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THE THRILLER

THE PAPER WITH A THOUSAND THRILLS

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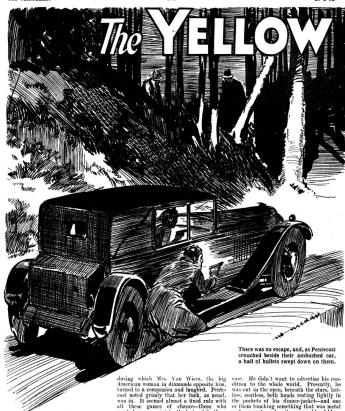


*A Sensational NEW
Mystery Novel*

The YELLOW DEATH

By EDMUND SNELL

The YELLOW



There was no escape, and, as Pentecost crouched beside their abandoned car, a hail of bullets swept down on them.

Chapter 1. FATE PLAYS A TRICK.

JANE PENTECOST, tall, elegant, six-foot-one in his socks, stretched the tablecloth instinctively, bending forward to watch that spinning disc and the little jumping ball upon which he had based his hopes. Around the long table other people watched with equal interest. Smart frocks and gleaming shirt-fronts surrounded Pentecost on all sides, gamblers like himself, some sitting, some crowding in behind the chairs.

A cigarette hung limply from his lip; he was aware of bright lights, mirrors, the strains of distant music. The ball rolled into a groove and stopped. There was a sigh of relief now that the tension was broken, a general burst of conversation

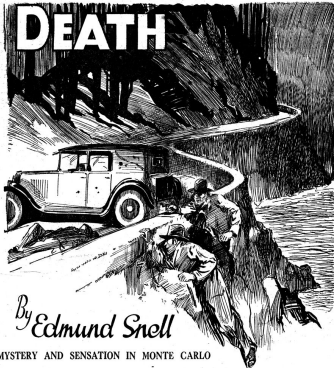
during which Mrs. Van Wier, the big American woman in diamonds opposite him, turned to a companion and laughed. Pentecost noted grudgingly that her luck, as usual, was in. It seemed almost a fixed rule with all these games of chance—those who wanted money consistently lost, while those who had none that they could do with already couldn't do wrong!

A croupier's rake, manipulated by a little Italian in the most matter-of-fact way possible, hovered in front of Pentecost, then slid away, carrying his last pile of counters with it. He rose and pushed back his chair. There as fear from the press behind tried to take possession of it together, and there was a mild scrimmage.

As he gained the stairs, he caught himself laughing aloud. He was braver, bolder, braver in the wild? It was a man's game, anyway. He had known that before he started. His cigarette burnt his lip. He ejected it hastily and lit another with shaking fingers. A couple passed him, coming down, and he tried to look at his

own. He didn't want to advertise his condition to the whole world. Presently, he was out in the open, beneath the stars, listless, rootless, both hands resting lightly in the pockets of his dinner-jacket—and one of them touching something that was metal and compact, and quite as capable of blowing him into eternity as a Service pistol ten times its size!

The air was keen, invigorating. Monte Carlo, the amazing paradise of fools, shined white and dazzling on all sides, white terraces and balustrades, a kind of permanent exhibition of folly, of bright lights and palms and wonderfully light-colored gardens. Two men, standing near the curb, stared after him and whispered something. He bit his lip. Detectives possibly, plain-clothes men whose duty it was to help to keep up the reputation of the place, to prevent unscrupulous bluffers like himself from blowing out their brains! If it came to a pinch, they'd escort him to some other and pack him off to England with a third-class ticket in his pocket. Pentecost



By Edmund Snell

MYSTERY AND SENSATION IN MONTE CARLO

grinned at the thought. What for? To enable him to sponge on his relations, to haunt public libraries looking for a job? Nothing doing! He was going out, according to plan. He had worked hard all his life, but luck had been against him. The girl upon whom he had pinned his hopes had failed him, turned him down. He had had nothing to live for when he had climbed from the "Blue Train" a month ago; now he had not even the means to live. The crowd's way out, people called it. He wasn't so sure about that. John Poutroost had original views on most subjects, and the matter of life and death was one of them. He believed that it was the more honorable course to settle the issue with a clean bullet, rather than become a burden.

He strode easily, shoulders swinging, trying to give the outward appearance of a man without a care in the world, to put any inquisitive watchers off their guard. A girl met him on the pathway, a pretty,

slim woman in a blue cloak whom he had noticed several times at the tables. He had spoken to her once when they had been neighbors. The fact that these two detective-fellows were sauntering after him prompted him to speak again.

"Good evening!" he called. "Not playing tonight?"

She turned and stopped.

"No, not to-night. I didn't feel like it somehow. You're played, of course?"

Poutroost nodded.

"Ever since dinner," he said.

"Any luck?"

The taller of the two men was almost level with them. Poutroost guessed that he was all ears, and lied convincingly.

"Amazing," he told the wearer of the blue cloak. "I'm going back in a minute to make some more."

The blue shadow passed on, moving more quickly than him. His companion stopped by, walking on the other side, joined his colleague lower down the avenue and remained

with him. Big brown eyes stared up at Poutroost from flushed cheeks. Red lips moved.

"I'm in a hole," they said, "and I'm looking for somebody to help me. I want twenty pounds, that's all. I'd wire it back as soon as I get to London. I—I don't want you to think I'm in the habit of asking men for money, easy I thought—"

Poutroost frowned.

"Well?"

"I thought you might be the sort of man who would understand."

"Books, eh?" suggested Poutroost, with just the ghost of a smile, knowing better than anybody what it felt like. The low white wall looked inviting. They sat down, side by side, and the man undressed his wrist-watch—the only article of any value at all that he possessed.

"Pop that," he told her ironically. "It might bring you in a pound or two."

The watch had initials and a date on the back. "J. P. from S. M. 5/9/31." John

Pentecost from Sylvia Marchant. He had sent it back to her when the break came, and she had returned it promptly with a hurried covering note. He hadn't had a heart to pass it himself. She hadn't interested him at all after that; otherwise he would have noticed that the lady in the blue dance-dress was good-looking above the average, unusually attractive, with decent hands and ankles, English, too, or American. There was a slight, though decidedly attractive, twang that he hadn't managed to place.

She was pushing the watch towards him, the strap still warm from his wrist.

"No, thank you, I couldn't, really. You said you'd been lucky, and I thought—"

"Thought I was speaking the truth, what? Well, I wasn't. I'm in the same boat as yourself—not a cent in the world. Funny, isn't it?" He spoke grimly, jostling with fate like his dagger, tugging at his pocket, touched the automatic again, and he became conscious with a sudden impatience, wanting to cut short the interview and get on with the business he had in hand. If he went on talking much longer, he felt he would lose his nerve. He was in the wall when she caught his sleeve, jelling his back.

"I'm sorry. I wouldn't have bothered you if I'd known." She stared into the night. "Miss isn't such a hard case really. I've a bed and a job—of sorts. It was just the job I wanted to get away from. I wanted to throw it up, to get away from people I'm anxious to associate with, to begin with a clean slate."

Pentecost stared at her.

"You're employed—here—in Monaco?"

She shook her head.

"It's not exactly that. If I were working here, I shouldn't be allowed in the Casino. No local people are. I've a job with somebody who's come here—a human culture, a man you would like to hit!" Her voice dropped to a whisper. "Nardini," she continued, not looking at him. "He boasts that the police of all five continents are after him, and that they'll never find him. I've been playing from time to time, slipping away when I thought he wasn't looking, hoping to make enough to get away from here. He says, if I do, he'll send men after me—to kill me?"

She held out her hand.

