pants.

Then I turned back to Eddie.

"Somewhere on the *Western Pictures* lot," I told him. "And now you know as much as I do. Let's get going."

We went down the million dollar County Building's special elevator shaft, out the back way to the parking place, and piled into Eddie's roadster. After we'd made about three miles in the direction of Hollywood without hitting anything Eddie whistled softly.

"*Western Pictures* lot—say!" He whistled again.

I lighted a cigarette. "What's the matter? Does that picture gal whose photographs you collect—the one with the platinum eyes and the blue hair—"

Eddie cut in. "They had a murder out there two weeks ago."

I frowned at him. "Check," I said. "I was in San Diego when that happened. A gal, wasn't it?"

Eddie let the roadster roll at around sixty, along Wilshire Boulevard.

"Gal named Smith," he told me. "Studio tag was Louise Lally. She was being featured,

but they figured on starring her later."

I said: "Wait a minute. That started out as a murder, but the coroner's verdict was suicide. They found a couple of notes two days later. Some actor guy over in London had forgotten he'd promised to marry her, and had married someone else."

Eddie said: "Yeah, but it looked like murder for a while."

I groaned. "Who worked on it with you?" I asked.

Eddie shook his head. "I was out in Bakersfield. When I got back it was all over."

I groaned more loudly. "And you read about it in the papers?"

Eddie nodded. "But I get the *best* papers."

I slumped low in the seat, and Eddie got the roadster up around seventy and worked the siren.

"I didn't want you on this job with me, Eddie," I said a minute or so later. "But the chief insisted."

Eddie grinned at the boulevard ahead. "I was born in Seattle, and the chief knows it."

I said: "What's Seattle got to do with it?"

Eddie cut the speed down to fifty.

"The Northwest," he replied. "I always get my man."

Eddie grinned at me, then swung over to Vine Street and we rolled towards the Hollywood Hills. The picture company's main entrance was just off Vine Street and when we pulled up in front of the arched doorway and piled out a uniformed guard shook his head.

"You can't park there. Don't you see the signs?"

Eddie grinned. "I can't see anything but the California sun on your brass buttons."

We went inside and the uniformed attendant called after us: "Wait a minute—you'll get a ticket!"

Eddie called back: "Thanks, but I've *got* a ticket."

I spoke to the snappily dressed girl behind the information desk. "McCoy and Rex, from County Detectives."

She smiled automatically. "What is it about, please?"

I said: "It's about murder."

Her eyes widened and then grew cold. "Who do you wish to see, please?" she asked icily.

Eddie got his head close to mine. "The dead one," he said slowly. "And the sooner we see him—the less chance there will be of *you* being strangled by a killer on the loose."

The girl pressed a button on a switchboard and spoke into the phone mouthpiece.

"Two men are here who say they are detectives. I thought Mr. Mahoney might be able—"

She stopped talking and listened. Then she said: "Yes, right away." She looked at me. "Go right in and on through to the lot. Then go straight along

the main street. It's Stage Four. Ask for Mr. Stone."

Eddie said: "Mr. Rolling Stone?"

The girl flashed a smile. "That's so old it's covered with moss."

I grabbed Eddie by the arm and we went through a door, along a corridor and out another door to the main studio street. Stage Four was a couple of blocks away, with big letters on the concrete.

Eddie said: "Nice, bright phone gal. Doesn't know there's a murder in the studio."

"She was bright enough to top a bum joke of yours," I replied.

When we got to the sound-proof doors of Stage Four, Eddie was about to open one. I shoved him away and pointed to the red light that was burning.

"Wait'll that goes dead," I said. "That means they're shooting."

Eddie's blue eyes stared into mine. "Pretty calm old studio, Mac. The telephone gal doesn't know they've had a murder, and they go right on shooting the stuff on the stage where the body is."

I grinned. We stood around for a couple of minutes and then I said: "They can't be shooting a scene this long. Let's go in."

I shoved open the outer sound door and Eddie followed me. When I got the inner door open we walked on a dimly, lighted, large stage. At the far end there were a lot of people. We neared the group and Eddie walked up to a uniformed officer.

"Where's the body?" he asked. "We're from County Detectives."

The man in the uniform pointed beyond the group. "Over there," he muttered.

Eddie said: "What are *you* doing over here?"

The man shrugged. "Waitin' to see what's going to happen. Just killing time."

Eddie looked at me. "What the hell?" he muttered.

I said to the uniformed one. "You're not a cop?"

He shook his head. "I'm an actor," he replied.

Eddie frowned at him. "Why the hell didn't you say so?" he snapped.

We went through the group of boys and gals and the uniformed one called after Eddie: "I didn't say so because a lot of these muggs might have argued with me."

Eddie swore under his breath. I said: "Take it easy, Handsome. The picture bunch know how to wisecrack, too."

Eddie stood still and shouted loudly: "Mr. Stone — Mr. Stone."

A man came up on his right. He was a big man and he looked tough. He was dressed roughly and had a lot of dirt smeared on his face, over make-up.

"I'm Stone," he announced.

Eddie nodded. "I'm Rex from County Detectives. Where's the body?"

Stone shrugged. "They took it away somewhere. I don't know where."

Eddie looked wearily at me. "This is the hell of a studio," he breathed.

A tall, solid man reached my side. He had worried eyes and quick, nervous hands.

"Anybody call for Stone?" he asked. "I'm Stone, business manager."

I said: "We're from Headquarters downtown. Is somebody dead here?"

Stone said: "Yes—it's been a murder. I'm sure of that. The body is on the flophouse set. The studio police are keeping everybody on the stage—everybody they can, that is. We haven't called in the Hollywood police, and we're trying to keep things quiet."

Eddie said: "Let's look the body over."

Stone led the way. I said: "Little confusing—a lot of actor cops around, in the Los Angeles police uniform."

Stone had dark eyes; his face was pale. "We're making a picture called 'Murder Again.' The scene we were shooting was a Los Angeles flophouse. Near Chinatown."

I said: "Who was the dead man?"

Stone frowned. "An extra. A man named Tom Grey. He was playing a bum. I don't know anything about him, and the assistant director just got him on call from the Central Casting Bureau. He was one of twenty."

We reached the flophouse set and walked along between long rows of cots. A studio cop in a brown uniform stood near the cot on which the body was lying. I went up close and looked at the body. The dead man was dressed like a down-and-outer. His face was white underneath a stubble of beard. His eyes were opened, staring.

Eddie said from behind me: "Slug do it?"

A man on my left said: "I'm Rising, the studio doctor. When I got in here he was dead. Killed only a few minutes earlier, I'd say. The bullet wound is in the back of his head—at the base of the brain. He must have died instantly."

I turned the body over a little. There wasn't much blood. Stone was on the other side of the cot.

"When did you discover he was dead?" I asked.

Stone said: "We're behind schedule on this picture. Our director is ill. So I was directing. After the scene was shot—the men sleeping—I called everyone up to the camera. Joe Jacobs, my assistant, noticed one man still on the cot. He pointed him out to me. I called a couple of times,

then figured he was asleep. Joe and I went between the cots, yelling at him. When we got close we saw his eyes were open. He looked dead. We shook him and saw the wound. Then we called the doc."

Eddie said: "No one heard the gun go off? No one saw the flash?"

Stone said: "I've got the whole bunch together and asked them. No one saw anything."

I said: "When was Grey last seen moving around—and who saw him?"

Stone frowned at the body. "I haven't found anyone who saw him move around after I did."

Eddie was looking under the cot on which the body lay, around the walls of the flop-house set.

"When did you last see him move around?" I asked.

The business manager's nervous hands moved and his eyes narrowed. "Just before we started to shoot the scene."

I said: "What do you mean by just before?"

A slender, blond-haired man came up, and Stone gestured towards him.

"This is Joe Jacobs, my assistant."

I nodded. "You said you saw the dead man just before the scene was shot. I asked you what you meant by 'just before.' "

Stone stuck a corn-cob pipe between his teeth. He didn't fill it with tobacco.

"I got the men on the cots, got them in the positions I wanted. Some on their backs, some lying sidewise. Then I went back to the camera and looked the set over. Most of the men were quiet, but Grey moved an arm."

I said: "At that time you didn't know his name was Grey?"

A little color showed on Stone's cheeks. He took the pipe from his mouth.

"No. He was just an extra."

Eddie called out, from a cot down the set room a short distance: "What the devil is this?"

He was looking down at something lying on the cot.

We looked in his direction and Jacobs said: "It's a dummy. From where you are to the end of the set—all the cots have dummies."

I went down and stood beside Eddie. "You should be on one of these cots with the rest of them," I told him. "Get to a phone and call the chief. Get Grey's address from the Central Casting Bureau and give it to the chief. He can send someone out to find something about Grey."

Eddie blinked at me. "Find out *what* about Grey?"

I groaned. "Anything," I said.

Eddie sighed. "Who's the gal in the blue dress over there?" he asked. "There's something about her—"

"Phone the chief first and ask

her who she is after," I cut in.

When I got back to the small group near the cot on which the body was lying Jacobs said: "We don't move the camera along the line of cots in the scene we shot. And it's pretty dark. So we used the dummies at the far end, in each row of cots. They photograph all right. Saves money."

I nodded. Stone got some tobacco in his corn-cob pipe and lighted it up. I said: "Which extra was on the cot beyond the one occupied by the dead man, the one farther from the camera?"

Stone shook his head. "There was a dummy figure on the next cot—and all the way down there were dummies, on both sides."

I looked at Jacobs. "You just told Eddie Rex that from where *he* was, on down, there were dummies. Eddie was about four cots from this one."

Stone said quietly: "We moved the cot Grey is on, brought it here and put the one that was here down the line."

I said: "Why?"

Stone said: "For better light. Here we've got two work lights. Down there we'd have had to flood the whole stage to get enough light for the doc—and that costs money."

I said: "Sure. Then, as I get it, the cot beyond the one Grey was found dead on—that one was holding a dummy?"

Stone said: "Yeah, that's it. And the cot on this side of the Grey cot was occupied by a man named Shiff."

I nodded. "Dig him up for me, will you?"

Jacobs went away, calling the extra's name. Stone frowned down at the body of the dead man.

"The thing that beats me is that we were all set to turn the camera over when I saw Grey move an arm, and then we went through the scene. No dialogue, no movement. Just a bunch of bums sleeping in a dimly-lighted flophouse. And then Grey didn't come up to the camera when I called the others—and he was dead when we got to him. No shot sound, no flare from the gun. Just a quiet scene—"

I said: "In what way did he move his arm. And which arm was it?"

Stone sucked on the stem of his corn-cob. "The arm nearest the camera. His right arm. He sort of lifted it, then let it fall over the side of the cot—the right side. He was lying on his back."

"He let it dangle?" I asked.

Stone nodded. "I thought that looked pretty effective. Like a man sleeping. And the poor devil—"

I cut in. "Just before he lifted his arm—there was no excitement, nothing unusual happened?"

Stone shook his head. "Not

a thing," he replied. "It's damned funny."

A heavyset man came up to me. He stood a half foot over my six feet. He had a hard mouth and small eyes.

Jacobs from behind the man said: "This is Lou Shiff."

I nodded. "You know the dead man, Shiff?"

He shook his head. "I've seen him around, that's all. A couple of times on Hollywood Boulevard. And I think he was over at Fox in some mob stuff a few weeks ago."

"Was he lying on his cot when you got on the one next to him?" I asked.

Shiff shook his head slowly. "Couldn't say as to that. The set was pretty dark. A lot of extras were lying around. I sort of dozed off and I guess I was on my cot for ten minutes before the camera started working."

"You didn't hear anything, or see anything near his cot?"

Shiff shook his head again. "I was lying on my right side—and that put my back to him. I didn't notice him at all when Mr. Stone called us up to the camera. I just slid off my cot and went along the aisle. It was Mr. Stone who discovered him."

I said: "Okay, that's all."

Shiff went away. Stone pulled on his pipe and frowned.

"I've asked everybody. Even the boys up in the rigging, working the lights. They didn't have much chance because we were using only a faint light. Haven't found anyone who saw a thing unusual. And yet—"

I said grimly: "Yet Grey got dead from a bullet—and was moving his arm just before the scene started."

Stone swore softly. "It's got *me* licked," he said.

I said: "Well, I'll phone for the coroner, and when we get the bullet we may learn something. You shot the scene after he moved. I'd like to see how that comes out."

Stone nodded. "I thought of that, myself. The film is being developed now. It should be ready in a half hour. We can run it in my private projection room."

I said: "Swell. But if you didn't see anything, and your assistant didn't see anything—and nobody else saw anything—the film won't be much help."

Stone took the corn-cob out of his mouth. "Can't tell," he replied. "There might be some little thing we failed to notice."

"Let's say a prayer," I said. "And while I'm thinking one up I'll wander around and talk to some of this bunch."

Stone smiled wearily as I turned away. I went down the two lines of cots, and looked over one of the realistic and life-size dummies. Then I went back towards the camera and ran into Eddie and Rex.

"Got anything?" he asked.

I nodded. "The beginning of a headache," I replied. "Get the chief?"

Eddie grinned. "Yeah. Grey lived in a boarding house over on Franklin Avenue. I gave the chief the address and he's getting a man out there. I know a girl who lived around the corner from where this Grey lived and—"

I said: "Who cares?"

