JUNE
35c

THE saint DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

Edited by LESLIE CHARTERIS

The Frameup
by OCTAVUS ROY COHEN

The Repeater
by F. VAN WYCK MASON

Of Perfume and Sudden Death
by PETER CHEYNEY

Dark Reflections
by HAL ELLSON

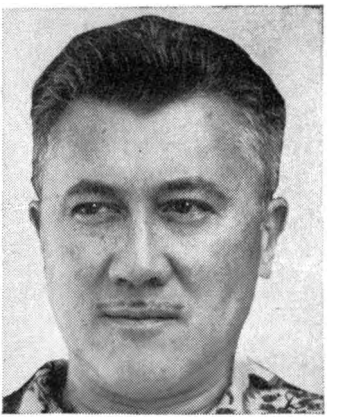
Amateur Assassin
by HAYDEN HOWARD

THE HAPPY SUICIDE

A NEW SAINT STORY by LESLIE CHARTERIS

SOME OLD, SOME NEW — THE FINEST IN MYSTERY FICTION

A KING-SIZE PUBLICATION



THREE MONTHS AGO, when I introduced the new map of my distinguished kisser which currently adorns this page, I thought I had given the photographer, Arthur Knight, all the credit he had coming. But a letter from one of our friendly readers, concerning some details of my recent story THE GENTLE LADIES, shows me that I have still given him less than his due. Referring to a mention of the Chesterfield Club, a now unhappily defunct institution of Prohibition-days Kansas City, she writes: "Judging from your recent photograph, it is my guess that your Daddy snuck you in and hid you under a table."

This is a most exhilarating compliment to a ripening grandfather who recalls that even in those days he was a little large to sneak in and hide under tables, much as he might have enjoyed the free load, especially in a joint like that, if his Daddy had been sporting enough to cooperate. But I am forced to admit that I may owe a lot of my complacency to the magic of Mr. Knight's camera.

I had a somewhat similar reaction a little before that when another reader wrote in to say how happy she was with the editorial taste of yours truly and the other editor whose name appears on the masthead, Hans Stefan Santesson, and why didn't we start our own book club which she would like better than the other book clubs she had joined. It was most flattering to be suspected of having good taste, but I had to reflect that I might make much less of a showing without Stefan, who does all the heavy wading through the material from which each issue is assembled.

For this issue, all by himself, he culled the off-beat Peter Cheyney, OF PERFUME AND SUDDEN DEATH, Hayden Howard's brand-new AMATEUR ASSASSIN, the solid stuff of Van Wyck Mason and Octavus Roy Cohen, and another new story by the fast-growing English writer Michael Innes, while simultaneously dredging up other new stories by Hal Ellson and Harlan Ellison, and even managing to keep their names untangled, which anyone must admit is no small feat in itself.

While all this productive effort was going on, the Supervising Editor freely admits that he was doing precious little except look ageless and sweat out THE HAPPY SUICIDE. But if you think the net result was worth it, that's probably what counts.

Cleve Cheney

GABRIEL HEATTER reports on dramatic new invention that triumphs over hearing loss and hides deafness as never before

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THE saint
DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

JUNE, 1957
VOL. 7, NO. 6

The Happy Suicide 4
by LESLIE CHARTERIS

How Is Your Crime I.Q.? 28
A NEW FEATURE

The Frameup 29
by OCTAVUS ROY COHEN

The Detective Story 40
by MICHAEL INNES

The Repeater 44
by F. VAN WYCK MASON

Dark Reflections 70
by HAL ELLSON

The Amateur Assassin 78
by HAYDEN HOWARD

Of Perfume and Sudden Death 86
by PETER CHEYNEY

The Saint's Ratings 111
A NEW FEATURE

Toe the Line 112
by HARLAN ELLISON

Expert Assistance 122
by LLOYD ARTHUR ESHBACH

THE SAINT DETECTIVE MAGAZINE, Vol. 7, No. 6. Published monthly by KING-SIZE PUBLICATIONS, INC., 320 Fifth Ave., N. Y. 1, N. Y. Subscription, 12 issues $3.75, single copies 35¢. Foreign postage extra. Reentered as second-class matter at the post office, N. Y., N. Y.

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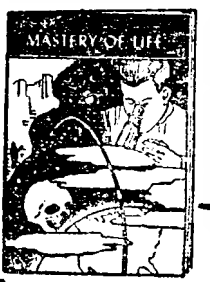

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the happy suicide

by . . . Leslie Charteris

The chief mourner was one of those fantastic phenomena that descend upon a delighted public, fortunately only once in a generation.

THE advertisement said:

GALLOWS FOR RENT. Strong, excellently constructed. Only $10 a day, exclusive occupancy. Rope free. Do it yourself. Box 13, Miami Gazette.

"It was a gag," Lois Norroy said, perhaps rather unnecessarily.

She had a nut-brown sun tan that contrasted quite startlingly with blond hair of a pale platinum shade that the human follicle hardly ever manages to sustain much beyond infancy without chemical assistance; and this, combined with a figure of noteworthy exuberance in the upper register, made her look more like the popular conception of a movie star (or rather, perhaps, that anomalous creature known to the trade as a "starlet") than an extremely able and somewhat cynical writer of the lines that made such dumb belles seem wise, witty, or cute, which she was.

"You see, Paul was one of these Do-it-yourself fiends," she explained. "It was his one relaxation, the only pastime that could

The Saint reluctantly turns detective again, having a natural weakness for paradoxes—especially when presented by attractive blondes.

take his mind completely off his job. Where other fellows would have kept a library or a stable or a harem, Paul kept a workshop—to rest in. But it was a shop that any professional craftsman would've been glad to settle for. If there's any tool or gadget he didn't have, it's only because he hadn't heard of it. So when he decided he wanted this lamp post out by his barbecue, of course he had to make it himself. He did it very functionally and seriously, and he swore it wasn't until it was finished that he realized how much like an old-fashioned gallows it looked."

But only that morning, Paul Zaglan had been found dangling by the neck from his own unintentional gibbet, with an overturned step-ladder under him, in the barbecue-patio of his house in one of the less pretentious developments north of Miami, and only thus for one day had succeeded in crowding his more famous brother in the headlines.

"Then we started kidding about it," Lois Norroy said, "and that advertisement was the result. It was Paul's own idea, but we all agreed it might bring some goofy answers. And he thought they might give him some ideas or some gags he could use in a show."

"So after all, it still only took his mind off his work the hard way," said the Saint.

He had no reason to be quite so cynical; but if we must be technical, he had not much reason even to be there at all. Don Mucklow had invited him to help ferry a boat to Grand Bahama and stay over for some fishing, but a strong north-easter had started to blow and forced them to postpone their sailing. Then, when they were circumnavigating nothing more hazardous than the smörgasbord at Old Scandia, Don had run a collision course with Lois Norroy and introduced him. After that, being what she was, it would have been too much to hope that she would forget him when Paul Zaglan's suicide added an unexpectedly lurid newsworthiness to the assignment she was already working on. These things were always happening to Simon Templar, and sometimes he felt he was getting quite used to them.

"But you don't have to be so utterly flip about it," Lois said rather edgily.

"It's true, though, isn't it?" Simon protested mildly. "When he built this thing he was trying to forget his job, but it turned right around and started giving him ideas. Which only proves that when Destiny has you by the ear it isn't much use wriggling."

"Then why don't *you* relax and enjoy it?"

A certain most unsaintly gleam

came into Simon Templar's blue gaze.

"It seems to me," he murmured, "that that Oriental advice was originally given on a rather different subject. Now if that's what you have in mind, darling—"

The editors of *Fame* Magazine would have found it hard to believe, but Lois Norroy actually blushed.

"I mean," she said hastily, "why don't you step in and solve the mystery?"

"Because, for one thing, as I tried to tell you when you were trying to set me up for a *Fame* story—and in spite of a lot of popular myths—I am not a detective."

"You'll do until a better one comes along."

Simon gave her a cigarette.

"I don't think the local Joe Fridays would like to hear you say that," he drawled. "But even if you're determined to suborn me with outrageous flattery, what makes you think there's any mystery to solve?"

She looked at him with improbably steady and challenging brown eyes.

"You must have been fairly close to a few suicides before this," she said. "But did you ever know one who was completely happy just before he did it?"

"How sure are you of that?"

"Remember, I was with him all yesterday afternoon and evening, until he went home about eleven o'clock. We were still working on the Portrait. At Ziggy's."

This statement was not as cryptic as it may sound to those who were never addicts of *Fame* Magazine, which at that time was at the peak of its somewhat transitory success. Devoted to the most intimate discussion and dissection of current celebrities, it was a lineal descendant of the lurid scandal sheets that had swamped the newsstands a few years before, but like many a child of murky parentage it had risen considerably above its origin.

Although it catered to the same appetite for gossip and revelation, it was much more dignified, much more discriminating, and therefore on occasion much more deadly. But it was not necessarily destructive; it enhanced at least one reputation for every three that it undermined; so that there was never any lack of professional exhibitionists who were eager to play Russian roulette with their futures by cooperating to become the subject of one of the Portraits which were the main monthly feature of *Fame,* with their caricatures emblazoned on the cover, and a synoptic biography and assessment inside to which no closeted skeleton was sacred. And for this treatment, Paul's

brother Ziggy was an ineluctable natural.

Since *Fame* Magazine has long ago published its devastatingly competent capsule of Ziggy Zaglan, this chronicler is not going to try to top it. Let it simply remain on the record that a man who lacked every imaginable (or should it be imaginary?) asset of good looks and good voice, agility or ingenuity, wit or charm, talent or temperament, was able for a stretch of months which it would only be agonizing to enumerate to stay at the top of every popularity poll or rating system devised to assure timorous sponsors that their commercials were interrupting the entertainment of a satisfactory number of bleary-eyed slaves of a TV set. He was one of those preposterous phenomena which afflict the public once in a generation like an epidemic: he resembled no other performer, living or dead, and indeed there was a cadre of die-hards which forlornly maintained that he was not a performer at all, but millions of 100% American housewives would have taken a Trappist vow sooner than they would have missed their daily dose of Ziggy Zaglan.

He was also important enough to be able to dictate his own working conditions, which he took advantage of to do his show for nine months in the year from Miami Beach, where he had established his legal residence for the two most seductive reasons that Florida could offer: its climate and its freedom from state income tax. As a result, several members of his permanent team had been constrained (perhaps not too reluctantly) to follow suit, and had moved their homes to the same fortunate area, though not to the identical gilded neighborhood. Perhaps the most inevitable of these was Paul Zaglan, a brother, who had the main writing credit on the show.

"I've always wondered," said the Saint. "Who was the brains of the act? Granting that some kind of brains were involved, of course."

"It wasn't Paul," she said. "Paul was a wonderful guy, and a terrific worker, and he had lots of brilliant flashes. But the personality that came over to the public was always Ziggy's. Paul was the carpenter. He gave Ziggy scripts with a solid framework and lots of interesting angles, but they'd never have got off the ground until Ziggy added his own curlicues and all those zany touches that seem to send half the half-witted public."

"I gather that this doesn't include you."

She shrugged.

"Would anyone buy curlicues with nothing to hang 'em on?"

"Or scaffolding with nothing on it?"

"All right," she said sharply. "Maybe I just liked Paul better as a person. I used to know him fairly well in New York, before Ziggy was big enough to move down here—before I even went to work for *Fame*."

Simon slanted an idle eyebrow at her.

"Okay, what happened last night?"

"Ziggy and Paul had been working on the show all afternoon, except when they were being interrupted by Ted Colbin—that's Ziggy's agent—and the man from the network, Ralph Damian. There's a big hassle going on about a new contract, so they're both down here to fight it out, so that every time they reach a compromise on something they can take it straight to Ziggy and see if he'll buy it."

"Ziggy is so biggie?"

"With a hey-nonny-nonny and a cha-cha-cha. So Monty and I—"

"Take it easy," pleaded the Saint. "I'm meeting people too fast. Who's Monty?"

"Montague Velston," she said. "My partner on this assignment. This is the third *Fame* Portrait we've worked on as a team. . . . We'd just been stooging around, watching the antics and making our own notes. That's the way we operate when we're getting one of those candid snapshots of an alleged genius at work."

"Thank you for warning me," Simon said. "I had a hunch all along that—"

"We had dinner rather late, about a quarter of nine. After coffee, Paul said he was bushed and went home. Ziggy was just warming up—he starts nibbling dexedrine after lunch, and by the time everyone else is folding he's opening up. He went in the den and started his final re-write on the next script. He always does that himself, after everything's been hashed out with Paul and the rest of the gang. That's when he adds those unique touches that make the Ziggy Zaglan show."

"So everyone else went home too?"

"Oh, no. After all, we only had hotels to go to, and it was cozy enough at Ziggy's, and the drinks were free. And he'd said 'Don't go away, I'll be through in an hour or two, and you won't even miss me.' Monty and Ted started playing gin rummy, and Ralph went on the make for me."

The Saint remained politely expressionless.

"And?"

"It could only be verbal skirmishing, of course, with Monty and Ted in the room. He turned the radio on to an FM station that was playing Viennese waltzes, very softly, so it wouldn't disturb Ziggy, who was typing a blue streak in the next room, and

gave me his best intellectual line. I kept him going for almost an hour, for my own education, but when he realized it was only an academic interest he got restless."

"Men are so selfish, aren't they?"

"About the same time Ted Colbin was getting tired of losing to Monty, so he was quite receptive when Ralph suggested they ought to catch the last show at the Latin Quarter and case the talent."

"That sounds a trifle unchivalrous," Simon remarked.

"Oh, naturally I was invited to go along, which gave me the chance to beg off without costing him any face. Monty was still in a sport shirt and said if he went back to the hotel and changed at that hour it would be into his pajamas. So Ralph and Ted went off, leering and wisecracking."

"Without saying good-bye?"

Another voice said sepulchrally: "When Ziggy Zaglan is creating, nobody but nobody interrupts him."

They both turned to see the slight dapper man who had come strolling around the corner of the house. He wore gray suede shoes, charcoal doeskin slacks, and a pearl-colored silk shirt with gunmetal-tinted collar and pocket hems. Even against this carefully neutral background his face seemed colorless. He had wavy black hair, black eyes set rather close together, a pencil-thin line of black mustache, and a smooth sallow complexion. He looked like a man that prudent strangers would hesitate to play cards with.

"This is Monty," Lois Norroy said, and introduced the Saint.

Montague Velston shook hands very gently.

"Pardon the interruption," he said, "but I'm an amateur detective myself. When I heard that Lois had gone off with you, something told me this was where you'd be."

"Since you caught up with us," Lois said, "you go on with the story."

"As far as I'm concerned," Velston said, "it's strictly filler. Lois and I sat hashing over our notes and a few other things for about an hour, and then Ziggy came out waving a script and saying he had the show wrapped up and now we should all relax. His idea of relaxing was to pick up Ted and Ralph from the Latin Quarter, and then we should all go on to some all-night strip-clip emporium out towards Hialeah where we wouldn't need coats and ties or practically anything else except money. This I wanted like a brain tumor, but I figured that it might be part of our assignment to observe Ziggy on a bender, so I agreed to be sacrificed."

He had a soft and languid way of speaking which combined

with his total lack of facial vivacity to keep you belatedly groping back for some mordant phrase that he had almost smuggled past you.

"Was it worth it?" Simon inquired.

"You would expect a constructive answer from a burnt-offering? Ziggy played host to all the disengaged hostesses, and bought, by my count, twenty-five gallons of alleged Bollinger. In between contour chasing at the table, he got into every act on the floor. If he hadn't been the great Ziggy Zaglan, it would have been embarrassing. Since I'm not the great Ziggy Zaglan, I was embarrassed anyhow, but everyone else thought it was as cute as a flea on a basket case. There were a few high spots which would slay the lads at a college reunion, but which would hardly get a good yawn from the sophisticated editors of *Fame*. Finally Ziggy fell asleep, about five ayem, and Ted paid out a few hundred dollars from his account and we took him home. Since then I've only been trying to scratch the fungus off my palate." Monty Velston took out a thin cigar, gazed at it mournfully, and put it back in his pocket. He turned patiently to Lois again. "I still haven't heard what really happened with you after we dropped you off at the hotel. Or was I too groggy to assimilate it when you phoned?"

"I didn't do a thing but sleep, and I was having breakfast by the pool when Ziggy arrived and told me about Paul. The police had called him, and he was on his way over here. I threw some clothes on and came with him. They'd taken down the—the body, by that time, but everything else was just the way they'd found it."

"Which was how?" Simon asked.

The young woman shrugged. "Just about like now. Except for the step-ladder. That was lying down. He must have kicked it over when he—jumped off."

She wasn't altogether the invulnerably casehardened reporter that she liked to pretend, he realized. There were words which evoked mental images that made her flinch momentarily before she consciously toughened herself to go on.

The ladder was about six feet high, Simon judged, as he strolled past it. The top platform was just below his eye level. Some tidy soul had righted it and set it over some distance from the lamp-post with which it must have been used.

"The colored woman who works—worked for Paul every day, came in at nine o'clock and found him," Lois concluded. "The police lieutenant who sent for Ziggy only wanted to ask some routine questions, mostly to find out if we had any idea

why Paul did it. He didn't get much help."

Simon walked slowly around the structure that had triggered the whole weird episode, examining it more closely. The resemblance to the traditional primitive gibbet was almost ludicrously exact, for essentially it consisted simply of a square upright post about eight feet high with a single thirty-inch arm projecting from the top, like an inverted L, and a diagonal strengthening brace between the two members: it was easy to see how any imagination could have been carried away by the train of macabre humor which had ended in such a deadly joke. But a detailed study compelled one to add that even if it had fallen into an artistic pitfall it had been designed with some mechanical ingenuity and constructed with professional skill. There was an electrical outlet fitted flush in the under side of the crossbar, self-protected from rain, which was evidently intended to service the lamp which was planned to hang from the bar, but the wiring to it could only pass through the center of the arm and the upright. Simon saw that each of these members was actually made from two pieces of wood which must have been grooved down their inside length and then joined together to form the necessary tunnel for the concealed wire, but the halves had been so carefully matched and finished that only the keenest scrutiny could detect the joint.

"You were right," Simon observed. "He was certainly an amateur in one sense only." He went on staring emotionlessly at the noose which still dangled from the stout iron hook under the end of the crossbar, where the lantern was obviously meant to hang, adding the last gruesome touch to the gallows outline that turned similarity into solid fact. "And a Jack of many trades, apparently. Carpenter, electrician—and rope handler. How many suicides would you think could tie a correct hangman's knot? I'll give any odds you like that ninety-nine per cent of hanged suicides swing themselves off on any old slip-knot that they can fumble up. But the authentic legal knot is quite tricky, at least tricky enough that I'm sure nobody ever hit on it by accident except maybe the inventor. And this is a perfect specimen that you could use in a textbook for executioners."

"Very interesting," Velston said, in his toneless voice that made it impossible to tell whether he was serious or sarcastic. "Do you get any other associations?"

"The rope is fine, new, expensive white nylon—the very best. One loose end is bound with scotch tape, the way the chandlers do it to prevent it un-

raveling; the other end is raw. So it was cut off a longer piece, and whoever cut it figured this piece was expendable."

"This is deduction?" Velston said tiredly. "But it makes sense, too. What, after all, is the current market for a loose end of rope that just hung somebody?"

"Put that needle down, Monty," Lois snapped. "Could you do any better?"

"That is not in my contract. I observe, and report. This material I may need some day. Mr. Templar cannot possibly live forever without being taken for a *Fame* treatment."

"Children," Simon interposed pacifically, "I may have an inspiration. Let's pull a switch. I think I could sell *Fame* a portrait of two of its distinguished collaborators at work on a *Fame* portrait. Let me go to work on it and give you a rest from observing me. After all, I still haven't anything to work on here."

"Wouldn't you like to look around the house?" she asked.

"Not particularly. I wish I could convince you that I'm not the Sherlock type. Cigarette ash to me is just cigarette ash. I probably wouldn't recognize a clue unless it was labeled. I've bumbled around a few times and come up with some answers, but they were mostly psychic. And here, I don't even know what crime I'm expected to investigate. Are you sure you aren't just trying to dream one up, so you can grab a fast and phony vignette of the Saint in action? If so, you should let me in on it, and I might go along with the gag—for a percentage."

Lois Norroy bit her lip.

There was a moment in which both she and Velston seemed to teeter in search of a balance that had been unfairly undermined. It was Montague Velston, expectably, who recovered first.

"This would require a fiat from the board of directors, with whom we hirelings do not sit except at bars and usually when we're buying," he said. "Under the circumstances, we'd better accept your proposition, Mr. Templar. Anyhow, as Lois points out, we should keep our noses to the current gallstone. The reason I'm here, in fact, is because Ziggy has called a press conference at which he will distribute his quotes on the subject of Paul's suicide without playing any favorites, and I think we should have this performance in our file. You're welcome to join us, Mr. Templar."

"I wouldn't know how to turn down an invitation like that," said the Saint, in a perfectly dead-pan facsimile of Velston's tone.

He took them both in his car, since Velston had found his way there by taxi. They were only a few blocks from the western end

of Broad Causeway, and on the Beach side Lois gave an address which the Saint's elephantine memory for local topographies could place within a block or two. Otherwise she sat rather quietly between the two men, as if each of them inhibited her from naturalness with the other.

The Saint was correspondingly restrained by the hope of maintaining a neutrality which he did not feel. He had been aware of a certain warmth of unspoken friendliness growing between himself and Lois which might go on beyond this episode, but about Velston he was not so sure.

Ziggy Zaglan's home was almost completely hidden from the street by a high wall draped with blazing bougainvillea, and uninvited admirers were still further discouraged by a pair of massive wrought-iron gates that blocked the driveway. Velston got out and gave his name to a microphone set in one of the gate-posts, and after a brief pause the gates swung open in response to some electric remote control. The house that came in sight as they followed the drive around the curve of a tall concealing hedge was in the tropical-modern style, with wide cantilevered overhangs to shade its expanses of glass and screened breezeways that sometimes made it hard to see exactly where the outside ended and the interior began.

The front door was opened as they reached it by a white-haired Negro butler who should have been posing for bourbon advertisements, who said: "Good afternoon, ma'm and gentlemen. Mist' Zaglan is out by the pool."

They went out of the central hall around a baffle of glass brick and indoor vines, and came into the living room. At least, it had three-quarters of the conventional number of walls for a living room, and towards the back or inner wall it had many of the usual appurtenances, including some recessed shelves of surrealist bric-à-brac, some overstuffed furniture, a card table, a large portable bar, and an enormous edifice of bleached oak centered around a television screen supported by several loudspeaker grilles and buttressed by cabinets which undoubtedly contained as good a collection of records and hi-fi reproductive equipment as a dilettante with money could assemble. What would have been the fourth wall consisted only of ceiling-high panels of sliding glass, through which with the help of bamboo furniture an almost unnoticed transition could be made to the preponderant outdoorsiness of the swimming-pool area, which in turn expanded through almost invisible screens to the lot's western frontage on upper Biscayne Bay and the sea wall

and walk where a shiny 30-foot express cruiser was tied up.

In the area which clung hardest to the time-honored tenets of living-room décor, two men disengaged themselves somewhat laboriously from the plushiest armchairs. One of them was slim and wiry, with a seamed sunburnt face and crew-cut blond hair; the other was tall and moon-faced, with a hair-line that receded to the crown of his head and very bright eyes behind large thick glasses.

"This is Ted Colbin, Ziggy's agent," Velston introduced the wiry one, who looked like a retired light-weight fighter. "And Ralph Damian, of UBC." He indicated the moon-faced one, who looked like a junior professor of mathematics. "May I present Simon Templar?"

The name registered on them visibly, but not beyond the bounds of urbane interest.

"Not the Saint?" Damian said, looking more than ever like a recent and still eager college graduate, and not at all like the lecherous executive that Simon had visualized.

"Guilty."

"I've had so many people tell me there ought to be a TV series about you that I've sometimes wondered whether you were fact or fiction."

"Before you sign anything, Mr. Templar, if you haven't already," Colbin said, "I wish you'd talk to me. I'd like to give you my impartial advice, and it needn't cost you a cent."

"Mr. Templar insists that he has nothing to sell," Lois said. "Not even to anything as painless as a *Fame* interview, with me doing it. He's only here now to watch Monty and me in action. But if you work on him, you'll probably wake up and find him starting his own network and charging agents ten per cent for selling them to sponsors."

The Saint grinned.

"This is a wicked libel," he said. "I only came here because Lois promised I could meet Ziggy in person, and perhaps get his autograph."

"He's out there," Damian said, "giving his all, putting a protractor on the angles."

His thumb twisted towards the pool area, where all that the uninitiated eye could see was a group of half a dozen nondescript men clustered around a focal point which their own semicircle of backs concealed from view.

"How do you know that's what he's doing?" Simon asked curiously.

"That's easy. Would you like to hear it?"

He opened a panel in the bank of record cabinets, flipped a switch, and turned some dials. In a few seconds the cracked plaintive voice familiar to every-

one who had been within range of a radio or TV set, which to millions of fanatical adorers was capable of eliciting every nuance of response from guffaws to tears, came through the multiple speakers a little louder than life.

"*I'm not going to speculate on Paul's reasons for doing what he did. Let the people who don't really care have a field day with their guesses and gossip.*" This was the dignified, the earnest Ziggy, who sometimes came out for a curtain speech in which he begged people to give generously to the Red Cross, or to remember an orphanage at Christmas, his plea made all the more cogent by that hoarse and helpless delivery, reminding them that under the motley of a clown might beat the heart of a frustrated crusader. "*Everyone knows that I've always maintained that an artist's private life should* be *private—that after he delivers his manuscript, or walks off the stage, the world should let him alone. Paul never shortchanged any of us who depended on the material he gave us. But his own life was his own show—to coin a phrase—and if he chose to finish the script where he did, we haven't any right to ask why.*" Here came the gravelly catch in the throat, burlesqued by a hundred night-club comedians in search of something foolproof to caricature. "*The only sponsor he had to please is the One who'll eventually check on all our ratings. . . .* How does that sound?" Another voice, less readily identifiable as Damian's, said: "Pretty lustrous, Ziggy. I only wonder if that last touch isn't extra cream on the cereal—"

Damian flicked the switch again, silencing the record, and said himself: "We ran it through a couple of times before the newsboys got here, of course. With a property as big as Ziggy, you can't shoot off the cuff."

"May we quote you?" Velston asked.

"I'd be wasting my breath if I asked you not to, so I only hope you'll do it correctly. I shall repeat my exact words to your charming collaborator, as a precaution." Damian glanced around, but Ted Colbin had edged Lois away to the other side of the room, where they seemed to be talking very intensely but inaudibly. He turned back to the Saint, with a disarmingly juvenile kind of naughtiness sparkling in his eyes. "Are you shocked, Mr. Templar? I've admitted that Ziggy Zaglan's interview on his brother's death was rehearsed like any other public appearance. Isn't that a sensational revelation?"

"You must wait till I try out a few answers to that," said the Saint amiably.

Outside, the group of men by the pool was breaking up. They

began to straggle away towards some exit which by-passed the living room. One figure was left behind, the smallest of them all, a somber silhouette in dark blue slacks and polo shirt gazing into the sunset.

Then, a moment after the last reporter disappeared, the lone little man turned and began walking towards the house, with increasing briskness, until he rolled aside one of the screen doors and almost bounced into the living room.

"It was all right," he wheezed. "It played like an organ. I could feel it. But I need a drink."

His skin was tanned to the healthy nut-brown which was everything that the Florida Chamber of Commerce could ask of a professional resident with a yacht and a pool, but his build was a trifle pudgy and he had a little pot which he did not try to disguise. In fact, it was an asset when he slumped his shoulders and assumed the dejected question-mark stance which was one of his most effective mannerisms. His face could best be compared to that of a dyspeptic dachshund. He had hair that looked like the first attempt of an untalented wigmaker. This is not to say that he had a comedian's natural advantage of looking funny. He looked like a mess, a rather unpleasant mess with a bad disposition, whose hangdog air was a shield that only served to ward off the indignation of bigger and better men. This at least was the screen personality that the American public had taken to its bosom in one of those absolutely implausible weddings of mother instinct and perversity which have been the Waterloo of every would-be prognosticator of the entertainment market. This was Ziggy Zaglan, in whom almost nobody could find any requisite of success except that millions of people were crazy about him.

He was halfway to the portable bar when he noticed Simon, and skidded to a stop. He elected to play this in dumb show, with pointing finger and interrogative eyebrows.

"Mr. Simon Templar," Damian said. "Your summer replacement."

"I brought him," Lois said, detaching herself from Colbin. "He wanted to meet you," she said rather lamely.

Zaglan got it. He drew circles over his head with one forefinger, his eyebrows still questioning.

The Saint nodded.

Ziggy scuttled behind the pushcart bar and cowered there, peering from behind it in abject terror. Then he picked up a bottle, aimed it like a gun, pulled an invisible trigger, and staggered from the imaginary recoil. Recovering, he inflated his chest,

preened himself, and drew more haloes over his own head, only this time as if they belonged to him.

It was as corny as that, but everyone had some kind of smile.

"Have a drink, Saint," Ziggy said, putting out his hand. "Scotch, bourbon, or shine?"

"I'll take some of that Peter Dawson you just blasted me with."

Ziggy dropped ice cubes into glasses with one hand while he simultaneously poured with the other.

"The first one, you're a guest. After that, it's every man for himself. Nice to have you aboard."

He raised his glass, saluted quiveringly, and turned back to Ralph Damian. As if nothing had interrupted him and the Saint had been disposed of like the turned page of a magazine, he went on: "Listen, Ralph, it came to me out there: this ties in perfectly with a new opening I had in mind for the next show. We know that by then the whole world has heard about Paul. Why isn't there something better than the old Pagliacci routine and the show must go on? Why not come out and face it? Now suppose I opened the show with something like I had for this press conference bit. Then I go on: *But you've all read how Paul didn't seem depressed when he said good night to us. So whatever else was on his mind, he must have been satisfied with the ending of the script he'd written for himself. Just as he was satisfied with the script we're going to do tonight—*"

Simon felt a nudge, and turned to find Ted Colbin at his elbow.

"Can I talk to you for a minute?" said the agent.

"Why not?" said the Saint. "Everyone else has."

Colbin steered him out on to the pool terrace, deftly collecting a highball along the way.

"I hate bullshooting," Colbin said bluntly. "So I'll come right out with it. What are you doing here?"