"Good night, Mr.—"

"Pentecost," said the man, feeling that at this juncture nothing mattered very much. "John Pentecost, the world's champion failure?"

"I don't believe that. Miss's Youngs lecturer. Perhaps we shall meet again."

"Believe—"

A white hand, driving in a handbag, produced an insignificant bundle of French notes.

"Please take these. I wish I could lend you more. Your luck may change tomorrow!"

Pentecost thanked her and went on his way without them. He found a place presently, a sheltered spot in some ferns, with the Mediterranean making white foam around the rocks countless feet below. Moving on to a narrow ledge, he drew the pistol from his pocket. His thumb shifted the catch from "safety," his forefinger circled the trigger. With any sort of luck he would pitch over after he had fired, and relieve the municipality of a responsibility. The wind carried music from the Casino across to where he stood; a cold moon, sailing in a cloudless firmament, cast long shadows from the trees. It was lonely out there, the ideal spot. Odd, unimportant things drew his attention—the lights of a train on the mainland, looking like a toy thing toasting its way through a cardboard panorama, a clump of pines on an eminence,

the headlights of a car sweeping the Caspian Road.

The watch, back on his wrist again, showed a quarter to midnight. Funny that that girl should have asked him for money if he was like when you asked the way of somebody in a new district. The man who asked was always a complete stranger in the place! A three-cent note across his torso, all lights again, some floating police heard from the East, Southampton or Tilbury he guessed, slipping through the Straits of Gibraltar and up the Bay. He would have liked a tinner or every time he had done the same trip!

He shrugged his shoulders and raised the automatic slowly to his forehead.

"I shouldn't do that, if I were you," said a deep voice close behind him.

Muttering something to himself, Pentecost stuffed the automatic out of sight and swung on his heel—to see a large man with a beard and an opera hat standing a few paces behind him.

Pentecost was amazed.

"What the devil's it got to do with you?" he demanded rudely.

The stranger moved his head to and fro several times, removing the cigar from his lips to do so.

"Nothing at all, I admit. Your life's your own. To prevent you from doing what you wish with it would be the shortest impertinence." He reached down and straightened his creasing vest. "I was only going to suggest that five hundred pounds and a trifling risk might be preferable to—er—well, it's a cold night for this sort of thing, don't you think, Mr. Pentecost?"

The other retreated from his ledge and came closer, still staring.

"Afraid you have the advantage of me," he stammered, wondering where the stranger could have heard his name.

The stranger chuckled and gave a suitably jerky bow.

"Nardini, Mr. Pentecost. Dr. Eddie Nardini—and the offer I mentioned just now is perfectly genuine."

THE LUCK CHANGER.

"What did you say, name?"

Nardini laughed again.

"At the risk of offending you, I must confess that I have had my eye on you for some time. I made it my business to inquire about you at your hotel. The moment I noticed you I said to myself, 'Now, here is a young man, of undoubted capabilities, who is going to perpetrate something really desperate if I don't stop him.' And, you see, I was right!"

"A philanthropist!" muttered Pentecost ironically.

Nardini shook his head.

"Oh, dear, no! Nothing of the kind. It happens that I have uses for really desperate men."

Pentecost granted, but said nothing. He was turning over in his mind the extraordinary coincidence of Nardini turning up when he did—and himself confessing to be broke ten minutes before to Youngs Lorrey in the Casino gardens. Frankly, he didn't believe it was pure coincidence. He thought he could picture the girl in the blue cloak hurrying to her employer and telling him all she had heard. She might have guessed what he intended to do by the striped sign—his which he had left her.

They were walking back through the gardens now; Nardini with his overcoat buttoned across his enormous chest, Pentecost cold, dazed and more than a little unstrung. This coming back to life when he had worked himself up to the point of destroying himself was a painful anticlimax. He should have been lifeless by this time, battered on the rocks, drifting somewhere below the surface of the Mediterranean. Instead of which he was keeping step with

the strange man in the opera hat, prompted partly by the promise of "five hundred pounds and a trifling risk," partly by the magnetic personality of somebody who had already been described to him as "a human volcano," a man he would like to hit!

"Cigar?" suggested Nardini, offering the other his case.

"Thanks," murmured Pentecost, and helped himself.

Another curious thing struck him: He had been in Monte Carlo a while now—and never remembered seeing eyes on the Dr. Eddie Nardini character. That he refused to have been watching him all the time! Pentecost had grown to know most of the habitués of the gaming tables by sight, many of them people, in fact, who never played at all. He could hardly have overlooked so conspicuous a personality as Nardini.

A closed car was waiting in the roadway, a long luxury-car—cream with black lines and roof. As they approached, a little dapper man in chauffeur's uniform leaped from the driving seat and whirled open a door. Nardini signed to Pentecost to get in first. They disposed themselves in separate corners on upholstery that looked as if it had only just come from the works. A smooth, almost imperceptible chivver from the self-starter set the engine in motion. The car crept on its way, carrying Pentecost meditating on the immediate future, and conscious that all blinds were tightly drawn across the windows.

The immediate future seemed to bother him. After all, he had committed himself to nothing as yet, and there remained still some hours of darkness in which to stage a second attempt at self-destruction. A sentence flashed across his memory: "He boasts that the police of all five continents are after him, and that they'll never find him!" Glancing along the seat, to see the glowing tip of Nardini's cigar and eyes, hard as steel, staring at him over it.

"A nice car!" remarked the bigger man.

"Yes," returned Pentecost; "very—"

"Cars are like dogs—in some respects," assented Nardini aloud. "One talks in part with them when the time comes." He relaxed into silence. Pentecost shivered in his corner, wondering what the diables he had meant by that.

The car stopped presently, and he heard the insistent tapping of the horn. "Gates created open; they drive an over wheel round like loose grass and stopped again. The door opened, revealing a tall light of shallow steps, with an electric light burning at the top. Pentecost followed Nardini up the flight. In the brief space before the door closed behind them he had caught glimpses of a garden of exotic plants, of the lights of Monaco glowing against a violet horizon, putting the stars into insignificance, of a dark sea fretting against the rocks over which the villa creased piled dangerously.

Nardini's face, cigar and all, jerked round suddenly. He was leaning up his coat.

"Any idea where you are?" he demanded.

Pentecost spread out his hands.

"None at all," he confessed.

"If not so much the better!" He pressed the opera hat that against his chest. "Walk there a second." Tying through an adjacent doorway, switching on the light as he went, he left Pentecost a trifle bewildered, staring into the scared eyes of the girl who had admitted them.

"You?" she gasped, and broke off, listening to Nardini's movements in the other room.

Pentecost's face was like a mask, expressionless, grim.

"I imagine it's you I have to thank."

"What do you mean?"

He drove closer.

"Didn't you tell Nardini I was going to shoot myself?"

He shook his head.

"I didn't know! You weren't going to do that?"

"I was, and I may still." Leaning against a half-disintegrated wall, he surveyed a long passage, gleaming parquet flooring, oak stairs with a wrought-iron rail and handrails. "What's this place? A den of thieves?"

Yvonne nodded toward the open door.

"He heard you, then?"

"There came a sound from the inner room as if somebody was opening and closing drawers."

"Yes," said Poutouet. "Told me he had need for a really desperate character. Any idea what the job's going to be like?"

To his other astonishment, her face had gone as white as death.

"Don't do it," she whispered hoarsely. "Keep out of this. You don't know what it means. Promise me—"

Nardini stepped into the hall, closing the door after him. He beckoned to his guest.

"Come along, Poutouet. We'll have our little talk now. Yvonne, you can go to bed."