A voice called loudly, excitedly, from behind the walls of the flophouse set: "Mr. Stone—Mr. Stone!"

I turned around and watched a black-haired, slender man come running towards the cameras. Stone called from his spot near the dead man.

"Over here! What's the matter?"

The dark-haired man hurried towards the cameras. His lips were twitching and his face was pale. When he got near me I reached out and grabbed him by the left wrist.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

He stared at me, then tried to twist away. "Mr. Stone!" he called. His voice was high, almost shrill.

I said: "Take it easy. Stone can come over here. What's wrong—"

He said: "Let me go, damn you! It's happened again."

I jerked him closer to me. "I'm from County Detectives," I snapped. "*What's* happened again?"

He swallowed hard, stopped struggling. "It's murder!" he said, excitedly. "Murder — again!"

Stone came up in time to hear that. I asked: "Where?"

The dark-haired man groaned and slipped towards the floor of the set. Stone and I caught him and eased him down. Eddie Rex called: "Get some water, someone."

Stone was working over the man. He looked up at me. "He's Reynolds," he said. "He's a cutter—doing the cutting on our picture."

I said: "Okay, but let's get him talking."

An extra girl came towards us, very good looking and very scared. We used the water she hadn't spilled from a paper cup, but Reynolds was in a dead faint. Eddie looked at me and swore.

"Where's he come from, Mac? Maybe I'd better go out and look around. Or maybe—"

I said: "Maybe you'd better take it easy until we learn what he's trying to get at."

The studio doctor came over and leaned down. I said: "He says there's been another murder. We've got to get him back to consciousness."

The doctor ripped open the top of the dark-haired man's white shirt, got his head low. When he straightened up he

looked at me and said steadily: "You won't get him to talk again. He's dead."

Stone's face was very pale. His lips moved but he didn't speak.

"He had a bad heart, I know that," the doctor said. "He's fainted before, at the studio. I've warned him about excitement."

Stone muttered: "But he saw something. He said it had happened again—"

He broke off. A short, barrel-chested actor—one of the men in the flophouse scene—came running up. He spoke to the doctor.

"At the other end of the stage, Doc—up in the rigging. I think he's dead."

The doctor said: "Dead—up in the rigging?"

I spoke sharply: "What were *you* doing, up on the rigging platform?"

The actor shook his head. "I wasn't up there. I just happened to look up and saw him—hanging there!"

When the chief said: "Hello, McCoy," I got my face close to the booth telephone mouthpiece.

"Things are happening fast out here," I told him. "Want the facts?"

He swore. "Got a bowling date tonight—hope it isn't tough," he replied.

I said: "It's plenty tough."

Madden swore again. "Tell me now what you know."

I took a deep drag on my cigarette. "An extra by the name of Thomas Grey has been apparently murdered. There's a bullet wound in his neck, base of the brain. A cutter by the name of Reynolds is dead, apparently of heart failure because he saw a man hanging from the rigging they use for the overhead lights. The man hanging from the rigging is dead. He was an actor who worked in the same scene as Grey. Strangulation by rope. Suicide or murder."

Madden said: "Is that all?"

I said: "That's all—so far. But we've been out here only an hour."

Madden muttered something I didn't catch. "Got any ideas?" he asked more clearly.

I said: "Yeah, too many. And Eddie's got a few, all bad. And the business manager's got a couple."

Madden spoke grimly. "What is the best one—so far?"

"Grey was murdered by Hallowell, the other extra. Hallowell hanged himself. The cutter had a bad heart and just passed out."

Madden grunted. "Any reason for this Hallowell to murder Grey?"

I said: "Yeah, he hated him."

Madden said: "Then what the hell did he hang himself for, after he'd killed him?"

"Remorse," I replied. "And I think the whole theory is lousy."

Madden grunted again. "Find a better one, and I'll be out there in a half hour. Keep the people we need around the studio. I'm getting the dope on Grey now."

I said: "So am I. There's a girl in the thing.

Madden said with sarcasm: "No? Is it possible!"

He hung up and so did I. I went out of the booth and Eddie said: "I've been thinking, Mac, that—"

"Can you prove it?" I asked.

"Prove what?" he muttered, his blue eyes staring.

"Prove that you've been thinking," I said. "The chief's coming out, so we've only got a half hour to dig up anything we might get medals for."

Eddie frowned. "Now that we know Grey and Hallowell were both after the same girl—"

He broke off. I said: "Yeah? What next?"

He shrugged. "We've got something to work on. I think the girl's telling the truth. Hallowell was crazy about her. He'd seen her a few nights ago, out with Grey. He'd hated Grey for a long time, she admits that. So when he saw his chance—"

"What chance?" I cut in.

Eddie's blue eyes blinked at me. "The chance to murder Grey," he replied.

I frowned at Eddie. "What *was* the chance?" I asked sharply. "How did Hallowell murder Grey?"

Eddie said: "He shot him. The cot he lay on was right across the aisle from Grey's. He shot Grey, then flopped on his own cot. He stuck around for a while after Stone started questioning everybody. Then things got working on his mind. So he went to the other end of the stage, climbed up to the rigging platform and used the length of rope."

I nodded my head slowly. "Just by luck he wasn't seen or heard shooting Grey."

Eddie said: "There was a little excitement before the scene was shot, Stone admits that. Dummies being moved around, placed on the cots. The actors moving around. Grey was lying face downward, and the set was fairly dark. Hallowell used a small caliber gun with a silencer. It didn't make much racket, and the flash might not have come off at all. If it did the others might have thought somebody was striking a match.

I looked at Eddie and groaned. "All right, Hallowell murdered Grey in the way you say. Then what?"

Eddie said: "Then he flopped on his cot, across the aisle. Maybe he had time to turn Grey over on his back, or maybe Grey rolled over, convulsively, when he was shot. Stone came along, thought Grey was sleeping or

just lying there, and went on back to the camera."

I said: "And Grey came to life, moved his right arm, let it dangle?"

Eddie's blue eyes held faint triumph. "That was just another convulsive movement — maybe his last."

I looked at the California sky and whistled off key. Eddie said: "That's my theory."

I nodded. "And you're stuck with it," I replied. "Glued fast right up to your ears."

He frowned at me. "What did Hallowell do with the gun?" I asked.

Eddie shrugged. "Kept it in a pocket until he left the set. Then he tossed it somewhere. This is a big stage—about half a city block. A lot of sets on it. He could have hidden it a hundred places."

I nodded. "The set was pretty dark. There wasn't much blood on the wound or on the cot. No powder burns on the skin. That means it was pretty swell shooting. And a silencer can make quite a bit of racket on the first shot, even. Sometimes it slips up, and there's a flash."

Eddie shrugged again. "This time it didn't slip up. What sound it made was drowned by other racket. Maybe it was good shooting—maybe it was luck."

I said: "Okay, Eddie. You hand it to the chief that way."

He nodded. "I sure will."

He walked towards the line of projection rooms, and Eddie said: "What's *your* idea?"

I shook my head. "It isn't yours, Eddie. I always have thought you were a lousy dick. Now I'm sure of it."

Eddie grinned. "What's your idea, Mac?"

I lighted a cigarette, not offering Eddie one because I knew he'd take it.

"Maybe Grey hated Hallowell. He pulled a gun on him and threatened to shoot him if he didn't go to the other end of the stage and hang himself. Hallowell promised to hang himself after the scene. Then Grey, realizing what he'd made Hallowell promise and knowing that Hallowell always kept his promises, shot himself in the back of the neck, but managed to throw the gun away and fall on the cot, where he died."

Eddie's eyes were very large. "And Hallowell hung himself, as he'd promised," I finished.

Eddie stood still and swore at me. "You wouldn't kid me, would you, Mac?" he asked.

I shook my head. "It seems as good to me—as your idea," I said.

Stone stood near the projection room door. His thin face moved from side to side as we came up.

"Terrible business, McCoy. That suicide a couple of weeks ago. The Lally girl. Now a mur-

der—the cutter dropping dead—and another suicide."

I said: "What *another* suicide?"

He blinked at me. "Hallowell, of course."

I said: "Oh, Hallowell? That was suicide, eh? You're sure of that?"

Stone stopped blinking and stared at me. "You don't think someone murdered him, carried him up to the rigging platform, put a rope around his neck and dropped him six feet below the platform, do you?"

I said: "No."

Stone continued to stare at me. "There isn't a mark on his body except the rope mark around his neck. He fastened that rope, then lowered himself, strangled himself."

Eddie nodded his head vigorously. "What did he do all that for?" I asked.

Stone spoke grimly. "It's a cinch. He murdered Tom Grey, then realized what he'd done."

I smiled. "How did he murder Grey without thirty or forty people seeing him?"

Stone shrugged. "That's one for you. That's *your* job."

He led the way into the projection room. The lights were on. Ellen Dana sat beside a uniformed police officer. She looked as though she had been crying. She had dark hair and eyes, nice features.

The Hollywood cop said: "Hello, McCoy. In for the show?"

I nodded and edged past the two of them, sat down beside the girl. Eddie and Stone edged past me. Stone sat next to me, on my left. The girl spoke shakily.

"You found his gun, Mr. McCoy?" she asked.

I said: "Whose gun, Miss Dana?"

Her lips trembled. "Hallowell's," she said very unsteadily. "The one he killed Tom with—"

Her voice broke. I shook my head. "Did Hallowell hate Grey very much?" I asked her.

She nodded. "Terribly. I've never known anything like it. He felt that I—was absolutely his. And whenever he saw me with Tom—"

She broke off again. I said: "Did he ever threaten Grey in your presence?"

She hesitated, then nodded slowly. "I hate to have to say so—but he did. Twice. He told me once that he'd kill Tom Grey for taking me away. I was very nervous and I tried to tell him that he'd only be caught, sentenced to death. He laughed at me. In a very grim way. He said he'd never be caught. But I didn't—think—"

She stopped. "Didn't think what?" I asked.

"That he meant he'd—hang himself—afterwards," she finished weakly.

Stone said: "Ready to see this

strip? There isn't much of it—just a shot of the men sleeping."

I said: "Yeah, let's take a peek."

Stone leaned forward and pressed a button. The side wall lights of the projection room went out. An assistant camera man was holding the scene number plate before the camera as the screen caught the projection.

Stone's voice said, from off the screen: "Quiet everybody, when we fade in on this! And you men on the cots—don't move. You're all dog-tired. All right—camera!"

The camera man with the slate snapped off and the scene was the men on the cots. My eyes went to the left row, to the tenth cot. The figure was too far away from the camera to distinguish the face. And Tom Grey was slightly out of focus. But I could see the arm dangling, motionless, over the side of the cot. The camera was on a platform, and angled down on the scene.

Stone said softly: "No dialogue. We were going to dub in the sounds of the street, and some snoring."

I nodded, my eyes on the motionless figures on the cots. There seemed to be twenty or thirty of them in each row, and the dummies looked very real, in the background. There was no movement.

Suddenly Stone's voice sounded sharply: "Okay—cut. That's all right!"

The screen at the far end of the room became white and blank again. Eddie said: "All right, hell!"

Stone spoke grimly. "Ironical—those words." He pressed a button and the projector room lights flashed. "Want it again?" he asked.

I shook my head. "What for? There's no movement. Nothing happens."

Eddie said huskily: "The poor devil was already dead."

I stood up, and Stone rose beside me. Ellen Dana dabbed at her eyes with a handkerchief.

"It's terrible—to think that Hallowell could do—such a thing." Her words were very low.

I said: "Don't think it, then. Think something else."

She lifted her head, sucked in a sharp breath. "You mean—perhaps Hallowell *didn't* murder Tom?"

I shrugged and edged past her towards an aisle of the small, narrow room.

"I can't see how he murdered Grey," I said simply. "And I can't see him hanging himself from the rigging platform. And I can't see a couple of other things."

Stone said wearily: "What *can* you see?"

We went from the projection room to a street of the studio.

I smiled a little. "I can see murder," I said slowly. "And then I can see murder again."

Stone muttered. "You think Hallowell was *murdered,* too?"

I nodded.

Eddie said: "For God's sake, are you going crazy, Mac? There isn't a mark on him, except on his throat."

I nodded again. "That's right," I told Eddie. "You've been going over the ground with a fine comb."

Eddie swore. "I haven't *got* a fine comb," he breathed.

I grinned. "Get one—and keep the hair out of your eyes," I advised.

Stone said sharply: "What we want to do is solve this business. You two seem to spend a lot of time kidding each other."

I nodded. "It's our sunny dispositions, Mr. Stone," I said. "What next?"

Stone frowned at us. "I'm going to report to the general manager," he said.

I smiled at him. "See you later. We'll be around somewhere."

He went away towards the Administration Building, scowling.

Eddie looked at me. "The Hollywood cops are on the scene now. Notice the one with Ellen Dana?"

I nodded. "Couldn't miss his feet. They're almost as big as yours, though not so flat."

Eddie let that pass. "I don't think that gal was crazy about either Grey or Hallowell. Not from what she told me. But she got a jolt when they both passed out."

We walked back towards Stage Four. There was a small crowd around the nearest entrance and the studio police were keeping people outside and pretending they knew more about what was happening inside than they did.

One of them said to me: "Did the film show anything?"

I nodded. "Yeah—a lot of guys sleeping on cots. Not very helpful."

The studio cop swore, and nodded his head. His eyes were narrowed and thoughtful.