"You heard—"

"I heard what Lois said, and what you said, which was two loads of nothing. The way I dope it out, Norroy and Velston are dragging you along just to see if you'll stir up anything they can use. Even if you don't do anything, they can hang half a dozen speculations and innuendoes on you, and since it's a fact you were here the readers will believe that where there's smoke there's fire. That's *Fame*'s oldest trick. I think you're smart enough to know that. So I dope it that either you've got nothing but time to waste, or you think there may be something crooked in the deal."

"Why do you dope it that I'd tell you?"

"Because I might be useful."

The Saint's blue eyes probed him dispassionately.

"You've got an investment here," he said. "Ten per cent—maybe more—of an awful lot of money. Why would you want to help anyone who might even accidentally turn up something that might jeopardize it?"

"Because I'm an old-fashioned big-dealing sonovabitch," Colbin said, without animosity. "I play all the old copybook maxims, right down the line. 'If you can't lick 'em, join 'em.' I know that nobody ever scared you off or bluffed you off, if you thought you had hold of something. So why should I beat my brains out trying to be the first? So I'll help you. I'm hoping there's nothing you can dig up that'll damage my property. But if there is, I want to be the first to know. Perhaps I could show you a deal."

"I haven't offered anything."

"Okay. Nothing venture, nothing gain.' What can you lose? I'll play my hand, you play yours. But I'm putting my cards on the table. Help yourself. From all I've heard about you, if anyone gives you a square shake, you do them the same courtesy. That's all I'm asking."

"Since we've agreed to no bullshooting, Ted—how do I know about your shake?"

"Try me."

Simon took out a cigarette and lighted it, taking plenty of time.

"Well, Ted," he said, "what's all this about how happy Paul Zaglan was, just before he topped himself?"

"I'd say he was walking on air," Colbin answered. "I mean metaphorically, before he tried it for real. He'd just delivered his last script and quit his job with Ziggy."

Simon raised his eyebrows.

"Was that something to celebrate?"

"Now he was going to write what he'd always wanted to."

"The Great American Novel—or The Play?"

"Anything, later. But first he was going to get eating money by selling his memoirs of Life With Ziggy."

"It sounds like a nice fraternal parting gesture."

"They were only legally brothers. You could find that out quick enough. Paul was the elder, but he was adopted. Later on, the parents were surprised to discover that they could make one of their own, after all. That was Ziggy. But all his life, Paul took care of him. He'd promised the mother he would—the father died while they were kids. It was Paul's way of paying her back for taking him out of an orphanage and raising him in a real home."

"Until last night he decided he was all paid up?" Simon murmured.

"Until the day before yesterday, when she died. I guess that's when he really started to feel happy."

The Saint was luckily accustomed to surviving jolts that would have staggered the ordinary mortal.

"No doubt he was anticipating a humdinger of a wake," he said.

"She'd been very sick for a long time," Colbin said stonily. "Cut out the phony bullshooting sentiment, and anyone would call it a merciful release. But it was a release for Paul too. He could stop being a brother to Ziggy."

Two thin parenthetic wrinkles cut between the Saint's brows.

"I must have missed that—at least, I didn't notice anything about it in the papers."

"You wouldn't have. It wasn't the same name. She married again after the boys were grown up."

"Even so, I'd 've thought—"

"Her second husband went to jail as a Red spy. Very likely it was as big a shock to her as anyone—anyhow she wasn't indicted with him—but you know how these things go with the public. It wasn't a relationship that Ziggy would want to advertise."

Simon released a very long slow trail of smoke.

"But you knew it."

"Ziggy got drunk and cried it out on my shoulder when the story broke. About the husband, I mean. He thought his career was finished, and I was ten per cent as worried myself. But somehow, the connection never came out."

"Then why are you telling me?"

"To prove I'm leveling with you," Colbin said, and took a swallow from his glass. "Norroy and Velston may trip over it some day, by accident, but they won't find it by hard work because they don't work like that. You'd find out, if you cared enough; so I'm only saving you the trouble. But you won't spill it to Lois or Monty just for kicks. 'The leopard doesn't change his spots.'"

"Some great philosopher launched that one," said the Saint. "When did Ziggy see his mother last?"

"I don't think he ever saw her after that. He couldn't risk it, could he? Be reasonable, man. But I know he called her on the phone quite often. She understood."

Simon Templar took a last deep pull at his cigarette, and put it down in the ashtray on one of the marble poolside tables. He stared abstractedly at the darkening blue bay, beyond which the deceptive skyline lights and neon tints of Miami were beginning to twinkle, striking the high points off the gleaming chrome and glistening

varnish of Ziggy Zaglan's trim speed cruiser tied alongside the sea wall. Now he could read the name lettered on her transom: she was called, almost inevitably, the *Zig Zag*.

"Yeah," said the Saint vaguely. "I'm sure." He could have been talking to himself, until he turned. "Do you know where I can make a quiet phone call?"

Colbin pointed, with an air of complete confidence.

"Over there, the way the reporters left. Around the corner, you're in the hall, and the phone's in an alcove on the right. I'll wait here for you."

Simon made no commitment, but threaded his way between a vine trellis and some potted palms, and located the phone without much difficulty. He had a little more trouble finding the man he wanted to talk to, but there were few places where the Saint did not have his own odd connections, and in Miami they were especially various.

In a comparatively few minutes he had been deviously and electronically introduced to the Beach medical examiner.

"Certainly he was hanged, Mr. Templar," was the official statement. "Any other injuries? Nothing that I noticed, though of course I didn't look very hard. The larynx was ruptured, but that often happens, particularly with a heavy man."

"There's no chance that he was throttled first and then hung up there?"

"Not unless he was garotted with the same rope. And I think even that would have left a different kind of mark. Yes, I'm sure of it. But death was definitely due to strangulation."

"His neck wasn't broken?"

"No." An increasingly puzzled note crept into the doctor's voice. "May I ask what you're driving at?"

"I'll tell you at the morgue tomorrow," said the Saint. "I think you'll be there again."

He went back out to the pool terrace, where he found that Lois had joined Colbin. They both dropped anything they might have been discussing directly he came in sight, and waited expectantly for him to talk first. It happened to be conveniently easy to address them together.

"You were both right," he said. "I was led into this by the nose, so it's too late to tell me to keep my nose out of it. But I soon found there were so many paradoxes in this set-up that I was very nearly ready to believe that one more would turn out to be like the rest—just normal. Until it dawned on me that I'd only been looking at it upside down."

"I have to read this sort of thing every time I pick up a paperback book," Colbin complained. "I guess it must be the only way to do it."

He had made himself comfortable on an aluminum and plastic long chair, and Lois was sitting on the end where his feet were up. The whole setting, from the boat at one side to the living room in which the other three men were now lighted as if on a stage, was straight out of *House & Garden.*

"Everyone here is a fugitive from type casting," Simon explained imperturbably. "Lois could be taken for a lot of things, none of which is a female writer. Her partner, Monty Velston, looks like the popular picture of a card-sharp or a confman. You're a big-time agent, but you might be an ex-jockey. Ralph Damian is a network vice-president, but he could pass for a junior-college teacher. Ziggy looks like—well, frankly, nothing. Maybe it should have a big N. . . . What did Paul look like?"

"A bear," Lois said.

"Weighing?"

"Oh, more than two hundred."

"About two-thirty," Colbin estimated.

The Saint kindled another cigarette.

"All right. Among all these contradictions, I couldn't go up like a rocket over a suicide that didn't look like a suicide. Even though Lois tried to tell me he was too happy. After all, I thought, maybe that's the way they kill themselves in show business. But you added a lot of detail, Ted, that I couldn't slough off. And about that time the light struck me. I try to tell everyone I'm a mystery moron, but it finally got even me. It wasn't a suicide that didn't look like a suicide. It was a murder that didn't look like a murder."

"Ah." The ice cubes rattled in Colbin's glass as he drained it. "Thanks for the elucidation. And you know who?"

"I think so."

"Do we have a deal to talk over?"

"No deal, Ted. Not for cold-blooded murder of a happy man. There are too few of them."

"Okay. If it's a square shake, okay. Let's have it."

"Let's go inside," Simon said.

Lois Norroy got to her feet, her eyes fixed on him frantically as if she was dying to ask something but couldn't. Simon took her arm and turned her quietly towards the living room. The deck chair creaked as Colbin hoisted himself up with a sigh and followed them.

Plate glass sliding on noiseless rollers let them into another world as silently as a film dissolves.

Zaglan and Damian stood with highball glasses in hand, listening raptly to a voice which came from the battery of speakers, which was still Ziggy's but with improved resonance. Vel-

ston sat in a chair a little apart, also nursing a tumbler and listening with no less attention, if with a more cynical air.

The voice was saying: *"It's the oldest cliché there is in the theater, that the show must go on. But we'll try to give it a different reading, which I think would be more like what Paul would have told us: Let's go on with the show!"*

Ralph Damian was rubbing his chin, pursing his lips judicially, saying: "I don't know, Ziggy. It still sounds a bit—"

"Flatulent?" Colbin rasped.

For a stunned second after that he had everyone's undivided attention, and he did not waste it.

He said: "Anyhow, the Saint's got another different idea of what Paul would want. He thinks Paul was murdered."

Since the bombshell had been dropped for him, Simon Templar resignedly made the best use he could of it and took a moment to observe the reactions. Ziggy's, almost fatefully, was the most stereotyped and the most exaggerated. His eyes bugged and his mouth fell open. Damian switched off the playback machine, and his eyes sparkled fascinatedly. Montague Velston even looked interested.

The Saint tidily eased some ash off his cigarette, and said deprecatingly: "It wasn't my original idea, but it grew on me. I didn't start turning psychological handsprings the first time I heard that Paul seemed too happy to commit suicide. However, I've heard a few important details since which made it pretty unarguable."

Ziggy brought his chin up off his chest at last, so abruptly that it squeezed the horizontal lines of his mouth.

"What details?" he demanded; and his eyes turned so that they almost switched the question to Colbin.

"Nothing that would have to come out if the rest of the case was clean," said the Saint quietly. "But I'd already started squinting sideways at some of the other details. First, Paul's lamp-post—or gallows, as it turned out to be. An unusually neat and ingenious piece of homework, certainly put together by someone with a good mechanical mind. Then the noose—if you'll pardon my enthusiasm—a beautiful professional job, which very few amateurs could tie, not even good carpenters like Paul. But the gallows was already there, and it wasn't planned for a gallows. Someone else might have tied the noose. Someone else who had an interest in knots, and who'd bothered to learn some."

"Like me?" Damian suggested, the edge of derision barely showing through a mask of polite intelligence. "How did you

know I kept a little sailboat on Long Island Sound?"

"Shoot me," Colbin said. "I should of kept quiet about the stretch I did in the Navy in the last war, after the draft caught me."

"Tell him about me, fellers," Ziggy implored frantically. "Tell him how I can't even tie up a Christmas package. Tell him I only have a boat because it looks good out there in the publicity pictures. Tell him I can't even wear a clip-on bow tie without it comes undone."

The Saint smiled, with a patience he did not feel.

"To be more concrete," he said, "I just talked to the medical examiner who did a pro forma autopsy on Paul. He confirmed that Paul died by strangulation, which could include hanging. He wasn't throttled by hand. His larynx was ruptured—if you'll all pardon the gruesome details. But his neck wasn't broken."

"What is this supposed to mean to us laymen?" Velston asked, with strenuously inoffensive tolerance.

"Only that a guy who apparently liked to do everything just right, whether it was putting together a lamp-post or a scaffold, and who must have been one of the few suicides who ever swung in a genuine hangman's knot, must 've turned awful clumsy and stupid at the last moment if he couldn't think of any better way to finish the job than to step off a low rung of a six-foot step-ladder and choke himself slowly and miserably to death, instead of jumping off the top and getting it done with a quick clean broken neck."

"Would you expect a man who's upset enough to commit suicide to be as rational about it as that?" Damian objected.

"If he was calm enough to tie that knot, I would," Simon replied.

Colbin crossed to the liquor trolley and refilled his glass.

"What the man means," he said, "is that someone grabbed hold of Paul, who was twice as big as any of us, and hung him up there."

"After hitting him a judo cut on the Adam's apple which would make him helpless and also start him strangling," Simon said calmly.

They all thought about it with reluctant but increasing soberness.

"Did you tell him we once did a Portrait on a judo expert, Lois?" Velston asked. "With his hints on self-defense for determined spinsters. I remember, that was one of them. But of course, two million other people read it in *Fame*," he added hopefully.

The attempt fell rather flat.

"When did Paul die, Saint?" Lois asked.

"That was my first question," Simon answered. "As practically everyone knows now, no doctor can examine a corpse and say 'He died three hours and twenty minutes ago,' like they used to in the old detective stories. How closely they can hit it depends on the climate, and what the body died of, and a lot of other things. The guy I talked to wouldn't stick his neck out—if you'll pardon the expression—any further than that it was somewhere between eleven last night and one this morning, give or take an hour or so at either end."

Everyone could be seen doing mental arithmetic on that.

"Then that clears all of us, at least," Damian said in a tone of relief. "We were all together, more or less, for hours before and after that margin."

"That's true," said the Saint. "But if this was a premeditated job, it was meditated by someone who knew about that gallows-lamp-post. And the advertisement I saw only came out yesterday, and it was under a box number. That doesn't make it top secret, but it does limit the field."

"We all knew about it," Lois said. "Paul had us all over to his place for cocktails, two days ago, and that's when we were kidding about it and the idea for the advertisement came up."

"Except me," Ziggy put in quickly. "I wasn't there. I had a date with—"

"But you heard about it."

Colbin turned around with a sudden angry break in his dour composure.

"Where are we getting at with all this bullshooting?" he snarled. "Let's say it and the hell with it: most of us had some reason to shut Paul up, because of the damage he was threatening to do Ziggy—"

"Not me," Velston said. "I love Ziggy like Pasteur loved rabies, but for him I wouldn't murder a maggot."

"How do I know what you wouldn't do to stop someone scooping you with a scandal?" the agent retorted. "How do I know you weren't jealous because Lois was getting too chummy with him? Or if Lois had a grudge against him for something that happened when they knew each other before? And who the hell cares? We don't have to go through all this crap about motives, because all of us have got perfect alibis."

All of them turned to the Saint again, only now they seemed far more comfortable than they had been for some time. It was as if Colbin's outburst had enabled them to throw off a lurking doubt which had been privately oppressing each of them, letting them take deep breaths and begin to relax again.

But somewhat disconcertingly,

Simon Templar was still the most confident and relaxed of all.

"Therefore," he said equably, "the alibis may not all be perfect."

"Mine is," Ziggy croaked. "It must be good for about twelve hours. I was here before dinner, and all through dinner, and then I was working for a bit, and then—"

"You went into the den, but can you prove that you stayed there and worked?"

A stricken expression that was unintentionally one of the funniest grimaces he ever made came over Zaglan's face.

"I was belting the typewriter all the time. Everyone must of heard me." He appealed to the others. "You all heard me, didn't you?"

"They heard a typewriter," said the Saint. "For about an hour—which was enough time for you to have run over to Paul's, by car or even across the bay in your boat, and done everything we've talked about, and come back. May I look in your den?"

Zaglan nodded, dumbly, pointing to a door in a side wall.

Simon opened it, glanced in, and came back. He said: "There is a tape recorder on the desk, which I suppose you use to try routines out for sound. You seem very fond of that method. But it could just as easily have played back an hour of typewriter music which you'd recorded in advance, and you already had everyone scared to death of interrupting you when you're having an inspiration, so there was no risk that anyone would even knock on the door."

"You're nuts," Zaglan said hoarsely. "If you can find a tape recording anywhere in this house with typewriters clicking on it, I'll eat it. I'll be the first guy to have a tapeworm with sound effects."

"That's not the right answer, Ziggy," Damian said, his eyes glittering with alert anxiety. "Everyone knows you can run a tape back and erase everything on it in a few seconds."

"Whatya trying to do, frame me?" Ziggy squealed. "You sold out to another network?"

He tore at his hair in quietly cosmic desperation, his rubbery features contorting like those of a baby preparing to cry, until a brainwave rolled over him as transparently as an ocean comber.

"So after I knocked Paul out with the judo, I dragged him up a ladder and stuck his head through a noose. Me, weighing a hundred and twenty pounds soaking wet. Tell 'em, Ted," he pleaded desperately. "Tell 'em how I sprain my wrist if I swat a fly. Tell 'em about my hernia—"

"Take it easy, little man," said the Saint hastily. "I'd already thought of that. I suppose you could theoretically have done it all, but only with the help of a lot of gadgets and gimmicks which are much too complicated for my simple mind. I've only put you through the wringer this much because by all accounts you seem to be rather a heel, and it may do you some good. But I was using you mainly to prove how deceptive an alibi can be. Now I have to wreck the whole time-honored alibi system."

Ziggy Zaglan was too dazed, or relieved, to be insulted. He sagged back against the nearest supporting piece of furniture and gulped: "You do?"

"I mean, according to the tired old detective-story rules. If any of you ever read them, which I suspect you have, you know the convention. An alibi as an alibi is an alibi. Even if only one other character corroborates it, it's an alibi. In detective stories, for some reason, it isn't supposed to be kosher to have two characters in cahoots. The villain is always a lone wolf. But in real life it's usually the opposite. When a good police officer hears a cast-iron alibi, the first thing he wonders is what might be in it for the supporting witness. I keep telling everyone I'm a lousy detective, but I have talked to some good ones."

Montague Velston tugged some folded paper and a ball-point pen out of his pockets.

"This," he said, "I have got to get verbatim."

"So I started thinking about the other alibis where they were thin. For instance, while there was an hour where Ziggy was only represented by a tapping typewriter, there was also an hour where you and Lois only have each other to testify that you were both sitting around here."

"But even if we'd wanted to —to do it, for any reason," Lois said breathlessly—"we couldn't have. I mean, how could we tell when Ziggy would decide to quit working? It might 've been in two hours, or ten minutes, or even in ten seconds he might 've come bouncing out to get a drink or ask us to listen to something!"

The Saint nodded cheerfully.

"I thought of that too. And I may say, darling, that I felt a lot better when I convinced myself that you weren't in on the deal. But then I had to start thinking about Ted and Ralph, who also were their own best witnesses for more than an hour. And when Ted took me aside and began selling Ziggy shorter than anyone, it made more sense all the time."

"Sure," Colbin scoffed. "That is how I got to be a big agent, selling my clients short."

"You could always get other

clients, but you only had one neck. You'd try almost anything to protect your property, but if it went sour the property could take the rap. You thought you had it made until I showed up, and then you got a wee bit panicky and started coppering your bet too fast. You always had that way out in mind, of course, from the time you swiped a piece of new rope from Ziggy's boat. But you were hottest of all when you sized up Ralph Damian as a bird of your own feather. He'd provide the alibi you thought you ought to have —according to all those paperbacks you read—and on top of that you could see how useful it might be to have a big wheel at UBC tied to your wagon. What percentage of your percentage of Ziggy did you have to promise him to sell the deal?"

"This is all delightfully libelous," Damian said, with his bright eyes dancing. "Does he have any assets, Ted? We should be able to sue him for everything he's got."

The Saint sighed. It was a pity, he thought, that there were still a lot more detective-story clichès which he hadn't yet had time to extirpate. But he could keep working at it.

"You must talk it over with your lawyers," he said agreeably. "I know they'll be glad to hear that you expect to have some way of paying them. But first, they'll have to get you off this murder rap. Perhaps you'd better phone them right away, because the cops are planning to pick you both up after you leave here. The only reason they aren't banging on the door now is because the Ziggy Zaglan show is such good publicity for Miami Beach that they want to keep him out of it as much as possible."

"Who did you talk to when you went to the phone?" Colbin challenged shrilly. "Anyone but this hick medical examiner?"

"Only an old friend of mine, the sheriff, Newt Haskins. He told me that a more elaborate autopsy, with an analysis of Paul's digestive tract, which I didn't mention before, had pinned down the time of death pretty closely around midnight," said the Saint prophetically. "At that time, you two were supposedly on your way to the Latin Quarter. But then they checked the car park attendants," he went on mendaciously, but with unwavering assurance, "and found that you didn't get there until very much later, in fact only a short while before Ziggy and Monty came to drag you out. And then they went back to make another check at Paul's—they must have arrived right after Lois and Monty and I left —and they found that like any good gadget man he also was wired for sound. He had his

plaything running when someone dropped in last night, and the sound track is a bit confusing, but—"

"You moronic crummy little fast-buck promoter," spat out the network executive, glaring brilliantly at the haggard little agent. "You said it was foolproof, but—"

"I didn't know there were such fools as you," Colbin said wearily.

Simon Templar shrugged, and backed away from the argument, and went in search of the telephone again to call an old friend, the sheriff, Newt Haskins, whom he had not yet talked to. It was not altogether unfortunate, he thought, that some of the oldest clichés were still paying off. As long as they could still be used to make the ungodly trip over their own tongues, he would probably have to go on taking advantage of them.

He also hoped he would be able to get his part wrapped up in time to move on to an equally venerable but more pleasurable cliché, which would call for taking Lois Norroy off to dinner as a preliminary.

HOW IS YOUR CRIME I.Q.?

What do you know about Dr. Crippen?

Dr. Hawley Harvey Crippen, born in 1862 in a small town in Michigan where his father ran a drygoods store, studied medicine in Cleveland, later receiving a diploma as an eye and ear specialist. In 1893 he married a second time, the new wife, Cora Turner, a former music hall actress, seeming a strange choice for the quiet and almost prim man.

By 1900 he had become manager of Munyon's Remedies Co., in London. Some time afterwards there began to be talk, it was recalled later, about the quiet friendship between Dr. Crippen and young Ethel Neve, described as "modest and well mannered," who worked there as a typist.

One evening in 1910 his wife and he entertain for friends. There is no indication that anything is wrong—perhaps Cora is a little louder, a little more possessive, than is usual for a wife in 1910—but what makes the card party memorable is that this is the last time she is seen alive.

Naturally there is talk. After some time Dr. Crippen tells how he's heard from America that his wife is dead. But Inspector Dew of Scotland Yard, assigned to investigate the disappearance, is not satisfied, and finally, one day, in the cellar of the Crippen home, they find a mass of human flesh, strands of hair and some clothing.

Days later a "Mr. Robinson and son" are arrested as they set foot in Canada. Dr. Crippen and Ethel Neve begin the long road home. . . .

the frameup

by . . . Octavus Roy Cohen

Harry had been through fire—and he'd come through clean. Wouldn't they ever believe that he intended to run straight?

JIM HANVEY did not look like a detective and, by the same token, his visitor did not in the slightest degree resemble a crook.

Harry Whalen was of average height and average figure, which means that his hundred and fifty pounds of weight were symmetrically distributed about a frame five feet seven inches in height. He had a square jaw, a pleasant face, and big, friendly brown eyes. But just at the moment those eyes were filled with the vague light of trouble, and his attitude was one of mingled pleading and anger.

"I'm in a rotten hole, Jim," he declared. "Unless you help me I'm in for a stretch . . . and you know what that would mean to me."

The man mountain in the easy chair toyed idly with the gleaming gold toothpick which hung from the hawser spanning his prodigious tummy. His eyes—small, lusterless, and fish-like—were curtained by the deliberate drooping of the lids. They opened with equal slowness and turned blankly upon Whalen.

Hanvey was the personifica-

Octavus Roy Cohen, author of LOVE CAN BE DANGEROUS, BORRASCA, etc., *has created few characters as challenging as gargantuan, triple-chinned Jim Hanvey, who certainly does not look like a detective, but can be deadly when fighting fire with fire in defence of a man he believes innocent*

tion of inertia. He was an immense person, whose gargantuan frame was topped by a bulbous head which rested upon triple chins. Despite his tremendous size, the clothes which he wore hung loosely upon him, giving the impression of a bloated scarecrow.

Considering his visitor through expressionless opaque eyes, Jim reached for a box which stood near at hand and extracted therefrom a long black cigar. He bit the end from this with meticulous care, lighted it, and blew a cloud of the acrid smoke into the room.

Whalen blinked, but—politely—made no comment. Jim grinned.

"My cigars kinder strong for you, Harry?"

"They're pretty powerful, Jim."

"Have one?"

"No, thanks. But I'd be obliged for a bottle of smelling salts."

The ponderous detective chuckled good-humoredly. "Shuh! Harry, these things don't smell no worse to you than those cigarettes of yours do to me." His eyes roved toward the window and dwelt there ruminatively for a few moments. It seemed as though he had forgotten his visitor, and just when Whalen was beginning to fidget, Hanvey's slow, drawling voice came to him:

"How long since you pulled your last job, Harry?"

"Four years," answered Whalen promptly. "That's a pretty long time, Jim. Seems to me it proves that I really am trying to run straight."

"Sure does, son. You wouldn't noways fool me now—would you?"

Whalen's face flushed. "You know I wouldn't, Jim. No decent crook would lie to you. And besides, I've come to you for help."

"So you have. . . .Uh-huh! You sure have. What you been doin' all this four years?"

"A half-dozen things, Jim. It's pretty hard, you know, keeping a job and just barely getting along when a chap has been used to big money and high living. But I stuck it out, Jim; and just about a year ago I got a little stake together and bought out the haberdashery shop I'm running."

"Haberdashery store, eh?" Hanvey blinked slowly. "Got any red neckties?"

"Beauties."

"Maybe I'll come down and buy a couple. I don't usually go in for swank, Harry; but I do love red neckties."

"I'll be glad to see you, Jim," —the man's voice was charged with bitterness—"provided they haven't sent me to the pen." With sudden fury he smashed one fist into the palm of the other

hand: "Damn it, Jim! Won't these flatfeet ever let a man alone? Won't they ever believe that he intends to run straight? Won't they ever forget that they got crossed up once. . . . Listen, Jim, I'm not bleating; I'm not welshing. But I'm married! I'm happy. My wife—"

Then he paused.

"Does she know?"

"About me having been a crook? Sure. I told her before we ever got married. If it hadn't been for her, I couldn't have stood the gaff. But I've been through the fire—and I've come clean, Jim. I don't want to talk too much about it. It sounds mushy."

"I like mush, son."

"You come down and see my shop, Jim. Then come home to supper with me and the wife. You'll understand."

"I'll do that very thing, Harry. Meanwhile, suppose you start at the beginning and tell me the whole mess."

Whalen stared bitterly at a spot on the carpet. Then he started to speak, marshaling his facts carefully and struggling to avoid any untoward display of emotion:

"I'll make it as brief as I can, Jim; there's no need elaborating details."

"None at all, son."

"It started eight years ago. I was pretty wild then. Forgery was my line."

"Sure, I know, Harry. And you were slick. I was after you once—and missed."

"So did Mike Lannigan. He was after me three or four times. I made him look kind of foolish down at headquarters. I understand they gave him the laugh and he swore he'd get me, no matter how long it took. When I married and went straight, I think he was the most disappointed man in America. He came to see me a few times—sneering at me, saying he knew I was covering something, announcing that he was watching me every minute. I laughed at him, Jim, because I knew I was through. All I wanted was to be let alone. I think any man is entitled to his chance to be honest. . . ."

He lighted a cigarette and hesitated a few moments before continuing.

"There's no use my dwelling on everything I had to do, or all I went through. There were times when it was pretty hard sledding, Jim. There were times when— Well, that dirty dog came around to see Lilla when we were down and out. Told her all about me. Told her I'd slip some day, and when I did he'd see that I did a long stretch. I guess that was what kept me straight—Lilla's terror and the determination to show that guy that I was better than him.

"Last year I got a chance to buy out this little haberdashery business. It isn't much, Jim, just a hole in the wall; but it's a good location and there's a nice living in it for a man who isn't scared to work hard over long hours. . . . Lilla keeps books for me and is my only clerk. At first I didn't even have a boy; I'd get down early and sweep the store out myself. I got an awful kick out of being a business man. For the first time in my life I was really happy. For the first time, I wasn't thinking that a man needed all the money in the world to be contented." He looked up. "I ain't boring you, am I, Jim?"

"Gosh! no, son. It's like a movie."

"Well—I guess I had a lot to learn about business. For one thing, I laid in more stock than I should. I got caught short. My creditors were beginning to yell, and I paid them every dime I had but not enough. I was still around two thousand dollars short."

Hanvey's eyes opened with maddening slowness and turned toward his visitor. But for all the change of expression on his heavy face, he might not have seen Whalen.

"Yes?" he prompted. "And then?"

"There's a man in this town, Jim, maybe you've heard of him? Quincy Ackerman."

"Yeh." Jim's lips twisted in distaste. "Nice, high-class, thoroughly respectable thief!"

"And not always so respectable. That's how I happened to know him." Harry Whalen drew a deep breath. "I met him years ago, Jim, when things weren't breaking very well for me. There was some crooked promotion . . . and he needed my help. I did what he wanted, and the thing went wrong. Looked like both of us were going up. They sort of had the goods on me, and I had Ackerman dead to rights, because of a letter he had written me. But I thought he was a poor sap, and I fixed to leave him in the clear and take my own chances. No need of both of us doing time. The man was so grateful he almost made me sick. Wanted to do everything in the world for me. Cringed around like a whipped cur. Well, . . . I got clear, and of course they did not have anything on him, the way I fixed things. You'd have thought I was the greatest man in the world . . . then."

He paused, and Hanvey prompted, "Then?"

"Sure. But since— Did you ever do a big favor for a man, Jim, when you had the goods on him—and then when he'd come clear, have him hate you because you had been in a deal together?"

"I know pretty well what you mean. And this Ackerman—"

"He got respectable. Not hon-

est, mind you, but respectable. He made money in ways that didn't put him in danger of the penitentiary. And I guess the more he thought of me, the more he hated me, because I was the one man in the world who had the goods on him. It has gotten so that he's the worst enemy I've got—the dirty, crawling crook! He'd like to see me out of the way for about ten years, just to get me off his mind."

"I see. You sort of make him remember an unpleasant past. Before he was successfully dishonest."

"Exactly. I knew you'd understand. But, to go back to my story, I needed this two thousand. I knew how Ackerman stood with the banks here, and I talked to an assistant cashier of a bank which had refused to loan me money. I asked him if Ackerman's endorsement on my six-months note would be acceptable and he said, 'Sure.'