He swung off past the stairs. At the far end of the passage John Poutouet looked back. Yvonne was still standing where he had left her, staring after him with fear, stark and unmistakable, in her eyes!

"They cut down in case chairs in a room that was all windows. Coolly curtains were drawn apart, and Poutouet could see nothing but the sea and scattered lights. The place was warm—centrally-heated, he imagined, although he could detect no signs of a radiator. A man in evening-dress brought in drinks on a silver tray, set it on a small table between them, and went silently out.

"If you would care for whisky," said Nardini, "the decanter is by your elbow. If you prefer absinthe or cognac—"

He helped himself to the former, letting water drip into the glass through a fat dome of vapor, poised on a special spoon.

Poutouet took whisky.

"I'm stopping short at murder!" he said out suddenly. "I suppose you realize that?"

Nardini surveyed him with brows upraised.

"My dear Poutouet!" he objected with an air of injured innocence. "What a very unrefined remark!"

The other bent forward.

"I believe in getting down to brass tacks as soon as possible. Dr. Nardini, I want to know what the job is, and what exactly I'm expected to do. Don't think for a moment that I've any illusions. If you didn't imagine I'd be useful to you, you wouldn't have gone to the trouble of stopping me killing myself—and you're not paying out five hundred pounds standing for nothing!"

The other pressed the tips of his thick fingers together.

"No," he admitted placidly. "That's true enough." He opened the green field in his glass slowly and put it down again. "I am a man, Mr. Poutouet, who suffers abnormally from curiosity—other people's curiosity. Actually, I am of a retiring nature—and this curiosity annoys me. As soon as I find I can bear it no longer, I decide to disappear. At one time this disappearing business was comparatively simple, but gradually it became more and more difficult. Quite between ourselves, I have looked a sleeping berth on the Côte d'Azur Express, leaving here at 2.32 to-morrow morning for Paris. My plans were to drive to the station in that very nice car you were in just now, to step on to the train with as little fuss and ceremony as possible—and not to return. You follow me?"

Poutouet smiled.

"Oh, quite!"

Nardini's fingers danced on the table.

"Unfortunately, I received word this afternoon from an extremely reliable source that my movements were being watched. Sleeping-car berths are expensive, Mr. Poutouet, and one hates waiting them."

The other glanced up sharply.

"And you are looking for somebody to take your place—in expensive you?"

"Exactly. You will drive to the station in my car, disguised as nearly as possible as myself, and furnished with my passport and tickets. Among other things, you will carry a small locked bag, which I will hand you myself before you leave. You will enjoy the experience of traveling in one of the most luxuriously appointed trains in the world."

"And what happens when I get to Paris?"

Nardini threw back his head and laughed.

"The chances are, my friend, that you never will!"

Poutouet's jaw dropped.

"I see," he said. "There may be a hold-up somewhere along the route?"

"Nardini went on sipping absinthe slowly.

"The French police," suggested Poutouet, seeing that the other was silent.

"Very probably."

Poutouet frowned at the tiled floor, trying to see daylight. He believed Nardini to be a crook, the leader of a gang, as likely as not, but for some of those cunning necklaces and earrings and other pretensions worn by the smart women of the Casino.

He was taking all that into account, but even if his host were the "banana venture" Yvonne had pointed him as, he didn't see any colossal risk in being arrested on the train-de-luxe in mistake for him. Five hundred pounds seemed big pay for a little inconvenience and possibly a few hours' detention until the police had discovered their mistake. He should have thought Nardini could have found a score of men willing to carry out the deception for a tenth of the reward.

Nardini pined the whole length of the glassed-in sun-room and came back again, pausing by Poutouet's chair.

"Of course," he purred easily, "you may stop a bullet on the way. I'm told there is a prize on my head—and the French police are apt to become excited. In that case, you'd be just where you intended to be when I met you, without the trouble of having to perform that painful duty yourself. You see, you're really nothing to lose, have you?"

"No," agreed Poutouet. "I'll do it."

Nardini threw his

smoked cigar to the floor, crushing it out with the heel of a patent shoe. A strange smile hovered on his lips that made Poutouet believe that there was something behind this affair of which the other had not spoken. Nardini had his wallet in his hand and was counting out some notes. He passed them to Poutouet.

"Fifty pounds on account," he explained. "You will be handed the balance as the train. I want you to settle your hotel bill and take what luggage you possess to the station. Buy yourself an ordinary ticket and have the things registered through to Paris by the afternoon train. Then meet the driver of that car we came in at the same place, at midnight. Is that quite clear?"

"Perfectly," returned Poutouet, and tucked the French equivalent of fifty pounds into his big pocket. They passed down the passage and into the garden, by the same flight of steps. The car was waiting; the same chauffeur descended briskly from his seat and threw open the door. Stairs and roots iron, and the tidiness Mediterranean plaiding lashed far below! Nardini extended a large hand, and Poutouet gripped it.

"It's a bargain, then. If you fail me, Mr. Poutouet, look out for yourself; that's all."

The car dropped him where it had picked him up less than an hour before. Using back to the Casino for his coat and hat, an irresistible temptation, asked Poutouet to try his luck again. What did it matter, anyway? He was booked for a cozy ven-



"Who are you?" Poutouet demanded. The stranger drew himself up. "My name is Nardini," he said, and the other started as he recognized the name as that of the master crook against whom he had been warned only a moment before.

lure with every chance, as long as he could see, of going out on the way! Mrs. Van Wier was still down there, glittering with emeralds and diamonds, with a small assembly of courtiers to justify her devotion to the game! Prefectoz found a chair near her, resolved to see half Nardini's fifty—and then go home.

His brain boiled. His first hundred francs had come home a winner. They were pushing tokens towards him, instead of taking them away! He played haphazard, any old hand—because nothing mattered very much, the ball ran for him. Mrs. Van Wier's mountain dwindled into a barren plain; she struggled for shoulders and departed. Prefectoz, left alone with a school fee, "sold his luck" until he could ride no more. The place spun round him. He had a dim memory of tipping crooks, shaking hands with people he had never seen before, staggering up stairs and into the loom air of night, richer than he had ever been in his life!

On the coverlet of the bed at his hotel he scattered his winnings, then rang up the night-porter for champagne. For want of better company, he made the porter stop and drink with him. Life was good again, well worth the living! It was wonderful how a sudden change of fortune healed old sores! Filling the porter's glass for a second time, he opened the french windows and stepped out on to a shadow balcony. Some of the violet had gone out of the blossoms. The stars were pale; streaks of grey were appearing on the eastern horizon.

"Aaaa!" He flung back over his shoulder into the lighted room, and craned his glass to the last drop. A man who was strolling under the avenue of trees opposite stood up sharply, saw Prefectoz standing there, and passed on. Prefectoz stared after him, vaguely perturbed in his mind, owing to his level and west in. He sent the porter back to his post with a thousand-franc note in his pocket and a grin on his wrinkled countenance which ran from ear to ear.

Prefectoz undressed, determined to find Yvonne in the morning and give her that twenty pounds. Nardini could have his fifty, too, if he could find him. He would have to detail someone else for that job, some poor devil who was sleep on his back and wanted the money. Slating before the dressing-table, he glanced at his own reflection in the mirror.

"We're rich, old man!" he told it—and then his face fell. He had remembered Nardini's parting threat and the unpleasant emphasis the human nature had put behind it. "If you fail me—look out for yourself; that's all!" He had given his word, too. That was unfortunate. The only hope was to go to Nardini early, explain the circumstances, and ask him to let him off. The trouble was he didn't know in what part of Monaco his villa was, or what it was called. Midnight, the hour appointed for his meeting with the chauffeur, would be too late.