"That's what I figured," he muttered. I groaned and we went inside the stage and towards the flophouse set. The coroner had arrived and announced that in view of the circumstances he would perform an autopsy on all three bodies. The studio doctor stated that the cutter had died of heart trouble—caused by the shock of seeing Hallowell hanging from the rigging platform.

The coroner was a tall, thin man with red hair. "I don't doubt it," he said. "And I don't doubt that this Thomas Grey was shot to death or that Hallowell died by strangulation. But we'll play safe."

I called: "Mr. Stone!" loudly, several times.

The actor of the same name popped up and I shook my head at him.

"You're the wrong Stone," I told him. "I want the business manager who was directing."

A platinum blonde with tragic eyes touched my right arm. "Do you think the murderer is still around, or did Hallowell murder Tom Grey and then kill himself?" she asked.

I said: "What do *you* think?"

Her eyes grew very large. "I think there's a murderer in the studio, waiting to strike again. I'm very frightened."

I grinned at her. "You're a lousy actress. You don't think anything of the sort, and you aren't frightened. You just want to make goo-goo eyes at me and waste my time."

She looked as though she were going to cry and went away.

Eddie Rex scowled at me. "You hurt her feelings, Mac," he said. "What's got into you? You called for Stone, and you knew he'd gone in the other direction. You just left him."

I nodded. "And the Stone that popped up knew I wasn't calling for him. He knew I wanted the business manager. He knew it the first time I called. I just wanted to see if he'd pop up again."

Eddie looked puzzled. "Well, he did. What's that prove?"

I shrugged. "It proves that a lot of people seem to be stupid around this set. Maybe they're just good actors."

Eddie stuck a cigarette between his lips and lighted it. He looked very thoughtful.

"It's a set-up to me," he said slowly. "You're getting all steamed up about a lot of things that don't count at all. That cutter's death was just one of those things. He had a bad heart and got a shock when he saw the body hanging. It comes down to this—Hallowell and Grey were after the same girl, and Hallowell was burned up about it. He saw a chance to murder Grey and he did it. Then he couldn't stand what he'd done. So he hung himself."

I smiled cheerfully. "You said that before," I reminded him. "But you haven't told me *how* Hallowell murdered Grey without anyone knowing it. That is, you haven't told me how he did it—and made it stick with me. And you haven't told me why Hallowell, having done what you think, didn't just go around back of some scenery and use the gun on himself. He took an awful lot of trouble killing himself. And you haven't showed me the gun he was supposed to have used on Grey."

Eddie said: "Just the same, that's my theory and I'm giving it that way to Madden, when he gets here."

I said: "I can hear him laughing now."

Eddie coughed nervously. "You've got to give him a better one," he said.

I nodded. "Or the murderer of the two of them," I said quietly.

Eddie's body stiffened. He stared at me. "What the hell do you mean by that?"

Someone screamed from the distance. Extras and studio police started moving away from the flophouse set. There was another scream, shrill and prolonged. I moved past Eddie Rex and ran pretty fast towards the sound.

The screams seemed to come from the center of Stage Four, but there were a lot of small sets in the way—drawing rooms, corridors and hotel lobbies. I stumbled around in the dim lighting of the unused sets and finally reached an interior that was supposed to be a line of elevators in an office building. Near a far, imitation marble wall a dark-haired girl was standing, the palms of her hands pressed tightly against her face.

"What's wrong?" I asked, moving quickly to her side.

She took her hands away from her face, which was very white. She stared at me blankly.

I said: "What's all the yelping for? I'm McCoy—from County Detectives."

She lifted an arm and pointed upward and to her right, without looking in the direction herself. I followed her raised arm, and saw the figure swinging slightly from a platform above another stage.

A voice called: "Over here—over here! There's a man hanging—"

I swore softly, and got away from the elevator set and into one that was pretty dark. There was a line of gray-barred cells. It was a jail set. The figure above it swung very slowly. I looked around and saw Stone, the actor. He started towards iron steps that made a ladder to the rigging platform above.

I called sharply: "Wait a minute, Stone!"

He pulled up short, at the foot of the steps. I reached his side, shoved him out of the way.

"How'd you get down here in such a hurry?" I snapped.

His lips twitched. "I was walking around, and I heard screams. I looked up—and saw the body."

I said: "What made you look up?"

I didn't wait for his answer. I started up the ladder, and when I reached the platform I moved to the spot where the rope was looped. There were a lot of voices below, now. I knelt on the platform and looked over the side.

When I stood up a voice from another set called: "Cut that

rope—he's still swinging! Up there—cut that rope—"

I stood up and I lighted a cigarette. Then I walked slowly towards the iron ladder. Eddie was coming up, breathing heavily. When he reached the platform he stared at me.

"Did you cut him down?" he muttered. "Who is it?"

I said: "I didn't cut him down."

Eddie said: "How do you know he isn't dead?"

I said: "Because he never was alive. He's just a bunch of sawdust and rags."

Eddie blinked his blue eyes. "It's a—dummy?" he breathed.

I nodded. "It takes one to guess that another one's one," I told him.

Eddie said: "But why the devil—"

I rolled my cigarette between a couple of fingers. "Let's go back to the set and see who's been killed while all of us were pulled down here," I suggested.

I went down the ladder. The crowd below had already spotted the hanging figure as a dummy. The doctor caught me by an arm.

"It must be a crazy man—doing this stuff," he said.

I said: "Yeah, crazy like a fox."

I went back to the elevator set and looked for the dark-haired girl. She wasn't there. I went back through the other sets and didn't find her. She wasn't on the flophouse set. I described her to three studio cops who didn't recognize my description, but joined in the search. At the end of fifteen minutes she hadn't been found.

Eddie came up to me on the flophouse set. He was shaking his head from side to side.

"It beats me—just a dummy swinging. And swinging the way Hallowell was."

I said: "Hallowell wasn't swinging. He was too heavy to swing. There's a draught up there, and the dummy caught it."

Eddie frowned. "But who the hell did the job—and why? Nothing happened, while we were fooling around the jail set."

I said: "How do you know? Just because you haven't found any bodies?"

He scowled at me. "I don't like this layout, Mac. Too many things are happening that don't make sense."

I grinned at him. "When too many things happen that *don't* make sense," I said slowly, "you and I haven't the chance to find the things that *do* make sense."

Eddie blinked at me. "Hey!" he said. "You don't think someone's trying to keep us away from something?"

I sighed. "Go away, Eddie," I said. "Go away and finish your nap."

He shook his head. "I haven't been taking a nap," he replied.

I nodded. "Yes, you have.

Eddie," I told him. "You've been taking a nap for six months."

The business manager came up, his dark eyes holding the same worried expression.

"What has happened now?" he demanded. "I was just told that another body—"

I interrupted him. "How many dummies did you have on the set for the scene when you shot it?" I asked.

Stone said, using his hands nervously: "Twenty we used in the scene. But we had more than that lying around."

I dropped the cigarette I'd lighted a few minutes before, heeled it. I described the girl I'd talked to on the elevator set.

"Know who that might be?" I asked.

He shook his head. "There are six other companies working on the lot," he said. "She might have come over, out of curiosity. Just another extra girl."

I said: "Okay. This actor, Stone—is he a relative of yours?"

Stone shook his head. "His name is Benn Stone. Mine is Lynn Stone. I don't know him, except through that name similarity."

Eddie shook his head and said slowly: "It beats me."

The doctor came up. "I think perhaps Hallowell's brain went after he murdered Grey. He might have hung that dummy in one place. Crazy, you see. His mind working that way. Then he hung himself."

Eddie said: "Hey! *That's* an idea!"

Stone stared at me. "So that's what it was—a dummy hanging?"

The doctor explained.

Eddie muttered: "Sure—Hallowell just went crazy, realizing what he'd done. He grabbed one of the dummies, while the others were trying to figure who had killed Grey, went over to the jail set and hung it up."

I said: "What for?"

Eddie shrugged. "He was crazy. Maybe he wanted to see how much rope he needed, for himself. There was *something* in his mind. Maybe he figured the dummy would be found first, if he was followed—and that would give him time to hang himself."

Stone said slowly: "Of course, you can't tell what was in his head. But it looks as though Hallowell murdered Grey."

The doctor nodded.

A studio cop came towards us, calling: "We've found it, Mr. Stone."

When he reached us Stone said: "Found what?"

The cop said: "The gun the murderer used. Sam Burke looked it over, using gloves. It's a twenty-two and only one bullet has been used."

I said: "Where was it found?"

The cop said: "Inside one of

the overheads—the big lights on the platform. About ten feet away from the spot where Hallowell was found hanging."

Eddie said: "Well, I guess that settles that. He got rid of the gun before he stuck his neck between the rope, before he lowered himself from the platform. And a twenty-two accounts for the small wound."

Stone nodded slowly, then shook his head. "A terrible thing. Both of them dead, and poor Reynolds going out from the heart shock."

I looked at the studio cop. "Ever see a silencer on a twenty-two?" I asked.

The cop looked puzzled, shook his head. "I think I read about one though."

I smiled a little. "A lot of writers use silencers as if they can be bought in cigar stores and stuck on anything. Did *this* twenty-two have a silencer on it?"

The cop shook his head. I looked at Stone. "A twenty-two makes plenty of racket, even if it *is* a woman's gun."

Stone said: "He might have wrapped it up in something to smother the sound. There was some noise around the set, you know. And it was fairly dark."

Jacobs called from a wall phone just off the set: "Oh, McCoy—you're wanted on the phone."

I went to the phone, which was in a sound-proof booth with a red light outside that blinked the signal. When I closed the door and said: "Hello," Winkie Stevens said from the other end: "Me, Mac. The chief sent me out on the Thomas Grey job. I've been buzzing around his neighborhood. Want what I got?"

"All of it," I told him. "Everybody on the lot has solved this mess—everyone but me."

Winkie said: "Grey lived alone. Just a couple of bags in his room, some toilet stuff, a lot of clippings. He had a featured part once and it looks as if he never got over it. No letters. The landlady says he was quiet and never talked, but he'd been pretty bitter lately. She thought it was because he couldn't get much work, even as an extra. But he didn't howl about that."

I said: "What did he howl about?"

Winkie coughed. "Just once he told the landlady that if a certain person didn't pay him what was owed he might get desperate and go after it."

I said: "Uh-huh—that's been done before. Any tip on the person?"

Winkie said: "Not from her. I cleared out and started doing the stores and a couple of bars nearby. The place he ate, when he ate. I got just one tip—from one cafe. He didn't drink much, but when he did drink he was

apt to talk. This night he got confidential with a certain bartender. He said he was desperate. He had a lot of money coming to him, and that if he didn't get it the person who refused to give it to him would be sorry first and dead after. Those were the exact words, Mac. 'Sorry first —and dead after.' The bartender remembered them."

I said: "That's all? He didn't get a name?"

Winkie coughed for a few seconds. When he got through he said: "My right lung's still okay, thank God. He said Grey used a name and it sounded like a woman's name. But it wasn't clear. But Grey did say something about wishing he'd kept out of the lousy picture business, and the bartender got the idea that some woman owed him a lot of money—a picture gal."

I said: "Anything else?"

Winkie coughed for the third time. "I thought that was a hell of a lot, Mac. That's all of it, and I haven't been working long."

"Okay," I told him. "Now you go after this angle. It looks to some people as though he was murdered by a fellow by the name of Hallowell, who hung himself about ten minutes later, here in the studio. Hallowell's first name is James. You can get his address from Central Casting Bureau. Hallowell was working in the same scene as an extra, and is supposed to have hated Grey because of a girl. You see if Hallowell was the one who owed Grey money, and pick up anything else. Then call me back."

Winkie said: "Okay — but Jim doesn't sound like a girl's name to me. And anyway, Grey didn't murder him—he's supposed to have murdered Grey."

I said: "Yeah, I know all that. But pick up that angle anyway."

Winkie coughed again. He said: "Okay, Mac," and hung up.

I went back to the group and Eddie narrowed his blue eyes on mine.

"Anything important?" he asked.

I nodded. "An accident." I told him. "A County Detective actually picked up a clue."

Stone's big shoulders moved up and down nervously. He frowned at me.

"I'm convinced that Hallowell murdered Grey, and then killed himself," he said. "Jealousy. He used a small gun and smothered the sound. We didn't see the flare, if there was any flare. He was lucky in sending the bullet to the base of the brain, as Grey was lying on his stomach, face downward. The movement I saw later was a convulsive one, as your partner has stated."

I said: "Okay, Mr. Stone. The chief will be here soon. You can back my partner up when he tells him that story."

The doctor spoke softly. "I'm

in accord with it, Mr. McCoy."

"Okay, Doctor," I said pleasantly. "You can back up Mr. Stone and Mr. Rex."

The cop who had announced the gun had been found nodded his head. "It looks as though it happened that way to me, Mr. McCoy."

I patted the cop on the shoulder. "That makes it a quartette," I told him.

Eddie looked at his polished, big shoes. "You don't agree, Mac?" he said, a little sadly. "That's too bad."

I grinned at him. "Isn't it?" I replied. "If you gentlemen will pardon me I'll go over to the projection room and eat celluloid."