"Then I went to Ackerman. He greeted me as cordially as though I had been a rattler. Well, at that, he doesn't love me any more than I do him. But I told him I wanted his endorsement on that note, and would almost certainly need a renewal. He kicked like a steer . . . and would have refused if he had dared. Anyway, I got it, took it to the bank, and they loaned me the money. It tided me over."

"And you're all right now?"

"No. It's this way, Jim: I've got to renew that note for another six months. And I can't without Ackerman's endorsement."

"Won't he renew?"

"No."

"Why?"

"Because he'd rather send me to jail."

The big, pursy face of the detective was alive with interest.

"For what, Harry?"

"Forgery."

"H-m! I'm afraid I don't understand all I know about this. You ain't been pulling anything, have you?"

"No. But he's got me dead to rights, just the same."

"S'pose you explain, son. I'm kinder hazy."

"Well, Jim, suppose this were to happen: Suppose, when this note comes due—which is Tuesday—they make demand on me, and I can't take it up. They immediately notify Quincy Ackerman, as endorser, that he'll have to pay. And just suppose, Jim, that Ackerman pretends to be terribly surprised, and says that he never endorsed that note in the first place!"

Whalen ceased speaking. His face was white, and mirrored clearly the strain under which he labored.

Hanvey was thinking—although his heavy countenance gave no indication of that fact.

He nodded slowly, with vast approval:

"A very, very slick scheme, Harry. I didn't know Ackerman had that much real brain."

"He hasn't!"

"But you said—"

"The whole plan was Mike Lannigan's."

"So-o. Mike's, eh?" Hanvey fumbled with his golden toothpick. "How come?"

"Mike's been after me hot and heavy, ever since I made a goat of him years ago. He thought for a while that I would not stay straight. Now that he knows I will, he's out to frame me. And this is his chance. Of course he knows all about Ackerman, and the fact that I was in on a crooked deal with the man. He knew that we were together, and I guess he found out that Ackerman hates me. So he went to the man and told him how to get me. It was his idea."

"You sure?"

"Certain. Lannigan has been down at the shop taunting me about what was going to happen."

"Sweet little playmate, ain't he?"

Whalen's eyes became hard as chilled steel. "It's right lucky, Jim, that they're not after me for murder. I almost killed him!"

"I wouldn't hardly blame you, son, except that murders are terrible messy. Now, let's see: You came to me—?"

"Because you're the only dick I know who's got a heart, Jim Hanvey. You play square with us crooks, and you've got the rep for preferring to keep a man straight. I want you to help me. I'm not going to get sentimental, but—there's the wife. . . . It's a rotten unfair thing. I've laid all the cards on the table. Will you help me, Jim?"

Hanvey smiled a slow, warm smile. "Sure, Harry, sure I will. If I can only think how."

Whalen drew a deep breath of relief. "You'll do it some way, Jim. I know you will—"

"Shuh! I ain't no good, Harry. Just lucky—and fat. Let's see now. . . ." He placed the ends of his spatulate fingers together and puffed reflectively on the black projectile which was held between his thick lips. "You said that you once had the goods on Ackerman?"

"Yes. There was a letter he wrote me. . . ."

Hanvey did not look like a detective. Mike Lannigan certainly did.

Lannigan was more than six feet in height; broad and muscular, and he walked with a firm, positive stride. He wore great square-toed shoes and a derby hat, and his eyes had all the mellow warmth of icicles.

He stood in the corner now, regarding his visitor with bleak discourtesy.

"You can darn well keep out of this, Jim Hanvey," he ordered. "I don't like fat men butting into my affairs."

"No-o? But it ain't me, Mike; it's my friend, Whalen."

"When did he get to be your friend?"

"From the minute he turned straight. I downright approve of crooks who quit the thorny rose path."

"Well, I don't. They're no good, and ought to be in jail—and that's right where Mr. Harry Whalen is headed."

"But, Mike, you know good and well that this is a frame-up. You know Ackerman really did endorse that note."

"Let Whalen prove it then," snapped Lannigan. "Ackerman says he didn't."

"And you'd frame a nice young fellow like Harry?"

"I didn't say I would. But suppose I did? Suppose he didn't commit this particular offense? Hasn't he done a lot of other things he ought to be in jail for?"

"Like making folks understand what a fool you are, Mike?"

Lannigan towered over Hanvey's bulky form with his fists clenched: "For one nickel, Hanvey, I'd—"

Hanvey looked up and blinked deliberately. "Gosh, Mike, you ain't got a lick of diplomacy. I didn't come here to mix up with you. I came to see wouldn't you call off this campaign against Harry Whalen."

"Not a chance. He's going to get a nice long vacation, with all expenses paid by the State."

"How thoughtful you are. It's downright touching. Well—" Hanvey emitted a deep sigh, and heaved his vast bulk out of the chair. "Guess I better go tell him to get fitted for a suit of stripes. Because, when a clever guy like you sets out to frame a man, Mike, I reckon he ain't got a chance."

Lannigan's face was purple. "You ain't trying to kid me, are you?"

"Kid you? Golly! Mike, a feller couldn't really do that, could he?"

Hanvey reached the street and stared up and down the busy thoroughfare. His fat face was wrinkled with tiny lines of worry and, unconsciously, his fingers sought the gold toothpick which was his companion in times of mental stress. Then he waddled slowly toward the center of town, tremendous figure swaying slightly and overlarge clothes flapping grotesquely.

Ten minutes later found him in the presence of a thin, hawk-like man who stared at him in unfriendly fashion from under black, bushy eyebrows.

"My name is Hanvey, Mr. Ackerman, Jim Hanvey."

"Well," rasped the man; "what of it?"

"Nothing in particular. Just thought you'd like to know."

"Why?"

"Because I sort of aim to do a little business with you. I've got something to sell."

"I'm not in the market for anything. There's the door."

Jim turned and surveyed the mute panels. "Well, dog-gone if it ain't. Now, who'd have thought—"

"Use it!"

Jim rose ponderously. "All right, Mr. Ackerman. Guess I can take a hint as well as anybody. I'm terrible subtle." He waved a limp and languid paw. "See you in the penitentiary."

The figure behind the desk grew rigid. His voice came in a harsh croak. "Wait!" He licked at his dry lips. "What's that you said?"

"That I'd see you at the penitentiary. You see, I'm a sort of detective, Mr. Ackerman, and I figured you'd be going up for a stretch just about the same time as my friend Harry Whalen. So it'd be only nice for me to stop at your cell and say hello."

"Sit down!" Quincy Ackerman's eyes were flaming with fear. "You said you had something to sell me—"

"But you ain't interested. And you kind of looked at me as though you weren't partial to fat men. So I guess—"

"What is it?"

"Oh, well." Hanvey reached into the pocket of his coat and produced a letter. "Just a piece of paper, Mr. Ackerman. Figured you sort of might be a collector of such interesting documents. The price of it is two thousand dollars. Cash."

The other had himself under better control. "Why should I pay two thousand dollars for that letter, Mr. Hanvey?"

"Gosh! I don't know. It ain't even a new letter, and the stamp on it ain't worth a durn. Been canceled and everything. But Harry Whalen said you was a sentimental guy and maybe you'd like to have it as a souvenir. He says you wrote it to him a long time ago, sort of thanking him for a favor he done you—something like taking all the blame for a little deal you and him was mixed up in. Some promotion proposition. Harry sort of had the idea that if you didn't want to buy it, the district attorney might be willing."

Ackerman extended a trembling hand. "Let me see it."

"Oh! sure—you can see it. But you can't hold it. Not that I don't trust you . . . but I got to be careful." Hanvey opened the letter and held it out to the other's gaze. "Pretty little letter, ain't it? If I was a rich man, I reckon I'd pay two thousand dollars for it and call it a bargain."

The thin man was trembling. "Whalen swore to me he destroyed that letter."

"Did he now? Who ever would have thought Harry could make such a mistake? And, besides, wouldn't he have been silly to tear up the only hold he had over you? Of course you're a gentleman, Mr. Ackerman; but suppose you hadn't been. For all Harry knew—if he destroyed the letter—you might some day try to frame him into the pen, and that would be terrible. Not that such an idea would ever occur to a fine gent like you; but Harry had to be mighty careful."

Ackerman reseated himself at his desk. "Two thousand?"

"Cash."

The man wrote a check, summoned his secretary and dispatched her to the bank for the money. Then he stood near the window, regarding Hanvey through half-closed eyes. The man was impossible: a caricature; yet he gave Quincy Ackerman a very uncomfortable feeling. Instinctively, Ackerman knew that Hanvey spoke the truth—he was getting out very cheaply. And he had been an idiot to believe that Whalen destroyed that letter.

The money was received and paid over to Hanvey. The huge detective extended the letter to Ackerman.

"Suppose you burn it," he suggested. "We'll both be happier knowing it is destroyed."

Ackerman made a thorough job of it. He heaved a sigh of relief as Hanvey departed. He knew now that he had been skating upon very thin ice.

Monday morning at precisely nine o'clock Harry Whalen entered the First National Bank. On the curb outside Jim Hanvey was standing. Through the glass doors he could see Whalen, but not hear him.

Whalen was very much the business man. He approached the "Notes and Discounts" window and nodded to the clerk on duty.

"I have a two-thousand-dollar note coming due tomorrow," he said. "I'd like to take it up."

The note — endorsed by Quincy Ackerman — was produced. Whalen paid the two thousand dollars and accepted the note in exchange. Then he joined Hanvey outside and exhibited the slip of paper.

"And now," suggested Hanvey, "suppose you tear that into little tiny scraps."

Whalen ripped the thing across and then across again. Eventually, he held in his hand a hundred bits of paper. He walked down the street with Hanvey, dropping them one by one.

"And that," declared the fat detective, "is that. Our gentle

friend, Ackerman, couldn't prove anything now in a million years, Harry. The note is completely and absolutely gone, and you are in the clear."

"And I have you to thank," said Whalen hoarsely. "Believe me, Jim, the wife and I ain't going to forget this in a hurry."

"Aw, dry up! Besides, this whole thing ain't finished yet. Remember that you're an honest man—and you've got a little business to attend to later this morning. Let's drop into this telephone booth a minute."

Hanvey produced a dime and called a number. The harsh voice of Mike Lannigan answered.

"Mike? This is your old buddy, Hanvey."

"Well?"

"Sure. I'm fine."

"What do you want?"

"Heard from Quincy Ackerman this morning?"

"Say, listen here, Hanvey. What have you—"

"I'll be at Ackerman's office at ten o'clock. This deal ain't entirely closed up yet, Mike. Suppose you be there. It most likely is going to be an interesting session."

He was grinning when he rejoined Harry Whalen. "Just invited Mike Lannigan to join us at Ackerman's. Thought it might be fun to see those two suffering together."

"Yeh!" chuckled Whalen. "It might."

When they reached Ackerman's office, Mike Lannigan was already there, his broad figure silhouetted against the window frame. He stared venomously toward the visitors.

"Well, Hanvey," he rasped, "I guess you think you're awful smart."

"Gosh, no, Mike. I'm dumb—an' lucky."

"Hmph! What did you want me here for?"

"To prove something."

"What?"

"Ain't I been telling you all along that Harry, here, is an honest man? Ain't I?"

"What about it?"

"Show 'em, Harry."

Whalen moved around the desk and borrowed Quincy Ackerman's pen. That gentleman watched his visitor with distaste not untinctured by curiosity.

Harry Whalen proceeded in a very businesslike manner. He produced a blank note from an inner pocket and wrote rapidly. Then he extended the slip of paper to Ackerman.

"I'm much obliged for the loan, Ackerman," he started; but the tall man cut him short:

"I didn't make a loan."

"Oh! yes, indeed you did. And that is my note for the two thousand dollars cash you gave Hanvey for me, with interest at eight per cent. It comes due in six months—and I'll be well able to take it up by that time."

Ackerman turned growlingly to Hanvey.

"What's all this tomfoolery? You know perfectly well I *gave* you that two thousand dollars."

"He didn't ask for a gift, Mr. Ackerman. All he wanted in the first place was a loan. You see, when you endorsed his note originally, you promised to renew if it became necessary. And since you were planning a few funny tricks—by advice of my detective friend here—Harry thought he'd work things this way."

Ackerman tossed the note aside. "Let's not mince words, Hanvey. I *bought* that Whalen letter for two thousand dollars. It was worth it."

"Sure, Ackerman. It certainly would have been."

Quincy Ackerman's beady eyes flashed to the fat, good-natured face of the detective.

"What do you mean—'Would have been'?"

"Oh! nothing much. But just between us friends, Mr. Ackerman, I'll explain that I advised Harry to fight fire with fire. Remember, he used to be uncommon good with other folks' handwriting—"

"You mean — ?" gasped Quincy Ackerman.

"Sure," grinned Jim Hanvey. "The original letter you wrote Harry was destroyed years ago. The one you bought was a first-class forgery!"

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the detective story

by . . . Michael Innes

The murderer was a rather impulsive man — too easily startled and easily upset —

"MY DEAR BROTHER'S death was, of course, a great grief to me." Miss Filby offered this, in a wholly comfortable tone, towards the end of her little party. The interval that had elapsed since Sir Rupert's decease could now undoubtedly be reckoned in months rather than weeks; and the party had decidedly not been uproarious. Nevertheless it was possible to feel that Miss Filby was setting out to enjoy life, if necessarily in an unspectacular and middle-aged way. Now she had paused placidly, clearly expecting some appropriately conventional response.

"I gather," Appleby said, "that it was very sudden?" He spoke vaguely, while hunting for his hat. Leaving her remaining guests, Miss Filby had accompanied him into her high, gloomy hall.

"Entirely unexpected. And . . . and such frightful pain."

Miss Filby's voice had changed. Appleby, glancing at her quickly, saw that the general comfortableness of her new life was in fact haunted by some specter. "I'm very sorry to hear

Sir Rupert Filby's death had been sudden and rather painful. Possibly the murderer would never have been identified if Michael Innes' famous detective, John Appleby, art connoisseur and Scotland Yard official, had not taken the trouble to be polite to the mildly sorrowing Miss Filby.

that," he said gravely. "But at least Sir Rupert didn't suffer for long."

"No more than an hour—but it was enough." Miss Filby hesitated. "You don't know about it. Poor Rupert came home one evening — I never discovered from where—and appeared to be perfectly well. Fifteen minutes later, this—this agony came on, and lasted for an hour. But it was quite enough."

"And then he died?"

"Yes. And no cause was ever discovered. That, you see, was the second awful thing. Since Rupert was so famous a chemist, it was thought that conceivably he had ingested—taken—something fatal in his laboratory. But the *post mortem* revealed nothing at all, no cause of death, no organ or function apparently disordered in the slightest degree." Miss Filby's voice shook. "It was the body of a man who ought not to have been dead."

It must have been trying, Appleby thought, for the fellows in the Path. Lab. But again some remark was called for. "I'm very sorry that I hadn't a chance of knowing so distinguished a man as your brother better."

Miss Filby was pleased. "You would have had much in common," she said. "Rupert took a keen amateur interest in criminology. Might I show you his books?"

Having of necessity responded with a civil murmur, Appleby found himself conducted into a large, dead, and careful dusted library. Miss Filby moved to a corner. "There!"

Appleby glanced first at one shelf and then at several more. "But my dear Miss Filby," he said in astonishment, "these are simply detective stories—hundred of them!"

"Isn't it the same thing?" Miss Filby was not at all put out. "Rupert was a great authority on them. And—do you know?—he even wrote one."

"Dear me, I'm afraid I have not read it. You must tell me the title, so that I can get hold of it."

Miss Filby shook her head. "It was never published."

"Really?" Appleby imported the proper mild regret into his reply to this insignificant intelligence. "But why not?"

"I never knew. I suppose it wasn't clever enough."

"I see. Has the manuscript been preserved?"

"Oh, no! I saw Rupert burn it myself. But he gave me no explanation, apart from saying that he had consulted a friend."

"Was that, do you think, before he had shown it to anyone else—a publisher, for instance?"

"That was my impression. I was disappointed, since it would have been amusing for Rupert to launch out with a new hobby.

But I don't think it was ever mentioned between us again."

Appleby was looking at Miss Filby with an absent frown. Presently he asked a final question. "How long ago was this?"

"Oh—comparatively recently. Certainly not more than a couple of years before Rupert's death."

It was a week later that Appleby called on Dr. Taverner. "I understand," he said when he had introduced himself, "that your uncle, Julius Taverner, died suddenly about a month ago?"

"That is so." Taverner, who was seated behind a large desk in his handsome study, looked at Appleby attentively. "It was quite unexpected, and might almost be called mysterious. Which is the reason, I suppose, that you are making official enquiries?"

"I'm not doing that." Appleby shook his head emphatically. "Indeed, I am doing no more than following up, quite privately, an obscure speculation of my own."

"This is surprising. But proceed."

"I don't know whether you were acquainted, Dr. Taverner, with the late Sir Rupert Filby?"

For a fraction of a second Taverner hesitated. Then he bowed. "Certainly," he said smoothly. "Rupert Filby was a very old friend of mine. You know the family?"

"Filby himself I know only slightly. But Miss Filby I know quite well."

"This is most interesting." Taverner rose and with cordiality steered Appleby to an armchair by the fire. "We shall be more comfortable here. May I offer you a glass of sherry?"

"Thank you. I shall be delighted."

"Splendid." Taverner went off and busied himself for a moment in a corner of the room, and Appleby took a little stroll towards a window. They met again before the fireplace, Taverner carrying a silver salver with two handsome crystal glasses already filled with brown sherry. "Or would you have preferred Madeira?" he asked. "I can get it in a moment."

Appleby shook his head, and Taverner set down the salver between them. "Yes," he said. "Poor Rupert Filby. It was very sudden, that." He frowned. "By jove—you don't think it connects up in some way with my uncle Julius? They had uncommonly similar ends."

For a moment Appleby was silent. "Dr. Taverner," he presently asked, "when did Filby show you his detective story?"

Taverner jumped to his feet —and at the same moment there came a thunderous knocking at his front door. He whirled round and strode to the window, and then turned back shaking.

"Only a telegraph-boy," he muttered. "Funny way to behave." He picked up his sherry with an unsteady hand and drained it. Then he looked at Appleby's empty glass. "It won't do," he said suddenly. "You've got nothing—and now you never will."

Appleby too was looking at his own empty glass—and then he glanced at Taverner's. "I'm so sorry," he said, "but, while you were at the window, I was admiring these glasses. And I'm afraid I accidentally switched them round. Do you mind?"

"You devil!" Taverner's voice was a high scream. Before Appleby could intervene, he had snatched a pistol from his pocket, thrust it into his mouth and pulled the trigger. Within seconds he was dead.

An explanation was owing to Miss Filby. "You see," Appleby said, "your brother, being a great research chemist, happened to discover what is, in a way, the detective-story writer's dream: the absolutely indetectable way of committing murder."

"The poison unknown to science?"

"Much more than that. The *untraceable* poison unknown to science. He wrote his story round it, and showed the result to Taverner. Taverner at once pointed out the fatal flaw. Unless the true formula was given in the story, the effect would be unconvincing and feeble. Actually to give it, on the other hand, would be tantamount to putting an invincible weapon in the hands of every criminal in the country.

"Taverner had noted the formula, and when he wanted his uncle Julius out of the way, he planned to use it. But to do so with your brother alive would be too risky."

"My brother would certainly have known that Dr. Taverner, as Julius Taverner's heir, would inherit a large fortune from him."

"Precisely. And your brother might have drawn conclusions—and so your brother had to go first. When I appeared to draw conclusions, I had to go also."

"You!"

"He tried to get me with a glass of sherry, as soon as I had hinted that I was enquiring quite on my own. I emptied it on the carpet while his attention was distracted—"

"You had arranged the distraction?"

"I had indeed, since his likely plan of campaign was pretty clear to me. Then, by way of frightening him into confession, I pretended I'd switched glasses. I'd forgotten about his almost certain terror at the coming pain." Appleby rose. "But I suppose a quick end was best for him. And the formula, let us be thankful, has perished too."

the repeater

by . . . F. Van Wyck Mason

AS HE straightened three rows of campaign and decoration ribbons gleamed like a miniature rainbow on the narrow chest of Achille Garros, colonel commanding *le Premier Regiment de Marche Etrangère.* In his hard blue eyes an expression of real interest had begun to supplant one of polite boredom.

"It is then a murderer you seek, Monsieur le Capitaine?"

"Precisely, Colonel, a very dangerous murderer," quietly replied the American, as with alert and deepset gray eyes he returned the Frenchman's curious stare. "Pablo Mendez is no common killer, sir. He's got lots of brains, and no conscience at all."

Colonel Garros settled back on his chair to seem suddenly dwarfed by the immensity of the scale map of North Africa which, mounted on the wall behind, revealed in a series of bright-headed pins the innumerable *postes* garrisoned by the Legion.

"You can positively identify this murderer, Captain North? Recall the Chinese saying: 'To

"It's a lie!" he yelled, his face scarlet. "I was going to kill him, but damn it, somebody beat me to it!"

Francis Van Wyck Mason, distinguished historical novelist, author of the recent OUR VALIANT FEW, *1956, Little Brown, returns to The Saint with another adventure of the famous Captain Hugh North, American Intelligence officer, hunting a murderer who has taken refuge in the French Foreign Legion.*

guess is cheap, but to guess wrong is expensive'—especially in the Foreign Legion. Here in the depot and scattered about Sidi-Bel-Abbes, there are now some eight hundred legionnaires."

"I, personally, can't make the identification, Colonel," North replied in flawless French, "but Lieutenant Ransome can."

The second of the two visitors, an unusually handsome young man, leaned forward eagerly, looking very broad-shouldered in his neat Palm Beach suit.

"Yes, sir. I served in the same regiment with Mendez. I'd recognize him anywhere, even if he'd grown a beard and dyed his skin." The younger American hesitated, then went on a little uncomfortably, "If we find Mendez, you people will surrender him to us?"

Beneath his gray mustache Colonel Garros smiled like an amiable Norman wolf. "But, of course, Lieutenant. Silly novels and *cines* to the contrary, *la Légion* never shields murderers from justice."

Five silver galons glinted on the fierce old man's sleeve, when, apparently struck by a thought, he bent forward and more closely studied Captain North's brown, rather Indian-like face.

"By chance you are not the famous Capitaine Hugh North who did such amazing Intelligence work in China two years ago, and again in Budapest this spring?"

"Well, Colonel, I don't know about the famous part of it, but I did happen to be in those places at the time you mention."

The veteran's bleak smile relaxed. "It is amazing—you are so *tranquille,* so unassuming for such a celebrated figure."

"Hugh never puts on side, sir, but right now I'd be rotting in prison if it hadn't been for him." The younger American's enthusiasm was like that of a boy for his school hero.

"Exaggeration is Lieutenant Ransome's chief fault, Colonel," North said quickly. "Shall I outline the facts of the case?"

"I shall be delighted to hear them."

"Back in 1932 Lieutenant Ransome here was serving at Fort Cook under Captain Pablo Mendez, who is a Spaniard from the Philippines."

"A Spaniard in the American army?" Colonel Garros looked courteously surprised.

"He was a naturalized citizen, sir. This Mendez, though we didn't find it out until later, got into a nasty scrape with a woman, and had to have some money to get out of it." Captain North's hand crept up to tug briefly at his close-clipped black mustache. "He decided to rob the paymaster's office—there was always a large sum of cash in small bills on hand there. Next, with callous

cleverness, he decided to divert suspicion and pursuit from himself. This is where Ransome comes in.

"At that time, my friend here was in love with a lady named Lucinda Wallace, who was in the process of getting a divorce from a brutal and insanely jealous husband. They were to be married as soon as she was free. Wallace, however, was a mean and dangerous sort, and had Ransome and the lady even been seen together he would never have given her a divorce, and might quite conceivably have killed her.

"Somehow Mendez learned that the engaged couple met on regularly established occasions. Cleverly he argued that Ransome, being a gentleman, would never offer an alibi which would endanger the woman he loved. On this theory Mendez went ahead and established an alibi of his own by inviting a brother officer to his quarters. Again he was smart, because he so geared a clock that it would gain twenty minutes in an hour." North broke off. "Please forgive this reminiscence, Colonel, but I want to show you the type of man we are hunting."

Into the small khaki-clad figure across the desk crept a new manner. "Please proceed. The story is of greater interest to me than you imagine."

"When Mendez' guest arrived on the night of the projected robbery he remarked that his clock had stopped, and—mark this—he brazenly borrowed his guest's watch to set it by. As if by accident, he then overwound the borrowed watch until its mainspring broke. When Mendez' caller left, and Mendez went away to commit the theft, the clock read ten o'clock when it was actually only nine-twenty. The one thing the rotter had not counted on was that the paymaster might come in unexpectedly, intending to work on some accounts."

North's voice dropped a pitch or two, but the words issued crisply from his thin brown lips. "Surprised, the thief shot, and a number of people in the post heard the report at about ten minutes of ten. Always a cool one, Mendez finished his burglary, took the money and got away. He even went so far as to plant a package of bills in Ransome's locker."

The Frenchman nodded several times. "I can guess the rest, and I am sorry for you, Lieutenant Ransome."

"If Captain North hadn't been abroad at the time it'd have been all right, Colonel. But, as it was, they had such an airtight case against me, I didn't stand a chance, and the court-martial had sentenced me to life imprisonment. When North got back I told him the story, and

before long he proved my innocence."

"Why are you suddenly so interested, Colonel?" North demanded, while in from the blazing afternoon floated the notes of a distant bugle.

"Recently I have heard of a case in the civilian courts at Oran —an affair so similar it is striking. Of course, it must be merely a coincidence, but it is still interesting."

"Um, a civil case. It may be, as you say, a coincidence—but still—" North got up to briefly inspect a stand of battle-torn colors which, in a glass case, stood at the far end of the room. "But still it's an old police adage that the criminal always repeats—sooner or later."

"Have you the fingerprints of your fugitive?" Colonel Garros asked.

"Yes, sir, but not of the sort you mean. Please look at this." The Intelligence captain produced a photograph. "Here is a photograph of the ordinary army automatic with which Captain Leeson, the paymaster, was murdered. That blur on the right side of the barrel was made by the forefinger held along its side."

"It is not much of a print, Capitaine."

"I know it, sir, but it's a valuable clue just the same."

The commander interrupted with a raised hand. "The hour of inspection is almost at hand. You have a good photograph of the murderer?"

"Mendez was too careful. All we have is this." North produced a dim, time-yellowed snapshot of a clean-shaven man in the uniform of a lieutenant of infantry. "That's why our advocate general detached Lieutenant Ransome from duty to make the identification for me. It isn't an easy job we've got before us, because Mendez is a fluent linguist. He could have enlisted in the Legion as an American, a Frenchman, or any one of a number of Spanish-speaking nationalities."

"About when would this fellow have enlisted?"

"A year ago," North replied. "That's approximate, of course."

Thoughtfully, Colonel Garros placed the photograph on his desk, and with a sinewy brown hand pressed one of a series of buttons; almost instantly a spick-and-span orderly tramped into the post commandant's white-walled office and stood to wooden attention.

"My compliments to Capitaine Dufour of the 11th Company, Sergeant Villejo of the 16th, and Corporal Crane of the machine-gun battalion. I wish them to report here immediately. Use the telephone."

In answer to Captain North's uplifted brows, Colonel Garros explained in clipped sentences.

"These men are of an unofficial Intelligence Corps we maintain within the Legion. They, sooner than anyone, should find your man. A cigarette while we wait, Messieurs?"

Sergeant Villejo, the orderly quickly reported, was today on duty on the rifle ranges, but the others would come at once.

"Then call Sergeant Calles—I want someone who knows our Spanish-speaking legionnaires."

"Crane?" North lingered on the name. "Is he English or an American?"

"An American, I believe. The fellow enlisted about the time this *maudit* Mendez must have appeared. *Doucement*!" A shadow had fallen across the sedulously scrubbed threshold. "Ah, here he is, *Entrez*!"

At first glance, Captain North became definitely interested in this powerfully built N.C.O. His was a strong, naturally swarthy or deeply tanned face which clearly bore the scars of battles emotional as well as physical.

"At ease, Corporal. You know all the American legionnaires now on duty at the Base Depot?"

"Yes, sir. But some of them not very well, sir." Crane's was a Southern accent, North swiftly decided—sounded more Texan than Georgian. "Since times got hard in the States there have been quite a few American bleues."

"Have you ever seen one who looked like this?"

The big American corporal had not as yet observed Ransome, a silent figure in the background, and he had picked up the photograph and was studying it when North caught the faint click of a swiftly drawn breath. From the corner of his eye he saw Ransome clutching the back of a chair and trying hard to look unconcerned, while he peered fixedly at the newcomer. The N.C.O., whose facial outlines were blurred by a short yellow beard, shook his kepied head as he put down the likeness of Pablo Mendez.

"No, sir. Reckon I've never seen anybody like that around here, sir."

"Le gusta à usted la Légion?" Smoothly North put his query.

"Pero sí, Senor Capitan," Crane returned, then looked more than a little confused to have found himself answering in Spanish.

"Any questions, Captain?" Colonel Garros was frowning now and definitely irritated about something.

"No? Then you may go, Corporal. Orderly! Call Captain Dufour if he has arrived."

Corporal Crane jumped to attention, clicked his heels sharply, then did a smart about-face which for the first time brought him face to face with Ransome Only an observer trained to ao-

tice the subtlest reaction would have caught that fleeting rigidity in the American N.C.O.'s expression. Only Hugh North would have noted the faint, involuntary closing of the big, blue-sashed corporal's hands as, with hobnailed heels ringing loud on the freshly watered red tiles of the corridor, he swung out of sight.

Nor could Captain Dufour make an identification. Sergeant Calles, a slant-eyed Mexican, studied the picture with great interest, however. He even laid a none too clean finger across the lower part of the photograph's face, and squinted at it from jet and glittering eyes. Eventually he shrugged and put it down.

"No, *mon colonel,* never have I seen anyone like this."

"Sure of that?" the D.C.I. officer demanded abruptly.

"Sergeant, if you even think you know this man, you must tell us," Colonel Garros warned, his gray eyes coldly gray as bayonet points. "This is a matter of grave importance."

"He's a murderer," Ransome amplified to be immediately withered by a look from North.

"A murderer, *por Dios*!" the Mexican cried. "Then I am all the more sorry I do not know him, M. le Colonel."

But North, seated in the background, remained doubtful. On that scarred, swart face there had briefly played an expression of positive pleasure.

"You may go, Sergeant." Colonel Garros shrugged sympathetically as he got up, a thin, battle-scarred fighting cock of a man.