At all costs he must find the girl.

Shedding to the window to look at the dawn, he noticed that was again, standing in the road, looking up at the hotel—a dapper figure in a dark cloak, the broad brim of his felt hat pulled well down over his eyes. Prefectoz drew the curtain and glanced at the painted ceiling. He believed it was the fellow in evening-dress who had served Nardini and himself with drinks!

THE STRAGGLE ON THE CLIFF.

So he was being followed! He supposed, in the circumstances, he must expect that sort of thing. He held fifty pounds of Nardini's money, and Nardini would have him tracked until he was safely in the sleeping-trail and on his way to Paris. This spying business annoyed him, nevertheless, comprehensible as it was. It

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implied, among other things, that his word wasn't good enough, that Nardini believed him as shifty-eyed and cunning as himself! He should have taken Yvonne's advice, and cleared out, promising nothing. And yet, if he had done that, he would have missed getting that bundle of notes that had been the means of making his rich. More than probably, too, he would have been dead by this time.

John Prefectoz slept, breakfasted at eleven and went out, looking for the girl. The news of his success had gone round. Comparative strangers stopped him in the gardens to congratulate him, newspaper-reporters dogged him, countless people tried to touch him for money. Two things weighed on his mind: He realized that if all these people knew of his luck Nardini would know it, too—and he sensed, rather than knew for certain, that he was being shadowed wherever he went.

He locked his winnings, gave up his room at the hotel, settled his bill and had his baggage carried to the station. The girl failed to show up. In the afternoon, carrying out Nardini's instructions to the letter, he registered his things to Paris and bought a ticket. He banished the tables after that, but resolutely refrained from playing. The lure of that little jumping ball was gone; he had had his lesson. Ten-time came, twilight, darkness, and still there was no sign of Yvonne. He hung about in those gilded halls of pleasure, sunning them, straining his eyes to catch the flutter of a blue dance-sleeve coming down the stairs. Dragging himself away presently, he scouted the gardens, striding restlessly along gleaming pathways, trying to decide what he should do.

Nardini's threat didn't bother him unduly; it was that confounded conscience of his that was the trouble. He had made his pact with Nardini, and he supposed he ought to keep it. After all, look at it how he might, it was the other's serving him from outside that had changed his luck. The sumner of all contracts was that things that happened once they were signed and sealed could not be taken into account. He had shaken hands on the deal—and that was all there was to it. Inconvenience at the moment was no excuse for going back on his word. And yet it was inconvenient, definitely.

Nine o'clock struck somewhere. Only three more hours to go before he was due for his appointment! There was nothing else for it; he would have to go through with it. Hardly thinking what he was doing, he had taken a narrow track running through iron-gated pines with distant lights and the sea showing through. It was silent in there, deserted. He passed to light a cigarette, glancing behind him as he threw the match aside to see if Nardini's spy was following. He caught his breath.

A woman was coming towards him on the soft earth carpeted with pine-needles, a slim woman in a light cloak!

Stepping back into the trees, he watched her come up.

"Oh, it's you!" she cried. "I hoped it was."

Prefectoz raised his hat gravely. "Good evening, Miss Lorraine. You wanted to speak to me?"

"Yes. I wanted to stop you taking that train to Paris. You'll be mad if you go."

"You hear that, don't you? It's a trap."

Prefectoz nodded calmly. "A trap, eh?"

"Of course. Didn't you see through it when he told you? Why should Nardini become interested in you all of a sudden? Why should he want to supply you with a deeper to Paris, and all that money?"

Prefectoz laughed. "My dear lady," he said, "that is a question I have been asking myself frequently since our interview."

She leaned against a tree, her blue cloak wrapped around her, two small bonnets above showing beneath the branches of her flock.

"Listen," she pursued softly. "I didn't go to bed. I hid somewhere and heard all he told you. I suppose you're wondering why I did, why I took so much interest in a complete stranger I had met in the gardens. Well, I'll tell you that first. Ten offered me the only thing you had in the world—your watch—when you were down and out, just because I asked you to help me. I'm not crazy about you. Don't think that. I suppose I've seen too much of the wrong sort of men to be crazy about any of you. But I—I appreciated your offer; that's all."

"Nardini doesn't look like you think; his suit makes him up. The police don't know what he really looks like. You're not travelling alone on that train. One of the gang will be there, too, in the same coach. His job's to murder you on the journey—to murder the man who lets the police will think is Nardini. They've a big case on 'em; it's been planned for weeks. Unless something goes wrong, the police won't be wise until the train is well in its way, but there will be detectives on the train who don't mean to let the supposed Nardini get off."

Prefectoz whistled softly.

"Like that, is it?" he murmured. "And the small locked bag—?"

"There'll be some of the lot in that—real stuff, not paste. Nardini believes in doing things properly. What they've got to think is that you're double-crossed the gang and that one of them's followed you and killed you. If they allowed you to live, you'd talk and give the game away."

Prefectoz lit another cigarette.

"Thanks," he returned dryly. "It's as well to know where we stand!"

She glanced nervously over her shoulder and held out her hand.

"Good-bye," she whispered, "and good luck!"

Prefectoz drew out his pocket-book.

"Just a minute, Miss Lorraine. There's the matter of that twenty pounds to be settled yet." He scribbled something on an envelope. "That's my address in London. You may care to have it."

He took the notes and tucked them into her flock.

"Good-bye," she said again.

She hurried off, turned suddenly and came back. "They're in the trees," she gasped, "watching me. I saw Joe Zena on the path. What am I going to do?"

Prefectoz had seen the man, too, sitting like a dark shadow between the pines. He made after him without a word. The phantom stole behind one of those broad mats

and a knife, skillfully pitched from cover, swept Pontecost's hat from his head, pinning it to a tree.

"Like that, is it?" muttered the man who had gambled with his life, and pressed on notwithstanding, trailing a little figure that staggered over the pine needles towards the cliff edge. A tongue of flame leaped from behind a rock, with a queer popping report close to its heels. There was another and yet another. As the last of the bullets whizzed past him, Pontecost muttered aloud, "Easy as my friend, if you want me to catch that train!"

He stared behind him, thinking for the moment that there were others of the gang in the neighborhood; but saw nobody. Women's nerves, he told himself—seeing a dozen people when there was only Joe Zena! Probably the fellow had been listening. He would have to stop his nonsense, prevent him getting back to Nardini with the story that Yvonne and himself were in league. It didn't matter to him particularly; he could look after himself. It was the girl he was thinking about. If Nardini suspected she was double-crossing or spreading anything wild he would be lost. He felt that he owed Yvonne's whole lot. Whether he took that sleeper or not, he knew the type of man he had to deal with. He supposed the woman would be instructed to go through his pockets and bring back what remained of Nardini's money.

The trees thinned out, and John Pontecost started. Chance, coincidence, a curious sequence of events had carried his quarry and himself to the spot he had selected the night before at which to destroy himself! He recognized the jutting cliff of rock, the peculiar outline of the bushes.

Zip! A fourth bullet passed his head so closely that he felt the wind of it. The shooter skirted a boulder and turned to retake aim. On the far side he met Pontecost, unsuspectingly! A lean arm, shooting suddenly out, sent Zena flat on his back; the force of the blow set him rolling once he had landed, rolling towards the edge of the precipice. He let out a wild cry and disengaged his weapon, trying to save himself with his hands. Pontecost's fingers, grasping a flying snail, jerked his owner roughly into safety. Joe Zena, half sitting up on the rock, glared malevolently into the eyes of the man he had tried to murder. His gaze dropped a couple of feet and focused upon the dark barrel of a small automatic pistol.