I went to the far end of the stage, and out to a narrow street and turned towards Stage Three. The gal I was looking for wasn't there. I didn't find her on Stage Two, either. There were no companies working on Stage One, but I wandered through the emptiness of it. She was lying on a couch in a drawing-room set, dabbing her eyes with a handkerchief, when I walked up quietly. She sat up at the sound of my footfalls, and looked at me with frightened, dark eyes.

I said: "Don't be scared." I pulled up a gilded chair and sat down. "Let's talk."

She said in a choked voice: "What about?"

I shrugged. "Well, say—about Hallowell and Tom Grey—and you."

She moaned, stood up and swayed. When she started to fall I caught her and eased her down to the ornate couch. Her eyes were closed and her body was limp.

I muttered: "I hope to hell *she* has a good heart," and went looking for a water cooler.

She was all right in about ten minutes, but her dark eyes held a frightened expression and she didn't want to answer questions.

I began to get tired of it and finally said: "I like the story about you just having wandered over to Stage Four because you'd heard there had been a murder. And you screamed when you saw what you thought was a body hanging from the rigging platform. And then you ran away because you had to get back to your own set and play in a scene. And you fainted just now because I frightened you. It's a swell story, but it's all lousy."

She shook her head. "It's the truth!"

I smiled grimly at her. "There isn't much truth being handed out on this job. There have been studio cops at the sound-proof doors of Stage Four for the last hour or so—at all of them. How'd you get inside the stage?"

She said softly: "I told the one who stopped me that I was

working on 'Murder—' " Her voice broke.

I said sharply: "'Murder Again?' Nice title for that picture, wasn't it? Picture of a dead man on a cot, and a dead man hanging from the rigging platform. Swell title—"

She took her hands away from her face. "Stop!" she cried. "For God's sake, stop!"

I said: "You didn't tell any studio cop that you were working on that picture, in order to get inside. And if I start to trace your actions in the last two hours I'd find you weren't due to work on any other set. You know what I think?"

She just stared at me, crumpling a wet handkerchief in her fingers.

"I think you were inside of Stage Four when Tom Grey was murdered."

She stood up, crying out: "No, no—"

I caught her by the left wrist and pulled her back to the ornate couch again. Her eyes stared at me wildly.

I said: "Let's get acquainted. What's your name?"

Her voice was so low I could barely hear it.

"Ann Rollins."

I nodded, smiling. "Is that your real name or just a picture tag?"

She looked away from me. "It's my—real name."

I said: "Which would you rather I do—get the truth from you right here, or call the County Detective office and have the chief put a couple of men on you, to find out things?"

She said: "I'll answer your questions."

I offered her a cigarette, which she didn't take, and lighted one for myself.

"Do you know Ellen Dana, the girl Grey and Hallowell both loved?"

She said: "Very slightly."

I smiled. "Did they both love her?"

She looked me in the eyes. "I don't know."

I said cheerfully: "I'll allow you a few 'I don't know's,' but not too many. Who murdered Hallowell?"

Her hands went to her throat. She started to rise. I spoke softly. "Sit down. Who murdered Hallowell?"

She sat down and said dully: "I thought he committed suicide—"

I stopped smiling. "Did you? Well, he didn't commit suicide. He was murdered."

She half closed her eyes. "I thought—he killed Grey—"

I interrupted. "He didn't kill Grey. Who murdered Hallowell?"

She swayed and shook her head.

I said: "Don't faint again, or you may regain consciousness in

a hospital with a cop sitting alongside."

Her lips tightened and her dark eyes grew small. She sat very straight. "I won't faint. You ask me who murdered Hallowell. I'll ask you—who murdered Tom Grey?"

I said: "Uh-huh. Going to stop acting eh? Well, *I'm* asking the questions just now."

She smiled a little. "I don't know who murdered Hallowell. I don't think he was murdered. I think he killed Grey and hung himself."

I nodded. "Sure he was. Who owed him some money that would have counted big?"

She shook her head. "I didn't know his friends. I just knew Tom."

I said: "Why did you scream so much, when you saw that dummy hanging?"

She drew a deep breath. "I didn't know it was a dummy."

I smiled at her. "You knew Tom Grey was dead, didn't you?"

She said: "Yes."

I took the cigarette from between my lips. "Then who did you think that dummy was?" I asked sharply.

Her eyes were very small. She pressed her lips tightly together, shook her head.

"I didn't think about that. My nerves just gave way. I screamed. Then you came and I pointed up to the place it was hanging. You went away, and I just wanted to get out, get away from the stage."

"Why?" I asked quietly.

She shrugged. "I wanted to get out in the air, away from that terrible place. My nerves—"

I whistled the first half of the chorus of *Lovely Liar,* and she said: "I'm not lying."

I looked at her dark eyes. "Two men were dead. One you knew pretty well. You saw what you thought was a third body, hanging in the air. But you weren't curious enough to stick around and learn who was swinging up there. Even though you had the curiosity to come over to the stage."

She said: "I wanted to—get away."

I nodded. "And I'll tell you why. Because you thought that you *knew* who was hanging up there."

She kept her eyes narrowed and her lips pressed tightly together.

I said: "Who did you *think* was swinging from the rope?"

She shook her head slowly. "I just wanted—to get away."

I stood up. "Okay, Miss Rollins," I told her, "and I'm sorry you can't *stay* away. But right now you and I are going to walk over to Stage Four."

She looked up at me. "What are we going to do when we get there?"

I shrugged. "Let's go over and

see," I suggested. "We may get some ideas when we get there."

She rose and we walked slowly from the stage and along the studio streets to Stage Four. When the studio cop looked questioningly at Ann Rollins, I said: "She's needed inside. We're going to shoot a scene where a gal screams. She's a good screamer."

We went in, walked across the stage to the flophouse set. Madden was standing with Eddie Rex and Stone.

I introduced the girl to the chief of detectives and said: "She knew Tom Grey, but she didn't know any of his friends. She came over after two men were dead and her nerves gave way when she saw a dummy hanging. So she screamed. Then she ran away."

Madden said: "Eddie thinks it's murder and suicide. And then there was a fellow whose heart was bad."

I nodded. "I agree with Eddie on the fellow with the bad heart."

The chief said: "It looks as though you might have to agree with him all the way, Mac. I've looked over the gun found near the platform where Hallowell was hanging. It's a twenty-two and I just got a call from the coroner. They took a twenty-two caliber slug out of Grey's neck. We've got the motive—jealousy. And Stone here seems to think the murder could have been worked on the set."

I said: "Yeah, I know that. He was puzzled at first, but he changed his mind."

Stone shrugged his big shoulders. "I've been more or less forced to. All the evidence—"

"McCoy—McCoy!"

I looked at the chief. "Don't let Miss Rollins go off in any dark corners." I said. "She might start screaming again."

I went to the phone booth, listened to Winkie Stevens for a couple of minutes, hung up and went back to the group who were standing near the cot on which the body was found.

Madden said: "Anything special?"

I nodded. "Pretty special," I replied. "Hallowell had a quarrel last night, at his place. The other boarders didn't see the man he quarreled with, but one of them heard part of it. And he heard a name. Hallowell called the other fellow Tom several times."

Eddie said: "Yeah—you see? That makes our theory all the tighter."

Stone nodded. The girl's face was expressionless.

I said: "It makes *my* theory all the tighter, too."

Madden tapped his red hair with big fingers. I looked at Ann Rollins, and then across the set to a spot where Ellen Dana sat

near the Hollywood police officer.

"Hallowell and Grey quarreled because they were both down on their luck. They'd been that way for a year or so, and a certain gentleman owed them money. Quite a lot of it. Winkie Stevens says that the sum mentioned last night was twenty thousand dollars."

I looked at Eddie, who was frowning. "Grey was in favor of putting some pressure on this fellow, but Hallowell was afraid. They quarreled about that."

Madden said sharply: "What sort of pressure?"

I shook my head. "There was a woman mixed up in it. The boarder in the next room caught her name. She was to be told that if this fellow who owed Hallowell and Grey the twenty thousand didn't come across—they were going to finish him off. It was Grey's idea, and Hallowell was against it. Grey said he was sick of starving and that this fellow owed them the twenty thousand and had it, but wouldn't pay. The girl was to be told what was going to happen to this fellow if he didn't come through—the idea being she'd go to him and warn him. Then he'd come through."

I stopped and Madden said: "Yeah—what else was heard?"

I smiled. "That's all, Chief. Grey was for the scheme and Hallowell was against it. Finally they quieted down and both left Hallowell's place."

Eddie said: "Sure. But what's that got to do with what happened today?"

I groaned. Stone looked puzzled, and Ann Rollins' face was expressionless.

Madden said: "Well, they hated each other on account of this Dana girl, anyway. Now they disagreed over the threat to this fellow who owed them the twenty grand. That made them hate each other all the more."

I said: "Maybe, but not enough to drive Hallowell to murder and suicide."

Ann Rollins ran her handkerchief across her forehead, reached out her other hand and steadied herself by holding Stone's right arm.

"I'm—very faint," she said shakily. "I'd like to leave the—"

I cut in. "Okay, but how about telling us how Grey and Hallowell tipped you off as to what was going to happen to this fellow if he didn't come through—tipped you off last night?"

Her face was very pale.

I said: "You don't want to be mixed up in a murder, do you?"

Fear showed in her eyes.

Stone said: "The girl's ill, McCoy. You can't give her a third degree like this."

I smiled at him. "All right, Stone," I said slowly. "I'll admit she got a shock when she saw

that dummy hanging over the jail set, and thought it was *you*."

The girl sucked in a sharp breath. Madden swore softly and Eddie Rex blinked his blue eyes at me. I looked at the chief.

"Grey got tight one night, in a spot not far from where he lived. He said he was desperate and he needed money. He was sick of starving and trying for extra jobs. He'd had money and he'd loaned some of it to this person who wouldn't pay him back. He mentioned the person's first name, but the bartender didn't remember it exactly. He thought it was a woman's name."

I looked at Stone. "Your first name is Lynn," I said quietly. "That can be a woman's name, *or* a man's."

Stone said: "What the hell are you talking about?"

I smiled. Ann Rollins stood very straight, her hands clenched at her sides. Madden backed up a few feet and watched Stone.

"The name of the woman that the boarder heard mentioned at Hallowell's place last night, the woman they were going to go after—was Ann."

Ann Rollins uttered a little moan. She lifted her hands to her face, and I pulled them away.

"Didn't they come to you last night—Hallowell and Grey—and tell you they were going to kill him if he didn't pay up?"

She stared at me wildly.

Madden said: "Better answer, lady."

She spoke very softly. "Yes—yes." She covered her face with her hands and shivered.

I looked at Stone. "You are the man who owed them the money. You've been seen around Hollywood with Miss Rollins. She went to you and told you Grey and Hallowell were after you. Maybe she begged you to pay up. Maybe you couldn't or maybe you just didn't want to pay up."

Stone was breathing heavily.

I said: "You're a big man, Stone—a strong man. You've got nervous hands. Do you want me to tell you how you decided to protect yourself, and not pay over the money you owed? Do you want me to tell you how you murdered Grey?"

Stone pawed the air with his right fist half-clenched. "You're a fool, McCoy!" he said in a strained tone. "You're crazy!"

I shook my head. "Not crazy enough to fall for your story of how Tom Grey moved an arm just before the camera started working, Stone. And not crazy enough to believe some other stuff you told me, too."

Stone said: "It's the most ridiculous—"

Madden said: "Shut up, Stone."

I looked at Madden. "It was pretty dark on the set. Stone shot Grey in the back of the

neck, but he didn't do it on the set. Grey didn't see him come up behind him, and a twenty-two doesn't make much racket if it's smothered in a coat.

"When Grey dropped, Stone carried him over near a pile of dummies, and when he got a chance, just before the scene was set for a shooting, dragged him off the pile and carried him like a dummy to the cot. When he got him on the cot he ordered everybody off the set and shot the scene. Then he went through the business of calling up the actors and being surprised when Grey didn't come."

The girl said: "Oh, my God--"

Madden looked at Stone, who stood very still, his eyes narrowed on mine.

"That's close to the way it happened," I said. "I didn't see it happen, and neither did anyone else. But that's about it. Grey was dead, but Hallowell wasn't. And Hallowell might be suspicious. Also he might keep on demanding *his* share of the money that was owed. So Stone had to work pretty fast."

I paused and Stone said huskily: "The whole thing is a damned lie!"

I shrugged. "I've seen blood on a dummy about a hundred feet from here, on the other side of the set. One of the dummies in the pile. And you had a good spot, a set-up. You knew that Hallowell and Grey both liked Ellen Dana and had had some trouble over her. You knew she'd have to admit that. So you figured you could frame Hallowell as the killer of Grey and then make Hallowell's death look like suicide."

Madden said: "Move back a little, Miss Rollins. Don't get between Stone and me."

Ann Rollins moved back, mechanically. I kept my eyes on Stone.

"I don't know *how* you got him to go up on that rigging platform with you, Stone. But you were in the position to ask him. You were directing. And when he got up there you strangled him. Not with your hands, but with the rope next to his skin. Then you lowered him and returned to his set."

I stopped and Ann Rollins made sobbing sounds, her hand over her mouth. Eddie Rex swore softly.

"Miss Rollins suspected what had happened, I think," I said slowly. "But the dummy got her. She'd thought you'd hung yourself. That broke her nerve."

Madden said: "How'd the dummy get hung up here?"

I shook my head. "That beats me," I said simply. "But I can make a guess."