"It will not be easy, this mission of yours. You are still determined to find Mendez?"

"We have no choice, sir. Mendez is a clever, cold-blooded killer."

Again a bugle shrilled a call which took Hugh North back some fifteen years. Yes, surely he had not heard *Rassemblement Générale* blown since '19. A major, grotesque because of a hideously powder-burned face, appeared at the door and saluted.

"Sir, the staff is formed and ready."

"Is it not possible," suggested the commanding officer, "that if you gentlemen watched the regiment parade you might see your man?"

North smiled and shook his head. "I'm afraid Ransome wouldn't stand much chance of making an identification. I've noticed that lowered kepi straps make it hard to recognize even people who are very familiar."

"True." Colonel Garros silently considered the point while his orderly brought in sword, Sam Browne belt and scarlet-topped kepi. "*Tiens,* perhaps I have the solution. When I inspect the regiment, Lieutenant Ransome

shall accompany me and look at the men from close range." He shot the D.C.I. officer a penetrating glance. "You see, I still have that other affair in mind—if the crime was committed by a legionnaire I want him caught.

Turning to the door, the commander of the First Regiment addressed his orderly. "During their stay at the Base Depot, Captain North and Lieutenant Ransome will be my guests. Put their baggage in the quarters of Lieutenant St. Onge."

"A thousand pardons, but has *mon colonel* forgotten that Lieutenant St. Onge returns to Sidi-Bel-Abbés today?"

"Do as I say," snapped the veteran. "Lieutenant St. Onge is remaining two days more. Inform the lieutenant's orderly."

At the name St. Onge, Captain North thought he saw several of the staff—they were waiting in the corridor—exchange glances which argued no great love for their absent comrade.

Twenty minutes later Captain Hugh North was standing unobtrusively in an archway listening with no small enjoyment to the famous band of the Legion. Out there, drenched by the rays of a still torrid North African sun, the famous First Regiment stood drawn up in motionless, erect files of khaki and white. How bravely sunlight sparkled on those wickedly slender bayonets which, on entering, create a cross-shaped wound—a fact deplored by certain Mohammedan enemies of Madame la République.

For a brief space North became no longer a mere man hunter, but an officer gazing with a West Pointer's critical appreciation upon the spectacle of bronzed, perfectly drilled files swinging by line on line, every button agleam, every rifle at an identical angle, and every hobnailed foot taking the cadence in unison. The tricolor swept by —"*Honneur et Fidélité—Valeur et Discipline*" — the golden words flashed bright.

Presently, however, instinct made North revert to his problem. Was Mendez swinging along somewhere amid those hard-bitten battalions? If so, under what nationality had he enlisted? How interesting that Crane understood Spanish—an odd type; dark, vital and primitive, if his face meant anything.

Suddenly the band altered its temp and struck up "Louis Quatorze," so beloved of the Legion. With a unanimous clatter of calloused hands impacting on rifle butts the First Regiment swung into "Regiment Front" and came to halt, every squad as precisely located as squares on a chessboard.

Of all the hundreds who had marched by, but two faces had given the Indian-like D.C.I. officer food for thought. First

the bearded corporal called Crane. The Texan had swung along with lips compressed in a tight and thoughtful line. Then, six paces in advance of his platoon, Sergeant Enrique Calles had tramped by, jet eyes obliquely regarding Ransome who, a distinctive, well set up figure in civilian clothes, was now standing three paces left and rear of the wiry little colonel.

On the far side of the parade ground had assembled a colorful throng of watchers such as might collect nowhere but in heat-lashed Sidi-Bel-Abbés. Swarthy infantrymen from Algerian line regiments cursed and jostled Turcos and Tirailleurs Marocains, but most colorful of all were the black-bearded Spahis, whose white cloaks, scarlet breeches and neat top-heavy turbans of dark blue captured and held the eye.

Further and in great number there were clusters of towering, childlike Senegalese in old A.E.F. uniforms. North smiled wrily—Liberty Bonds had paid for those garments now clothing these Muslims from the swamps of West Africa! Captain North's military reactions decreased still further—after all, he was here on business other than admiring those flawless counter-marchings.

"Bad, bad," North muttered beneath his breath. "If only the colonel hadn't taken it into his head to drag Alex out for inspection. If the boy doesn't recognize Mendez *muy pronto,* the brute will have his chance to skip!"

Gradually, North's pulses began to quicken their beat because, far across the heat-shimmering parade ground, the inspecting group had begun to march slowly along the perfectly aligned ranks. Would those two stalwart sergeants marching as orderlies at the rear of Colonel Garros' staff suddenly fall out to seize that cold-blooded murderer who, with subtle cleverness, had doomed a fellow officer to lifelong imprisonment?

North's prominent cheekbones grew still more visible as the inspecting party passed the last of the front rank. Inexplicably, the conviction grew upon him that Ransome would not recognize Mendez among the companies drawn up out there, so, more bitterly than ever, the D.C.I. officer cursed himself for letting Ransome so easily surrender the priceless advantage of the first move. His mood, therefore, was not pleasant when, the inspection being at an end and the regiment having marched off to barracks, he rejoined Ransome, Colonel Garros and the heavily perspiring staff.

A short, blue-jowled captain sauntered over to North and said, "Should Lieutenant St. Onge return unexpectedly to Sidi I shall be delighted and

honored to offer the so famous Capitaine North the hospitality of my quarters." He smiled broadly. "Even in the swamps I have found those who admire your work. Naturally we are all wondering what has brought you to the depot? Some affair of St. Onge, by hazard?"

"I regret, Captain, and I am sure you will understand, when I say that the matter is confidential," said the D.C.I. officer smoothly, and again he noted a curious tenseness when St. Onge's name was mentioned.

Captain North still was aware of an uneasy premonition nagging at his brain as amid the soft twilight he put the finishing touches to his black bow tie. In the next room Ransome was whistling the catchy chorus of "Louis Quatorze." Good job the boy was cheerful again. Alex had taken the two years at Portsmouth very hard indeed—and no wonder.

His hand was almost on the knob of the door leading to Ransome's room when beyond it sounded the muffled thud of quick moving feet, instantly followed by the dry, staccato crack of a pistol. Wrenching back the door, North saw the room in darkness, but nevertheless leaped inside to grapple with a figure in flowing white robes.

A knife gleamed as the D.C.I. officer aimed a savage right to that dark, dimly seen head, whereupon North abruptly checked his swing to clutch wildly at that descending wrist. Simultaneously he twisted his body violently sidewise, and escaped with a sleeve slashed from shoulder to elbow. Back and forth over the slippery tiled floor the two men wheeled and stamped, until North, in breaking away, managed to land a jolting right jab to the other's chest.

He in the white robes gasped "Oh-h-h!" and staggered, clawing at the air to regain his balance. With the quick relentlessness of a leopard, North leaped forward again to settle the matter, but tripped on one of Ransome's out-flung arms, and in falling heavily forward succeeded in knocking out his wind so thoroughly that all he could do was to twist and gasp in helpless agony.

Fortunately, the intruder's one thought must have been flight, for, ignoring the helpless D.C.I. officer, he sprang through a window and vanished into the darkness where startled shouts and queries were echoing among the neat little white-washed houses of Officers' Row. Half-strangled, and suffering as only a man can when his lungs are temporarily paralyzed, North crawled over to the inert body of the infantry lieutenant.

"Alex," he choked. "How bad is—it?"

But Alex Ransome stirred not at all, just lay as he had fallen. When a little air had trickled into North's tortured lungs he struggled up on hands and knees and, by dim moonlight beating in through the window, stared miserably at a dark stain quickly spreading between the shoulders of his friend's white mess jacket.

"Bon Dieu! Quelle horreur!" Lieutenant St. Onge's orderly came clattering in with a pair of crop-headed sergeants hard on his heels.

There followed a brief silence terminated by one of the sergeants saying, *"Er ist ganz todt,"* and he rushed out bawling for the guard.

Like a rising wind, the alarm increased.

The officers ran in, only half in their mess uniforms, their voices strident with excitement. Bugles wailed, and then a guard detail with rifles at the ready came up at the double to throw a cordon about the little house. Among the first officers to appear was none other than Colonel Garros, and his eyes glittered like sword points when he beheld young Ransome crumpled in the center of the round grass mat.

"Clear the room," he directed the Officer of the Day. "Lights! *Cré nom de Dieu,* lights!"

Trembling, the orderly produced a new bulb to replace the one smashed by the fall of the room's single reading lamp.

Poor Ransome. What a wretched end for such a wholesome, open-hearted young fellow. North, still sick and weak, wondered at the ways of providence. Who had dealt him this second and final blow? Bitterly the D.C.I. officer cursed himself for not having immediately questioned his companion concerning the Corporal Crane episode. He should have looked Ransome right up after inspection instead of letting the boy linger at the Officers' Club until almost dinner time.

The Officer of the Day, one Captain Khaniev, a Tartarlike individual with a face sharp as a woodman's axe, stopped to pick up an automatic pistol lying near that window which, opening from a garden, had afforded an entrance for Ransome's murderer.

"Don't touch it!" North's sharp warning filled the room.

"The work of a native, it would seem." Colonel Garros pointed to the imprint of a bare foot which, hideously etched in blood, was repeated twice before it drew a crimson smear across the window sill.

"Yes, *mon colonel,*" the Officer of the Day agreed swiftly, "Lieutenant Hàtvàny's orderly saw an Arab running from the garden."

"You saw the face of this

wretched *indigène?*" queried the Russian captain.

"Nothing, except that he was dark-complexioned, and had a short beard." Captain North, D.C.I., shrugged apologetically. "Sorry I can't help you more, Captain, but I had the worst possible chance of seeing anything useful, because I ran from a brightly lit room to a very dark one. I'd even hate to guess how tall the fellow was."

"But surely," Colonel Garros objected angrily, "you must know that."

"Sorry, but it would be next to impossible. You see, Colonel, when an excited person sees a figure in the dark he always imagines it to be bigger than it really is."

"True, you are right," the veteran conceded, while tugging at his slender mustaches. "Once, when an *aspirant,* I killed a Hanoi pirate—thought he was a giant—but in the morning all I found was a little fellow, hardly bigger than an orangutan." Colonel Garros broke off, and drew himself up. "And now what? I need not point out that this is a matter demanding attention of the most serious."

Hugh North turned a gaunt face etched with somber lines. "First, we had better look for evidence."

Stooping over what had been not twenty minutes before a vital, laughing being, the American tried to forget the cloying, sweet reek of blood rising from the floor, and narrowly examined that soggy hole between the murdered man's broad shoulders.

"Shot from a distance of about four feet," he pronounced, then, using a handkerchief, picked up the automatic. A low grunt of exasperation escaped him.

"There are no fingerprints," predicted the Officer of the Day.

Before replying, North crossed to the light, and there carefully inspected the killer's gun—an issue automatic of large caliber.

"Right; there are no prints," North said, but failed to mention a faint oval smear visible on the oily surface and parallel to the barrel casing. What was the use? It might mean nothing at all.

Colonel Garros started for the door. "Captain Khaniev, you will request the chief of the civil police to report immediately to Depot headquarters. Also Yousoof Moulai, the chief of the Native Police."

Captain North, whose French was no less fluent than his English, glanced up from the fatal automatic. "Why these preparations, Colonel?"

"I intend to have the Village Nègre combed from one end to the other. We have sharp eyes among the loafers in the *souks,* and a man with a bloodied foot would be noticed."

"Beg pardon, sir, but I don't think such an effort is necessary." North's objection was the essence of deference.

"Eh, and why not?"

"Because, Colonel, I feel very sure the murderer was not an Arab—although it is possible that he may have been."

"*Comment?*" Colonel Garros frowned and his terrible blue eyes narrowed.

"For three good reasons, sir. First, I felt trousers and a heavy belt underneath the killer's robes; second—please correct me if I'm wrong in this—the fellow's wrists were thick and big boned, and I have always been under the impression that most Arabs have peculiarly slender wrists and ankles."

"Monsieur is quite right about that," somberly put in Captain Khaniev, and his manner grew more respectful.

"Well, the man I fought had big hands which must have been gloved—since there were no fingerprints on the automatic. I recall his right wrist was so thick I had a hard time getting a grip on it."

"And the third reason?" Colonel Garros had halted in the doorway.

"When I hit the man he cried 'Oh-h-h!' like a European, and not 'Aiee' like a native."

"One perceives, Captain North, that your reputation is well earned," the Colonel said, and smiled his wolfish smile again. "You should have small difficulty in catching the murderer."

North gazed somberly down upon the flat, blood-bathed body of his friend. "On the contrary, sir, I expect this to be an extremely difficult case." He shrugged. "In fact, my information is so imperfect and meager I may not succeed at all. As you know, the one man who could have identified Mendez is—dead."

Frowning, Colonel Garros nodded once and turned briskly aside. "Captain Khaniev, you will take orders from Captain North as from myself. You, the native and the civilian police will give him every possible co-operation—understand? All possible co-operation." He held out a mahogany-colored hand. "Captain North, more than I can say, I am grieved that so terrible thing should have happened. *Bon soir et bonne chance.*"

North delayed only long enough to bow his thanks, then, procuring a flashlight from his baggage, he set to work. To begin with, he studied the crimson footprint with great care, and felt that his first suspicions concerning the race of the murderer had been well founded. Nowhere to be seen were impressions of the enormous callouses which develop on the feet of persons habitually going barefoot. But, of course there was a

chance of some Europeanized Arab having done the job. His calculations on the probable height of the man as indicated by the footprint were interrupted by a Danish corporal who came running in to say that a patrol had arrested a legionnaire absent without leave, and in the act of leaving the evil-reputed Village Nègre.

"And who was the man?" Khaniev's tone was metallic.

"An American, sir."

North's head jerked up. "Not by chance someone called Crane?"

The messenger looked definitely startled. "But, yes, *mon capitaine.*"

"He was in uniform?"

"Yes, *mon capitaine;* but not *en règle*—in order."

"He looked hot—breathless?"

The blond legionnaire nodded vigorously. "He looked as if he had been running."

"Captain Khaniev, will you please order Corporal Crane to the guardhouse?" North requested after brief inward consideration. "I think I'd better talk to him."

"Anything else, monsieur?" The grizzled Officer of the Day drew himself up as if to leave.

"Yes. Please send someone to fetch that Mexican sergeant called Callas; by the way, you might also find out if Sergeant Villejo has returned from the rifle range. I need him to help in checking up on these Spanish-speaking legionnaires."

"Villejo is on his way. I left orders for him to wait at the guardhouse," came Captain Khaniev's courteous reply. You could see the old Russian was deeply impressed at being treated as the trusted collaborator of *"le distingué Capitaine Nort."* Then, lowering his voice, he added, "Pardon, if I suggest there is an important element to this case of which you know nothing."

"By all means, Captain Khaniev, the more to work with I have, the better the possible result."

"Monsieur, it is more than possible that your so charming friend has been killed in error. The proprietor of these quarters, Lieutenant Phillipe St. Onge, is —er—not of a high moral caliber. He lies, cheats, and has love affairs of the most deplorable nature. Were he not a superb officer he would not have lasted so long. As it is, St. Onge has many enemies both in the garrison and in town." The old Russian's sharp face contracted as his gaze once more fell upon that shiny red pool beside Ransome's body.

"Thank you, Captain—that is a most valuable pointer—in fact, I was wondering just when he joined the Legion?"

"St. Onge enlisted less than two years ago—because of his brilliance and our heavy losses

in the Atlas campaigns he has risen fast—too fast, perhaps. Again your pardon, there is something more you should know. True, Arabs do have small hands and feet, but many half-breeds have thick wrists and feet as big as those which made the prints."

"You have any definite suspicions?" the American invited.

"None, monsieur." The buckle of Khaniev's Sam Browne glinted as he shrugged. "But you should by no means rule out natives."

"I am deeply grateful for your suggestions—and tact," murmured North, and felt he had gained a firm ally in this hatchet-faced émigré.

Faces glided by the reading lamp, they examined the pistol together, and Khaniev pronounced it to be of regular army issue.

"Number AC-37747."

"Um, all sevens—might bring us luck. You might check up on these serial numbers," North suggested at length. "Probably we won't learn much—I suppose a lot of issue small arms find their way into the Native City, don't they?"

"But, yes. Altogether too many. That is one reason why the Village Nègre is perpetually 'off bounds' to legionnaires."

"A good reason, too. Now Captain, if you don't mind I need to mull this matter over a little while, then I'll join you at the guardhouse."

The ex-czarist nodded and caught up his kepi, but in the doorway he paused. "I trust you are armed, monsieur? If you are not, let me remind you that in North Africa death strikes more quickly and easily than in the States."

"I'll take the hint." Characteristically, the D.C.I. officer made no mention of the compact .32 automatic which invariably rested in a shoulder holster beneath his left arm.

After taking care to see that he was not in a direct line with the window, the D.C.I. captain seated himself at a desk in Lieutenant St. Onge's sitting room and caught up a pencil, but for several moments remained staring vacantly into space. At last he bent forward, and, as was his custom, began to write quickly a list of silent questions.

1. What, if anything, has Crane to do with Ransome's death?
2. Did Sergeant Calles recognize Mendez from the photograph? If so, why did he lie about it?
3. Had Ransome been shot in error?
4. Is St. Onge—

A faint noise in the corridor sent Captain North gliding across the room with the lithe

silence of a jaguar on the prowl. Quite suddenly he wrenched open the door to find standing outside a sergeant, down whose long sunburnt face perspiration was running in bright rivulets until they vanished into his beard. The N.C.O., however, was in no compromising attitude, but standing bolt upright with one hand raised to knock.

"*Monsieur le Capitaine North?*" he inquired in labored French.

"*Sí, estoy el Capitán.*"

The other relaxed and broke into liquid Spanish.

"Sergeant Villejo reports as ordered."

"Why did you come here? Haven't you been to the guardhouse?"

"No, *Señor Capitán.*"

"Then how did you know I wanted you?"

"A message telephoned to the rifle range said that the colonel had ordered me to report with all speed to an American army officer staying in the quarters of Lieutenant St. Onge." The Spanish N.C.O. smiled in a peculiarly winning way. "When I heard that, Señor Capitán, I hurried. El Capitán sees how warm I am."

"And why should my being in the house of Lieutenant St. Onge make you hurry?"

The bearded N.C.O. hesitated, then his dusty blue shoulders lifted in a suggestion of a shrug.

"Someone heard talk in the *souks* last night—idle chatter, no doubt."

When Villejo hesitated, North said, "I know it's not done for an N.C.O. to discuss his commissioned officers, but you have official permission in this case. Who is this Lieutenant St. Onge? Where is he from?"

"No one knows, sir. The lieutenant says he's a Belgian, but no one believes him. He speaks perfect English, excellent French and good Spanish."

"Do you understand English?" North suddenly demanded in that language.

"*Cómo?*" Villejo's dark brows joined in perplexity.

"*Habla usted Inglés?*"

"No, señor, only Spanish and a little French."

"You are a Spaniard, then?"

"Yes, Señor Capitán, of Guadalajara."

"To return to the lieutenant. Has he been in the Legion long?"

"For an officer, a very short time, sir. Perhaps a year and a half."

"Does Lieutenant St. Onge ever speak of the United States?"

"Yes, Señor Capitán. He has lived there, I believe."

The aspect of the case in general, North perceived, was growing more complicated, and, as he gazed about the bare white-walled room he sought for something more than a mental picture

of the *soi-disant* Belgian. Significant, perhaps, was the fact that he had found only a single snapshot of the man who called himself Phillipe St. Onge. That photograph, however, which was of St. Onge posed on a pistol range, attracted North's attention. With growing deep interest he studied the athletic figure of a man who, effectively outlined against a mass of white clouds, was deliberately sighting his weapon. How long and tapering his forefinger seemed as it curled about the trigger, but how expertly his left arm steadied his left hip, and how graceful was the figure's whole stance.

"Señor Capitán is tired?" suggested Villejo, when a long sigh escaped North's thin lips.

"Perhaps. I'm going now, and I'll expect you at the O.D's office in twenty minutes."

Smartly, Sergeant Villejo clicked his heels and saluted, then silently departed.

The stars were flaring and sparkling as they do only in North Africa when Captain North, D.C.I., made his thoughtful way toward the cluster of lights marking the guardhouse entrance. He was, he discovered, rather anxious to meet St. Onge. Too bad that photograph of Pablo Mendez was so wretchedly old and dim. A few pounds more or less and the growth of either beard or mustaches would make vast changes in so barely recognizable an original.

To Captain North's surprise he received in the orderly room a note sealed with a twenty-five-centime stamp and addressed to him in an unpracticed handwriting. In effect, it said:

ILLUSTRISIMO SENOR CAPITAN:

I could not speak in public, but if you will meet me tonight at the bandstand, which will be empty, I will tell you something about this man you seek. I am sure you will feel the information worth a few francs. I will wait from ten to half-past.

Your unworthy servant who kisses your feet.

E. CALLES.

A trap? A fraud? Or a genuine lead? Interesting possibilities occurred to North in rapid succession, and, after considering them in Captain Khaniev's deserted office, he glanced at his wrist watch. The hour being only nine-thirty, he concluded there was time for an interview with the enigmatic Corporal Crane.

He found the Texan occupying a *cellule* in the guardhouse, clenched hands held to his forehead, and staring sullenly at the floor. Crane undoubtedly was not Mendez, or Ransome would have lost no time in denouncing him. Yet there was some strong and unmistakable hostility in the

glances exchanged by the two men. Why should this pair hate each other; and why hadn't Ransome explained immediately? Was he afraid to? Perhaps a pointer to Crane's true identity lay in that direction. North's imagination went seeking, probing into the background of the case. Suddenly he paused in midstride.

"I wonder now? Maybe—well, it's worth a try."

North donned his most blank, cigar-store Indian expression as he watched the turnkey slide back the iron-barred door to Crane's *cellule*.

"You don't look so chipper, Legionnaire Wallace," he began in an entirely casual tone. "Is it because you're beginning to realize that killing someone is about the stupidest way of solving a problem?"

At the name "Wallace," the prisoner's sun-bleached head snapped up, and he blinked a little.

"I see you know me," he admitted, and nervously continued to twirl his heavy kepi between thick fingers. "I suppose that skunk Ransome has told you."

For reasons of his own, Captain North nodded silently.

"It's sho' mighty queer how things work out sometimes," the Texan went on, with eyes fixed on the stone floor. "Ever since Lucinda left me, I—I've been thinkin' 'bout how I'd kill Alex Ransome. I've been savin' pay to go home and do it, ever since I heard he got off that murder charge at Fort Cook." The big man in khaki and white chuckled drearily. "Yep, it's funny how things work out. Instead, he came all the way to Africa to give me my chance—the dirty, homewrecking louse."

"Well, you at least might thank the poor devil for saving you a lot of time and money," remarked the gaunt D.C.I. officer.

Charles Crane, *caporal des mitrailleuses*, otherwise Lansing Wallace, glowered at his visitor.

"My time and money? Say, you don't think I bumped Ransome off?"

"I do think just that, Mr. Wallace, and I'm going to see you properly hanged for it."

The prisoner sprang up, hobnails grating on the stone floor, and started for the impassive man before him. "You will like hell! What proof have you?"

"Plenty," North returned coldly. "Your motive is clear, and you were found out of bounds in the Village Nègre, under suspicious circumstances." North hazarded a shot at random. "You were even seen sneaking away from Officers' Row."

The missile must have found a target, for Crane's face seemed to crumple before it flamed a furious scarlet.

"It's a lie!" He yelled so loudly that prisoners in neighboring cells raised a wild clamor. "I was goin' to kill him, but damn it, *somebody beat me to it!*

North slowly shook his head. "A good act, Wallace, but it doesn't go over. I have yet to meet a murderer who admitted his guilt—to begin with. Don't try to fool me. When the patrol caught you, you'd been running, you could give no account of where you'd been, and, unfortunately for you, there were footprints in Ransome's room made by a man of your size and weight. So you see, Corporal—er, Crane, really, you are in a bad spot."

"Like hell I am!"

"Oh yes, you are. I know plenty of men who've been executed on not half so much incriminating evidence as exists here."

From the prisoner's face the color faded until it looked as pale and weather-beaten as a last year's circus poster. "Get out of here!" he roared. "I didn't do it! I wanted to, and I was going to, but I didn't do it! I tell you I didn't!"

North fixed the suspect with a baleful gray eye. "Stop that. You gain nothing by bellowing. Though you probably don't deserve it, you'll have a fair and an impartial court-martial, and if you behave and do one thing I ask I'll see that you get every possible consideration."

"To hell with you!"

But such were Captain North's powers of persuasion that at the end of five minutes the big Texan was sulkily compliant, and even a little curious when the Intelligence officer emptied his .32 automatic and passed it over to the prisoner.

"Snatch this gun out of your tunic pocket two or three times and quickly aim at that center bar in the window."

"I don't see what you're drivin' at, and if you think I ever was a gun fighter, you're all wet. Well, here goes." His huge hand swallowed up the wickedly slender automatic, and his forefinger practically filled the space between the trigger guard and the trigger itself.

"Too small for me," he grunted, as thrice he pulled out the .32 and as many times aimed at the bar. "That enough?"

"Yes."

"What's the big idea, anyway?"

"To clear up a certain point," North replied, his brows merged into a single thoughtful line. "I'll be back."

Waiting for him outside the guardhouse door was Sergeant Villejo, cigarette nonchalantly adangle from his lips, and thumbs hooked into that wide blue woolen sash which forms

the Legion's peculiar and most distinguishing mark.

How far is it to the bandstand?" the American demanded, once he had acknowledged the N.C.O.'s salute.

"The bandstand, sir?"

"Yes. I've an appointment there."

"Señor Capitán, it is a long quarter of a kilometer from here."

"Then it's lucky we've a cool evening," North commented as they set off past groups of legionnaires, chasseurs d'Afrique, Spahis and Senegalese who, arms linked, swaggered along, sometimes silent, often singing, and sometimes betraying how recently they had quitted one of those terrible *bistros* which dispense appalling liquor to some of the best—and worst paid—soldiers in the world.

"And what did you find out about Lieutenant St. Onge?"

"Something of possible interest, sir." The Spaniard's expressive eyes flickered sidewise. "Instead of staying on the range, he left it late this afternoon."

"At what time?"

"About six o'clock, sir."

That, North calculated, would have been about half an hour after they had had their interview with Colonel Garros. Was it possible that Calles, hungry for possible profits, had brought St. Onge into town with a mysterious warning? North felt quite sure that the Mexican N.C.O. was not above a bit of sharp trading. Yes, North thought he saw it. Suppose St. Onge knew something, had done something better, kept quiet, would he not be willing to pay good money for silence? Undoubtedly. On the other hand, if the American government wanted—in terms of cash—its man more than St. Onge wanted silence, well, there'd be a pretty *sou* in it for the genial Enrique Calles. Increasingly, North felt the need of some earnest conversation with the Mexican.

Presently Sergeant Villejo halted, his eyes very white and curious in the gloom, and silently indicated a domed structure dimly seen in the background.

"The bandstand is there, Señor Capitán. Shall I go with you?"

"No, it might scare away my friend."

"As you wish, sir," the N.C.O. agreed quietly, and, pulling out a battered packet of "Gaulois," prepared to wait. "I hope your man will not keep you waiting—there is much to do. Call me if there is need."

Sergeant Enrique Calles was at the bandstand, but he offered no greetings for the simple reason that his throat had been cut from ear to ear.

Once the alarm had been given and the meager evidence noted, Captain North started

back to the commandant's office, experiencing somewhat the sensations of one who labors to make sail on a storm-tossed boat drifting toward a lee shore. How dearly had Sergeant Calles paid for his greed. One indubitable fact stood out—Mendez had taken alarm and would undoubtedly balk at nothing to preserve his secret. When North considered the second murder in relation to the first his puzzlement increased. Certainly Crane, glowering in his *cellule,* had had nothing to do with this second killing, yet it was absurd to think of the crimes as being unrelated.

Having made a formal report on Calles' murder to an acidly outraged Colonel, North deliberated his next step.

"I have been informed, sir," he began, "that Lieutenant St. Onge left the recruiting depot this afternoon. Would you please see if he can be located?"

"Not at the range!" The colonel's neck swelled and his terrible blue eyes sparkled like a swung sword. "*Cré nom de Dieu!* He's had no orders to leave it. Marchand! Hàtvàny! order a search—Ah, Khaniev, you're just in time."

The ex-czarist captain hurried in, saluted jerkily. Excitement had drawn streaks of color along his craggy cheekbones.

"Colonel, I have something to report."

"Let it wait, Captain," snapped the commandant. "Organize your search—"

Something in Khaniev's manner attracted North's attention, and he risked an explosion by quietly suggesting, "Perhaps, Colonel Garros, it might be wise to hear what the Officer of the Day has to report."

"Well?"

It was to North rather than to his colonel that Khaniev said, "I looked up the serial numbers on that pistol—AC-37747—and it belongs—"

"To Crane?" the colonel said quickly.

"No, sir—to Lieutenant St. Onge!"

Over the post commandant's office a curious, breathless silence spread with a widening effect. Then all the brown-faced officers turned to Colonel Garros. He sat very erect behind a row of telephones on his desk. Said he,

"Gentlemen, have any of you any idea where St. Onge may be found?"

No one spoke, but in the background Sergeant Villejo clicked his heels.

"Well, Sergeant?"

"Possibly, sir, I can find him."

"*Comment?*" Buttons flashed all over the office as everyone turned.

The Spaniard's eyes wavered, looked wretchedly uneasy. "Sometimes I have seen him go into a little house in the Souk Khamoun."

"The Souk Khamoun!" Colonel Garros glared. "That is in the Village Nègre—off bounds. Tomorrow you will remind me of this."

The Spanish sergeant's bearded jaws tightened. "Yes, *mon colonel.*"

"Well, Captain, I suppose you will want a detail?" the wiry little commandant inquired of North.

"No, sir. A detail might cause a commotion—and would perhaps frighten our man off."

"But the Village Nègre is a bad place for white men," protested a hawk-nosed major. "It is worth one's life to go there after dark."

With impressive unconcern North shrugged. "Nevertheless, I prefer to go alone. I trust Sergeant Villejo will be permitted to guide me?"

"Of course," Colonel Garros agreed.

"Would it not be better to wait until St. Onge reports at the barracks," suggested Khaniev, nervously fingering a holster strapped above his right thigh. "He does not know himself suspected—and it is really suicide for Captain North to enter the Village Nègre."