"Better believe yourself, Joe," advised Pontecost sternly. "I'm not shooting any nonsense."

He sat down, because it was easier than standing, watching a little white-haired rat of a man with a mop of dark, warty hair muttered over his forehead.

"You're a nasty bit of work, if you'll excuse my saying so," he pursued.

Joe Zena, lying back on his elbows, spat! Remembering a damaged jaw, he brought up a hand and felt it. "One day you pay for this," he muttered in broken English. "Suppose! I make you pay!"

Pontecost lit a cigarette. Yvonne Larimer crept through the trees to his side.

"What are we going to do?" she demanded fearfully.

At sight of her Joe Zena uttered a string of curses and tried to spring to his feet. Pontecost's shoe, taking him in the pit of the stomach, pressed him down.

"I know," spluttered the would-be assassin, struggling against the shoe. "I hear all you say, you understand. What happens when I tell Nardini, eh? You get the Yellow Death on your track; that's all!"

Pontecost stooped to the edge and peered down. Easy enough to his gaze, a line from jutting from a crevice. Deep down, the waves fretted around pointed rocks like teeth.

"For two pins, Joe Zena," he said, "I'd throw you over."

Something rustled behind him, and the girl screamed. He turned in time to see his recent adversary crouch like a panther on the ledge and spring. Swift as lightning, he stopped aside. A chunk of rock, dislodged by his foot, went rattling on the downward course Joe Zena had intended him to take. Zena came, too, head down, arms extended like a wrestler, hoping to catch Pontecost unawares. Pontecost, poised on the very limit of the rock, saw in a flash that he had out-manoeuvred him. Joe Zena, in his mad rush to obliterate his enemy, was achieving his own destruction. The impetus carried him too far. Pontecost, none too sure himself, grabbed at a flying coat-tail as Zena stumbled over the brink. The material gave between his fingers, leaving him struggling to retain his balance. A wild cry, a miniature avalanche of rubble—and Zena had dropped clear into space.

Yvonne crept beside Pontecost and peered down.

"Horrible!" she whispered suddenly.

"You didn't do it."

He shook his head.

"No," he tried to "out" me. But he's gone, all the same!" He wiped his forehead and went back slowly to find his hat.

MRS. VAN WERKER'S JEWELS.

The girl thanked Pontecost again, and left him. Facing Zena's knife from the blade and stuck it in, ignoring two long cuts in the grey felt. The knife interested him. It was long, born as a razor, and along the lower handle knotholes had been cut. Zena's method, he imagined, of keeping count of his victims! He closed

it presently and dropped it into a pocket. Ten minutes passed, and he was still standing there, trying to decide upon some definite plan of action. There were no shadows drifting in the trees now. Joe Zena, the man who had been destined to hang on his trail, was dead.

He was hesitating between using the ticket he had bought and taking the first train to Paris, and waiting about for the cream-colored car with the black lines. Now that his spy was silenced, he could leave Monaco inconspicuously by taxi and pick up the night express at Nice or Cannes. To return to Nardini's villa, now that he knew what was in store for him, would be like running his head into a noose. The question of contact no longer entered into it. Nardini had exacted a promise from him under false pretences. He would have liked to have had no further interview with that gentleman though, to have told him precisely what he thought of him and given him the killing he deserved. A thought struck him. There was always the possibility of going to the police and having the man followed. The only drawback to that was that, in surrounding the villa and roving in Nardini and his colleagues, Yvonne Larimer very probably would be roped in, too.

He was on the path, retracing his steps towards the Casino, when the sound of voices close at hand prevented him to step back into the trees. Flattened against a trunk, he made out two dense shadows against the night, a tall man and a shorter, and the voice of the larger man he recognized as Nardini's. The two passed quickly to where Pontecost lurked. The brightness of good lights waited to his nostrils. "You're certain he came along this way?" Nardini was saying.



When Nardini had vanished through the door, the girl spoke to Pontecost in a frightened voice. "Don't do it," she whispered hoarsely. "Keep out of this. You don't know what it means."

"Positive," insisted his companion in a thinner voice. "He left me in the garden to follow the Englishman. You saw come through this way, too, about five minutes after him."

"Yves?" What was she doing here?" "Don't know. It looked queer to me. I had my own job to look after. I'd put your note in my pocket to Mrs. Van Wiers. I was in the road opposite her hotel when I thought I heard firing—three, one after the other, and a fourth a bit later. I may have been mistaken, but it sounded like Joe's gun."

The two men stopped.

"What should he want to shoot for?" demanded Nardini. "My instructions to him were to keep Pontecost in sight all the time. I didn't expect him to give trouble; I only wanted to be sure of him."

There was a long silence.

"Supposing he's in with the police?" suggested the shorter man. "Supposing you're

put your money on the wrong horse? We'd look nice then, wouldn't we?"

Nardini laughed.

"Think I'm getting too old for my job?" he retorted. "Thank I don't know a damned Englishman from a French sleuth? Pontecost made a lot of money at the tables after he left me last night. That's all I'm worrying about. Five hundred pounds and a luxury berth to Paris is tempting in any circumstances, but he may not be so ready to face the risk—again he's played again and lost it all."

The other nodded.

"There is that," he admitted. "It takes a clever man to know when to leave off. Wonder where Joe is?"

"She had my note?" asked Nardini, changing the subject.

"Yes. I've got the reply here somewhere. She's expecting the car at eleven. Captain Richards'll be with her, though I don't think he'll give much trouble. I'm watching outside, to see if she's got all the stuff on her when she leaves, then I nip back to pick up what I can in her suite. The hold-up started on the coast road in the Costa's papers." A hoarse chuckle drifted to Pontecost through the trees. "It's scuttler after that, eh, and join up across the Italian frontier, with those two dumb-bells clinging to the wrong Mister Nardini on the case? And, if the Wolf does his job properly, he won't split."

Nardini was standing in the centre of the path, with his back to Pontecost.

"All right," he retorted calmly. "You know what's expected of you. See that you carry it out. I'll be off now. You'd better carry on through the wood and keep in touch with Zena until a quarter to eleven. Be close to her now. And no drinking, mind. We need clear heads for this business."

He struck off, passing Pontecost again. The latter, peering cautiously, realised for the first time that Dr. Edith Nardini had no brand!

Nardini hunched off into the distance. The second creek hitared on the track for some seconds, watching him, then turned abruptly and made off in the opposite direction. Pontecost emerged presently, a trifle dazed at the significance of what he had overheard. Mrs. Van Wiers, then, was the big job that was on tonight! She was being trapped, too! There was to be a hold-up on the coast road, at some lonely spot selected for the purpose!

He quickened his steps, intending to seek out Mrs. Van Wiers and get her wise. He held no brief for Mrs. Van Wiers, but it would be something if he could queer Dr. Nardini's pitch. He turned up his collar as he re-entered the garden, and pulled the brim of his damaged hat over his eyes. The skies had cleared over and already the pavements were wet. He was glad that it was raining; it made his efforts at self-concealment less conspicuous. It dawned on him, as he hurried along, that, strange how he might, a capricious Destiny kept dragging him back into the queer, mysterious undercurrent agitated by Nardini and his associates.

The thing was as innocuous as the tables. Nardini, in Pontecost's imagination, loomed over the fashionable world that thronged Monte Carlo like a hideous octopus, with a tentacle always ready to drag him back at the psychological moment. Five hundred pounds and a trilling risk, Yvonne Corriener, a duty imposed on him by overbearing two men plotting in the trees. He resolved to be firm after this, to warn that wealthy American woman to look out for herself, and charter a car to take him to Nice. It would be better, in any case, to leave Monaco before the Nardini gang discovered that Zena was dead.