Stone was breathing heavily again. I watched him.

"Some of the set crew, the electricians or somebody—put it

up there as a joke. Probably someone from another stage. One crew playing a joke on another. But it wasn't so much of a joke—because *it gave Stone his idea* for the second murder."

There was a little silence, then Madden said to Stone: "Want to come through, Stone?"

The business manager's voice was unsteady. "I tell you it's all a lie! I never—"

I turned and called off the set, towards several studio cops. "Bring over Conners, the roof worker who was up above when Stone used the rope on—"

Stone cried out fiercely, and leaped for me as I turned. I reached for my automatic, but his weight was on me before I got it loose from my hip pocket. He pounded me with a heavy fist as we went down hard. My head hit the floor of the set and from some great distance I heard something that might have been a shot sound.

Stone wasn't pounding me any more, and my head was clearing. Someone was pulling me up. I blinked at Eddie Rex.

"Thanks," I muttered. "That's the first helping hand—you've given me—today."

Behind me Madden was kneeling beside Stone. He said: "By God! you're dying—you'd better come through. The bullet's right under your heart."

I leaned over and heard Stone say weakly: "Yes—I killed them both. I didn't have the money. It was—"

He broke off, closed his eyes. His head wobbled and then was still. A studio cop grabbed me by the arm while I was rubbing the back of my head. Somebody was calling for the doctor.

"What was you yelling for us to bring over?" the studio cop asked.

I grinned. "I was yelling for a guy named Connors," I said. "But so far as I'm concerned—there *isn't* any Connors who saw Stone do any murder. Just a bluff."

Madden looked at me thoughtfully. "You're getting bright, Mac," he said. "It worked."

The doctor came up and looked Stone over. He straightened up. "Nothing serious. Shot in the hip."

Madden grinned. "He *thought* I got him in the heart, anyway."

Someone was leading Ann Rollins away. I looked at Madden and Madden said: "Well, that's washed up."

I nodded, and slapped Eddie Rex on the left shoulder. "Fine work, Eddie," I said. "Damn' fine work. You were so wrong that you had Stone thinking he was going to put over a double murder. And that didn't hurt *my* chances any."

Eddie shook his head and his blue eyes looked hurt. "I figured he was a good guy," he muttered.

I grinned at him. "He was,"

I said. "Until he tried being a good guy at a bad job."

Someone called. "Phone for McCoy!"

I went into the phone booth and Winkie Stevens said: "I just picked up the information that Grey had a scrap with Hallowell over a girl, about two weeks ago in a spot down at Santa Monica where—"

I said: "Fine, but we don't need anything more. The murderer confessed."

Winkie said: "The hell you say? Who was it?"

I said: "Yeah, that's the fellow." I hung up and went outside, walked to a water cooler and slapped some water on the back of my head and neck. It felt good.

Murder and high-keyed suspense trace strange patterns of compassion and terror—as a man without hope seeks desperately to escape from the darkness within himself.

THE JAWS OF DARKNESS

By HAL ELLSON

A mystery story writer beloved by millions brings his inimitable gifts to bear on a honeymoon with an ill-fated bridegroom—in a brand new, secret spy thriller.

THE BRIDAL-NIGHT MURDER

By OCTAVUS ROY COHEN

in the next SAINT

the owl hoots twice

by . . . Sax Rohmer

A murderer who returns to the scene of his crime may find the shoes of another suspect tightly laced to his own instep.

IT WAS DARK when I got back to the barn. There was no one in Quarry Lane as I climbed over the stile, and the night was still and humid. Except for the people who had a weekend cottage at the top, practically nobody came along at this season.

Using the light sparingly, I made a careful search of the barn's ground floor before I ventured in. It was empty.

The bread and cheese and pickled onions I had eaten at the Forester Arms had satisfied my appetite. The ale was pretty weak —but we had got used to weak ale in England since the war. I felt sleepy. Perhaps that quart had been a mistake. But, God knows, I had needed it.

Back up in the loft I felt safe again. There were plenty of spy holes and I didn't think it likely that I would be taken by surprise. I sleep lightly, and wake like a weasel at the faintest stirring.

As I lay down on my tramp's bed I thought about Mary Maguire, wondering if she suspected me.

When the infamous Dr. Fu Manchu is vacationing in secret with his companions in crime and his famous creator is waiting for him to tip his hand a surprise treat may well be in the making. For Sax Rohmer is likely to seize upon just such a moment to write a new and different kind of mystery yarn. A hooting owl in an English countryside setting may not always symbolize terror. But here it does, in a tale of murder guaranteed to keep you guessing.

I closed my eyes, and studied the mental picture. Old Bill Maguire, landlord of the Forester, came into it, but right in the foreground stood his daughter. Mary Maguire, with her high cheekbones and wide-spaced blue eyes, hardly conformed to the standard concept of a pretty girl. But she had a remarkable figure, and the eager friendliness of her smile made her seem beautiful. I wondered about her.

The Celts are unpredictable, in my experience, and I knew that Superintendent Stopes of the local police used the Forester. I had left by one door that evening as he had come in at another. And those wide-spaced eyes of Mary's could see a long way.

I wondered.

Just as I was dozing off, an unearthly yell jerked me from half dreams, and I sat up, tensely alert. The next moment I knew it was the big white owl whose quarters I had invaded, setting out on a night's hunting. It had dropped the body of a young rat on my head only a few nights before, and so I had a friendly feeling for the bird.

Rain had begun to patter on those parts of the roof that remained intact. I was settling down again, hoping the downpour wouldn't reach the spot I had chosen, when I saw a faint light shining through a cranny in the wall.

Almost before I knew it I was flat on the boards, peering down. Someone holding a flashlight was coming toward the barn.

There was no sound but that of the rain on the roof and a faint sighing from the fir trees which grew close up to the barn. Fir trees always sigh when it rains. Whoever held the light had come into the barn and was standing stock-still.

Then came a call: "Jim!"

It was Mary's voice, and Jim was the name by which she knew me. I had been in the Forester a number of times when the bar was empty, and she and I had got talking. She had the trick of making friends quickly.

I lay still. "Jim!" she called again.

I balanced the chances. She must have followed me. The bar had been closing when I left. Whatever her motive, she had cool nerves. I had to face it out.

"Hullo, there! Who is it?" I shouted.

"Mary Maguire. Did I wake you up?"

"You did. But it doesn't matter. I'll come down."

I climbed down the ladder. There was a plank there, set on trestles, which at some time had been used as a saw bench. She had put the lamp on the plank and was sitting beside it. She wore a raincoat and had a striped handkerchief tied over her hair.

I sat down beside her. Her eyes regarded me gravely. There was

a depth of discernment in the gravity of her eyes that I found disturbing. There, in the dimness, I wondered why had she ventured after me. What did she suspect?

I pulled out a pack of cigarettes and offered her one. She shook her head, and from under the wet coat produced a full pack. "Keep yours. They're hard to come by—and expensive."

She put a cigarette between her lips as I snapped my lighter.

"Why did you follow me, Mary?" I asked.

She blew a smoke ring. "I wanted to find out where you lived."

"Why?"

"Well—" She hesitated, her eyes searching mine. "It's a hard world the peace has brought us, and I thought I might be able to help you.

"Did you find anything today?"

I shook my head. "Not a thing."

"It's taking chances to employ a man except through the Labor Exchange."

"I know it is."

She regarded me in her grave way before speaking again: "Are you a deserter, Jim?" she asked softly.

Her eyes were almost eager as she waited; and I think if I could have given her an honest answer I would have been, for a moment, the happiest man in England.

"Yes," I lied, and looked away.

"Oh!" It was a sigh of relief. "I thought that was what you were hiding. Whatever made you do it? Is there someone—you just had to get to?"

"No. No one. It wasn't that."

"Well, it's none of my business, and you don't have to tell me if you don't want to. But you're a stranger in these parts, and you couldn't be in a worse place just now."

"How's that?"

Her eyes searched mine again, almost fearfully. "The murder."

"What murder?"

"Surely you heard them talking about it in the bar? They talk of little else."

I conjured up what was meant to be a puzzled expression, then nodded slowly.

"I remember," I said. "I did hear. But why should it bother me?"

She was watching me, intently. "The superintendent asked me tonight if I knew you, and where you're from."

I whistled, and silently cursed my carelessness. I could have got meals somewhere else. But I had been drawn to the Forester, and at this moment I knew it was Mary who had drawn me. Once I had found out that Stopes frequented the house, common sense should have kept me away.

"You told him you didn't know?"

"Of course. I didn't—then."

"Is the superintendent a particular friend of yours?"

She stared past me, dreamily shaking her head. "Perhaps. But if you want to get arrested, stay here. And it won't be just a court-martial you'll be facing."

"What do you mean?"

Her eyes were fixed on me again. "They think the man who killed old Pettigrew is still in the neighborhood," she said.

"He's a fool if he is." I paused, doubtful if it would be wise to say more. Then, "Who was old Pettigrew, anyway? I haven't been keeping up."

Mary watched me for what seemed a very long time before she started to tell me about the murder of Cyrus Pettigrew. Some of her statements were wide of the mark, and I had to guard my tongue. She never once looked at me while she related it.

Cyrus Pettigrew, she said, had lived the life of a hermit in a broken-down bungalow less than a hundred yards from the barn where we sat. He had no relatives and no friends and he had the reputation of being a miser. And, in this case, it was well deserved.

About a month before, his bungalow had been burgled during one of his rare absences. With great reluctance he had reported the matter to the police, assuring them he had no valuables in the place which could account for the burglary. And the ramshackle interior of the bungalow seemed to support his statement.

Three weeks later he was found dead in the lane beside his old push bike, and Superintendent Stopes had a job on his hands.

It was clear that old Pettigrew —he was close to seventy—had been knocked off his bicycle, for although the attack took place after dark, Pettigrew knew every foot of Quarry Lane and there was no obstruction which might have upset him. Furthermore, there had been some attempt to stanch the bleeding from a wound on his skull, as the medical evidence proved.

Investigations threw more light on the mystery, but none on the identity of the murderer. Cyrus Pettigrew distrusted banks and had a considerable fortune in notes hidden in the bungalow. In recent months, he had grown to distrust the Socialist government as well, and had begun to convert his hoard into diamonds, to purchase which he paid periodical visits to a dealer in Hatton Garden.

He had returned from such a visit on the evening of his death, coming down from London by the 6:45 train—third class—and reaching Lowerwood at 7:42. His push bike was parked at the little station, and the last man—excepting, presumably his murderer —to see him alive was the Lowerwood stationmaster.

Further investigation disclosed that he had left the Hatton Garden dealer with four thousand pounds' worth of diamonds in his possession. Many other packets, to the value of twenty-five to thirty thousand, were found buried under the bedroom floor, together with a hoard of notes not yet converted.

When his body was found—by a veterinary surgeon from Underhill who had lost his way in the dark—the diamonds were gone. Cyrus Pettigrew at this time could not have been dead more than ten minutes, the police surgeon said.

"He lay in the lane right outside this barn," Mary said, watching me fixedly.

She offered me another cigarette, but I shook my head.

I looked around me into the shadowy corners of the barn. Mary blew smoke which hung in the still air like a veil between us.

"And you knew nothing about it?" she asked.

It was hard, with her eyes on me, but I lied again. "No."

The rain was increasing, becoming a tattoo on the roof above. The sighing of the firs had risen to a whisper, so that I caught myself trying to hear what they were saying.

Mary stood up.

"Get away early in the morning." She pulled the raincoat over her shoulders. "Take my advice."

She moved toward the door.

"Mary—" She half turned. "Promise you won't say a word about me being here," I said.

Then she turned right around. She was holding the lamp to shine down onto the littered floor and I could barely see her eyes. But I thought there was a new expression there.

She was silent while I could have counted ten.

"All right," she said.

A shadowy shape swept past, silently, like a mocking phantom. The white owl's hoot echoed mournfully around the barn.

I followed Mary to where a sheet of rain curtained the doorway. And I began to wonder again.

"It's a vile night," I said.

She spoke with her back to me. "Did you ever hear a barn owl hoot twice? I mean just twice, no more."

I was puzzled. "I don't know if I ever did."

"They'd tell you, where I come from: If ever you do, look out. It means black luck for somebody."

The light shone down onto the muddy path as she made her way out.

"Good night, Mary—and thank you," I murmured.

But I heard no reply, although I stood there for a long time, listening to the firs whispering.

I passed an uneasy night. The rain stopped just as gray light

began to creep in at gaps in the roof and wall. The home-coming bats had awakened me.

There are quarrelsome things in a man's make-up, I suppose, and few of us will take the trouble to analyze our impulses. All I know is that I decided to shave off my two days' growth of beard that morning and leave the refuge of the barn. The odds against me, during the day, were high—whether I was in the barn or out of it.

Anyway, I made an attempt to spruce myself up a bit. I noted, from a spy hole I had discovered, certain activity in Pettigrew's bungalow, along the lane. I believe a constable was still kept on duty there. But no one came into the barn.

Leaving the barn by way of some loose boards on the side away from the bungalow, I headed for the stile; it was around ten o'clock. I knew I was mad—but I was going to the Forester again. It was a dull, damp morning, and the mud came over my shoes as I crossed the orchard to the farther stile.