"It wouldn't do to wait," North said firmly. "St. Onge may be planning flight, and I'd hate to have him slip through my fingers—if he really is the man I want."

"The man we all want," rasped the colonel, looking more than ever like a ruffled gamecock. "Two murders have taken place on this post, *'cré nom de Dieu,* under my very nose!"

Accordingly, half an hour later Captain North, D.C.I., and the Spanish sergeant—complete with bournouses, chechias and heel-less slippers—quit the quarters of the man they were about to hunt.

"You—er—are armed, Señor Capitán?" the sergeant demanded.

North nodded. "And you?"

"Yes, sir. As I have explained, we must be very careful. Our danger is double—first, this St. Onge is a dangerous man, and second, if we are suspected, we get this." Villejo made a short, sidewise gesture before his throat.

"I'm trusting you entirely, Sergeant," said North, when once the harsh white outlines of the barracks had become lost in the darkness. "But tell me, why should St. Onge go to this house in Souk Khamoun?"

"Because," Villejo said, "he spends much of his time in it. In fact, he keeps there a mistress, an Arab, which is doubly forbidden."

"Very well, lead the way."

White walls splashed by passing camels and begrimed by soiled garments closed in gradually, until overhead only a nar-

row belt of stars was visible. The odor of decayed garbage grew stronger and surly dogs became more numerous as the two tall figures in white scuffed on. Ere long they plunged into a maze of streets so narrow that, by extending his arms, North could have touched both walls. Here furtive beggars shambled along, or paused to peer hopefully into smoky taverns where dozens of impassive, dingy-robed figures sat about watching the contortions of some wretched third-rate Ouled Naïl dancing girl.

In doorways numberless outcasts snored, lean cats cruised everywhere in search of scraps, and swaggering Turcos lorded it over the street. Occasionally burly legionnaires, never less than six in a group, reeled by on their way back from a cheap and illicit evening spent in the enjoyment of the Village Nègre's full-blown pleasures, cursed or brushed contemptuously by the two men in bournous and gandoura. The white walls grew grimier, more decorated with flowing Arabic inscriptions, then seemed to touch overhead.

Not in years had Hugh North been so aware of menace lurking on all sides. Gradually the streets became darker and darker and the ancient human warrens at either side canted more and more to meet each other. Now no language was to be heard save guttural Arabic and occasional native dialects.

"In a few minutes, Señor Capitán," Villejo whispered in sibilant Spanish, "we will be in the Souk Khamoun. Hold your pistol ready, and whatever happens stay close to me; do exactly as I say."

North, filled with sudden misgivings, drew a deep breath. Stick he must, of sheer necessity. It would be next to impossible to find his way back out of this seething human anthill. Strange odors assailed his nostrils, and the exotic reek of a spice dealer's house, now the erotically pungent smell of a native tanner's shop, and, more rarely, the heavy scent of musk, jasmine and patchouli marked some perfumer's booth. The latticed covering of the souk admitted very little light, and only here and there could a star be seen.

At last the sergeant's hand, moist with sweat, closed over North's, and he pointed to a door massively clamped with iron. "We are here. Follow me when I signal."

Tiny hairs lifted and tingled on the back of North's neck when, after Villejo had rapped softly, metal rattled, and a light from a tiny porthole gleamed like a demon's golden eye. Abruptly the bright circle became eclipsed as someone behind it peered out into the squalid street. There followed a guttural chal-

lenge in Arabic which the Spanish sergeant answered in barely perceptible tones.

"You still want to go in?"

"Yes. I must find St. Onge." Hardly had the words left his lips than, like a chill and poisonous fog, a presentiment of impending doom suddenly closed in upon North, just as it had that night before Soissons when a .410 had made a direct hit on the P.C. Accordingly, he slid his hand beneath the sour-smelling woolen bournous and quietly disengaged his .32. Oddly enough, Sergeant Villejo must have shared his presentiment, for he, too, covertly produced a service automatic, and, using his forefinger as a guide, he leveled it point-blank at the door.

Just then a hawk-featured Arab opened the door, and, by the slash of light which leaped across the street, North beheld a face evil as original sin. Other shadows wavered on a clean white wall behind. Should he go in? The thought of young Ransome lying there so flat on the center of St. Onge's grass rug decided him. What lay beyond that door? St. Onge and his *péri*—battle? Death?

"*Deur reuo!* Come in quickly." Villejo, his bronzed face twitching with excitement, plucked North's sleeve and darted in when the door swung wide enough open to admit the passage of his body. North followed, every sense keyed to its fullest efficiency, and then the big porter instantly shut and barred the door. Without a word, he then shuffled off into the interior of the house.

"St. Onge is here—in there." With his automatic he indicated a passage.

"Go ahead," North whispered, and felt suddenly incredibly calm. It was good to have things definite.

The feeble orange-hued rays of a mutton-fat lamp briefly lit the Spaniard's figure as he led on toward a further room. From that direction came voices speaking in an undertone. As they drew near the door, Villejo stepped aside and motioned North ahead.

"You have only now to make your arrest."

The Intelligence captain, however, shook his head, and his cheekbones now stood out in prominent ridges.

"Go in first. You know the way."

"As you wish, Capitán." Tightly gripping his pistol, he set off down the passage with North but a step or two behind.

"*Reudd balhou,*" Villejo called, and stepped into a dim and squalid room. Occupying it were three figures—two of them, lean halfcastes, stood facing the door, their bluish faces taut as they leveled their automatics. The third man—he was in uniform

—lay on a grimy Kairouan rug, bound hand and foot.

"Stand steady!" Firmly the D.C.I. officer pressed his .32 muzzle into the small of Sergeant Villejo's back.

"*Qué hay?* What are you doing?"

"Tell those men to drop their pistols *muy pronto*!" North's voice held the quality of a closing trap.

Just then a deafening roar made the room resound, and a dazzling jet of flame sprang toward North's eyes. He who had opened the door had risked a shot over Villejo's shoulder. Even as a bullet went *tchunk!* into the wall not half a foot behind the D.C.I. officer's head North promptly shot Villejo through the shoulder, then dropped flat to dodge a brace of shots, and before the Spaniard's anguished shriek was in the air he shot twice more with uncanny quickness.

As suddenly as it had begun the gun play was over. Coughing because of the bitter powder fumes, North sprang up listening, braced for further dispute, but the two half-castes lay tumbled on the floor, and Villejo could only writhe, curse, and clutch his shattered shoulder.

Quite calmly the prisoner, who appeared to be an officer in the Legion, said in English, "My congratulations, monsieur—that was excellent shooting."

Villejo began screaming curses in English, and when he struggled to his feet his fury was terrible to behold.

"Cut out that yelling, Mendez!" North panted, and his voice was like a raised fist. "Stand still now, you'll bleed to death if that hole in your arm isn't tied up."

The murderer turned, his sweaty brown face contorting like that of a man in a fit. "Why the devil bother? I gambled and thought I'd won, but since I've lost I'm going to die anyhow, so to hell with you, Señor Capitán North!"

North settled the argument with a jolting blow to the jaw which snapped the wounded man's head back, and sent him toppling inert to the body-littered floor.

"Good work," observed the prisoner, this time in French. "*Ma foi!* but I was afraid for you when you started in here."

"Who are you?" North demanded, abandoning his careful scrutiny of the surroundings.

"I am Phillipe St. Onge, lieutenant of the Legion." His was a gay, reckless and somewhat dissipated face, but not in any sense a vicious one. "And whom have I to thank?"

Captain North informed him briefly as he freed the lieutenant's hands and feet, then knelt to work over Mendez.

"Will nobody come?"

The lieutenant stopped chafing his swollen wrists long enough to laugh softly. "You forget, *mon capitaine,* that this is the Village Nègre. Name of a name, but you took a long chance in coming down here! Why did you do it?"

"Collect those automatics, and I'll tell you." While adjusting rude bandages to Mendez' wound North briefly outlined the case. "I suspected Sergeant Villejo from the start. You see his Spanish, though nearly perfect, is not that of Guadalajara, and it still remains certain purely Filipino inflections, especially when he is excited. That's why I always talked to him in Spanish. I wanted to be sure."

"Then you weren't sure?" St. Onge demanded as, callously enough, he turned over the exporter with a booted foot.

"No, not until we started in the door here."

The lieutenant bent his reckless eyes on this tall American in something like admiration.

"I was wondering what warned you in time to be prepared for the *dénouement* in this room? *Nom de Dieu,* but you are quick with the pistol."

North stooped and picked up Villejo's pistol. "Here's what gave him away." He indicated a blurred finger mark along the right side of the blue-black barrel cover.

"Oh, a question of fingerprints? But how could you recognize it so far away, and in a half light?"

North choked slightly, but said politely enough, "Lieutenant, it's the position of it."

"Position?" The big young officer in dark blue scowled, and looked uncertain of whether he was being mocked.

"Yes. About one man in five hundred sights a pistol with his forefinger held *parallel to the barrel* in order to better his aim. Such a man squeezes the trigger with his second finger. It's an excellent practice, though I've never learned it myself."

"Neither have I."

"I know that—"

"How? You've never seen me shoot."

"There is a photo of you in your quarters—fortunately it was taken on a pistol range, and showed your forefinger *on the trigger.* From that moment I doubted whether you were the man I wanted. You see, the guns which killed poor Ransome and the paymaster *both* had a blur alongside the barrel. Crane was suspected, but not by me after I saw him sight my pistol."

"Marvellous. But one more question. Why did you come 'way in here to make your test?"

The D.C.I. officer's smile was grim as he said, "Two reasons. Knowing what Mendez had done to Ransome, I was afraid for you; and if I asked for a

sighting demonstration in cold blood he might take alarm, fool me, and make the case infinitely harder."

"You are indeed amazing, Captain."

"Hardly, that, Lieutenant. Shall we go now?"

St. Onge shook his darkly handsome head. "No. Better let the quarter wonder about those shots a little longer; then we can slip out."

North smiled thinly. "You seem to know the Souk Khamoun extremely well, Lieutenant."

"True, Captain, one can find some quaint amusements in this quarter. That treacherous dog Villejo had been useful sometimes, so I didn't question his message that he had discovered a delightful new *endroit.* I left the range around six, and came here direct. But instead of a *péri,* those two *indigène* dogs," he nodded to the collapsed figures, "jumped upon me."

"Had you any idea that Villejo was trying to saddle you with a crime?"

"Crime?" St. Onge's jaw sagged open, and he forgot to shut it.

"Yes. Since inspection this afternoon our friend Sergeant Villejo, otherwise Pablo Mendez, has murdered two men and left your pistol on the scene of the first killing.

Silently St. Onge spat into the prisoner's face, then he said, "Go on."

North sighed a little wearily. "But for that matter of the trigger finger, he might as well have murdered two more."

"Two more?"

"Oh, yes, you and me. It was rather a neat idea. Incidentally, most of Mendez' ideas are neat. After implicating you in every possible way as bait, he would lead me into the Village Nègre to make an arrest."

North chuckled softly. "He was clever about throwing the suspicion on you not too much—just enough. Think, Lieutenant, how very simple it would have been for *le bon* Villejo to stagger back to the depot with a story of a terrific fight, of how you, St. Onge, had murdered me and then had made your escape! You would never appear to contradict him. You would have been murdered the instant I fell. Neat?"

St. Onge shivered a little. "*Ma foi,* much too neat! But you said you were suspicious from the first?"

"Yes. Aside from the other reasons I've mentioned, one of the oldest laws of criminology is that a criminal, once he had made a success of a method, *invariably repeats!* Accordingly, in this case I was looking for someone ready and eager to throw suspicion on somebody else. The minute Villejo began it I suspected him."

dark reflections

by . . . Hal Ellson

IT WAS a dark street, tree-lined, sodden with silence. At the far corner, shrouded with dark summer leaves, a street-lamp cast a white glare directly downward. A circle of light lay in the gutter. Beyond it were pools of shadow, distorted shapes, then only the huge wall of undiminishing night.

The houses were quiet, set back from the walk as if they had withdrawn themselves behind the high barricades of hedge. No lights were visible, except in one house. There they were all ablaze, even to the small windows high in the attic. A party could have been in progress there, but no sound came from the house.

"That's the place," the ambulance driver said. "302."

He picked out the number on the porch step with his spotlight, and the interne stared at it. The light recoiled, the white number disappeared.

"Looks like a party," Maxwell said. "Some drunk probably fell down the stairs. Saturday nights get me sick."

There was something frightening about these people. He felt as if he'd been there for days, a terrible weariness afflicted him.

Hal Ellson, whose DUKE *sold well over a million copies, again takes a leaf from Dostoyevski's notebook and explores, with haunting realism, the minds of two very tired people who laugh and drink and laugh and drink again, their faces fixed and stiff, fear hovering over their shoulders.*

The driver nodded and yawned. "Kind of quiet for a party. I don't see any one, do you?"

"Maybe they're all stretched out."

A distant church bell tolled slowly. Soft echoes clung to the street, and washed among the tree-tops.

"Let's go," said Maxwell.

He got out with the driver, slammed the door. The sound jarred the silence. A motor thrummed a block away, tires rippled into a diminishing whisper, the night and silence moved in once more.

The two men walked toward the gate. It seemed braced before them, its ringlets of dark wrought-iron slippery with light flung from distant windows. The driver fumbled. The gate held, then gave up its secret. The iron rasped as the bar came up, then with a gathering swiftness, the gate swung back ponderously behind them, clashed with the post, gave off a metallic ring and braced itself again in complete formality.

Both men paused. The light cast across the lawn was so bright it struck them. The grass looked unnatural, the trees were weighted down, their leaves motionless.

"Damned quiet, isn't it, Casey?" Maxwell said, staring at the house.

The white number on the step glowed faintly. They moved slowly toward the porch, mounted the steps which sounded hollow. The screen door sifted yellow light. A wide hall fled back into darkness.

Maxwell peered through the screen, then touched a button. A bell sounded with startling sharpness. The men waited.

No one answered.

"They must be soused," said Casey.

Maxwell pressed the button again. The bell rang sharply, faded, and silence returned. The yellow light sifted through the screen, and a dazzled moth, white against copper wire, sucked the light through the tiny webbing.

Maxwell turned away in disgust. "A phony call. Let's get some sleep," he said.

They walked to the steps. Casey stopped to light a cigarette, and a shrill female laugh startled them. They whirled around. The hallway was empty. The laugh came again.

"Drunk," said Casey, and a door opened at the far-end of the hall. Light rushed out. They heard the woman laugh again, couldn't see her, but now a man stood in the distant doorway. He waited there as they came back to the screen door, then moved toward them.

The moth dropped from the screen, fell to the porch, lifted itself and flitted away. The man

walked slowly, keeping his balance by using his hands against the wall. Moments later he stood before them, well over six feet, just beyond the screen, smelling of liquor, his face pushed against the wire, eyes glassy and unseeing.

"Yes?" he said.

"Did you call an ambulance?"

The man blinked, thought, then said, "Go away, please."

The woman's laugh cut short Maxwell's reply. She came to the door, pushed the man aside, smiling, eyes alight.

"Oh, there you are," she cried. "I knew you'd come."

The man stared.

"Now wait a minute," said Maxwell. "Is or isn't someone hurt here?"

"Hurt? . . . Why, of course, not," said the woman. "But come on in anyway. We've been expecting you."

"I could use a drink," Casey said, poking Maxwell.

"Come in," the woman invited. "The party is strictly informal."

The man opened the door. Casey stepped in, Maxwell followed. Huge light-flooded rooms gave off a heavy feeling of emptiness. They walked to the kitchen.

Maxwell looked at the man and woman. Both were exceptionally tall, the man dark, the woman blond, frowsy-haired.

"Ah, you're wondering," she said to Maxwell. "You're the serious type and you want to know what it's all about."

"It deserves an explanation."

The woman laughed, and explained. "Everyone left early, you see, and we didn't know who to call. So we called the hospital, and here you are."

Maxwell made a face, and the woman slapped the man on the back, laughing. "You see, didn't I tell you they'd be surprised?" she said.

The man didn't respond, and the woman turned to Maxwell. "Oh, we knew you'd be surprised. "Will you have some eggs?"

There were eggs frying in a pan on the stove, eggs in plates everywhere in the spacious kitchen.

Maxwell noticed this but said nothing.

"Won't you join us?" the woman asked.

"Well, we're here now. We may as well sit down."

"Scrambled?" the woman said, and she went to work. Obviously, she was very drunk. Her eyes didn't see. They were a glassy blue, empty as a wax doll's. Physically, she was quite in control, more-so than the man. His face was stark white, completely expressionless.

Maxwell and Casey sat down at the table. Empty bottles lay

on the floor. The man left, returned and uncorked another. The woman prepared the eggs, and dished them out. The man poured drinks.

"Bet you never got a call like this before," the woman said, laughing again.

"Hardly," Maxwell replied. "I've had some good ones, but none like this."

"First time we got a free meal," Casey put in.

The woman slapped her thighs and laughed. "Did you hear that, John? That's a good one."

Maxwell and Casey started to eat, and the woman cracked more eggs, dropped them in the pan. The man watched her. His face had turned gray, the dead glassy stare deepening in his eyes.

It was quiet now. The kitchen door, opening to the hall, stood ajar. Maxwell faced the hall and noticed the light burning at the other end. Lights burned everywhere in the house, but silence pervaded it and he felt uneasy.

The woman's voice brought him back. "You know, we've been cooking a crate of eggs, a whole crate," she said, and her laughter filled the kitchen.

Casey raised his eyes, exchanged glances with Maxwell and shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, yes, by the way," the woman went on, "this is John. I'm Grace. We forgot to introduce ourselves."

She laughed again, an interval of silence followed. Then Maxwell lifted his glass and a crazy ripple of piano notes sounded from another room. He stopped his hand.

"Is someone inside?" he asked, for he'd thought the house was empty.

A cat appeared in the doorway and answered his question. Yellow-eyed, tail held up like a bat, it stood there, and the woman pointed.

"There he is, Paderewski," she said, and let out a shriek of laughter.

The cat looked up at Maxwell and mewed as if she had lost her kittens. A second later it moved, went under the table and rubbed against his leg. He withdrew his leg quickly, and the animal rubbed against the other. He withdrew that one, looked under the table, and failed to find the cat.

The woman laughed, and pointed toward the back door which was open.

From there, outside in the dark that crouched under the porch roof, two yellow eyes looked back, blinked, and disappeared.

Maxwell turned and found the woman staring at him, a frozen smile on her waxen face. The man appeared to be staring

through the empty doorway at something beyond the night itself.

Casey got to his feet, looked at his wrist watch, and said, "We better go."

"Oh, no, please stay a while," the woman said, still staring at Maxwell. "Please stay."

The man looked tired now, suddenly old. His eyes had dulled. He sat down stiffly.

"Oh, don't be like that now," the woman said to him, and he didn't reply.

"Have another drink?"

"No," said the man, and the woman's face changed, grew tired-looking, her eyes seemed glassier, emptier. Suddenly, as if forcing herself, she laughed.

Maxwell stared at her, then at the man, and a chill went up his spine. Those two empty faces, the deserted hall, the doorway sucking the light out into the dark, all the bright burning lights in the empty rooms of the house he was aware of—and something more which he couldn't define. It was like a weight on the house.

What had struck him from the beginning was the woman's laugh. There was no note of gaiety in it. Hysteria, he thought, and he found the man staring at him now, ready to say something, explain all this drunken nonsense. But he didn't speak. The silence was broken by the painful mewing of the cat somewhere in the dark outside. The mewing ceased, and a patter of rain sounded on the porch.

Maxwell turned. The woman was speaking. "Do you play the piano?" It was the second time she'd asked the question. He hadn't heard her before. Even now her voice seemed distant and he experienced the odd sensation of being far removed from everything here.

In a moment his mind swung back, projected him into reality, and he was made aware of the glaring whiteness of the kitchen walls, the light, the bulk of a curved refrigerator.

"Yes, I play," said Maxwell.

"My husband is quite talented," the woman answered, and the man turned, stared at her. She laughed.

"It was really funny the way it happened," she went on. "You'd have died laughing."

"Grace!"

"Oh, shut up."

"The way what happened?" Maxwell asked.

"Grace."

"Will you please shut up, John. I don't appreciate it when you speak like that. You always have to spoil things."

Maxwell lit a cigarette, sat back and waited. The woman started to laugh, stopped herself, and said, "It was the funniest thing. Am I right, John?"

John stared at her and didn't answer.

"Wasn't it?" she insisted, and this time he nodded his head slowly.

"Something happened?" Maxwell asked.

The woman turned her doll's face and glassy eyes to him again. "What? Did you say something?"

"Did something happen here tonight?"

The woman tried to speak, paused, and lost herself. In the interval it was quiet in the kitchen, in the rest of the house, and outside. Then far away, fainter than before, Maxwell heard the church bell start to toll—which meant that somehow sixty minutes had elapsed since he'd stepped from the ambulance outside—and yet it seemed as if only a split-second had passed, that he had just come in and sat down. In the next moment the feeling was reversed. It seemed that he'd been sitting here for days, endlessly, and a terrible weariness afflicted him.

"You see," the woman said, coming to life again, "he didn't understand."

Maxwell looked at her and the room receded. "Who didn't understand what?" he asked.

"My husband."

Casey was looking on, bewildered now.

"Let's get it straight. Your husband did not understand what?" said Maxwell, and the woman blinked her eyes, smiled.

"Didn't you say you played the piano?" she asked.

Maxwell opened his mouth and shut it again. Possibly she was pulling his leg, for he felt a door had been deliberately closed in his face.

"You haven't answered me," she said, and Casey answered, "If you really want to know, he studied for eight years in Europe."

The woman stared at Maxwell. Casey's reply was beyond her. "Will you have some more eggs, Frank? Oh, now but that's not your name at all, is it?"

Maxwell felt a wall closing him out, he couldn't reach these people, nor solve anything. What of the heat? Wasn't it a hot night? Why then did he feel cold, numbed? It couldn't have been the drinks. Something else? Prickles on his skin expressed a dim warming, intuitively he felt that which his brain could not yet cope with. He wanted to get up and go, and had to force himself to remain.

Now the man arose and went to the back doorway. He stopped there, swaying slightly, and stared out at the dark. The woman watched him, her mouth partly open, waxen-faced, one hand against her breast, an icy diamond sparkling from a finger,

two red spots on her cheeks—an over-sized window mannikin.

Wind brushed the trees outside, leaves whispered, a soft patter of rain fell, an odor of wet earth crept in from the night.

"You were talking about your husband," Maxwell reminded the woman, and her head turned.

"My husband?" Her eyes met Maxwell's, saw through and beyond them. They seemed to be seeking something beyond the wall, perhaps another room in the house. They were sifting for fact in the dim corridors of memory, trying to fix time and event, trying and failing. She blinked, changed the subject and said, "Do you want more eggs?"

"No—we were talking about your husband," Maxwell replied, and the man turned round to stare at him. The woman hesitated . . .

"You never met him, did you?" she finally said.

Maxwell was taken back. He nodded to the man. "Isn't he your husband?" he said, and his voice sounded strange, as if someone else had spoken. A chill shook him, the house's enormous emptiness seemed ready to yield a secret.

"Oh, not him, not John," said the woman. "He's not my husband. You're not, are you, John?"

The man didn't reply.

The woman continued. "You may not believe it, but he doesn't come up to my shoulder."

Suddenly she laughed in that way of hers without gaiety. The man watched her as if waiting for her to go on.

"You know, it was one of those things," she said. "One of those impossible things. It was simply ridiculous. I mean him and me, with him being so small and me so big. It made me laugh. That was all I could do, but I had to have a few drinks in me first. Then I didn't care. I mean other people always laughed at us wherever we went. But he had money, and you know what that means. He was like that, always bringing gifts. But what did I care for such things? What good were they? Do you see what I mean?"

Maxwell nodded, slipped his cigarettes out of his pocket, put one in his mouth and forgot to light it.

"You see, he didn't want me to see people. He was always afraid, terribly jealous. He wanted me locked in a cage all the time, and then . . ."

A low rumble of thunder broke. Moments later rain fell, it slashed like a scythe in the trees outside.

"He hated me to see any one —talk to any one. Then I met John. What of it? I wanted to live, wanted to breathe. What

did I care for all of this, this house, the gifts?"

"Grace," the man said.

"We started seeing each other. Maybe you don't know, don't understand, but some people are made for each other, just as others never are, as if God . . ."

"Grace!"

She turned with a puzzled frown, then laughed shrilly, stopped, and the rain drummed steadily outside, isolating the house. The odor of damp earth seeped into the kitchen.

Casey poured himself another drink, held it up to the light, and the woman spoke again.

"It was the funniest thing. My husband . . ."

The man interrupted now.

"Oh, please!" she said, "I'm trying to speak, John."

"But the doctor doesn't want to listen. Give him a drink."

The suggestion was ignored. The woman began again. "John was here with me. You might say we were having a party. It was midnight, perhaps earlier. The two of us were in the living room, and my husband became angry. But there wasn't anything he could do about it. We laughed at him."

"Grace, keep quiet."

"Then my husband went upstairs. He came down later, still angry, but he paid no attention to us. He walked across the room to the piano, and began to play. I suppose he did that because he couldn't . . ."

"Grace."

The man's voice stopped her. She turned, stared at him, then looked back at Maxwell. She'd forgotten what she was saying, and she started to laugh, stopped, and said, "Can you play, Doctor? We'll have some drinks inside, and you . . ."

The man spoke her name again, but she wouldn't be stopped now. "Come on," she said to Maxwell. "Don't mind him. He's trying to spoil everything."

Maxwell got to his feet. Casey followed. The woman started toward the hall, and the man stood there watching with glazed eyes, too drunk to interfere and weary of protesting.

The lights blazed in the huge living room. Maxwell stood at the door and looked around. His eyes came to rest on the piano. A man sat there with his head on his arms, his arms on the keyboard. He appeared to be asleep, or weeping silently.

Maxwell hesitated. There was something wrong here, something odd about the posture of that small figure at the piano. Thick carpet softened his steps as Maxwell crossed the room. He stopped when he reached the piano, hesitated, then reached out, touched the man and knew immediately what the woman had been trying to tell him.

the amateur assassin

by . . . Hayden Howard

The killer had nothing against him personally, but the boys didn't like being persecuted, and they paid their dues. . . .

CHIEF COWAN limped on both feet like an old New York cop, which he was, and his eyes were perpetually searching for city faces who would rather have been seen in jail than in a town so small as Horse Trough. He was a ponderous man with the futile look of a fish out of water. Aside from the arrest of the - kid - who - broke - the - schoolhouse - window and Cowan's limpingly inconclusive campaign against Wistard's Roadhouse for contributing to the delinquency of minors, every day was like every other for Horse Trough's two-man police force.

So when Chief Cowan clutched Officer Juke's bony shoulder and wheezed: "Look, by the feed store, a torpedo who's killed at least eight men," Officer Juke tittered slyly like a country-boy who's been slickered before, which he was.

The emaciated little man leaning against the barrel of chick feed directly beneath the gently swaying MULES FOR SALE sign didn't look strong enough to pull the trigger eight

Hayden Howard returns with this story of the old New York cop, Chief of Police in the town of Horse Trough, whose eyes were too sharp for the comfort of some people, and whose devotion to duty could have had unfortunate results. Neither he nor the killer counted, of course, on the amateur assassin.

times. But as Chief Cowan limped toward him Officer Juke's snickers died away.

That little man did have mighty queer eyes, like a toad's when it crawls up out of the mud at spring thaw, all withered and grinning at those fat foolish-buzzing flies.

"Hello T. B., long time no see," Chief Cowan grated without joviality. "Take a good look, Juke. The only charge you can nail these gunsels for is carrying a concealed weapon. Mind if Juke searches you, Segal?"

"Nice weather," the professional assassin croaked unfathomably.

Juke stepped forward, cautiously eying the sway of the heavy boiler-plate MULES FOR SALE sign that had been fixing to fall from those worn halter-ropes for the last twenty years. He ran his hands over Segal's tent-like double-breasted suit and shrugged.

Chief Cowan pushed back his cap. He searched T. B. Segal himself.

"This burg should buy you an X-ray machine," the gunman called derisively after Horse Trough's two-man police force as they slowly climbed into the police car.

"I thought you was ridin' me home to lunch?" Juke exclaimed when they made a left turn instead of a right.

"Eat some crackers out of the glove compartment," Cowan replied abstractedly. "Someone in this town is about to be gunned and I've got to figure out who."

"Bet I know," Juke munched. "Wistard. Mebbe we ought to open the gate and let the bull in?" He glanced at the Chief to make sure he got the point.

"That's no way for a law officer to talk, Juke."

"Bet I'm right. You been sayin' there must be a syndicate Wistard lays his big bets off on. Bet he's in trouble with 'em. Don't see why we should protect him. Hey, where we headed?"

Chief Cowan made two quick left turns, taking them back to the business corner of Horse Trough, the feed store, the City Hall, the white limestone bank. Segal had vanished. The space where a low-slung gray coupe had been parked was empty. The coupe was far down the road.

"I get it," Juke exclaimed proudly, "we're tailing him!"

"You'll make an officer yet," the Chief chuckled and followed the gray coupe over winding roads, in and out through the low hills, forded the river bottom, growled the police car in low gear up a mule track into the pine country. Around a hairpin turn he almost rammed the parked gray coupe.

Segal was leaning against it,

grinning. "I'm lost. How do you get back to town?"

Cowan smiled in spite of himself. "Mind if we search your car?"

"You got no right," the gunman replied pleasantly and ambled over and sat on a boulder in the sunshine while they searched through the glove compartment, under the seat cushions and in the trunk.

As they followed Segal back to town, Officer Juke sighed wearily: "Bet he ditched it when he saw us coming out of the City Hall, right where we was standing, in the barrel of chick feed."

But just before they reached the paved road the police car had two simultaneous blowouts. "What's roofing tacks doing way out here?" Juke panted as he jacked up the wheel.

When they reached Horse Trough driving fast, Segal was leaning in plain sight beneath the MULES FOR SALE sign, and Chief Cowan roughly searched him while Juke plumbed the barrel.

"G'wan, you got more hands than a sailor in a parked car," Segal giggled. "You know I'm clean. You be careful or I'll long-distance my lawyer to sue you for mussing my undies."

"If you want to save yourself some grief," Cowan snapped, "drive your car across to the City Hall parking lot. Juke, we'll search him right; he's probably got secret compartments in that coupe for everything from heroin to sub-machine guns."