Zena had just been seen following him, the short man had heard shots. Some of them was going to credit that Joe Zena overbalanced and killed himself. They would jump immediately to the conclusion that Pontecost had sensed that he was being trailed, had barred his passage in the cliff-edge, and grabbed him over. None however knew that Nardini would have thought the same. It wouldn't be healthy for Yves or himself to be seen abroad in Monte Carlo in the morning.

It was ten twenty by his watch when he dropped down the stairs into the Casino. He heaved a sigh of relief. Mrs. Van Wiers was there, at her usual place. He espied the loan man with the sweep of dark moustache at her side was Captain Richards. Pontecost mingled with the standing players, trying to edge his way near her. The task proved a physical impossibility. A little hump-backed Greek, with the proverbial poker-face, was trying out a "system" with marked success, and the excitement was intense. A solid wall of humanity, five or six deep, interposed between him and his objective.

The dice spun, the little ball rolled and jumped and leaped, croupiers' voices slid over a green cloth, giving and taking, but taking mostly. There was the usual breaking of the spell, the beam of concentration; members of the Latin races expressing their disappointment or elation, shouting it out to all the world, English and Americans taking it philosophically. Pontecost found himself studying faces, the flushed face of a girl playing for the first time, the set expression of the habitué, despair in the eyes of a bearded Frenchman, who left his seat much as Pontecost had vacated his the night before, sought his way through to the open and made with uncertain steps for the stairs. Another prospective outside? He didn't know. The lure of the roulette machine gripped him at intervals, but he fought it down, concentrating his attention on the issue he had at stake. Somehow or other, he had got to speak to Mrs. Van Wiers, to whisper a warning in her ear, to stymie that hold-up on the lonely coast road.

Time slipped by quickly. It was roughly a quarter to eleven when Mrs. Van Wiers touched her companion on the arm and rose to go. The man with the ring of moustache began allowing his way through. It was easier getting away from the tables than getting to it. Pontecost tried to get near him, but was borne by the throng by one side. He trod on a woman's toe and apologized. The American woman and her escort were clear of the press by this time, and hurrying towards the exit. It was evident to Pontecost that she had that appointment in mind, the invitation Dr. Nardini had sent her at her hotel.

She sailed across the carpet, a display of jewels that was almost indolent glittering in the light. Women's eyes followed her as she went; remarks were passed, some bitter, others frankly expressing admiration. A voice from the end of the table rang out, inviting the ladies and gentlemen to make their stakes. Interest was diverted from Mrs. Van Wiers. The dice was spinning again.

Pontecost had shaken himself free and was threading his way through the thinner ranks of the more luckless—hard on the trail of Mrs. Van Wiers. Two big men got in his way on the stairs, hindering him in the stupid, blundering way people do when taken off their guard. He tried to pass on their left, and the taller of the two dropped bang in front of him. He wondered if it was deliberate. Up above he could hear Mrs. Van Wiers saying in a shrill voice: "Oh, it's raining! Now, isn't that just too bad?"



The sinister figure of Nardini's gangster loomed at the corner, gazing up . . .

Becoming desperate, he swept the obstacles aside and ran for it, leaving the first man sitting on the stairs staring up at him, and the second stooping to pick him up. More people, coming into the Casino in a bunch, a party apparently from one of the big hotels, produced further complications. Moreover, it was raining hard, and there were other people congregated on the threshold, shivering. He thrust his way out, casting several glances to the four winds. Mrs. Van Wier and her companion were well down the path when he sighted them. The woman had picked up her skirts and was running. Captain Richards was running, too.

Pentecost sprinted into the deluge, confident now on overtaking them before they crossed the road. He sorted out sentences in his mind, deciding just how much he should tell her, and how much he should leave out. What she knew of Nardini and why she should accept his invitation were no affair of his. She might not believe him. There was always that.

Quite suddenly, he sighted the moon-colored car, drawn up by the kerb. The chauffeur had left his seat and was holding open the door. As Pentecost came on to the scene, Mrs. Van Wier murmured something about "Just too good of Dr. Holst," and stopped inside. Pentecost caught Captain Richards by an arm and swung him round.

"Listen a moment," he cried. "She mustn't do that. Tell her to come out and go straight home. The thing's a plant, a job-up job."

The other gave him a curious stare and turned to follow the lady, and a group of three or four men in caps swept along the pavement about, laughing and singing, and carrying Richards and Pentecost with them. They broke up reluctantly and passed on, still singing. Pentecost came to his senses to find that the big car had left the kerb and was drawing off swiftly into the rain! He ran like the wind, swung on to the running-board at a point where there was a momentary jam, wrrenched open the door and dropped into the seat alongside an astonished Mrs. Van Wier.

The lady of the regatta sprang into her corner, staring at him.

"Well," she gasped, "if it isn't the tall man who broke the bank last night! What—"

The car was developing speed.

Pentecost bent forward, peering for breath.

"How to startle you like this," he said, "but I tried to get in touch with you before. You're no business to be in here, you understand. This car belongs to a big international crook, a jewel-thief called Nardini—"

Questioning eyes rested on his little frown-creases on the handsome forehead.

"But— isn't this Dr. Holst's automobile?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Afraid I can't tell you that. The man who drove me in it last night called himself Dr. Eddie Nardini, and I overheard him and another man tonight plotting to ambush you on the coast road and rob you of your jewels."

Mrs. Van Wier sank back on the cushions with a little gasping sigh.

"Well!" she exclaimed after an appreciable interval, "what do you know about that?"

HOLD-UP.

"What are we going to do?"

Mrs. Van Wier fired the question at Pentecost in the continued lull that formed the rear portion of Nardini's monologue. There was something queer about these carmen, too. When Pentecost tried to draw one aside to see out he found that the thing was fixed somehow,



... at the window at which Pentecost was standing.

down tight across the glass. The driver was equally invisible.

"He gave her a twisted smile.

"Right, I suppose. There's nothing else for it.

She flashed him a look of admiration.

"That's very good of you, but—but do you know how many there'll be?"

"No idea at all. A fair crowd, I should imagine. I've told Nardini never do anything by halves."

"Did you see what happened to Captain Richards?"

Pentecost started. In the excitement he had forgotten about him. Richards, if he had his wits about him, would suspect foul play and go with his story to the first police agent. Being invited like that and the car moving without him should have made him suspicious, particularly since, in the few words Pentecost had said to him, he had more than hinted at trouble. Pentecost wasn't worrying himself unduly. He was getting for a light. If he could get a smuck in of Nardini himself so much the better! But he wasn't blind to the fact that the timely arrival of police in a fast car would be helpful. There was Mrs. Van Wier, too, and all these stones!

"Captain Richards got pushed aside by some lugs," he explained, "just as the driver was drawing out. I guess it was all part of the plot. Nardini's taps had selected for a walk-over. He smiled grimly.

"Well, it's not going to be so much of a walk-over after all!" He drew out the lady automatic. "Can you shoot, Mrs. Van Wier?" he demanded suddenly.

She stared from the gun to Pentecost's face, then back to the gun again.

"You mean—I may have to use that?"

The man nodded.

"I mean I'm certain, Mrs. Van Wier. From all accounts, they're a desperate lot of cut-throats. I'm not saying this to startle you, but because I believe it to be a fact. I've had one of 'em digging my eyes—er—er since I raked in that pile

last night." (He thought that was the easier way to explain it.) "We came to grips at the bank—and the other fellow made a false move—and stopped over the cliff! I didn't push him, as it happened, he just went!"