Once in the cubbyhole—a tiny bar with only one high-backed wooden bench, wedged in beside the more exclusive saloon—I felt temporarily secure. It smelled of beer and stale tobacco. Service was through a hatch. With the hatch open, all that went on in the saloon could be heard easily enough.

When I rapped, Mary opened the hatch.

"Good morning," I said.

She stared at me very hard. There was no smile, no welcome in her eyes.

"So you didn't take my advice," was all she replied.

She set a tankard in front of me, swept the coins off into a till and turned aside impassively as someone came into the next room.

"Good morning, sir," I heard. "We don't often see you so early."

"No," said a man's deep voice, "I picked up a friend at the station. We're driving home—and it's a damp morning."

I knew the voice. Edward Larkin was an Underhill town councilor. When Mary had served their whiskies, I hoped she'd come back and talk to me. But she didn't.

"This is a tricky job, Larkin." I didn't recognize the other voice. "In fact, I hardly know where to begin. As a brother accountant, what's your own opinion?"

Someone struck a match.

"Well, Martin, frankly we fear he's been dipping pretty freely into funds raised for charity. He drinks hard, he's separated from his wife, and he keeps another woman over in Minsted. Apart from which"—the councilor dropped his voice—"he has his eye on—" Larkin paused.

"H'm. Good-looking girl," said the other speculatively.

"He never misses one. Of course, he's a good-looking fellow, himself, and smart, too. But—"

"Suppose—I only say suppose—I find a serious deficit? Will you give him time to make it good?"

"It wouldn't rest well with me. But he'll certainly have to resign. In many ways, the higher-ups aren't satisfied with the way things are run in this neighborhood. Take the murder along in Quarry Lane, for instance. Whoever did it must have known the old man's habits."

"Have the police no clues?"

I suppose Mr. Larkin shook his head, for the man called Martin went on: "If the locals are stuck, I should have thought it was a matter for Scotland Yard."

"So should I."

There was a pause.

"To come back to my job, Larkin—Am I to regard it as a confidential audit?"

"As much as possible, Martin. No scandal, if it can be avoided."

Then came a sudden silence, and I heard someone else walk into the saloon. Mary reappeared. I could just see her, through the hatch, where she stood. She smiled at the new arrival, and I thought a faint blush came to her cheeks. When he spoke, I knew.

"Top o' the mornin', Mary!" came a genial voice, but the Irish brogue was a poor imitation. "Why, Mr. Larkin!" the new voice exclaimed. "This is a pleasant surprise, sir."

"Good morning, Super," Mr. Larkin replied. "Meet a friend of mine, Mr. Martin Aloys. Martin—Police Superintendent Stopes."

I heard murmured greetings.

"I'm on my way to Quarry Lane, Mr. Larkin, and I just looked in to say how d'you do to Mary. I'm not satisfied with the way the inquiry is going. You will join me in a drink, gentlemen?"

Mary, with her back to me, stood at the till writing something. Now, she came across, whisked my tankard away and dropped a scrap of paper on the ledge.

She was leaning over the adjoining bar, smiling at Stopes and waiting for his order, when I picked the paper up.

It said: *Get out. Quick.*

The words gave me a queer thrill. I went. And I went in a hurry. One false move, now, and I was lost.

From what I knew of his habits, what with Mary being there, I didn't expect the superintendent to leave the Forester in time to reach the lane ahead of me, although I had seen his car outside the inn.

I was right. I got back into the barn without sighting a soul, after I left the highroad and climbed the orchard stile. I wast-

ed no time, though, getting inside. But I didn't forget to look carefully before I went in. Nothing was disturbed.

Up in the loft, I gave a deep sigh of relief. Every time I left it, even for an hour, I took tremendous chances. But I had to eat.

To get a view of the bungalow, through my spy hole, it was necessary to stand on a rafter and peer through a gap in the roof. It was tiring, for I could only support myself by holding on with both hands. But I stood there until I saw the superintendent drive up to the bungalow.

As a rule, a police sergeant drove his car. But Stopes was alone this morning.

I watched him go in. Then I lay down, with my eyes glued to the crack in the floor, waiting. If he came to the barn, he must hear no movement above. I got into as comfortable a position as I could.

There I waited. A sudden rustling broke the silence, and a huge rat crossed the floor below, halting for a moment by the bench where I had sat with Mary.

The minutes passed, and nothing happened. I don't know how long I had lain there when I heard the sound of an engine starting.

I got back on the rafter in what would have been good going for a squirrel. The superintendent was driving away.

I don't think any day before had ever seemed so long as that day. I had nothing to eat, and no chance to get anything. And thoughts of Mary haunted me until they became an obsession.

Shouldn't I have taken her into my confidence when she invited me? The facts, as I could have put them, would have changed the complexion of the matter. Why hadn't I trusted my instincts, which had prompted me to make a clean breast of it? I had been a blind fool.

As a result, she thought the worst of me, and I couldn't blame her.

About noon it grew very dark, and rain began to fall again. It went on steadily all through the afternoon, and only once was the lane disturbed by a footstep. A wild hope—that Mary was coming to look for me—died almost as soon as it was born.

In the first place, the footsteps were coming from the wrong direction. In the second place, they were slow and shambling.

A ragged object, a real tramp of the old school with a shapeless bundle swung on his back, pulled up just outside the door of the barn and stood there looking in, moisture trickling from the brim of a crazy felt hat.

I knew he was considering the idea of spending the night there, and I knew that at whatever cost, he must be kept out. I had too much at stake to be squeamish.

But as if the dark, cavernous interior of the place had cast a chill on his spirits, he turned and shambled off down the lane.

From then to dusk no one came near the barn.

Rain ceased about nightfall. I was terribly hungry and hopelessly depressed. Lack of food was bringing on a sort of drowsiness, and I began to wonder if I should be able to keep awake. I clenched my teeth. Tonight, I *must* keep awake.

It was, roughly, at eight o'clock that I was disturbed again. As I heard those quiet, purposeful steps drawing quickly nearer, I jumped to my lookout in the floor of the loft and settled down to watch.

At the door of the barn the footsteps stopped. I knew that the man—the steps were those of a man—was standing there listening. I relaxed every muscle, breathing slowly.

He moved a little to the left of the entrance, shining the beam of a flashlight ahead of him. I saw him kneel down at the base of a fir tree which stood like a sentinel before the door—and I knew what he was looking for.

He stayed there less than a minute. Then he got up and came into the barn. He swept his light around the barn's interior. When he directed it upward, I closed my eyes, and stopped breathing. When I opened them again the beam of light was once more directed downward. The man was bending down in the far, right-hand corner, scooping out ancient rubbish piled against the brick-work foundation.

I inhaled a deep breath. He was going to open the secret cache! I saw him remove two or three bricks from their places and put his hand into the gap. He pulled something out and slipped it in his pocket. He pulled out something else and dropped it on the pile of rubbish beside him. Then, into the hole he thrust a coil of thin wire.

He paused. He seemed to be listening again.

I knew that the wire, which had been stretched across the lane just before old Pettigrew came along, was only intended to pitch him off his bicycle. It did. And that fall killed him. There was medical evidence to show that an attempt had been made to stanch the wound on his head.

Interrupted by the unforeseen arrival of a car, the man responsible for the killing had only time to grab the wire away from the road and run into the near-by barn. But the thin strand had broken as Pettigrew crashed. Part of it remained fastened to a tree —a clue never discovered by the local police.

Now, I had seen the fragment of wire being untied from the base of the fir tree, and the stained handkerchief in a piece of newspaper which he had with

him. I had seen him put the bundle in his pocket.

I could have told him it was useless as evidence—stained with the blood of a dead rat. The handkerchief that had been actually used to stanch Pettigrew's blood lay safe in my knapsack. Stamped on it were incriminating laundry marks.

Just as he had finished what he had to do, the man below me sprang suddenly upright and snapped out his light. The white owl, circling outside, and disturbed by an unfamiliar light, had hooted—twice . . .

At the door of the Forester I checked for a moment, to get my breath. I had had nothing to eat all day, and it had been a test of endurance to sprint across the muddy orchard and so on to the highroad. But I had all my possessions with me, and my knapsack on my back.

I inhaled deeply, clenched my teeth, and opened the door.

There were only three customers in the saloon. One, a local farmer, I knew by sight; another, standing bolt upright in a corner, I recognized as a sergeant of the Underhill police who lived hard by. And the third was Superintendent Stopes. His car stood outside. Both the police officers wore plain clothes.

There was no one behind the bar.

I rapped on the counter.

"A double Scotch and soda, please," I said.

Maguire, who had been reading an evening paper in his armchair over by the window, gave me an unwelcoming glance but stood up to serve me. He still had his back to the bar when the superintendent spoke.

"I think I have seen you before," he said.

I turned and looked at him. He was a good figure of a man in his well-cut tweed suit, and except that he was rather puffy under his brown eyes, his features were good, too, a touch of gray in the crisp dark hair adding distinction to his looks.

"It's possible," I said.

"It's certain—and I shall be glad if you will show me your identity card, and any other papers you may have."

In a mirror across the saloon I could see Maguire, the whisky in his hand, staring open-mouthed. The police sergeant put his tankard on a table and took a step forward.

"Before I do that, Superintendent, I should like a word with you."

And, as I spoke, Mary came in. I saw her through the mirror and glanced back.

When our glances met, she flushed hotly, then grew white as marble. Her eyes seemed to be alight as she looked from me to the superintendent. I turned away. If my heart had jumped

when I got her note that morning, it sang now.

"Make it snappy. I'm waiting," Superintendent Stopes said.

"I should prefer it to be private—if you and the sergeant, there, would step outside for a minute."

Two blue eyes were fixed on me through the mirror. The superintendent and the sergeant exchanged looks.

"It concerns the death of Cyrus Pettigrew," I added.

Superintendent Stopes' expression changed as if a wet sponge had been swept over a painted face. He stared at me; I knew what he was going to say.

"Stand by here, Sergeant. I'll talk to this man, alone."

"I prefer the sergeant to be present."

The farmer looked riveted to his chair. Maguire still had the bottle gripped in his hand as though he'd been hypnotized.

There was nothing else for it. The three of us went outside. It seemed very dark, after the lighted saloon.

"The man who killed Pettigrew," I said, "was in financial difficulty. That was the motive. He must have tried, many times, to get alone to the spot, recover the diamonds and remove the evidence. But, for one in his position, it wasn't easy. He managed it tonight, though."

In a dead silence I swung my knapsack from my shoulder.

"The wire used in the crime is still in the old barn where the criminal hid it—and where I found it more than a week ago. There may be fingerprints. The packet of diamonds is in his pocket."

I opened the knapsack.

"You asked me for my identity card. Here it is. Sergeant, will you take it?"

I gave the card to the police sergeant and snapped on my flashlight to let him read it. What he read was:

Detective Inspector Jas. Yeoward
Criminal Investigation Dept.
New Scotland Yard, S.W.I.

"It's a painful duty, Superintendent Stopes, to arrest a senior officer. But I have to charge you with the murder of Cyrus Pettigrew on the night of the nineteenth of October. I warn you that anything you may say . . ."

When I got back to the Forester from Underhill police station —I was in a hurry and I came in a patrol car—the bar was just closing.

But Mary was waiting.

She whispered, "Jim, how could you do it to me? Didn't you trust me? Oh, I'll never forgive you—"

It's lucky that women don't always mean what they say.

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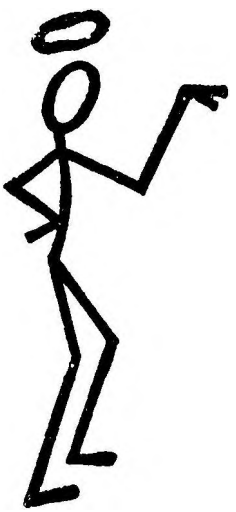

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checkmate in two moves

by . . . W. I. Eisen

Poison may be a most effective murder weapon. But there are even quicker ways of killing a man.

YES, I poisoned him. It turned out well, and I am not in the least remorseful. And now in two hours I shall be a free man and my own master. It was ten in the evening when I left Uncle Nestor with a feeling of unrestrained triumph, and set out on a serene walk down the avenue in the general direction of the waterfront.

I felt buoyant and unburdened, and it amused me to reflect that even Guillermo was profiting by the deal. Poor Guillermo! He was so timid, so reticent that I had known from the first I would have to act for both of us. I had foreseen the necessity on the day when we had been taken as orphans into a home as palatial as it was cold—a home where affection did not exist. It was as predetermined and as certain as the constant, daily click of coins around us.

"You've got to get into the habit of not squandering," Uncle Nestor would proclaim. "Don't forget, my entire fortune will be yours one day."

In an earlier issue Donald A. Yates surprised and delighted us with an exciting little tale in translation by the gifted young Argentine writer, Rudolfo J. Walsh. That off-trail mystery was so enthusiastically received that we have persuaded Mr. Yates to return to our pages with a repeat performance. It is by the equally gifted W. I. Eisen, and we believe it to be one of the best of the many unusual mystery stories being written by our Latin American neighbors.

We would look at each other, Guillermo and I, and we would smile. But unfortunately the arrival of that wonderful day seemed constantly to recede despite the fact that Uncle had serious gall bladder attacks and was, in addition, suffering from heart trouble.

As far as his domineering attitude was concerned it went steadily from bad to worse, becoming well-nigh intolerable when Guillermo had the ill-grace to fall in love. Uncle Nestor just didn't like the girl.