When Juke finally wriggled from beneath the coupe he gasped: "Aw gee, Chief, I want my lunch."

"The boy wants his lunch," Segal said. "You won't find nothing in my spare tire. Come on, kid, I'll buy you a sandwich."

Juke glanced questioningly at Chief Cowan. "Go ahead," Cowan said, "fill your belly while someone gets murdered in this town. But at least pay for your own sandwich."

"O. K.," said Juke.

When they came back, talking friendly-like, Segal looked in his car, gawked and let out a yell of rage. "You—you slit the seat cushions, you New York harness bull! You're persecuting me! You better lay off or I'll long-distance my lawyer. What are you trying to do, run me out of town?"

"They seemed kind of lumpy," Cowan replied in an apologetic tone, and Juke snickered behind his buttery fingers; his eyes shone with admiration for his Chief.

Segal jumped in his car and gunned away. They followed him out of town to Wistard's Roadhouse, and when he hurried inside they glanced at each

other significantly. When Juke crept back from watching at the window, he reported the gunman was still brooding over a beer. "Don't guess he was fixin' to kill Wistard, huh?"

"More likely he was watching for someone who comes to town regularly, or works there, say in the bank or the feed store or the City Hall. He could be waiting till five o'clock closing time when the people come out of the City Hall."

"Or mebbe casing the bank?"

"Not his line," Cowan replied, glancing at his watch for the tenth time. "Look, I've got to get back to town; with the D. A. driving in from the County Seat to talk to me about closing up Wistard's I've got to be there." He drove deliberately past the roadhouse, made a U-turn back toward town.

Juke twisted in his seat. "He seen us go. You know, Chief, I been thinking. You're a pretty brave guy—messing with this killer this way, ruining his seat cushions and all."

Cowan chuckled. "You're green, Juke. If I knew he was after me, I'd faint right through the floor. He's so quick I wouldn't have a chance. But Segal's a professional. He isn't going to fool around risking his neck killing cops who slit his seat cushions. He won't pull the trigger unless he gets a lot of money, in advance."

"Mebbe now we left him he'll kill Wistard," Juke suggested, hopefully.

"Not without a gun." Chief Cowan stopped the car. "You got your walking legs on today, Juke? Look, from the top of Badger Hill you can watch the whole countryside. You watch which way he drives."

"We have dinner pretty early at our house," Juke said pointedly as he got out of the car.

"I'll be back for you long before then."

Juke lay on his belly among the wild flowers atop the hill. He yawned. He harried a red ant with a blade of grass. Finally T. B. Segal came out of the tiny, far away roadhouse. Juke watched him drive toward the hill and turn up Skunk Canyon Road out of sight.

When the coupe did not reappear at the head of the canyon, Officer Juke leaped erect; he wasn't sure about the ways of New York gangsters. "My trapline's down there!"

He ran down the hill, crashing through the brush into the canyon, but as he neared the road he slowed, moving with infinite caution. Even the hopping squirrels did not begin to scold. Juke parted the young thistles and huddled there, staring across the road. Segal came out of the old, boarded-up Ol-

son place and waded back across the spring meadow to his coupe.

A squirrel ran up the oak tree above Segal's head, and Juke play-dreamed he had his rifle in his hands. He could bark that squirrel, smack his bullet off the trunk so that the splinters killed the squirrel and it fell right on T. B. Segal's head as he opened the car door.

"I could've," Juke sighed as the gunman drove back down the canyon. "I bet anything I could've." And he stared solemnly down the road. He certainly did not intend to force his way back up the steep brushy slope to the top of Badger Hill again, and he thought he'd better check his trapline as long as he was here. Narrowly he eyed the Olson shack.

When Chief Cowan finally located Juke, the young officer was ambling along the highway toward Horse Trough with the late afternoon sun at his back and a skunk swinging from either hand.

"How come you didn't wait for me on the hill like I said?" Before Juke could reply, the Chief snapped: "Which way did Segal drive?"

"After Skunk Canyon Road, don't know."

"You don't know? That's what I sent you up there to find out! Don't throw those skunks in the trunk!" Chief Cowan raced the motor while Juke tied them to the rear bumper and then drove rapidly toward town, muttering how some taxpayer was probably being murdered at that very moment.

As they neared Juke's weather-stained house Juke blurted plaintively: "Chief, my Ma's probably got supper on the table by now."

"All right, get out, fill your belly," the Chief retorted in a tone of voice that plainly said: you'll never make a cop.

"I was going to tell you—" Juke began self-consciously.

"Hurry it up, untie those skunks!"

Juke pushed through the cluster of his smaller brothers and sisters with a hurt expression, and Chief Cowan drove into town with tightly pressed lips. To his relief he spotted the gray coupe parked down the street in front of the hardware store. Segal's head rose up inside the car like a snake with a jam-jar over its hole as Cowan cruised past. Through his rear-view mirror the policeman watched the gunman turn the coupe onto the side street past the bank, out of sight.

Cowan made an illegal U-turn. After a few anxious moments he spotted the gray coupe and tailed it along the highway into the setting sun. In Skunk Canyon the professional assassin

stopped around a curve so abruptly the Chief gave himself away, sighed wearily as he climbed out of his car and limped after T. B. Segal across the meadow to the old Olson shack. Segal waited for him at the crooked doorway.

"Guess you want to search me, eh?"

"Might as well." Cowan found nothing more lethal than a fountain pen. "Listen Segal, you know I'm going to keep hounding you until you leave this town—without killing anybody."

"Aw now, don't look so worried, copper. How could I bump anybody with you sticking closer than my undershirt?" The little torpedo kicked at the boxes on the floor of the shack and finally sat down on one of them behind the kitchen table, his head cocked expectantly.

"There are no trouble-makers in this town who ask for killing," Chief Cowan began slowly as though he truly believed it possible to reason with T. B. Segal.

"Yes, there is," the gunman croaked. "I didn't do all this driving around just to build up a fat mileage allowance. I been waiting for you to crawl in my mouth." He watched the policeman's right hand with a vaguely amused expression and shrugged. "I got nothing against you personally, but these roadhouse boys don't like being persecuted and they pay their Syndicate dues regular, so—"

Chief Cowan recognized his own death grinning on Segal's face and made a frantic grab for his gun, whirling toward the doorway, for he thought a second gunman had crept up silently behind him; he had been ambushed.

Behind his back at the table Segal snickered and reached not hurriedly into the table drawer. There was a muffled bang.

Gulping like a fish out of water, Chief Cowan whirled again to stare at Segal who was leaping about, stumbling on the boxes, tearing at the skunk trap on his hand.

"I'm getting too old for the rackets," Segal moaned, bewilderedly nursing his hand as the Chief drove him toward town.

"You're not the only one," Cowan replied, stopping at Juke's house.

Juke emerged dripping from the cistern, where Segal's gun had jumped when one of the small fry experimentally pulled the trigger. "I would have told you I found where he hid it only you never gave me time."

But Cowan laughed and gave him a fatherly squeeze on the shoulder. "You'll not only make a cop, you'll make a detective."

"Don't feel too bad about losing my prints," Segal croaked

with sudden humor. "That wasn't my gun. Never seen it before. I was reaching in that drawer to get a pencil or something."

And to Cowan's horror, the Syndicate lawyer made it seem that way, and furthermore how could Mr. T. B. Segal be guilty of attempted assault with a deadly weapon when, supported by this policeman's own admission, there was no deadly weapon to assault him with?

"I don't understand this business," Juke whispered. "When are they going to send him to jail?"

The gunman did not even leave Horse Trough. He simply crossed the street from the City Hall and leaned insolently against the barrel of chick feed. Juke hung around outside the door where Chief Cowan, the D. A. and the Town Council were conferring, and to add to his uneasiness he overheard some of the old retired whittlers say Councilman Wistard was throwing his weight around so Cowan couldn't run Segal out of town as a transient without visible means of support. They said Mrs. Cowan better file her application for widow's pension.

Juke could not get his Chief's drop-jaw expression and sweat-beaded brow out of his mind. He whispered angrily with himself as he drove home in the police car. When he got back to the hardware store and laid his rifle on the counter, he said uneasily: "How's your sister feeling, Ike? Since I happened to be passing by, mebbe I better have another box of those shells."

From the side window of the hardware store, the shed addition to the bank blocked his view of all but one corner of the ground floor of the feed store, across the street and halfway up the block. He could see the top of the MULES FOR SALE sign, and on the corner of the building a fat shadow with fainter scrap of shadow leaning against it.

"My rifle's custom-made," he blurted without the usual touch of pride. "I better check if the bolt closes easy on these shells." It did, and he sighted nonchalantly out the open window; in the confines of the store the gun exploded deafeningly.

"Gawsh I'm sorry!" Juke exclaimed. "Somethin's wrong with the trigger-squeeze. No slack at all. Caught me by surprise."

The scowling clerk stopped screwing his finger into his ear and swallowed, trying to clear his head.

"You about busted my eardrums! Lucky nobody was on the street. A fine cop you make. You might of wounded somebody."

At the inquest Juke protested slyly to the Coroner's Jury: "I never heard no sign fall."

The coroner raised his glance from Segal's crushed and obscenely grinning head. "Chief Cowan did find your bullet up there in the wall."

The jurymen passed the frazzled halter rope around again. "Nobody's *that* good a shot." They voted twelve to nothing, Councilman, Juryman, Roadhouse Owner Wistard included, that: "It's what you call an Act of God."

Officer Juke smiled knowingly at Wistard, who turned a shade paler. Then Juke turned beaming to Chief Cowan for congratulations.

Cowan did not even shake his hand. "Thanks," the Chief said flatly. "I owe you thanks and I don't want to seem ungrateful and I couldn't fire you anyway while you're the big hero around Horse Trough, but I want to suggest you try another line of work. You just proved you'll never make a good cop."

Juke squawked with surprise. "Why? Why? Why?" he shrilled aggrievedly.

"The reason you don't understand why is the reason you'll never make a cop," the ponderous Chief sighed.

And Juke just stood there, his face trying out all the expressions of his movie-screen heroes —before ending blank.

MR. ABDULLAH

Johannesburg papers report the adventures of Detective Sergeant J. C. Grundlingh, undoubtedly the only South African detective to wear a fez—while on duty—and also dark glasses, a short black beard, and a black mustache. He is known (or was, until the story in the Johannesburg *Sunday Express*) as "Mister Abdullah."

Sergeant Grundlingh is attached to the Gold and Diamonds section of the C.I.D. The other week, three natives were in court, accused of trying to sell Mr. Abdullah iron pyrites as gold. One of the accused was telling the Court how "the Indian" had visited her home.

"Which Indian?" asked Prosecutor J. H. Krige.

"That one—," she replied, pointing to Grundlingh, who was attending the trial—but not in fez and beard.

Again, some time ago, he spent nearly the whole day with several Europeans who were suspected of dealing in uncut diamonds. Finally, when it was getting dark, and when he was satisfied that he had enough evidence, he identified himself as a police officer and arrested them.

One of the men protested, "Look here, Mr. Abdullah, you can't do this to us!" It took some time before they were convinced that he really was a European.

# of perfume and sudden death

by . . . Peter Cheyney

The dead man had been quite charming, clever and amusing —but he hadn't, unfortunately for him, understood people. . . .

THOSE people who are interested in the meteorological influences on crime will know of the effect of bad weather upon potential criminals. Just as any young policeman with a year's service knows that it is upon wet and foggy nights that individuals, leaving the welcome shelter of the public house and experiencing the inclemency of the weather outside, proceed to fight upon the pavement on the slightest provocation; their numbers being as three to one compared with those on the days when the weather is dry and mild.

It may be considered therefore that the fact that the Christmas of 1927 produced much snow in England had something to do with the murder which took place in "The Cloisters" and which was known as the Perfumed Murder for reasons which will presently be obvious. "The Cloisters" was, I should explain, a short and attractive passage—since pulled down—in the neighborhood of Gordon Square, not far from the University College Hall, at the end of

Some years ago, in quieter days, Peter Cheyney, better known over here for suspense and espionage novels such as LADY, BEWARE *and* ONE OF THOSE THINGS, *wrote a series of pastels around the interest in crime of the rather ageless Mr. Krasinski. Here is one of those stories, whose charm, to quote the Tatler, "lies in the way they are told rather than in what they tell."*

which, turning the passageway into a *cul-de-sac,* was the charming two-story house occupied by one of the characters in the episode I am about to relate.

It will be remembered that two days before Christmas the snow lay very thick in London, and it was at eight-thirty o'clock in the evening that Mr. Everard Forsythe, who had eaten a light but satisfying dinner, left his apartment in Bedford Square for the purpose of keeping an appointment to talk to his friend Mr. Hugo Melander.

I have always believed that an expert writer is able to show by the *actions* of the characters in his story the mentality and psychiatric processes of the people who pass across his pages, but in this case doubting my own ability I propose, in order that the purpose of the visit of Everard Forsythe may be made plain, to show what was in his mind and to give some indication of the backgrounds of both himself and Hugo Melander.

These two were very good friends, but just what being good friends means to you or to me is a matter which only we ourselves know. In some friendships there exists a tinge of dislike, envy or jealousy, some secret mental reservation existing in the mind of one or other of the friends which introduces a humor of spite into an otherwise perfect friendship.

The fact remains that there had come upon Everard Forsythe, during the two weeks previous to this time, such an accumulation of small jealousies, worries and suspicions, that he had felt it necessary to arrange to discuss his feelings with Hugo Melander in order that this mildly malevolent aspect should be eradicated from their friendship.

They were both about the age of thirty-five, both goodlooking and both sufficiently blessed with this world's goods not to have to worry about the more mundane aspects of existence.

Forsythe was a composer of sorts, best described as a good amateur. Some of his work had been successful, and I believe his *"Chanson Jeunesse"* gave great pleasure to many radio listeners during the years 1925 and 1926.

Hugo Melander was a poet, and I think a good one. He published his own work in slim green and gold volumes (privately subscribed), most of which seem strangely to have disappeared. I believe one of the few complete sets in existence at the present time is in my possession.

The essential difference between the two men was the peculiar and almost magnetic attraction which Melander possessed, and which seemed to Forsythe to have such an uncanny effect upon his women friends. This attraction may not

truly have existed, because the majority of women who knew Melander were not inclined to discuss him intimately after the events which I am about to relate had happened. But the idea that he had this attraction was strong in Forsythe and was I have no doubt responsible for the jealousy which existed in his mind.

It is not suggested that Melander possessed any of the attributes of a Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. He was slim, charming and good-looking. He possessed a mentality of the first order, but there was a lurking cynicism in the twisted smile which he adopted on certain occasions, a caustic expression of tongue and a cynical gleam of humor which Forsythe had noticed showing in his eyes on such occasions as they had talked together about women, especially certain women.

Had Forsythe been wiser, had he possessed the ability correctly to analyze himself, he would have realized that the one rift in the lute between himself and Hugo Melander was the fact that he was essentially jealous of the open admiration which Carola Cheshunt showed for his friend. He would have admitted that he was deeply in love with this charming girl and desired above all things to marry her.

He would have admitted too that the only reason he had not taken some steps in this matter or given any voice of his sentiments to her was the fact that there lurked in his mind a suspicion that she possessed more feeling for Melander than is usually evidenced between men and women who are merely friends.

Then again this suspicious side of Forsythe's nature questioned whether a friendship of an ordinary sort was possible between a man of the type of Melander and a girl of twenty-five, as charming, as open and as natural as Carola Cheshunt.

As Forsythe walked down Bedford Street, the snow crunching under his thin evening shoes, he experienced a certain mental satisfaction, due to no doubt to the fact that he had eventually summoned up sufficient courage to decide to talk straightly to Melander. If it is wondered why it had not been possible for these two men, who were friends, to discuss such a situation casually and openly on some previous occasion, it must be remembered that the business of deciding just who finds more favor in a woman's eyes is more delicate and more difficult when the two men concerned are as close as Forsythe and Melander were.

And, thought Forsythe, it was not really a matter only of Carola. Two other feminine personalities intruded themselves on the canvas with which his

mind was busy. They were Mrs. Vanessa Lorenzo, a dark, junoesque and passionate beauty, and a Mrs. Robina Gallery, a charming, poised and superficially casual lady whose fascination was so much greater than her forty years, and whose ability to charm is too well known to anyone who has met her to need further discussion here.

It had seemed to Forsythe that there existed between both these ladies and Melander that same odd dropping of the voice in conversation, the same whimsical and almost too affectionate smile on parting, the same *something* which, he desired ardently, should not exist where Carola was concerned.

But insofar as both Mrs. Lorenzo and Mrs. Gallery came into the question he had no qualms but merely curiosity. Both these ladies were well able to look after themselves. They were both truly experienced. Vanessa Lorenzo had buried two husbands, and Mrs. Gallery one. Their knowledge of life—and love—could be described as superb.

In other words Forsythe had not the remotest objection to Melander using—if he wanted to use—his peculiar and charming technique on these two ladies, who could either accept it if they desired or rebut it with their own equally charming wisdom. But the situation, he considered, was very different in the case of Carola.

If Melander desired to marry her, well and good, let the point be established and let both contestants for her hand start from scratch. But if he did not and was merely amusing himself—as Forsythe feared—by languidly working up to some innocent climax desired by what might be described as an over developed sense of the theater, a climax which, interesting as it might be to Melander, could bring nothing but unhappiness to Carola, then this mischievous process must stop. Forsythe had made up his mind to this.

By now he was in Gordon Square, and turned into "The Cloisters." At the end of the passage, through a crack in the curtains behind the upper floor windows, he could see the light shining in the dining-room. He stopped and stood silently for a moment contemplating the charming exterior of the odd little house, bestowing a more than grudging admiration for the superb manner in which Melander, with his developed sense of the artistic, had furnished and decorated his home.

At this moment, thought Forsythe, Melander, with dinner over, would be sitting at his dining-table. The softly shaded wall lights would be reflecting on the carved oak paneling that formed the somber background

of the dining-room. Probably the gramophone would be playing softly.

Moving towards the door of the house Forsythe congratulated himself on having selected this evening for his discussion with his friend. Melander had sent his housekeeper away for Christmas and his man Sparkes was at the theater with a ticket supplied by Forsythe. Melander was alone and no visitor would disturb the conversation, so important to Forsythe, which was about to take place.

On the doorstep he stamped the snow from his shoes and opened the door of the house with the key which, as Melander's friend, he had been given two years before. Inside, appreciative of the warmth and comfort of the hall, he took off his coat and muffler and hung them up. Then, lighting a cigarette, he walked slowly and quietly up the stairs.

Now and for the first time he began to feel a little afraid. Supposing Hugo was not inclined to be serious, supposing he was to treat Forsythe's case in the evasive, nonchalant and semi-humorous manner which he chose to adopt on occasion? Forsythe shrugged his shoulders and opened the door of the dining-room. As he thought, Hugo was sitting at the head of the long antique refectory table.

"Good evening, Hugo," said Forsythe, and stopped in his tracks. A little gasp came from him, for he saw that Hugo Melander was no longer of this world. His two hands were on the table before him. His handsome face was twisted in a grotesque mask of death, and the slim triangle of his once white dinner shirt showing between the lapels of his black velvet coat was soaked darkly with his own blood.

Forsythe, with a coolness that surprised himself, walked to the top of the table and stood looking down at his friend. He saw that Hugo was able to sit upright because the arms of the high-backed carved oaken chair in which he was sitting supported his elbows. His slim white hands lay flat on the table before him.

Forsythe saw too the handle of the long *stiletto* protruding at an angle from under the right shoulder blade of his friend, and almost simultaneously looked towards the spot on the wall where it was usually kept.

Quite suddenly he realized that the gramophone in the corner was still playing *Debussy*, and with a little despairing shrug of the shoulders he walked across the room and turned it off.

I suppose there must be a great number of people in this world who think that they have

a *flair* for the detection of criminals. Everard Forsythe was one of these. For a long time he had considered himself to be an amateur detective of no mean ability, had had, in fact, words upon this very subject with Hugo Melander who, with a characteristic lift of one cynical eyebrow, had said that so far as he was concerned his sympathies were invariably with criminals, against whom the dice were so unfairly loaded in these boring days.

And whilst Forsythe found himself profoundly shocked by the death—in its nastiest form—which had so suddenly come to his friend, yet almost in the same breath he experienced a strange delight in being the discoverer of the crime; in being in a position in which he could begin an exclusive examination into the circumstances surrounding the death of his friend, an examination which, he hoped, would eventually bring the killer to the gallows.

Having turned off the gramophone (which was one of those instruments which rewinds itself and supplies itself with new records from time to time without much attention), Forsythe looked about the room in search of some clue or indication which would set his mind working on the right line. But he had hardly done this when he stood still and began to sniff, because there was in the atmosphere, quite distinct to his sensitive and appreciative nostrils, a definitely attractive odor—that of an exquisite, but rather heavy, perfume.

He sat down in the chair at the end of the table opposite his dead friend and began to smile to himself. It seemed to him that the police would not have to look very far for the murderer. At the same time he realized that by the time he had summoned them the smell of perfume would have disappeared and the only witness to its ever having existed would be himself. He thought with a rather grim smile that counsel for the defense would soon make short work of him and his perfume clue.

He realized too that no English jury would, in a thousand years, consent to find a murderer guilty merely because someone arriving soon after the crime had *thought* that he could recognize a perfume worn solely by the killer.

The "other side" would, no doubt, produce the manufacturer of the perfume who, in the witness box, with a self-satisfied smirk, would indicate the thousands of bottles of this particular perfume that were sold in the world each year, taking good care (having been carefully coached beforehand) not to mention that very few of these

bottles were sold in England. No, thought Forsythe, there was no reason for him to mention the perfume to the police. He knew it was there; *he* knew the woman wore it, and *he* knew that he must now prepare, by other and independent evidence, to build up a case against her, a case which would eventually be so strong that she would pay the penalty for the death of Hugo.

Sitting there, looking at the poor corpse who sat so straightly at the top end of the table, Forsythe was certain that he knew just how Hugo had come to die in that odd position. Someone whose presence in the house did not surprise him, someone who had been in his bedroom, the door of which was set in the wall directly behind his chair, had stolen out and, with a little affectionate laugh, placed one arm round his head, and over his eyes, asking him to guess who it was.

Hugo had placed his hands flat on the table as children do when their eyes are covered, and was probably waiting quite cheerfully to be kissed when the point of the dagger, already taken from the wall by the murderess, had been deftly inserted under the right shoulder blade and pushed easily and straightly into Hugo's heart.

But the murderess—for Forsythe was, of course, aware that Hugo's killer had been a woman—had made the mistake so very common to the inexperienced criminal. Being used to wearing the perfume she had accepted it as part of her physical make-up; had forgotten that it was as much a part of her as her gloves or hand-bag. She would have been too clever to leave her gloves or hand-bag behind, but she was not sufficiently astute to realize that for a certain period a suggestion of her perfume might remain to definitely establish her presence in the room.

Forsythe sniffed again. It seemed to him that the odor was almost stronger than before. He got up and walked round the table and into the bedroom. There he stood in the darkness sniffing. Yes, the perfume was there too. He switched on the light and moved about the room trying to find some position in which the scent would be perceptibly stronger. Eventually he came to the conclusion that it hung equally on the air, and went back to his chair in the dining-room somewhat disappointed.

It was obvious to him that there was *too much perfume.* And then, with a sudden smile, realized that he was right in this supposition and that there *was* too much. Someone had deliberately planted perfume in the room, had sprayed scent about the place or dropped a spot or

two from a bottle with the deliberate intention of establishing the presence in the room of the person who normally wore the perfume.

Forsythe knew that the usual wearer of the scent wore just the right amount—just enough to be attractive when one approached near enough. Her mere passage through the room, or her presence there for a little while, would not implant this scent upon the air in the strength which, at the moment, assailed his nostrils.

His smile became broader. *Because he knew the murderess was still the same person.* Knowing her and her agile mentality, Forsythe understood perfectly well how she would reason. She would say to herself that it was possible that some time during the evening—but only after dinner (therefore she knew his, Forsythe's, dinner time, and that he would not be with Hugo until after dinner, and she could only have learned these facts from Hugo himself) he would be coming to the house. She had thought it possible that Hugo might have informed Forsythe that she was coming and so had definitely *over-established* her own presence there by spraying or dropping some of her scent about the dining-room and the bedroom.

She knew that he was intelligent; that he would recognize that there was too much perfume; that he would come to the conclusion that some other woman, someone who had reason to be jealous of her, someone who would be infuriated at knowing that she had been with Hugo, had deliberately sprayed the place with her rival's perfume in order that she might be suspected.

And in order for this plan to be successful she would have put herself in a position wherein she knew that the other woman possessed a bottle of her perfume which had been used for this illicit plan and had been obtained for the sole purpose of throwing suspicion upon her.

"Very clever . . ." murmured Forsythe to himself. "Very clever . . . but too clever. And all that remains for me to do now, dear Vanessa, is to establish the fact that you have given —possibly as a Christmas present—a bottle of your own particular perfume to the woman you desire me to suspect.

"And," he concluded, selecting a cigarette from his case, "I shall find that the lady to whom you gave it is Robina Gallery. I am certain of that, dear Vanessa, as I am that you murdered Hugo. But I'm not going to tell you yet."

And with this thought Everard Forsythe walked across to the telephone and proceeded to ring up New Scotland Yard and

tell them about the murder—which, to tell the truth, was a process that he had always yearned to experience.

It was on the morning of the 24th December, after leaving Scotland Yard—where he had made a statement concerning the finding of the body of his dead friend, but carefully omitting all mention of the perfume—that Forsythe decided to interview both Mrs. Lorenzo and Mrs. Gallery.

The authorities were already beginning to take the view that the murder had been committed by some person outside the immediate circle of Melander's friends and acquaintances. With extraordinary rapidity the Detective Inspector in charge of the case had checked on Melander's background in the past, had discovered that, at one time in his life, he had known a somewhat peculiar circle of foreigners in London with whom he had had dealings of one sort and another. There had been talk of a girl in an Italian confectioner's, and the police officer—hypnotized no doubt by the fact that the dagger which had killed Melander had been of Italian origin—was busy checking on these far off details.

Before going to Scotland Yard Forsythe had telephoned Carola. He had not spoken to her for her maid had informed him that she was prostrated with grief. Her parents, greatly concerned, had summoned a physician who apparently feared a complete nervous breakdown.

A little sadly Forsythe realized that he had been right about Carola. She had loved Hugo dearly and the news of his death had struck her down completely.

In any event, Forsythe had made up his mind that he would not attempt to see her until he had solved the mystery of his friend's death and brought the murderess to justice. He knew that the sight of her grief would force him to talk before the time was ripe, and, at this moment he thought, his evidence was not yet sufficiently strong to enable the police to arrest and convict Mrs. Lorenzo.

It was quite impossible to think about Vanessa without realizing that she was by nature a murderess. Everything about her indicated that if necessary she would kill. Her quiet and decisive method of speech; her complete ruthlessness of character; her ability to know exactly what she wanted and just how she was going to get it; her cool, unblinking, green eyes that looked so searchingly. Her caustic humor; her strong, slim and cruel hands. . . .

He remembered the rumors that had attended the death of her first husband who had died so strangely in the Argentine.

Forsythe thought to himself

that it is an ill wind that blows nobody any good. Deep within him there was the idea that if he could successfully avenge the murder of Hugo then that very process would enable him to marry Carola. She would turn to him in her grief, with a certain gratitude, as Hugo's friend. After the first shock was over and she had begun to realize that after all one must go on living, her very disinterest in life would bring her more closely to the man who had been so close to Hugo and who had so successfully brought his murderess to justice.

What Melander had lost on the swings Forsythe was likely to gain on the roundabouts.

Vanessa was lying down on the long sofa before a brisk fire. Close at hand was a tea-tray.

Forsythe thought that she must be one of the most attractive women in the world, that she was a superbly proportioned animal and that the lights in her lovely red hair produced by the flickering of the fire created the effect of an irregular halo about her head.

As she poured the tea, he noted with appreciation the exquisite modeling of the hand and arm, the perfect co-ordination of movement.

She looked at him smilingly, her green eyes unblinking.

"My poor Everard," she said, "I hardly know what to say to you. How terribly you must feel the loss of Hugo, more especially"—and she made a moue —"having regard to the manner of his passing."

She sighed.

"There are times," she went on, "when words seem quite inadequate. This is one of them—it is one piece of sugar, isn't it, Everard?"

Forsythe smiled.

"You know, Vanessa," he said, "that you are a supreme actress, but do you think you delude me?"

She put her hands behind her head and stretched luxuriously. Everard noticed that the green of her rest-frock matched her eyes.

"I never try to delude anyone, Everard," she said.

He nodded.

"I am a great believer in truth, Vanessa," he said. "I think truth *can* be a most effective weapon. At any rate I think it is the only proper weapon to use against such a charming and clever person as yourself. I know *you* killed Hugo."

She laughed, a rich trilling little laugh.

"Aren't you delightful, Everard?" she said. "But I am inclined to agree with you that truth is a good weapon, almost as sharp as that dagger that killed Hugo, which—as the news-

papers so dramatically point out —had razor sharp edges."

She moved her arms, and with a lithe movement swung down her legs from the sofa. She sat facing him.

"Let me tell *you* some truth, dear Everard," she said. "You who seem to believe that I killed Hugo. Well, I wish I had. I've wanted to kill Hugo a dozen times. Given the right circumstances, given an opportunity for murdering Hugo with a really good chance of not being found out, I think I should have done it a long time ago."

Her eyes smouldered.

"I loathed Hugo," she said. "I loathed him because I loved him so much, because he could be such a necessity and because he was the only man who has ever treated me casually. However," she went on calmly, "that is neither here nor there. But, Everard, I should like to hear your reasons for believing that I killed Hugo."

Forsythe took a cigarette from the box by his side and lit it.

"The perfume gave you away, Vanessa," he said. "I smelt it directly I got into the room. It was your perfume, there isn't another woman in London wears it. My first thought was that you had been there, but immediately I knew that your presence in the room wouldn't leave so strong a scent. It became obvious to me that somebody had deliberately planted the stuff about the place."

She nodded smilingly.

"So that you should smell it," she said, "when you came."

"Precisely," said Forsythe. "And they took good care that I should smell it. Directly I realized," he went on, "that the perfume was too strong, my thought was what you intended it should be—that somebody, someone who had a motive to kill Hugo, someone who knew that you were a close friend of his, someone who probably guessed that you either had been or still were his mistress, had deliberately left your scent about the place so that you should be suspected."