Mrs. Van Wier's eyes opened very wide. She was a handsome woman. Pentecost gave her thirty-five. A well-preserved thirty-five into the bargain, and by no means just the dressed-up doll all that jewelry had made her seem. He thought he saw a hint of the original colorist in those eyes, of the sound pioneer stock that had been the beginnings of a great nation. She was interesting things new, correspondence, neckties, bracelets of great price, dropping them into a jumbled heap in her lap.

"I can handle a gun," she declared, "although it's a big while since I had to. Cyrus made his pile in Mexico, and I think I can say that I helped him make it." Her blue eyes sparkled of some memory. "Some of those Mexicans are hard-balled, I can tell you. Cyrus and I had our barbs to the wall more than once, in the early days. Say now, that were in a dandy little shooting-iron."

She took it from him, examining it from right to bang with an expert eye.

Pentecost rubbed his hands together.

"This is just great, Mrs. Van Wier," he exclaimed, staggered at the transformation now that his fair companion was no longer decked with precious stones. "What are we going to do with all that stuff, by the way?"

The woman laughed.

"Why, put them in the pockets of your coat. They won't be so conspicuous there. He handled them gingerly, stuffing his pockets with things that he guessed to be worth a dozen times more than the money he had banked that morning.

"You've got to take 'em on trust," he stammered. "It's a whale of a responsibility, in any case. Supposing I got the worst of it, and can't look after all this?"

Her hand fell on his sleeve.

"I'm taking you, as I take most people I meet, on your face-value. Though what made me trust this Dr. Holst is more than I can explain." She sighed heavily. "I suppose the best of us make mistakes sometimes. I certainly did!"

The car appeared to be slowing down.

"When she stops," Pentecost told her, "look after the door on your side and ahead the first man who tries to come in." He opened Emma's knife and slit through the covering of the nearest window. A white road met his gaze, low bartering walls and the sea. He meditated trying the running-board and jumping possession of the steering-wheel. It might be done, but there was the risk of the car plunging over the cliff during the process. That same objection applied to steering the front curtains and shooting their driver from behind. Great, sweeping headlights blinded him, and a big car passed them coming from the opposite way, showed a trail, then faded off into the night. Their driver was accelerating, too. Evidently their destination was not yet.

The tension relaxed, he mused on the extraordinary happenings of the past twenty-four hours—his failure at the tables, his attempted suicide, the unexpected appearance of Dr. Eddie Nardini and his pact with him in the lonely house on the cliffs. Adventure, assuming her to be a goddess, appeared to have taken him very much under her wing! The return of his luck, the successful outcome of his struggle with Joe Zena, and now this amazing episode with a king's ransom in his overcoat and a grim fight in the office! His luck would have to be in the ascendant when Nardini's boys and himself came to grips!

A sudden jouncing-in of brakes roused him from his thoughts. The jolt sent him half off the seat. He had barely recovered himself when the door on his side swung open. A gun and a man's head appeared by a triangle of yellow light came in together.

"Stand up—both of you!" commanded a voice with a foreign ring. "Stop just where you are—"

Only one of Pontecorvo's hands obeyed. The other shot out straight in front of him, and a hit with knuckles as hard as nails found something solid beneath the flapping triangle of stuff. The intruder stumbled back into the night again, and his gun went off in the process, its bullet drilling a neat hole in the backboard above. A second report followed, almost like an echo of the first. It came from Mrs. Van Wiers, tucked well into her corner, dealing with a man who had attempted to get in on her side. A sharp cry of pain came from that quarter and the door slammed shut. Pontecorvo had no time to prefer assistance in that direction. As far as he could gather, Mrs. Van Wiers was perfectly capable of looking after herself. He inquired after his assailant into the forming rain, realising that their only hope lay in swift, decisive action. Something crashed in the glass and a bullet glanced his chest, smashing glass behind him. Grim shadows moved in the debris and the lights of the street were still on, illuminating a second car that had been drawn right across the road.

Pontecorvo, ignoring side-issues, found the wicker of the yellow car half on his feet again, and humped him for a second time, hoping before he could bring his gun into play. The next second he was crouching low, grappling desperately for that all-important weapon. A heavy firm hand closed close over him as he went down and adhered on to the asphalt under a torrent of foreign water. Shouting broke upon his ears and the noise of several people running. Almost before he was aware of it, he was erect again, straddling the man he had

hit, aiming sledge-hammer blows at phantom figures that were swarming on to him from all sides.

The blood was up now, the effects of four weeks of easy life banging around the gaming-tables wearing off. The main issue at stake—Mrs. Van Wiers's previous statements—rattled in his pockets like so many pebbles as he moved. The creak in the coat-way lured over and grounded. Pontecorvo hadn't got that gun yet. He had backed against the vehicle, screening the doorway as well as he could, leaving his fair ally only the one side to attend to.

The rear compartment of the car was in darkness now, either because Mrs. Van Wiers had smashed the roof-light herself, or a steep bullet had done the job for her. Whichever way it was, it was to her advantage. Before this, with the light on, she had presented an easy target for one of Nardin's boys with a pistol. Pontecorvo had seen enough of the gang by this time to realise that they were a desperate mob. The scheme was smash and grab, and over the border into Italy as soon as they had what they wanted. Very probably murder was not included in the original programme, but they were prepared to kill wherever serious opposition to their plans presented itself.

Serious opposition was here right enough—two facts at least which had not entered into Eddie Nardin's calculations. His hand counted on a scared woman and a genuine soldier with a mission, or perhaps an unspoken admirer of all seeing that he had commissioned some of his agents to attack Captain Richards outside the Casino gardens. He had hardly bargained for John Pontecorvo and a woman who had seen exciting times in Mexico! And at the present moment, with the former raging effective warfare in the downpour, Mrs. Van Wiers had the machine-gun from the back seat ready to hand. She had had winged two of the midnight mob already with that singularly handy pocket-automatic!

The light went on in the rain, between the low white parapet at the sill-edge and

the dark bulk of the cream-coloured limousine. There might have been six potential assassins swirling around Pontecorvo, eight, or even ten. Events happened so swiftly that he couldn't calculate. Guns popped in the darkness, popping the car, some flying wide, others missing him by an infinitesimal margin.

Masked men of diverse shapes and sizes grappled with him at one time or another, hoping to take him by surprise as he ducked or feinted or stopped aside. Out of this nightmare jumble on the coast-road certain happenings stood out in big relief. A two-headed man in an evening-gaiter who stuck a knife into Pontecorvo's arm—and retained so tremendous a hit from the other that he described a complete somersault over the parapet. A short, thick-set fellow, using a section of iron piping, who shattered the framework of the door with a blow that had been intended for Pontecorvo's skull—and succumbed to two jets working in rapid succession, leaving Pontecorvo in possession of his hoodlum.

That hoodlum forced the turning-point, as it were, of the first episode. Whirling it around his head, Pontecorvo charged into his adversary like a madman, clearing space, bestowing a cracked skull here and there, procuring for himself the breathing-time that he badly wanted. Moreover, it gave him a moment in which to think that greeted pistol from the roadway and gave it through the opening to a shadowy Amazon that was Mrs. Van Wiers.

"Thinks" came a grateful whisper from the interior. "You're doing fine!"

Pontecorvo slapped a hand to his left cheek and felt blood. A shot, fired from the shelter of the low wall itself, had gouged a line of pain there and passed on into the infinite. Mrs. Van Wiers, leaving her barricade for the instant, levelled the barrel of her fresh gun at a vague shadow rising for a second time above the parapet—and blazed at it with the accuracy of a sniper from a skid-hole.