"She comes from an impoverished family," he cold-bloodedly pointed out. "She lacks refinement. She's a *nobody.*"

Guillermo accomplished nothing by enumerating the young lady's good points. The old man was as pig-headedly stubborn as he was unpredictable.

With me, however, he was far more circumspect, for I presented him with a more disturbing problem—a conflict of personalities. He had set his mind on my acquiring a doctorate in chemistry at the university. But the investment had proven a poor one, and he found himself the uncle of a card sharp and horse-racing expert instead. Naturally, he did not contribute in any way to these diverting pastimes of mine. And it took some real ingenuity on my part to pry him loose from a single *peso.*

One of my favorite deceptive practices was to endure without complaint his interminable chess games. He had to give in when he was beaten, solely to save face. Unfortunately there was a darker side to the picture. When he was in a favorable position he would lengthen out the game painfully, analyzing each move with revolting deliberation, aware of my desire to hurry off to the club. He savored my torment with a sadistic satisfaction as he sipped his cognac.

One day he said to me with insulting irony: "It gratifies me to see that you've studiously applied yourself to the game. You are connivingly intelligent and an infamous loafer. But nevertheless your devotion shall have its reward. I'm quite fair, you see? From now on—since you're not getting a diploma—I'll keep track of our chess matches. How does that sound to you, lad? I'll copy the scores in a notebook, and keep a day-to-day record of our debts."

I realized then that if I bowed to his tyranny, I could clear several hundred *pesos* a week. So I accepted. From that moment on I became a slave to statistics. So absorbed was he in the outcome of his gamble that in my absence he fell into the habit of playing imaginary solitaire, and even discussed the matches with Julio, the butler.

Well, it is all a receding nightmare now. I had dared greatly

and I had found a way out. It could hardly have been called a pleasant way. But is death by violence ever pleasant?

I was approaching Castanera now. It was a wet, sultry night, and across the clouded sky darted flashes of heat lightning. The humidity dampened my hands and parched my mouth. At the corner an approaching policeman made my heart leap. Then he passed and I breathed again.

The poison—what was it called? Aconite. I had slipped it secretly out of the laboratory at school, and had deposited a few drops in his cognac surreptitiously. Uncle had been charming for once. Graciously he had excused me from the game.

"I'll make it solitaire," he said. "I gave the servants the evening off. It may seem strange to you, but tonight I want to be alone. Afterwards I'll read a good book. A man is wise when he surrenders completely to his mood of the moment. Go ahead."

"Thank you, Uncle," I said. "I would not have suggested it ordinarily. But today is Saturday, and—"

The devil! How well did he understand? Was it the clairvoyance of a condemned man? But I was sure I could carry it off.

But what of Guillermo? Undoubtedly Guillermo was a problem. I had met him in the hall immediately following my "carelessness" with the aconite. He was coming down the stairs, looking very preoccupied.

"What's the matter?" I asked him cheerfully, and I would have gladly added: *"Ah, if you only knew!"*

"I'm fed up," he replied. "I've had about as much of him as I can stand."

"Come on!" I said, slapping him on the back. "Whatever it is—it won't seem half as bad tomorrow."

"It's bound to seem worse," he muttered. "He's driving me crazy. Between him and Mathilde—"

"What about Mathilde?"

"She gave me an ultimatum. I must chose between her and uncle."

"Choose her," I said quickly. "It's what I'd do."

He looked at me with a despairing gleam in his eyes. Without my encouragement the poor fellow would never have made the slightest move to resolve his difficulties.

"That's what I'd do too," he said quickly. "But what would we live on? You know how implacable he is. He'd deprive me of everything."

"Well, perhaps if we're patient things will take care of themselves," I said. "Who knows . . ."

Guillermo's lips tightened. He shook his head. "There's no

way out. I'm trapped. But I'm going to have a talk with him. Where is he now?"

I was frightened, knowing that if the poison had worked slowly, and the first symptoms had not brought on convulsions he could still be helped and—a coldness crept up my spine.

"He's in the library," I said. "But leave him alone. When he finished the chess game he dismissed the servants. The old fool would be furious if you broke in on him now. He wants to be alone. Go forget your troubles at a bar."

He thought a few moments and when at last he spoke he seemed relieved. "I'll see him some other time then. After all—"

"After all, you wouldn't want to get excited," I said severely.

Guillermo fixed his gaze on me. For a moment he seemed angry, but the mood passed almost instantly.

I looked at my watch. "It's nearly eleven now," I said, aloud to myself.

No doubt it had begun by this time. First there'd be a slight sense of discomfort in the pit of his stomach. Then a sharp little pain, but nothing very alarming. He'd probably start cursing the cook.

Now, with the thought of it sharp in my mind, my calmness amazed me a little. The paving stones were distorted into rhombs, and the river was a dirty stain along the thick wall. In the distance I could see lights—green, red and white. The automobiles moved s w i f t l y along, their tires skimming the asphalt.

I walked on for ten more minutes, and then decided that I had gone far enough, and that it would be safe to return.

Once again I was on the avenue heading for Leandro N. Alem. From there to the Plaza de Mayo was only a few steps. My watch returned me to reality. The hour hand pointed to 11:30. If the poison had worked quickly, I would have nothing further to fear. Uncle would have suffered a simple heart attack and I—would be his very fortunate heir.

I entered a bar. A juke box was playing a popular melody and the waiter seemed surprised by my grim expression, and my undoubted pallor.

"Sir," he said. "Is there anything wrong?"

"I'm quite all right," I assured him. "Bring me a cognac."

"Very well, sir," he said. "You must forgive me. I—well, for a moment I thought you might have had an attack."

Through the windows I watched the passing caravan, the imagined ticks of my watch dominating every other sound in the place, even the beating of my heart. One o'clock came and

went. I drank the cognac in a single gulp.

At 2:30 I returned home. At first I suspected nothing—not until someone stepped out to block my path. In the dim light I could just make out a policeman's scarlet cape, and a sudden, terrible fear possessed me.

"Senor Claudio Alvarez?" he asked.

I nodded.

"Come in," the policeman said, stepping away from the doorway.

"W-what are you doing here?" I stammered.

"You'll know q u i c k l y enough," was his slow, dry reply.

In the hall I saw several uniformed men who appeared to have taken possession of the house. Julio, the butler, tried to talk to me. But the officer in charge, a gray-haired man with flashing dark eyes silenced him with a gesture. The officer immediately turned, and stared at me coldly.

"Are you one of the two nephews?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," I murmured. "The eldest. My brother—"

"I'm sorry to tell you that your uncle has been murdered," he said. "I am Inspector Villegas, in charge of the investigation. I must ask you to accompany me to the next room?"

I followed him into the library. Two assistants fell in behind us. Inspector Villegas gestured toward a chair and seated himself at the desk. He lit a cigarette, and continued to eye me coldly.

"You are the nephew, Claudio?" He spoke as if he were repeating a lesson he had committed to memory, and could ill-afford not to get it right.

"Yes, sir," I said.

"Well, then, explain what you did last night."

"The three of us had dinner together as usual," I said, choosing my words with care. "Guillermo retired to his room. Uncle and I remained to chat for awhile and then, at his suggestion, we went to the library. After we finished our customary game of chess I said goodnight and left. In the vestibule I ran into Guillermo who had come downstairs, and was just going out. We exchanged a few words, and then—I left alone."

"And now you're returning?"

"Yes," I said.

"And the servants?"

"Uncle let them go after dinner—insisted on their going, in fact. He wanted to be completely alone in the house. From time to time he'd do strange things like that."

"Your account agrees for the most part with what the butler has told us. When he returned he made his customary routine check upstairs and down. He noticed that the library door was

partly open and that light was shining out. When he entered the room he found your uncle seated before the chess game, dead. The game had been interrupted. So you were engaging in a little gambling match with him tonight, eh?"

For a moment I couldn't seem to breathe. My mouth was dry, and my heart had begun a furious pounding. *Uncle's well-known solitary games!*

"Yes, sir," I admitted, my voice almost failing me.

The inspector had probably already dragged Guillermo over the same coals. Where *was* Guillermo? Was it the inspector's plan to isolate us, to leave us alone, defenseless, and then to pick us apart?

"You were apparently in the habit of making a written record of your games with your uncle —to keep the details straight. Will you please show me that record book, senor Alvarez?"

I was sinking into a mire. "Record book?" I asked.

"Certainly, my good fellow. My wanting to see it should not surprise you. A police officer must verify everything. Before I leave this house I must satisfy myself that *you played the same as always.*"

I began to stutter. "Well, the truth is . . ." And then, in an outburst I couldn't control, "Of course we played the same as always!"

Tears began to sting my eyes. They had me—they had me! They were deliberately, maliciously playing with my desperation. They were amusing themselves with my guilt.

Suddenly the inspector said, accusingly: "You were the last one to see him alive. And also—the first to see him dead. Your uncle made no notation in the book this time, my good friend!"

I don't know why I stood up, tense, despairing. "All right!" I cried. "If you know, why ask me? I killed him because I hated him with all my soul. I could no longer endure his despotism."

The inspector seemed genuinely startled. "Good heavens," he said. "He gave in sooner than I had hoped. All right," he said, turning on me, "since you've decided to confess, where's the revolver?"

"Wh—what revolver?" I stammered.

Inspector Villegas didn't lose his calm. He replied imperturbably, "Come on, don't pretend your memory needs to be refreshed. The revolver! Or have you forgotten that you murdered him with one shot. One shot square between the eyes. Lord, what superb marksmanship!"

appointment in mayfair

by . . . B. L. Jacot

If you're planning a really big-scale swindle it's advisable to keep historic landmarks in mind.

AS HAMISH left the reception desk he caught a faint nod from the telephone clerk and he followed the boy with his bag. The manager was waiting in the suite reserved for the Maharajah. "We had the telephone message from Paris," he said.

"His Highness will arrive tomorrow," Hamish told him. He was sweating and he hoped it did not show. He looked up and caught the manager's eye with a smile. "He has some business in Bond Street," he said. "He wants a necklace here when he arrives and has written about it."

The Maharajah's weakness was making expensive presents. He had had several well publicized nuptials. And on jewelry bought in this way there was sometimes a commission coming in.

"I'll telephone the firm to say you have arrived," the manager promised.

"Thank you," Hamish said.

When the manager had left the suite Hamish took up the telephone. "Lucien? Is it all right to speak? He's going to ring up Ingalls to let him know how the old man is supposed to be coming tomorrow. You had no diffi-

When an English mystery writer with a provocative style makes an Indian Maharajah the target for an audacious tug-of-war between a swindler and Destiny in cruel disguise a spate of entertainment is immediately assured.

culty with the call from Paris then?"

Hamish's accomplice at the switchboard laughed. "What was to stop me? This is money for jam, boy!"

Hamish swallowed. This necklace would be worth about ten thousand pounds and with that sort of money there were always risks. Two days back Hamish had been the Maharajah's confidential man and nobody here knew he had been sacked. A piece of petty larceny which he thought could never be traced had come home to roost and Hamish was out. He had remembered then a letter he had noticed on the Maharajah's dressing-table about a necklace this firm was trying to sell him and the scheme had jumped into his mind.

"I'm going to call Ingalls myself now and get him to bring the necklace round here—tonight," said Hamish.

"Getting nerves?" Lucien asked. "You've done this sort of thing before, haven't you? Been doing it for five years and all on the up-and-up. In a couple of weeks we'll be laughing our heads off in Rio or somewhere, rolling in it. Think of that."

With Lucien at the switchboard from 6 p.m. to midnight it cut down risks, but there was always a chance something might go wrong.

"Get me Mr. Ingalls at his private address and listen in."

Hamish heard the hotel switchboard make the call and he heard Lucien say: "Hotel Ritz-Bristol, Mr. Ingalls. His Highness's valet would like to speak to you."

An old man's voice said: "The manager has already spoken to me. I have been expecting this call."

At his cue Hamish came in: "Mr. Ingalls? Good evening, sir. His Highness instructed me to get into touch with you as soon as I arrived. He would like to have the necklace to examine when he gets here tomorrow morning."

He paused and steadied his hand on the receiver. This was the ten thousand pound question, and he forced himself to make his voice casual. "Will you be able to send the necklace round to the hotel this evening?"

"I'll bring it round myself. In about an hour then, Mr. Hamish?"

After a wait Hamish called the switchboard again. "Did you get it, Lucien? He's on the way."

"I got it. I told you there was nothing to it. This is practically legal—and I'm here watching out for anything that crops up!"

The waiting was the worst. These chaps were always suspicious of the smallest thing—they had to be in their trade. But hadn't Mr. Ingalls known him for years, done several deals in practically this identical way?

The waiting was bad, all the same.

At twenty minutes to eight they telephoned through from Reception that Ingalls was on his way up to the suite. He had a briefcase with him, and Hamish moistened his lips. "I ought to get it down to the hotel safe at once," he said.

"A wise precaution." The old man took out the jewel case and laid it on the table. He produced a pen and a receipt form. "A formality the insurance insists on," he said.

Hamish nodded. He took the form.

"About the monogram?" the old man asked. "This is a plain case out of stock, of course."

"It will do as it is."

"The customer appreciates these little attentions. His Highness particularly. You will recall he always—"

Hamish's fingers were itching to get on the case and be done with it. The old man with the gray hair and striped trousers irritated him, balked him.