She took up her tea-cup.

"How delightful you are, Everard," she murmured, eyes gleaming.

He went on:

"I knew that you were still the murderess. You're a clever woman, Vanessa, but you forgot that I am rather intelligent myself. I knew at once that you had sprinkled a little too much of your perfume about the place so that I should think that someone else had planted it. Just as I shall presently find out," he went on, "that someone has a bottle of your perfume; possibly you sent one to somebody as a Christmas present."

She put her cup down and looked at him. Forsythe thought

he saw a little hatred in her eyes.

"You know, Everard," she said musingly, "you're not an unclever person, are you? It's a most extraordinary thing, but I *did* send someone a flask of my perfume as a Christmas present. Doesn't that thrill you? I sent it off to them on Thursday afternoon to make certain that they should get it. Carola was here when I did it. She can prove it. So they would have received it yesterday morning, just in time for Hugo's murder."

Forsythe nodded.

"Tell me something, Vanessa," he said. "You said a little while ago that you would have liked to have killed Hugo because he treated you casually. I don't think that reason is adequate. I think you had some other, more sudden, stronger reason for desiring Hugo dead."

She took a cigarette from the tea-tray. Everard walked over to the couch and lit it for her. Through the flame of his lighter he saw the little smile about her mouth.

"Oh, yes, my dear," she answered, "I would hate you to think for one moment that I am trying to reduce my motives for having *wanted* to kill Hugo. As a matter of fact," she went on, "last night would have been the ideal time for me to have *wanted* to kill Hugo. You know of course about Carola? Robina Gallery told me a few days ago that she thought that Hugo and Carola were going to be married, and that is a thing for which I could not forgive Hugo. I mean," she gave a little shrug, "Carola is a dear child, a charming, frank, pretty girl of twenty-five, as inexperienced of everything in this world—including Hugo's rather peculiar mentality when applied to sex—as it is possible to be."

Forsythe nodded. It had been as he had thought.

"I think I could have forgiven him for anything but that," said Vanessa with a little sigh which sounded rather artificial.

Forsythe drew on his cigarette.

"Have you got an alibi, my dear?" he asked.

She looked at him with wide eyes.

"An alibi! Of course I ought to have an alibi for last night, oughtn't I? Well, my dear, I am afraid I haven't one. In point of fact," she went on, "it is going to be quite difficult for me if the police should want to know where I was last night, and I expect they will when you've had time to talk to them at length."

Forsythe smiled grimly.

"You admit you were with Hugo last night, Vanessa?" he said.

"Definitely," she replied. "I went to see Hugo last night and

I went to see him for the purpose of being very rude to him. I told him many things which I thought would be good for him to hear. After which I left him, smiling rather strongly from his seat at the top of the table, apparently quite oblivious of my presence and concentrated on one of the *Debussy* records."

Forsythe smiled.

"So you two had a slanging match," he said. "Was he very rude to you, Vanessa? Did it take much to make you kill him, and by the way, you did it very cleverly too. After he told you that he and Carola were going to be married, you pretended to accept the situation, you began to walk about the room—you know that habit of yours. It was quite easy for you to take the dagger from the wall. And then you put your left hand over his eyes and made a little joke, and he put his hands flat on the table in front of him and you killed him. You remember of course, Vanessa, that your first husband—the one in the Argentine—died of a stab wound?"

She nodded.

"That was a terrible thing," she said coolly. "Poor Juan. . . . But, my dear Everard, strangely enough—and I can't quite understand this myself—Hugo, who could be so quietly, so cuttingly, so fearfully insulting if he wanted to be, was quite nice to me. Last night he wasn't a bit insulting. Tell me, Everard," she said smilingly, "when do I expect a visit from the police?"

He smiled.

"Not for the moment anyway, Vanessa," he said. "You see, I have not told them anything about the perfume. They're on the wrong track. Apparently they've discovered something about Hugo. Something to do with an Italian girl, a few years ago. They think that one of her friends may have been responsible. I don't intend to tell them anything about you, Vanessa, until my case is complete."

She nodded.

"I see," she said softly. "Well now, Everard, since you're such a believer in truth perhaps you'll let me help in building up this case against myself. I think it would be most amusing."

She threw her cigarette end into the fire.

"Aren't you going to ask me to whom I sent that flask of perfume?"

He smiled cynically.

"I know," he said. "You would naturally send the perfume to the other person who might have a motive for removing Hugo. You sent the perfume to Robina Gallery."

"But how marvelous you are, Everard," she said, with a little smile that showed her teeth. "I did. It was to Robina that I sent the flask of perfume, and now all you have to do is to find out

about that, and another nail is knocked into my coffin."

She got up, stretched once again.

"It is awful that they still hang women in England, isn't it?" she said. "You know, Everard, you ought to be a little concerned about trying so hard to get me hanged. You might regret it one day. But still I must say I do understand your motive."

"Which is?" queried Forsythe, rising.

"You will have Carola," she said. "The unlucky thing was that she loved Hugo, who would have made her a very bad husband, whereas you, my friend, would be a supreme mate. At the moment Carola is of course prostrated, but knowing that perfectly straight, frank, juvenile and clear-cut mind of hers, you are well aware that if you succeed in avenging Hugo's death, and after she has got over the shock of this thing, the logical sequence is that she will rebound into your arms.

"In other words, my dear, you will lead Carola to her marriage bed over my dead body. A rather mixed metaphor when you come to consider that I shall be swinging at the end of a rope. However, I promise not to haunt you both."

Forsythe grinned.

"You've got a supreme nerve, Vanessa," he said. "There are moments when I almost admire you."

She smiled.

"Come and admire me again soon, Everard," she said, "but I must turn you out now. I've a dinner engagement tonight. *Au revoir,* dear Everard."

Forsythe arrived at Mrs. Gallery's house at seven o'clock. He found her at her desk.

They shook hands without speaking. He noticed that her eyes were very tired and that they were red. Robina had been crying a great deal, he thought.

He wondered just how much there had been between Robina and Hugo and just how much of the Vanessa-Hugo *affaire* was known to her. Robina was essentially self-contained. She was what is known as the best type of Englishwoman. Yet the generations that had gone to the establishment of her poise were unable to prevent her wearing a suggestion of her heart on her sleeve today.

"You'd better have a cocktail," she said. "I suppose it's much better to go on doing the ordinary things and not think too much about it. By the way, have you been to see Carola yet?"

He shook his head.

"I thought it wasn't indicated at this time, Robina," he answered. "But I shall see her soon."

The maid brought in the cock-

tails. Robina moved over to the fireplace.

"Carola's quite done in," she said. "I telephoned this afternoon. Of course I guessed that she and Hugo were to be married. I've seen it coming for a long time, and, poor child, so far as she is concerned it seems that life is quite finished. She'll get over it of course. Given enough time people can get over anything and she's a brave girl."

Forsythe smiled a little grimly.

"She would have had to be brave to marry Hugo," he said. "I should have thought that even as brave a girl as Carola would have funked *that* jump."

"She didn't know very much about him," said Robina. "Of course she thought she did. All women do—as you well know, Everard. But I believe she was worrying a little. She came here yesterday morning—I feel now that she wanted to see me about Hugo, but it was too early for me. I was still in bed and I sent her away. I shan't forgive myself for that."

Forsythe drank his cocktail.

"I shan't go to see her until I've got my case complete against Vanessa," he said. "I know she killed Hugo. That's what I came specially to talk to you about, Robina."

She looked out the window. The snow was falling fast.

"I agree with you," she said. "It was the sort of thing that Vanessa would do, and, odd as it might seem, the sort of thing that Hugo would expect her to do."

He lit a cigarette.

"What do you think happened last night at 'The Cloisters'?" he asked.

She smiled a little grimly.

"I'm pretty certain that I *know* what happened," she answered. "I know that Vanessa made up her mind to see Hugo and have it out with him. Everyone knew that Vanessa only *seems* a cool person, but I know that she can get into the most fiendish rages. She'd probably spent the day pacing up and down like a caged tiger—hating everyone—Hugo, Carola and herself, but especially Hugo. I told her some days ago that I thought those two were planning to be quietly married.

"She made up her mind to tell Hugo just what she thought about him. She probably rehearsed it before she went—you can imagine Vanessa walking about selecting the most cutting phrases, picking out all the things which would annoy Hugo most and show him what a fearfully weak and lousy person he really was.

"Unfortunately for her—and for Hugo—she found him in the wrong frame of mind. He probably laughed at her. He could be terribly cynical when

he wanted to and instead of losing his temper he probably amused himself by baiting Vanessa. You can see him doing it, can't you, Everard?"

He nodded. He could!

"That was a bit too much for her," continued Robina, "so she killed him. Of course she had a justifiable grouse against Hugo, but so had a lot of other people—myself included."

Forsythe raised his eyebrows. She laughed mirthlessly.

"Don't let's pretend, Everard," she said. "You know perfectly well that I had been Hugo's mistress too. I don't think that Hugo realized his own weird powers of seduction and their effect on the women who were subject to them. He had not the ability to realize that what was an amusement to him might have been something rather serious where the women were concerned."

Forsythe stubbed out his cigarette.

"Scotland Yard are on the wrong track," he said, "I haven't told them all I know—yet. They are chasing after some Italian fellow—a man who was engaged to one of Hugo's earlier conquests. They think he might have done it. But that won't be for long. Quite soon I'm going to hand them Vanessa on a plate." "

"She did it," said Robina. "I know she did it."

"Precisely," said Forsythe, "and she's going to try to hang it on to you. Did you guess that too, Robina?"

"No," said Robina. "Is she really? Well, I'm afraid that she's going to find the process a little difficult. Naturally she would try to make out a case against someone else. She's quite clever, you know Everard."

"I know that," he said. "She's got a bit of corroborative evidence against you too, Robina—that flask of perfume she sent you."

Robina looked surprised.

"What flask of perfume?" she asked. "I've had no perfume from Vanessa. What are you talking about, Everard?"

Forsythe was silent for a moment.

He was wondering just why Robina should deny that she had received the perfume from Vanessa.

"Sit down, Robina," he said, "and listen carefully to me. When I arrived at Hugo's place last night—it would be about twenty minutes to nine—and discovered his dead body sitting there so very dramatically at the table, I realized that there was a distinct smell of perfume on the air and also that the perfume was nothing but Vanessa's *Lilas d' Amour Noir*. But there was too much of it. Obviously it had been planted in the place by Vanessa to make it appear that

somebody was trying to hang the murder on to her.

"Almost immediately it struck me that Vanessa had done this herself for an obvious reason. She knew that she had already sent someone a flask of the perfume—it was necessary to her plot that she should be able to prove this—and she told me this afternoon that she despatched a bottle of *Lilas d' Amour Noir* to you on Thursday night."

Robina shrugged her shoulders.

"Well, I haven't received it, that's all," she said. "I suppose it must have gone astray in the post."

"How could it?" asked Forsythe. "Things don't go astray in the post, Robina."

"I still say I haven't received it," she said with an air of finality. "And even if I had received it or supposing I was to say here and now that I had a dozen bottles of it, then all I can say is that Vanessa must be fearfully optimistic if she thinks that such a process would prove that I had murdered Hugo. It's perfectly ridiculous on the face of it."

"Possibly," murmured Forsythe. "But Vanessa is not so concerned with proving anything as in shifting the suspicion from herself. She realizes that in a murder investigation two suspects are better than one. Each one of them has fifty per cent more chance of getting away with it."

Robina helped herself to a cigarette and poured more cocktails. She brought Forsythe his and carried her own glass over to the fire. She sat down and smoked slowly for a few moments, drawing the smoke right down into her lungs.

"Everard," she said eventually, "I told you that I knew Vanessa had killed Hugo. I will tell you how I know.

"Last night I suddenly decided to see Hugo. I intended to warn him that I expected some sort of trouble from Vanessa and that if she did not succeed in making it for him she would try to score off that poor child Carola. It was quite a nice night—cold and snowy of course but I rather liked that. I took a cab to Gordon Square and walked the rest of the way. As I came up the west side of the Square I looked at my watch and saw that it was a quarter-past eight. Then, just as I was about to cross the road, I saw Vanessa. She was approaching 'the Cloisters' from the King's Cross end of the square. I saw her turn in to 'The Cloisters' and I was fearfully annoyed, but I knew that no good would accrue from my going in too, so I walked back to Bedford Square and took a taxi home.

"You arrived and found Hugo dead at say between eight-

forty and eight-forty-five and I saw her go in there at between ten minutes past and a quarter past eight. So there you are!"

Forsythe finished his drink.

"As you say, Robina, there you are," he said. "At the same time you have to realize that your story doesn't make things very much worse for Vanessa. You say that you were almost arrived at 'The Cloisters' and went away because you saw her going in. That situation will suit Vanessa very well. She will promptly say that you, knowing that she was probably going to call on Hugo, waited for her, saw her enter the house, waited for her to leave and then walked over and killed Hugo. After which you proceeded to sprinkle her perfume about the place."

"That's all very nice," said Robina primly, "except, as I told you before, I haven't any of Vanessa's perfume. So please don't go on talking about it as if I had."

Forsythe saw that Robina was a little annoyed.

"I rather wish that you *had* got it," he said. "The logical sequence of events is that you *ought* to have it because it would have been logical for Vanessa to have sent it to you."

"Don't be a damned fool, Everard," Robina rejoined somewhat acidly. "In a minute you'll be accusing me of having stabbed Hugo."

A moment or two elapsed before he replied. During that time he thought:

After all why shouldn't Robina have killed Hugo? *Why not?* He definitely did not like her denials of having received the flask of perfume because he was certain that Vanessa had sent it. That was the obvious thing for Vanessa to do.

But he said: "Don't be an awful mug, Robina. I know that such a thing is impossible. But don't you see what Vanessa is trying to do. She's drawing red herrings all over the place trying to create situations implicating you and hoping that she'll get away with it in the process. The joke is," he added somewhat bitterly, "it looks rather as if she will."

"Rubbish," said Robina. "She will get away with nothing after I've told the police about her visit to 'The Cloisters' last night."

Forsythe thought: "Well, why haven't you told them already, you've had ample time." He said: "Just take things easy. There'll be lots of time for you to talk to the police. Hugo was only killed last night. Besides, I rather fancy that I'm going to solve this thing in my own way. I have a feeling that I'm going to be the one who is going to bag poor old Hugo's murderess."

She looked into the fire.

"Poor old Hugo . . ." she

repeated. "I wonder if he really was 'poor old Hugo' or whether he didn't ask for everything he got. He was quite charming and rather clever and fearfully amusing, but he couldn't differentiate between people — especially women. Women were just things that existed for Hugo to amuse himself with. I don't believe that he ever had a serious thought about anybody or anything. Well . . . life caught up with him."

Forsythe got up.

"It was death that caught up with him," he said with a wry smile. "Well . . . so long, Robina. I'll drop in and see you tomorrow if I may, and until then keep your chin up."

Outside he walked slowly back to his flat in Bedford Square. He was thinking very deeply. He was thinking that her denial that she had received the perfume was something which made him suspect *her*.

He realized suddenly that except for the differences in appearance and character between Vanessa and Robina each of them had as strong motives for wanting revenge on Hugo, each of them had a key to the house and each of them had been to "The Cloisters" at an operative time the night before.

And he had only Robina Gallery's word that she had not gone in.

It was close on midnight when Forsythe put on his golf shoes and a thick overcoat and walked round to Gordon Square in the snow.

He was not quite certain as to why he was walking there. He had no intention of entering Hugo's house but he thought that the atmosphere of the Square might help him in the solution of the mystery which puzzled him.

He walked round the Square and, almost opposite the entrance to "The Cloisters," came upon a portly individual dressed in a suit of shepherd's plaid who was leaning against the railings, smoking the butt end of a cigar and looking up at the moon.

Forsythe wondered why he was wearing no overcoat and how such a very good-natured expression could exist on the face of any man on such a cold night.

"Good evening, Mr. Forsythe," said the overcoatless one, raising a billy cock hat an inch or two from his head, and then replacing it at an angle. "Good evening, Sir. May I introduce myself? I am Detective-Inspector Krasinsky, and I am very glad to make your acquaintance."

Forsythe murmured the appropriate things. He was thinking to himself that this meeting was perhaps lucky.

"I am very interested in this case of murder," continued

Krasinsky with a smile. "Of course there are people murdering each other all the time and one should not take the thing too seriously. Yet, believe it or not, there are certain aspects of this murder which interest me strongly.

"Such as, for instance, that business of the perfume. . . . Shall we walk round the Square?"

Forsythe stepped out beside his newly found acquaintance, somehow he found that he was not surprised that this rather strange Detective Officer should know about the perfume, in spite of the fact that he, Forsythe, had said not one word about it to anyone in authority. Also he felt rather relieved at the prospect of talking the thing over with this sympathetic person.

"Tell me, Inspector," he said. "Who do *you* think killed Hugo Melander?"

Krasinsky waved his cigar stub in the air.

"It doesn't matter," he said. "The thing is that you are the person who is, in my opinion, best fitted to carry out this investigation because I believe that you have the whole thing at your finger ends. In fact," he went on, smiling into the darkness, "I can definitely tell you, Sir, that it will be through you alone that the murderer of Hugo Melander will be brought to the gallows, and I would like to congratulate you on that fact in advance."

Forsythe felt a glow of pleasure.

"That's very nice of you," he said. "But I find it difficult to believe you just at this moment. I have been worrying very much all the evening as to who had the strongest motives for killing Hugo. Both Vanessa Lorenzo and Robina Gallery had such motives. They had opportunity. They had front-door keys, and they both went out with the intention of seeing Hugo. Either of them or both of them might have done it."

"Precisely," said Krasinsky, with a glowing smile. "Yet, my dear Sir, I am afraid that you are not making sufficient use of the facts that are already at your disposal. The whole case against the killer of your deceased friend, is or should be, at your finger-tips, on information which had already been supplied to you; because you must realize that even if the beautiful Mrs. Lorenzo and the charming Mrs. Gallery are potential murderesses there is also no doubt that, in this matter, they were both speaking the truth.

"I have always found during an experience which has lasted for several thousand years," continued Krasinsky, "that simplicity is the essential condition of mind necessary for the solution of murders; that and the ability

to seek and find the one incongruity which either proves or disproves the rest of the evidence, be it direct or circumstantial."

Forsythe nodded in the darkness.

"Therefore," said Krasinsky, his voice becoming rather fainter, and his presence seeming to be a little less clear to his companion, "I would suggest to you that a little concentration on the business of the perfume from every possible angle might help you in the solution of this mystery.

"That it will help you," he concluded, "I have no doubt whatsoever, because, as I have already told you, it will be through you and you alone that the killer of your friend will be brought to justice. Good night, dear Mr. Forsythe."

With a start Forsythe realized that the mysterious Detective Inspector, who knew so much about everything connected with the case had disappeared. He realized that he was standing leaning against the railings in the exact spot at which he had met Krasinsky. He began to wonder if he had not actually imagined this meeting and whether the portly figure was not merely a figment of his rather overwrought mind which, concerned so deeply with the nuances of crime, had conjured up this ghostly assistant.

He shrugged his shoulders and began to walk back towards Bedford Square, and, as he walked, he smiled a little, because into his mind had suddenly come the incongruity which Krasinsky had particularly referred to. An incongruity that was so very obvious that Forsythe had never even thought of it.

Rather vaguely Forsythe considered that Detective-Inspector Krasinsky must be an extremely efficient police officer whether he existed or not!

It was Christmas night and Forsythe sat at his desk in his comfortable sitting-room in Bedford Square and concentrated on the letter he was writing. It was nearly finished when the telephone bell rang.

It was Carola Cheshunt. Her voice was low and steady, but it seemed to Forsythe that it required an effort of will to produce each word.

"Carola . . ." he said. "What is it? What can I do for you? Are you *very* ill?"

"I'm all right, Everard," she said, "except that I feel all the time that it would be so sweet to die. I never knew that there could be such misery in the world. I've been walking about for hours. At first the snow seemed to comfort me but now I'm tired of it."

"You must go home, Carola," said Forsythe.

"I will, Everard," she said. "But I want you to do something for me first. Please, Everard. You still have the key to . . . to Hugo's house?"

"Yes, Carola," he answered.

"I want to see it just once more," she said. "The last time I was there it was on such a wonderful afternoon and the sun was shining through the window on to the oak table. Hugo was so sweet that afternoon. I'm going away tomorrow. They've told me that I'm to go on a cruise —somewhere where there'll be sun and laughter . . . doesn't that sound funny now? Sun and laughter. . . . But I want to see Hugo's room just once more before I go. I knew that I shall feel him there . . . sense his presence and perhaps feel better for thinking so at any rate."

"Very well, my dear," said Forsythe. "I will go there immediately and wait for you. I shall be waiting in the hall when you arrive. Just knock quietly."

"I will do that," she said.

Forsythe finished his letter quickly, slipped into his overcoat and went downstairs. He found a taxi on the line and ordered the driver to take him quickly to the Cheshunt house, to wait for him there for a few minutes and then to drive him to "The Cloisters" in Gordon Square.

Forsythe paid off the taxi outside "The Cloisters," walked quickly through the arched passage to the front door of Hugo's house and let himself in. Inside the place was cold, Forsythe thought, and smelled of death.

He closed the front door quietly behind him and went straight up to the dining-room. As he opened the door he was not surprised to find that the room was lit and that Carola was sitting in Hugo's chair at the top of the table.

Her face was as white as a sheet. Her eyes, usually so innocent and wide, were half-closed, almost slanting with a peculiar hatred. The red rims about them accentuated their glitter.

Forsythe sat down and faced her. He put his hands on the table in front of him.

"Carola . . ." he said. "This is how Hugo was sitting when you killed him. He was sitting just like this, wasn't he?"

She nodded. Then she began to laugh. A peculiar, hard, brittle, laugh.

"Just like that," she said. "Just like that . . ."

Her fingers began to play with her handbag that lay on the table in front of her.

"You've been a long time," she said. "Where have you been?"

Forsythe smiled.

"I went round to your house, Carola," he said. "I took a chance on you doing what I thought you

would have done. I told your maid that you had asked me to bring you the bottle of *Lilas d' Amour Noir* that you had in your drawer with your other perfumes and things. She found it. It was there all right."

"Damn you, Everard," she said. "Do you know where I got it from?"

Her voice was almost shrill with anger.

"Yes, Carola," he said. "You stole it from the table in the hall at Robina's when you went to see her on Friday morning. You knew Vanessa had sent it. You went there early knowing that she would still be in bed. You knew the packet would be on the hall table and you knew there would be lots of other packets and presents there. You knew it wouldn't be missed. Robina never even knew that it had arrived. Her maid probably received twenty Christmas gifts that morning."

She looked at him. Her eyes were straight on his and never blinked. Forsythe, fumbling for his cigarette case, wondered if she were quite sane.

He got out a cigarette and lit it.

"I never even began to think straightly about the murder until last night," he said. "Then I began to look for incongruities. First of all I took it for granted that both Vanessa and Robina were telling the truth. I knew that Vanessa was right when she had said that she sent the perfume to Robina and that Robina was right when she said that she'd never received it.

"I realized that Robina was right when she said that Hugo couldn't differentiate between people—especially women. She said that women were just things that existed for Hugo to amuse himself with. Well . . . that applied to you too. You'd gone the same way with Hugo as Vanessa had gone . . . as Robina had gone . . . but you had more to lose. And you thought he was going to marry you until a few days ago when he told you he didn't intend to—that I could have you. I knew now why he laughed when I telephoned and told him I wanted to have a serious talk with him. He was going to give you to me as a Christmas present—after he'd finished with you!"

She made a little noise in her throat and a grimace. It was a fearful grimace.

"It was all so obvious," Forsythe went on. "And I was such a fool. It was obviously you from the start, but you'd fixed it marvelously. I must congratulate you on that, Carola. When I smelt the perfume just after I found Hugo dead—in that chair where you are sitting—I hadn't enough sense to realize that whoever had left that perfume about the place had left it *for me to smell.* In

other words the murderess knew that I was coming to see Hugo.

"Well, quite obviously Vanessa didn't know. If she had she wouldn't have come round at the time she did knowing that I was due to arrive at any moment. Robina didn't know, and she went away without even coming into the house when she saw Vanessa.

"But you knew that Vanessa was coming. She told you that she intended to go and have it out with Hugo. You didn't say that you were going to be there or that Hugo had told you that I had arranged to see him soon after half-past eight.

"But you were here in this room when Vanessa arrived, and Hugo hid you in the bedroom. You heard just what Vanessa had to say to Hugo. And I'll bet she said an awful lot. Then you realized that you'd just been one of a crowd. That annoyed you, didn't it, Carola?

"Hugo got rid of Vanessa quickly. He had to with you in the place. She could only have been here for ten minutes or so.

"And then you came out and got the dagger and played your little game with Hugo . . . the lovers' game that you had played before. You put your hand over his eyes and you killed him. You had the stolen flask of perfume in your handbag. It was premeditated murder, Carola.

"After you killed Hugo you sprinkled some scent around the place, enough to make me believe that it was Vanessa planting it to make me believe that it was Robina who had been here. Then you went quickly before I got here. You must have had only five minutes to spare. But it was nicely planned."

She began to smile. Forsythe thought it was a ghastly smile.

"It's still well planned," she muttered thickly. "I've been to see Robina this afternoon. I got the story of your visit from her. You haven't told the police about the perfume. And nobody knows that I've a key to this house; that I was one of the women who had keys to this house. Do you see what I'm getting at, Everard?"

"Not quite, Carola," he said.

She spoke quickly. The words came tumbling over themselves.

"You found Hugo," she said. "Well, why shouldn't *you* have killed him? Vanessa and Robina know that you wanted to marry me—there's your motive. You've said nothing about the perfume."

She got up, fumbling with her handbag.

"I'm going to kill you, Everard," she said. "You know too much. I'm going to shoot you. No one will hear, and then I'm going to put the pistol in your hand and leave you here and they'll think you killed Hugo and came back here to commit suicide. Vanessa and Robina will

tell how you've been trying to hang this on to Vanessa and how you had begun to pretend that you almost suspected Robina. They'll *know* you did it. Do you hear, you poor fool?"

She took out the pistol.

Forsythe began to smile. He was thinking of the letter he had sent to the police, of the bottle of *Lilas d' Amour Noir* with Carola's finger prints on it that was even now on its way to Scotland Yard. He realized what the mysteriously evanescent Detective-Inspector Krasinsky had meant when he had said that it was through him that the murderess would go to the gallows.

He sat back in his chair and looked at her. He was still smiling bitterly as she pressed the trigger.

Forsythe slumped forward over the table.

"Poor Carola . . ." he murmured as he died.

THE saint's RATINGS

Why did we stick our neck out?

WHEN WE LAUNCHED *this public-service department, frankly, we had no idea that so many new books were being published in the 25- to 50-cent paperback field. The deluge of review copies which descended on us after our first announcement has had our reviewer slightly smothered. So to help him get caught up, this month we'll cut the preliminary cackle and let him lay all the eggs we have room for.*

OUR RATING SYSTEM:

Three haloes: Outstanding

Two haloes: Above average

One halo: Passable reading

A pitchfork: For the ashcan

THE NAKED STORM, by Simon Eisner (Lion, 35¢)
The old reliable Grand Hotel formula—American Plan, this time, and on wheels yet. Good enough, in this version, to surmount even the unrelieved vulgarity of the publisher's blurbs.

KILLER IN SILK, by H. Vernor Dixon (Gold Medal, 25¢)
If you read the papers you'll surely recall the case on which this book is based with almost embarrassing transparency. You may also agree that although the press coverage was necessarily incomplete, it also spared you a lot of pretentious pseudo-psychology and sophomoronic dialog.

DARK DON'T CATCH ME, by Vin Packer (Gold Medal, 35¢)
Also obviously inspired by recent headlines (Is this a Gold Medal policy?) this one tries to take the "color problem" into a barely modernized Uncle Tom's Cabin. Outstanding craftsmanship is wasted on what any Southerner will recognize as strictly Yankee plumbing.

THE DEADLY DAMES, by Malcolm Douglas (Gold Medal, 25¢)
The usual tangled web of bosomy deceivers and sadistic gunsels, with almost the entire cast ending in the morgue, except the stock model of private "I" who keeps getting clobbered but is never too punchy to come back for more.

KILLER'S GAME, by Edward Hudiburg (Lion, 25¢)
Unusual suspense story spoiled by some shocking implausibilities and purely synthetic characters.

DOWN THERE, by David Goodis, (Gold Medal, 25¢)
One of those remorseless slice-of-life jobs, the only jam on it being the kind the guy never gets out of. Skilfully grim to the bitter end.

DEATH IS A COLD KEEN EDGE, by Earle Basinsky (Signet, 25¢)
Shy boy discovers relief of inhibition and sex thrill in killing during the war, graduates to peace-time knifing of men, women, and children impartially. Just a crazy mixed-up kid.

toe the line

by . . . Harlan Ellison

Somehow, a phantom was swiping cars in broad daylight and running them out of the state before anything could be done about them.

THE cell door clanged into the wall, and the turnkey motioned Eddie Cappen to step out.

Cappen winked at his cellmate, picked up the handkerchief full of odds and ends he had collected during the past two years, and started toward the guard, saying, "So long, Willie, see you never, buddy!"

The little rat-faced man still in the cell laughed, jibed back, "See me never, hell! Eddie, you'll be back before I can grow a beard!"

Eddie Cappen waved an amused good-bye, and stepped onto the cell block ledge with its steel railing. The guard signaled to the end of the line, and the lever was thrust home. The cell door slowly slid back into place, closed, and Eddie Cappen knew now—for certain—he was getting out.

The guard hustled Eddie ahead of him, down the upper tier catwalk, and down the stairs at the end of the line. They walked quickly to the locker rooms, where the guard handed Eddie a package.

Harlan Ellison, author of the forthcoming novel, WEB OF THE CITY (*Lion Books*) *and well known for his stories on juvenile delinquents, makes a first appearance in* THE SAINT *with this interesting story, based on personal researches, of the mores and sense of humor of a small-time gangster.*

Cappen opened it and saw the cheap suit. He laughed inside. The first thing he would burn, when he was out, was this bit of charity from the State. He would be wearing three-hundred-dollar suits soon enough. He laughed inside again, and put on the suit.