"I'm quite sure the necklace is all right as it is. It will make no difference to—the sale, Mr. Ingalls."

"I could get the job done by first thing tomorrow morning and still have time before the Maharajah arrives."

Hamish was sweating again. "My orders were quite definite. His Highness wished the necklace here when he arrives. It is what he is coming to London for and he doesn't like to be disappointed in such things, as you know."

"I'll tell you what we can do, Mr. Hamish," the little man beamed. "Telephone through to Paris and ask."

Hamish could not afford to hesitate. "Well, perhaps you're right."

He picked up the telephone and found himself staring stupidly at the face of the clock. It showed a few minutes of nine. "This is Suite Four," he said, and heard Lucien's official voice acknowledge. Hamish asked him to get the Paris number, sending up a prayer that the other would be quick-witted enough to catch on.

"It will take a few minutes, sir. I'll call you."

Here was another wait and to fill the gap Hamish offered the jeweler a cigarette. When the call came in he jumped.

"Your Paris call, sir," Lucien announced. Then Hamish heard a connection made with a click and a French voice calling out: "Allo! Allo! Hotel Miramar."

Hamish panicked. The fool had taken him at his word and actually put a call through. What now? The seconds stretched until Hamish caught the old man's inquiring eye. "Miramar?" he echoed.

"Hotel Miramar," the voice

said, and Hamish breathed again. It was Lucien doing his stuff.

"Put me through to the Maharajah's suite," Hamish said. "Hamish, the valet, speaking."

He exchanged a nod with the jeweler, waited an interval, and then said into the telephone, knowing Lucien would be listening with interest: "His Highness's secretary? Good evening, sir. I have the necklace here in the suite as ordered, and Mr. Ingalls himself is with me here. He wishes me to ask whether His Highness wants a monogram on the case."

Hamish left a pause while the secretary supposedly went to inquire, and the two men in the suite exchanged a look. At length a voice squawked loudly in the receiver. Lucien was now doing his stuff again. "Tell him to leave the necklace as it is. The Maharajah will be seeing him in the morning about noon."

The old man was making signs and Hamish said quickly: "One minute, please—" He caught a message from the jeweler, considered the risk of refusing against the risk of letting him speak, and then said: "Mr. Ingalls as a matter of courtesy would like a word with you."

He handed the receiver across, confident that Lucien would handle the risk safely and he heard the old man saying: "I wished His Highness to know that I came at once to the suite myself to serve him in this matter and that I think he will not regret the purchase if he makes it. Beautiful stones—"

Hamish listened for a while to the answering voice squawking in the receiver. His nervousness had gone now. He had taken all the hurdles safely and was on the safe home stretch, with Lucien holding everything under control.

"I'd better get the necklace down in the safe," Hamish said.

The old man seemed to be thinking. He was staring at the wall, drumming his fingers on the case. "Nine o'clock," Ingalls said finally. "I never realized before that this hotel is so close to the Houses of Parliament."

"Houses of Parliament?" Hamish echoed.

"I expect if you drew the heavy curtains here—like this—and opened the French windows, you would hear the hour being struck quite distinctly. Yes, indeed."

Hamish crossed to stand behind the old man. He heard the last strokes of Big Ben sounding the hour and he had the notion that the old man had gone out of his mind, or childish.

When Hamish turned the other was replacing the case in his bag and there was a cold look in his eyes.

"I think we will wait for His Highness to arrive before part-

ing with these," he said. "If he is going to arrive."

"I don't know what you mean," Hamish told him. "Is this some joke?"

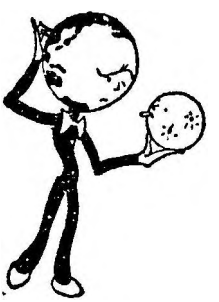
"No joke. You were all right up to the time when I heard Big Ben begin to strike. I heard it in our telephone conversation. The man I was talking to was not in Paris, Mr. Hamish."

"You're crazy," Hamish cried. "You're out of your mind. You—"

"I should not advise you to move about, Mr. Hamish. I'm well prepared to protect myself."

"Ring up Paris yourself and ask!" Hamish shouted. "Get through yourself—

"It's Scotland Yard I'm about to ring," Ingalls said. "I don't like this at all. Stay where you are, Mr. Hamish."



what's new in crime

by . . . Hans Stefan Santesson

Variety and excitement play drum major roles in a banner parade of unusual new mystery titles.

THE DYING Sir Robert Walpole, asked what he wanted read to him, is said to have replied, "Anything! Anything but history, for that is bound to be false!" Defining academic history as a "combination of myth, propaganda and guess-work," historian Hugh Ross Williamson, in his HISTORICAL WHODUNITS (Macmillan, $3.75), looks with a cynical eye on a number of deaths and impersonations, the "explanations" of some of which have passed into folklore.

There are, for instance, two schools of opinion on the subject of who killed the Princes in the Tower, many subscribing to the Tudor propaganda portrait of Richard the Third immortalized by Shakespeare and echoed, more recently, by Sir Lawrence Olivier. But Williamson (as did the late Josephine Tey in her brilliant DAUGHTER OF TIME) objects that Richard had nothing to gain from the youngsters' death while Henry Tudor had everything to fear from their existence.

Who killed Colonel Rainsbor-

A new mystery by Brett Halliday is always an event, and when it weaves its spell in Miami, Florida, you can be sure it will prove well worth the price of admission. For Mr. Halliday has resided in Miami and knows the town from A to Izzard. And for fact crime that rings psychologically true it would be hard to surpass the case histories of Wenzell Brown. Both these volumes and many others are discussed here by Hans Stefan Santesson with urbane charm.

ough, the man who might have overthrown Cromwell? Who killed Sir Edmund Berry Godfrey, Justice of the Peace who knew too much? Who was responsible for the death of Mary of Scotland's husband, Lord Darnley? Examining these and other cases, Hugh Ross Williamson turns a scholarly and rather cynical eye on academic history, and takes you a considerable distance along the road towards understanding the times and the mores of these men and women who rewrote the history of their days. Recommended.

Michael Innes occupies a rather unique niche in English letters, where the mystery novel often has a stature and a dignity accorded it by few publishers in these parts. I do not refer here to the Michael Innes mystery cult which the publishers tell us exists. I refer to the quiet, literate quality of Innes' writing, obvious in even this rather slight excursion into restrained unpleasantness.

Michael Innes' A QUESTION OF QUEENS (Dodd Mead, $2.95) reports on what happens when a number of oddly related people begin to take a strange interest in the half-forgotten doings of Sir Jocelyn Jory, Baronet, who had scandalized young Queen Victoria's England by his excessive interest in the dead. Recommended—for the initiate.

Brett Halliday's THE BLONDE CRIED MURDER (Torquil, $2.95) reports on Michael Shayne's 28th case in which the tough and indestructible Miami detective has two hours to find the answer to the identity and whereabouts of a killer—two hours packed with characteristic Shayne drive and excitement as a murderer waits, hungrily, for the moment when more blood will be spilled . . . Recommended.

Fredric Brown's THE LENIENT BEAST (Dutton, $2.75) not only describes the "day-to-day routine of a working police department in a middle-sized city," but also introduces us to detective Frank Ramos, a member of the Tucson police department, a sleuth whom it's to be hoped we'll meet again in the not too distant future.

Ramos, a Mexican by race—as they phrase it in Arizona—distrusts the world he lives in and the people he works or associates with. And not without cause. There are times when he wonders why people stay sober. He has to. He is a cop. Maybe he doesn't feel the same degree of devotion about the job that others do, but he tries to do his best, "nasty as the job is to do sometimes." And he succeeds brilliantly when he finally confronts a dedicated murderer, understanding *why* the other man had killed . . . Recommended.

Don't miss Israel Beckhardt and Wenzell Brown's THE VIOLATORS (Popular, 25 cents). Originally published by Harcourt Brace, the Beckhardt-Brown book, correctly described now as "the confidential story of ordinary people who turned to crime," is an introduction to a world of violence and repressions that may be just around the corner from you. Probation Officer Beckhardt, who has made more than three thousand investigations during the past eighteen years, and Wenzell Brown, author of a number of rather violent novels about juvenile delinquency in Spanish Harlem, have made an important and serious contribution to the field which may help to make the public aware of the desperate need for more well-trained and conscientious probation officers. Recommended.

Anna Mary Wells' THE NIGHT OF MAY THIRD (Doubleday, $2.75), apart from reporting on the problems faced by a group of genuinely likable people, illustrates the extent to which today's mystery novel can and often does reflect the tensions of our times. The degree of subtlety in this reflection and the depth or the lack of depth shown here, does not alter the fact that many of these novels will be studied, generations after we are gone, by people who will want to know what made us tick —and why.

The question of racism *and* the need for defining the extent to which Communism had come to influence campus thinking, has been among the problems faced by university leaders in recent years. The case of Miss Autherine Lucy in Tuscaloosa and the mobs of grim and angry men that seem to spring out of the ground at the mere threat of a change in the status quo, illustrate the gravity of the one question, and has, to some extent, helped to obscure the very real concern, in academic circles, about the reality of the second.

Miss Wells, in the present novel, describes young faculty wife Emily Everett, who had been active with the *Women for Peace,* as she faces these separate and still, here, related questions. It is possible that you will question, as I did, the reactions of some characters as we come closer and closer to the climax, but the novel is, nevertheless, an appealing portrait of a group of people in a college town facing murder *and* social problems that have become a part of our times.

Carol Malden, in William Pearson's HUNT THE MAN DOWN (Simon & Schuster, $2.75), wished her frightened, middle-aged husband were dead. She had never pretended that she'd married him for anything

but his money, and George Malden, facing bankruptcy, was aware of this and knew that bankruptcy meant that he would lose her.

Insurance investigator Shep Henderson, her first husband, knew her equally well. She'd divorced him because he was getting "poorer every year on white-collar wages and white-collar dreams, financed by white-collar credit." He knew her all to well—much too well—which may have been why he searched, so relentlessly, for the answer to when and where George Malden had really died.

An ably plotted novel of crime and hunger—hunger not for bread, but for the "security" that only murder could bring. Recommended.

Henri Catalan's SOEUR ANGELE AND THE EMBARRASSED LADIES (Sheed and Ward, $2.50) was an interesting contribution to a field by no means the exclusive domain of the more rugged and indestructible "Private Eye." Henri Catalan's SOEUR ANGELE AND THE GHOSTS OF CHAMBORD (Sheed and Ward, $2.50) is a somewhat less than happy sequel to the quiet Sister of Charity's earlier adventure, and undoubtedly largely so because the translator has felt it necessary to translate into alleged "whodunit" idiom what must, in the original, have had more of the subtlety and warmth that distinguished M. Catalan's earlier work.

This apparently rather free translation is unfortunate. While the story itself is slight, it is difficult to believe that the original is quite as graceless as this translation suggests at times. Dr. Angèle Persent, Sister of Charity and one of the most interesting recruits to the field in recent years is thus denied her due.

Angry Timothy MacCormack returns to Los Angeles—and murder—in Robert P. Hansen's MURDER IS WHERE YOU FIND IT (Morrow, $2.75), the vigorous story of Mr. MacCormack's repeated brushes with attempted and actual murder, in between arguments with two beautiful but somewhat amoral ladies. Realistic? Well—in a way . . .

The murderer was a man who had to be top dog at all times. He kept people around for what they did to his ego, and murder—when this paramountcy seemed threatened—was obviously the logical way out. Bert Iles' MURDER IN MINK (Arcadia, $2.50) is a fair example of the medium hard-boiled school, featuring a detective who snarls at the girl he'd like to kiss, tough boys with ambitions to graduate from the rackets, and the familiar Homicide Lieutenant with pale blue eyes and an air of fighting sleep.

—Continued from Back Cover

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❷ The Case of The NERVOUS ACCOMPLICE

Mason's beautiful client, Sybil Harlan, is on trial for murder. The District Attorney produces one witness after another—right down to a ballistics expert who says that the fatal bullet came from Sybil's gun! And all Perry offers in her defense is—*a wheelbarrow filled with rusty scrap iron!*

❸ The Case of The SUN BATHER'S DIARY

Perry gets a frantic phone call—from a woman who says all her clothes and her auto trailer were stolen while she was sunbathing. She offers Perry $1500 to recover them. The investigation leads Mason into a MURDER case. According to the evidence, the killer is either Perry's client . . . *or Perry himself!*

❹ The Case of The GLAMOROUS GHOST

Perry's client has amnesia. She can't remember a thing that happened on the fateful night her husband was murdered. She can't even recognize her own gun — the MURDER WEAPON!

❺ The Case of The RESTLESS REDHEAD

Perry Mason's client is the victim of a double frame-up . . . or IS she? The first time she called up Steve Merrill, the police came—and accused her of stealing $40,000 in jewels from Merrill's wife. The SECOND time she called him, the police came again. This time they accused her of MURDERING Merrill!

❻ The Case of The RUNAWAY CORPSE

Myrna Davenport hires Mason to get a letter which accuses her of planning to poison her husband Ed. (Ed has just died of arsenic poisoning!) Perry searches Ed's office and finds an envelope with six sheets of *blank* paper! Then the police accuse Perry of substituting the blanks for the REAL letter!

—Continued on Inside Cover

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