"This way," the guard indicated, and led Eddie down the corridor, past the administration offices of the prison. They stopped before the office that had WARDEN A. H. FELLOWS blocked blackly on its glass.

They entered the anteroom, and the guard motioned at Eddie, saying to the receptionist, "Tell Warden Fellows number 118022, Cappen, is here."

The girl nodded and flicked on her intercom, repeating the information. A gruff voice answered from the box, adding, "Send him in."

Eddie entered the warden's office for the second time since he and State Pen had made their mutual hellos. The first time had been on his entrance, when the warden had thoughtfully warned him to "toe the line and stay out of trouble." It seemed to be one of the warden's pet phrases, for Eddie had heard other cons laughing about it, but he had considered it good advice, and had done as the warden had suggested.

That was one of the reasons why his parole had come through early; he had been a model prisoner.

He *had* to be, to get out. And he *had* to get out, because his time in the Pen hadn't been wasted: he had figured out the foolproof system.

"Sit down, Eddie," the warden said.

He was a big, blocky man, with an almost bald head, with a few strands of brown hair combed studiedly back over the bald areas. His face was long, but fleshy. He had a nervous, cigarette cough, but he was a rough man to deal with. Almost alone he had quelled a riot a year before, using nothing but a megaphone and a firmly pointing finger. Eddie respected Fellows, and never underestimated the man.

The warden closed a folder, tapping it gently on the desk top, to even the papers inside. He looked up at Eddie, and his expression was so severe, Eddie was certain the warden wanted to smile, but would not.

"So you're leaving us, Eddie."

It was a statement, so Eddie just nodded, letting a reserved, lopsided bit of a grin cross his face.

"Well, you probably know what I'm going to say then, Eddie."

Cappen decided to play the part to the hilt. Sincerely, he said, "I'd appreciate it if you'd

say it anyhow, Warden, I haven't exactly enjoyed my stay here, but I think I've, well, learned my lesson."

The warden's face reflected pleasure, though there was no real, concrete evidence of it. "That's good, Eddie.

"Many men come out of here bitter and disillusioned. A few can make it just even with the world, and even less can come out ahead. You seem to be one of the last. You've been a good prisoner, Eddie."

Eddie knew that, had planned it just that way.

"But more than that, Eddie," the warden continued, "you seem honestly interested in making a good life for yourself. Now you haven't got as big a row to hoe as some of the men who come out of here, Eddie; your hitch was only for auto theft."

Eddie figured it was time to insert, "Yeah, but it was my third conviction, Warden, that makes it pretty rough. I got to watch myself real close." It was always wisest to acknowledge the fact than pretend it didn't exist.

"Well, Eddie, you're right in that, but with a little perseverence you can lead a good, healthy life, become a valuable member of society. All you have to do is toe that line . . ."

There it was!

That was the phrase. That was what had started Eddie thinking. The warden had said that two years ago when he had entered the State Pen, and the words had stuck with Eddie, till they had become a catchphrase in his mind, till the sound of the words had altered their spelling, and finally Eddie had hit the perfect, the ultimate, the foolproof method of auto hijacking.

". . . and you'll be okay, boy." The warden finished, almost beaming, convinced he had produced one good man from all the filth in his cells. Convinced he had salvaged one soul.

He gave Eddie his possessions, taken from him when first he had come to the prison, and his two years wages—pitifully small amount—and the instructions about keeping in touch with his parole board.

Eddie shook the warden's hand, stood up, and turned to go. "Don't forget, Eddie," the warden reminded him as the ex-prisoner's hand touched the doorknob, "just toe the line, and you'll be all right."

Eddie smiled back and nodded again.

Yes, sir, boss, he thought, *I'll do that little thing; I'll just do that.*

When Eddie Cappen had told his parole officer he intended to get a job with a garage, the lean, suspicious man arched an

eyebrow and glanced over Eddie's record. Auto theft.

"Isn't that a little too close to your old trouble, Cappen?"

Eddie had made a calculated move, and now was the time to back it up.

"Well, sir, I don't really know anything else but cars. I worked in the auto body shop at the Pen, and they said I was pretty good. I—I thought I'd put what talent I've got to good use."

There had been more talk, but finally Eddie had convinced the parole officer he was best suited for mechanics work, that he was sincerely interested in the garage business, and that his eventual goal was to open his own auto body and repair shop.

That week he went to work for Mickey Dalco at the little man's garage. Mickey knew Eddie had a record, but pursuing his policy of giving ex-cons a chance, he hired Cappen nonetheless. "Just work hard and leave the till alone, Eddie, and you've got yourself a good job for a long time," Mickey had said, and Eddie had shaken his hand on it.

Later that week he met with his parole officer again, and checked in, giving him the news of his job. The parole officer was still suspicious, but it seemed Eddie was taking steps in the right direction. He smiled, and Eddie shook his hand on it.

Still later that week, Eddie met with the old members of his car-heist gang. He talked to them in the back room of a beauty parlor, operated by his former girl friend.

They sat around, having shoved the hair driers aside, and Eddie grinned at the four men and one girl around the crowded room.

"Benny," he said to a dapper, thin man, "what's the best method for grabbing a car *you've* ever found?"

Benny ran a hand through his greased hair, and replied slowly, "I use the adhesive tape."

Eddie urged him to explain in detail.

"I take two rolls of adhesive, and lay a strip vertically down the window, with each of them, so they are like two bars on the window. I leave enough tape about the middle of the window so I can get a hold on it, then I jerk *down* real hard. It opens the window every time."

Eddie interrupted. "What're the risks?"

"They know my routine, the cops. If I'm caught with a roll of adhesive on me, they book me on suspicion."

Eddie nodded, turned to the second man, "What's your bit, Vinny?"

Vinny sucked in on the cigarette perpetually hanging from a corner of his slash mouth,

said, "I use a jump wire on the motor. The under 'alligator' clip, so's the vibrations of the motor don't shake the jump wire loose."

Eddie said again, "Risks?"

Vinny shrugged helplessly, "Same as Benny's, but also the wire sometimes comes loose anyhow, and I stall in the middle of the street."

Then it was the third man's turn. Grouse answered quickly, "I use two spoons. I shove one between the rubber edgings on the little window, stick the other one in and bend it, twist the second spoon so it opens the handle of the little window."

"Then you're in, right?" Grouse nodded, and Eddie added, "but you've got the same problems as the others."

Grouse replied, "Not only that, but it's harder than hell to get into a car these days that way. People spot you, what can you say?"

Benny inserted, "Yeah, and with my adhesive tape method, it don't work with them new push-button windows."

Eddie looked at the last man, "And you Tom?"

"I use a rolled up magazine. The big, thick ones. I use it for a lever. Jack-handle it over the door handle and jerk down. Of course I'm strong, that's why it works."

Then the woman spoke. "Okay, Eddie, we all know how each other make a buck. We know all the routines, and we know all the handicaps. What's the score?"

Eddie Cappen slid back in his seat, tilted his hat back on his head and grinned widely. "Kiddies, I've got the pitch of the year. The *only* sure-fire way of getting off with a hot car."

They grinned back at him, first dubiously, unbelievingly, but as he explained in detail, their grins grew wider, and finally . . .

Eddie shook with them on it.

Six months of inactivity came first. Eddie had to allay the fears and suspicions of the parole officer. He also had to get Mickey Dalco's complete trust.

Trust that would allow Eddie to say:

"Mick, I've got some more work to do on re-touching that '48 Chevvy's paint job over the rust repair. Okay with you if I stay late tonight?"

Trust that would allow Mickey Dalco to reply:

"Yeah. Sure. Here's the keys, Eddie. Lock up tonight, and just be here by eight tomorrow mornin', so's I don't have to stand around in the cold waitin'."

Trust like that took six months.

Trust like that allowed Eddie to use the tow truck. The big red tow truck with the Dalco sign on it.

MICKEY DALCO
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Trust like that was important. But finally trust like that came, and with it, Eddie's first venture into the foolproof car-jacking system typified by the phrase "toe the line."

Or, more correctly, "*tow* the line."

Eddie took Vinny with him on the first job. They took out the tow truck on Eddie's lunch hour, in broad daylight.

"Mickey, I'm gonna use the tow. Want to take a run uptown, see if they got my TV installed at home. Okay with you?"

"Sure, Eddie. Go ahead. But I'll need you pretty quick after lunch. Don't dawdle."

"I won't."

Eddie didn't dawdle. He traveled the nine blocks to the alley where Vinny waited with the big sign. The sign had adhesive tape stuck to its back, and it fitted neatly over the Dalco advertising on the side of the truck. The new sign read:

IMPERIAL REPAIRS
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With the sign up, they went looking. The car they wanted was parked double outside an apartment building, and Eddie backed up to the car in accepted tow style. He got out and lowered the winch chain. He hooked the big steel hook under the front fender, making sure through the locked car window the brake was off and the car was in neutral. It wasn't really necessary; most cars move with their front wheels off the ground, but there was no chance of error if you were observant.

That was Eddie's key to success. Be observant, and nothing can go wrong.

He jumped back in beside Vinny, and they took off quickly. A few pedestrians idly took notice of the big red tow truck hauling away the new double-color Mercury, but had they been checked later, they could not have told what the men looked like who had done the towing, what the sign on the truck said, or which way they had gone after they'd turned the corner.

It was a foolproof method.

On the fifth job they learned it was better to hoist the car by the rear wheels, for two reasons: the car followed the truck better, and they had found cases where front-wheel towing was impossible due to locked brakes. It was the sort of thing experience taught, as was the incident that occurred on that fifth job.

They crashed a light.

Unintentionally, but the cop

who was motorcycle-parked by the curb took after them, and dragged them to a stop.

He berated them, checked the truck registration—not the registration of the car in back—and let them go with a warning. Tom, on that job, sweated, but Eddie laughed all the way to the junkyard.

The four cars that had been previously stolen were all parked side by side in the yard. In the center of the deep yard, surrounded on all sides by chrome and rusting parts of old autos. Work had to be done on them, and Eddie did it in his spare time, cut off from the world, safe from cops.

He towed the Merc in beside the Cadillac, and unwinched the chain, letting the car down with a clang. Tom got out and lit a cigarette, leaning against the truck.

"Whew!" he gasped, "that was damned damned close."

Eddie Cappen dug him in the rib with a playful elbow. "Close, nothing. That's as close as they'll ever get. D'you ever read a story by Poe called 'The Purloined Letter'?"

Tom shook his head, and Eddie said, "Well, it was simple. This letter was stolen, and they knew it was in a guy's room, so they hunted and hunted, but they couldn't find it, even though it was there."

"Where was it?"

"In a letter box, with a bunch of others, right up on the wall, where they could see it all the time. Y'see what I mean? The cops can't see what's in front of their noses. They'll see us, but what's more logical than a tow truck draggin' a car away for repair?"

Tom grinned, started to say something.

Eddie cut him off. "*I* know. *I* know: what if a guy comes out and yells at us for hooking up his car? We just say, 'Oh, excuse me, Mister, we got a call for a repair on a crate like this . . . must be the wrong car,' and we drive off, grab another one down the line.

"And if the cops spot us, they check the truck registration and not the car we're hauling. No point to *that!*"

Tom nodded, clapped Eddie on the back. "Ed, buddy, you're a damned genius."

Eddie swiped a cigarette from Tom's pack, lit it and said, "All you gotta remember is to be observant. Check everything, and you can't foul up."

Tom continued once more, "You're a genius, Eddie baby. A goddamn dyed-in-green little genius!"

Eddie sloughed it off. "I owe it all to the warden."

Eddie worked steadily on the cars over the week-ends. Filing down serial numbers on the en-

gines, coloring them, changing plates and other identification. Benny, who owned the junkyard, made sure he was let strictly alone, and they moved five to eight cars a week.

The money was rolling in, but Eddie was playing it cool. He checked with his parole officer, and he buried the share of the money received for himself, not living higher than his garage salary allowed.

He was becoming a pillar of the community.

The auto theft toll mounted alarmingly, but the police were stymied. Somehow, a phantom was swiping cars in broad daylight and running them out of the state before anything could be done about them.

On their thirty-eighth haul, Eddie stole a Pontiac parked outside a grocery store, and as they pulled away, Vinny swore he saw a woman come rushing out onto the curb, screaming.

"Let her scream," Eddie philosophized. "We'll be long gone before she can do anything about it."

He left Vinny to check with the car fence about getting rid of the new heist, and took the Pontiac to the junkyard. All the other cars had been removed, and it stood alone.

Eddie jacked it down, and left it there. He was due back at the garage.

It was three days before he could get to work on it, but before he could leave work the scheduled night, three men came to the garage.

They talked to Mickey, and they studied the tow truck, and when they started back into the repair shop, Eddie knew something was wrong. He made a run for it.

He got as far as the window, ready to leap through and break down the alley, when they drew their guns.

"Hold it, hold it! Don't shoot!" he yelled, and they lowered their aim. *Must be another gang,* Eddie thought. *They don't look like plainclothesmen.*

"Looks like this is our boy, Daggerty," one of the men said to the other. They looked hard-eyed and ruthless.

"Where's the car, fellow," the man addressed as Daggerty said.

"What car?" Eddie tried to bluff it.

Daggerty's hand with the revolver came around in an arc, slashing at Eddie Cappen's face. The pain hit Eddie all the way to his brain, and he staggered, putting a hand to his cheek. Blood was flowing down his face.

"In—in the junkyard, crosstown," he said, in pain. "Who are you? How'd you find me? Who squealed?" Anger boiled in him.

Daggerty answered as he slipped the cuffs on Eddie Cappen.

"Nobody squealed. The woman saw a red tow truck, and this thing was big enough to call us in, so we searched the city till we found a red tow truck that fit the description. Then we found you. Too bad it took us this long."

"What are you talking about? What do you mean, 'Big enough to call us in?' Who are you?"

Daggerty looked annoyed.

"FBI, Mister. You pulled a beaut this time."

Eddie Cappen reeled, his legs felt like putty beneath him. "What're ya talkin' about? I only swiped a car. That's maybe a few years, but with parole I'll get out!"

The Federal agent shook his head. "Uh-uh, buddy. We don't want you for the car job. We've got you on kidnapping, and probably murder.

"There was a baby asleep in the back seat of that car, and this long without attention, it's probably dead."

The third G-man chimed in, "That's the chair in this state, brother."

Eddie Cappen felt sickness blacking up in him. A baby in the back seat. Dead . . . yes, after three days . . . dead!

Be observant!

He choked.

Toe the line!

He cried.

DEADLY PHOTOGRAPHS

One morning, back in the days when the League of Nations used to meet in Geneva, a detective happened to notice a man with an obviously expensive camera loading it in an unusual way. Mildly suspicious, he followed the man who soon joined three others, all of them carrying cameras of an identical make and all of them handling the cameras as if they weren't really familiar with them.

The detective telephoned headquarters. In the meantime, the four suspects took up their position near a terrace which the delegates would cross on their way to a meeting of the League. Their cameras were poised, four in a row, waiting for the notables.

Suddenly they found themselves surrounded by detectives, handcuffed and taken away in the waiting police car. The cameras were examined and turned out, as the detective had suspected, to be cases concealing automatics. As the men, all at the same time, pressed the shutter release, a hail of bullets would have poured into a dozen men on whose lives Europe's peace depended.

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by . . . Lloyd Arthur Eshbach

The medallion was so exquisite that Pember might have admired it with the eyes of an artist—if he hadn't been a crook!

WHEEZING, Isaac Pember leaned back in the groaning mahogany desk chair and stared hard at the letter. His fat fingers trembled a little as he turned it over and over, a gleam of anticipation in his bright little eyes. An air mail letter from London, from Cunningham, could mean only one thing.

Cunningham had made another find.

Pember worked an index finger under the flap, tore the thin envelope and drew out a single sheet of paper. His eyes darted swiftly along the closely-written lines, then retraced their course to linger over one especially fascinating paragraph.

"It is a beautiful thing, a perfect emerald as big as a pigeon egg, surrounded by brilliant cut diamonds, each a carat in weight, the whole set in a gold filigree medallion of exquisite workmanship. Indian, I believe. Shall I buy it?"

With some difficulty Pember sat up straight in his chair, lifted the phone from its cradle, and sent a cablegram. Three words. "Buy. Await instruc-

The jewelry trade is a hazardous one and perhaps more dangerously tempting than most people realize. In fact, a dishonest dealer in precious stones can be more troublesome to the police than a professional safecracker. But Lloyd Eshbach here invests justice with a stern majesty.

tions." Selecting a butter cream from a box on the great mahogany desk, he again leaned back, and looked idly through the one-way-vision glass wall which separated his office from the sales room. His heavy eyelids drooped over his bright eyes.

Not bad, he thought smugly, as he surveyed the quiet dignity and restrained elegance of Pember's—the shop which in less than ten years had become recognized among those who cared for that sort of thing as the last word in exclusive jewelry. A shop that was an interior decorator's dream in ebony, velvet and crystal. A staff with just the right degree of snobbish obsequiousness.

And soon Pember's would have another unusual original creation to sell—a fabulous emerald medallion. But first of course, he would have to devise a way to get it past customs. He had no intention of paying duty on it—or on any of his other importations, for that matter!

His thoughts reverted to the game he had been playing with customs inspectors for the past ten years. He and his staff had brought in an incredible number of jewels duty free. The authorities were morally certain that he was a smuggler, but they had never been able to pin anything on him. Pember chuckled with cynical complacency. There was always a way to get around customs.

The minutes plodded slowly by as Pember thought about the medallion, his keen brain weighing and discarding a variety of schemes which had worked in the past. This required something new. From time to time he ate a butter cream, and idly watched the coming and going of an occasional client. Then abruptly he sat up, struggled forward and pressed a button.

A moment thereafter an unusually beautiful brunette entered, holding a shorthand notebook and several pencils. "Yes, Mr. Pember?" she inquired.

Pember motioned toward a chair. "Take a letter to Cunningham," he said.

He dictated smoothly, without hesitation. "Draw on my London account to pay for the new merchandise. I'm assuming that the price is right. Paragraph. Whittlesey will pick up a young woman in the lobby of the Royal Court Hotel on the night of September 20th, at eight o'clock sharp. They will have dinner together and go to a theatre afterward. Please provide tickets. Some time during the evening your agent will give Whittlesey the parcel. You, of course, will know nothing of his being in London. Paragraph. Keep up the good work."

He paused, mentally reviewing what he had dictated. Then

he nodded briefly. "That will be all, Miss Hunter. I'll sign it. And now send in Whittlesey, please."

A gem of a girl, Pember thought as he watched her go. Far more than a mere secretary. Like every other member of his organization, she was most versatile.

Whittlesey entered the room soundlessly and paused before the great desk, his attitude expectant. Pember leaned back in his chair and stared fixedly at him, taking in the crewcut blond hair, the thin, almost boyish face, the slim figure of medium height. He was the man for the job, Pember decided. Whittlesey stood the scrutiny without change of expression, completely at ease.

Finally Pember wheezed: "I have an unusual assignment for you, Robert. You are going to yield to a sudden temptation which will lead you to rob me of a valuable emerald medallion. You'll dye that blond hair of yours brown and you'll take the first possible plane for London under the name of Richard Walker. Your use of the same initials will be a clue for the police. You will register at the Royal Court Hotel; and at eight o'clock on the night of September twentieth you will meet a young woman in the lobby. She will recognize you, but you will appear to be picking her up. You will have dinner together and will go to the theatre afterward. She will have the tickets. During the course of the evening she will give you a small parcel. It will contain the medallion. All clear so far?"

Whittlesey nodded. "Yes, all clear."

"When you return to your room you will unwrap the parcel and hide it in your luggage. Then you will wait. Be a little furtive. Act like a man with something on his conscience."

Pember ate another butter cream. "We now come to the one unpredictable part of the plan. I can't say how quickly the police will find you. But you will be found in time. Play outraged innocence until they discover the medallion. When you are arrested, confess everything. Tell how you were tempted when the customer brought in the jewel to have some loose stones tightened. How on impulse you took it and fled to London. How you've been living in fear ever since, not knowing just what to do next. Afraid to attempt to dispose of so unusual an article. Regretting that you'd ever seen the thing. Still follow me?"

Whittlesey nodded again, a hint of admiration behind his rigid impassivity. "It's quite clear, Mr. Pember."

"The rest is obvious. The British police will work with the American authorities, and you

will be brought back to the States. The police, of course, will bring the stolen medallion with them. When they report to me I will decide that you have learned your lesson and should have another chance." He paused, pursing his lips.

"One more item. If we have to produce the customer who brought in the emerald, I'm sure Mrs. Parkhurst will be willing to—cooperate. So, make out a receipt for the jewel in her name in the regular way. Take an inexpensive brooch or medallion from stock and put it in an envelope, marking the receipt number on the outside. Then put it in the vault. Any suggestions?"

Slowly Whittlesey shook his head and smiled. "Looks airtight to me, Mr. Pember."

"Then get expense money from Miss Hunter—and on your way."

Three days passed before Isaac Pember made his next move. On the morning of the fourth day he phoned one of his better customers—a wealthy widow named Lydia Parkhurst. He told her that it might be necessary for her to come to his office to identify the emerald medallion she had brought in for repair.

At her gasp of puzzled surprise, Pember continued casually: "We've just discovered that one of my clerks has stolen it—Whittlesey, the young man to whom you gave it—and when it is recovered, the police may want you to identify it. I'm sure you'll be glad to cooperate, won't you, Mrs. Parkhurst?"

A low, hate-filled voice answered, "I have no choice, have I—you obese monster!"

Pember smiled as he returned the phone to its cradle. How fortunate that amateurs sometimes tried their hands at jobs even skilled professionals found difficult! And how fortunate for him that he had discovered Mrs. Parkhurst's efforts and had obtained proof of a highly incriminating nature. She had been useful on occasion.

Next Pember had his secretary phone Whittlesey's apartment. For obvious reasons there was no answer. Thoughtfully Pember took a butter cream from the always-available box and ate it with evident enjoyment. Then he pressed the buzzer of the intercom. "Miss Hunter," he said briskly, "call Police Headquarters, Sergeant Voorhees, please."

In less than a minute his phone rang. "Hello!" he answered, his voice suddenly excited, anxious. "Voorhees? This is Pember. I've been robbed!"

"You have?" Pember could almost see the delighted grin on Voorhees' lean face. "Now that's a switch! How does it feel to be on the receiving end for a change?"

"Look, Sergeant," Pember said testily, "this is no joke. One of my men, it appears, made off with a really valuable piece of jewelry—and the worst of it is, it isn't mine. It was brought in for repair. So send someone over for the facts so that you can get after the young pup. If I don't recover the medallion, it'll cost me a lot more money than I can afford to lose!"

"Okay," Voorhees growled. "I'll be over myself."

He was there in about fifteen minutes, a long, lean, craggy-faced individual who was as unlike the jeweler as a man could be. It was immediately obvious that he didn't like Pember or anything about him. His dislike stemmed from an encounter several years before when he had been working with the Customs Office, and Pember was the quarry. Voorhees had not enjoyed his failure.

He declined a butter cream and said brusquely: "Okay, let's have the dope."

Without wasting words Pember told his prepared story. He spoke of Whittlesey's receiving the medallion, and of his showing it to Pember because it was so unusually fine a piece. He told of Whittlesey's phoning the next morning to tell of a bad cold he had contracted. Of their discovery a few minutes ago that the envelope which supposedly contained the emerald actually held an item from stock, of no great value. He mentioned their phoning Whittlesey's apartment after discovering the theft, but without result.

Voorhees made notes during Pember's recital. Then he asked a few questions—Whittlesey's address, what he looked like, and so on. When he inquired about the owner of the medallion, the fat man balked.

"Look," he protested. "Let's keep her out of this for the present. She doesn't know it's missing, and I don't want her in my hair any quicker than necessary. Maybe we won't have to call her in at all."

The detective shrugged. "I don't suppose we need her right now. One more thing—a description of the missing medallion." With this added to his notes, Voorhees left.

Isaac Pember leaned back in his creaking chair. A grin appeared on his heavy face. He began to laugh, almost soundlessly, his great body quivering. In smuggling, he had long since learned, there was nothing more important than having expert assistance!

Pember heard no more about Whittlesey and the emerald medallion until fourteen days later. Twice during the interval, solely to keep up appearances, he phoned Voorhees to needle him about his slowness. The second time he called he was told that

the detective was out of town on a case. Then on the fourteenth day Voorhees called him.

"Well, Pember," he said with unusual cheerfulness, "I just got back from England. And I have your boy Whittlesey—*and* the emerald. Want to come down to headquarters to prefer charges?"

Pember simulated hesitation. "N-no, I don't think so. If the emerald is all right, bring it—and Whittlesey—over here. I want to talk to the boy."

Eating butter creams, Pember sat back and waited. He hadn't felt so good in a long, long time.

Through the trick glass partition he saw Voorhees enter with Whittlesey and a uniformed policeman. As they came back through the shop to his office, he saw that Whittlesey and the patrolman were handcuffed together. He scowled. That was uncalled for. Then his frown became a grin. It would break Voorhees' heart to have to remove the manacles! He met them at the door of his office.

"Come in, gentlemen," he wheezed affably, "come in." As they entered, he put a puffy hand on Whittlesey's shoulder. "Robert," he said in fatherly tones, "why did you do it? You should have known you'd be caught. You can't buck the law." Robert hung his head.

"Okay, okay," Voorhees interrupted impatiently. "Before you kill the fatted calf for the prodigal, suppose you make sure we rescued the right jewelry. Maybe he switched the loot somewhere. So before you tell him you think he's learned his lesson and you'll give him another chance, take a look at this."

He drew a flat black jewelry case from an inside pocket, pressed the catch and displayed to Pember's eager gaze the most beautiful emerald he had ever seen. Oddly, the encircling diamonds seemed only to intensify the glory of the emerald. It was like looking at cold green flame in the depths of a miniature crystalline sea. Only Pember's habitual self-control prevented his betraying the excitement he felt. He merely nodded and grunted:

"That's it. No question about it." Casually he reached for the jewel.

"Unh-unh!" Voorhees snapped. "You don't get this till the owner signs a receipt. It's worth too much for me to be taking chances. Besides, it'll be needed as evidence."

Pember bristled. "You won't need evidence unless I press charges. And my signature should be as good as the owner's! I definitely don't want to bring my customer into this mess now that the gem has been recovered. She'd lose all her confidence in Pember's. Where's the form?"

Voorhees shrugged as he drew

two papers from his pocket, examined them and put one back. "That's what I thought you'd say, so I brought a form for you to sign." He indicated a position on the sheet. "Sign right here."

Quickly Pember glanced over the typewritten sheet. There was nothing unusual about it. It was simply an acknowledgment that he had received from the police department a medallion which it described, and that the medallion was the one which had been stolen from him by his assistant, Robert Whittlesey. He picked up a pen and scrawled his signature.

Carefully Voorhees folded the paper and put it into an inside pocket. Just as carefully he closed the jewel case and put it into the same pocket. Then he sat on a corner of Pember's desk and looked into the fat man's face with a contented smile.

"It has taken a long time, Pember," he said quietly, "but we've caught you at last! And this time there won't be any slip-up."

Pember's face grew crimson, and his fat jowls quivered. "What are you talking about?" he wheezed, a trace of uncertainty in his voice.

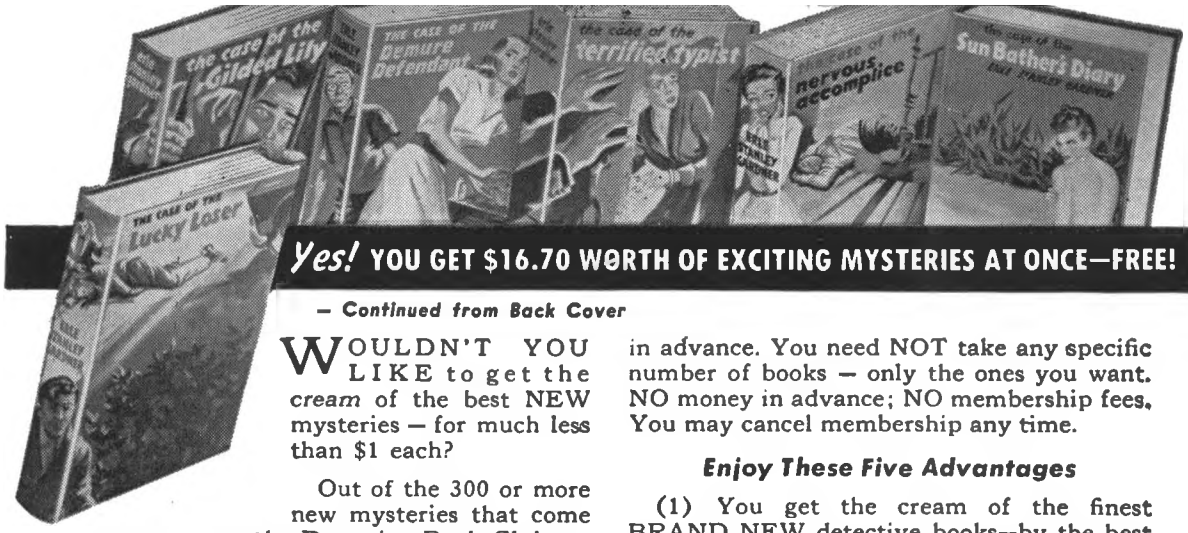
"Simply this, Pember. You walked into a trap!" Voorhees was obviously enjoying himself. "You see, the customs men planted this emerald on Cunningham. You never saw it before I brought it into this office. And, Pember, this will slay you. Mrs. Lydia Parkhurst gave them the idea! She bought the emerald from a big London house, and before they shipped it to her, she came up with this very excellent plan. She got tired of your persecution, and told all about her single fall from grace. And, Pember, for helping us trap you, she'll get off without a sentence." He chuckled. "Was she surprised when you called her to tell about the medallion being stolen!"

The fat man seemed on the verge of strangulation. His mouth worked soundlessly and his little eyes flared in helpless fury.

"Oh, yes," the detective added, "when your boy Whittlesey was given a preview of the situation, he proved himself to be a very smart lad. In exchange for preferential treatment he has told us a lot of things. Your fat goose is cooked! Thoroughly cooked!"

Casually Voorhees picked up the box of butter creams on the desk beside him. Apparently failing to notice the purple-faced fury of the fat man, he bit into a chocolate, then offered the box to its owner.

"Have one, Pember," he invited. "Better take two. Where you're going they're not part of the menu!"



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