"Thanks" muttered Pontecorvo lazily, waiting for the shadow to rise for a third time in rain. Other rounds came at him from greater distances. A man squirmed from the position into which Pontecorvo had thrown him recently, and felt the weight of the iron bar before he could bring off a shot at close-quarters. A beam of bright light moved jerkily towards him. They were trying to swing on to him the spot light from the car that blazed the thoroughfare! Something in his brain ticked. The thing was sticking. Presently they would lower the net and have it free! He couldn't stand for that, couldn't wait five minutes with his beam focused right on him and a dozen pistols waiting to pick him off!

The cream-coloured limousine looked a poor thing now, with a broken door swinging open and jagged panes where windows had once been. Edging his way to the front, with a definite plan in mind, he saw that the driver's seat was empty. Stripping off his raincoat, whose previous ballad had impeded him from the start, he dug it through to Mrs. Van Wiers, wreathed upon the forward door and snarl behind the wheel with bullets whistling all around him. The road was wide here, wide enough for him to turn the car if he got the chance.

He felt for the starter, pressed it and breathed a sigh of relief as the six cylinders emitted a pleasant throbbing. He had to lean out to back, with the rain forming an all but impenetrable blanket behind, and Nardin's handlets sniping persistently. The rear-wheel on the asphalt grated against the parapet. He looked over the steering and got her halfway round, reversed again and managed to turn her nose towards Monte Carlo. He was aware of a figure, gun in hand, springing on to the running-board,

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Letters to the Editor should be addressed to "The Thriller" Office, The Florence House, Finsbury Street, London, E.C.A.

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followed immediately by others, slinging there like limpets.

Pontecost sensed that they weren't through the road yet. The rock rose up on the inland side, and he drove towards it, meaning to give a nasty journey to any of those hang-on who still persisted. Long before a front wing grated on the rock he heard men shouting in alarm, dropping off behind and falling. His lips wore a cynical smile and pulled the car into the road again, knowing that he still had two or three on the other side to reckon with. Bounded up there in the driving compartment, with Nardini's curtains screening the rear, he couldn't tell what Mrs. Van Wier was doing. Whatever it was, he looked to her to clear that running-board and the automatic, while he gave the powerful his last limit of gas. Something banged at the back. Mrs. Van Wier or a enemy? It was problematical. A shrill cry made him push out the clutch and jam on the brake band. The gear snapped into neutral, and Pontecost was out, a clear half-mile from the scene of the hold-up, with two men coming at him at once and a third engaged in dragging the American woman from the car.

His badgeron had come out with him. The menacing two roared like ninjapias. Before they could attempt further trouble, he had the third by the coat-collar, twisting it tight. Mrs. Van Wier emerged, shaken, but still smiling.

"The gas jammed," she explained breathlessly.

Pontecost pointed down the road. "Take my coat and beat it," he told her. "Don't stop for anything. I'll hold 'em—!" He shouted something after her about picking her up if he could. The next second he was fighting with two of the three thugs—and Nardini's second car was speeding on to the scene through the rain.

A PRISONER:

Six months ago, "She's got the stuff" in French. Out of the corner of his eye John Pontecost saw an injured gangster scuffle up from the road and legs running in the direction Mrs. Van Wier had taken. His heart sank. For him to be overtaken now meant disaster—the loss of the stones at least; quite probably split-headed murder! In the past half-hour he had built up a great respect for Mrs. Van Wier. The thought of her fighting an uneven battle with nothing but a jammed gun to defend her drove him more desperate than ever. Clearing aside his two assistants with savage sweeps of the iron bar, he flung it with deadly accuracy after the departing crook. The fellow threw up his hands, and fell headlong. Pontecost, satisfied now that that danger was scotched, turned in time to tackle the taller of the remaining two with his bare fists. The third blew odd, a swing to the chin that drove the other yards. The following car was almost upon them. Pontecost was on the running-board, springing for the driving-seat, when luck, that seemed to have been with him all the way, forced him contrary. A bullet, fired wildly across the advancing beams of light, took him in the back. Hall-manned though he was, he managed to crawl behind the wheel and jam in a gear. A red mist danced before his eyes. He was aware of pain and intense cold, and a mad desire to plant the immense chest across the road, just as the others had done when the trouble began. He was never more fit to wear a straight corset. He might still save Mrs. Van Wier. Gritting his teeth, he had the consolation of knowing that he had achieved his purpose. The automobile had gone to his right. The stretch-out, after that, came. Pontecost had known, stubbornly resisted his better's pressure. The engine stopped with the gear still crunched, and the jolt



As he moved through the trees, he heard a slight sound. The next moment a knife whizzed his hat from his head and pinned it to the tree trunk.

pricked the wheel into Pontecost's chest. He was just conscious of glaring lights, blinding orbs with rain streaming across them, the harsh screeching of brakes hastily applied, the hoarse shouting of men, a crash—and then a kind of insane slide, heat, and the shattering of everything around him.

Consciousness returned to John Pontecost slowly. He seemed to have been lying for hours, staring at a pallid light with a cracked oval shade that hung from the ceiling of a barely furnished room. The cord that conveyed the light to the ceiling looked dusty and frayed; there was an accumulation of dust and cobwebs around the shade and the lamp itself. Lying in a state of partial coma, he had been vaguely aware of the presence of someone behind him, of a sponge and warm water and traces of pain whenever the sponge was applied, of remarks made in a soft, soothing tone, although whether addressed to himself or merely thoughts of the speaker muffled about he did not know. There had been a period when he had been pushed gently from side to side, a broad bandage wound round him and fastened. He had but a muted recollection of all this; but for the undeniable presence of the bandage when his senses returned, it might all have been part of an extraordinary dream.

He stirred and tried to sit up, and the pain began again, forcing his back. His gaze, wandering carelessly, took in cluttered windows devoid of curtains, a wooden

carriage-pole with a jumble of brass rings, a bare boarded floor, a heap of odd books thrown just anyhow in a corner, a large wooden trunk with rusted iron angles-pieces, and a long, laced curtain which might cover some alcove. Presently he discovered that he was lying on a box-spring mattress, with a rough blanket thrown over him and another, rolled to form an improvised pillow, under his head. His presence there puzzled him. A sudden rush of thoughts, filling into his brain in an oddly disjointed fashion, sent him sitting up with a jerk. A hand crept to his back, pressing on the spot where the pain seemed to be; consolation, cold as ice, stood out on his forehead. He remembered now. He had heard men talking in some trees—about a robbery they were going to do. He had gone in a car along the coast road—and there had been fighting, Nardini's boys! The phrase came clear, as if he had known it all his life. For Tom going over the cliff, a girl in a diamond-bank himself throwing an iron bar at a man with an injured arm!

Rain, pattering against the slatters outside, helped him to straighten things out, taking him back to other rain and a polychromed limousine with a hooded door. He had it clearly now, cut and dried. Mrs. Van Wier had run away, carrying his rain-coat stuffed with eucalyd leaves and thousands—and the car he had not laded with another. His head went into his hands. He thought he knew where he was, just how much the business of the room signified. He had been captured by the

police, together possibly with some of the gang. Mrs. Van Wieren would come round in the morning and explain. They would let him out. He remembered that he had sent his trunk out to Paris, and meditated on calling at the best tailor's he could find and buying a fresh suit.

Martini slipped by, and he was still sitting there, his head in his hands, dead in trousers torn and splattered with mud, the brass dangling; in a vest that had blood on it in places, and his socks. He looked up suddenly and noticed something that he had overlooked—a small glass bottle—dark lying on a packing-case near the head of the bed. He reached for it and unscrewed the stopper. There was an inch of fluid in the flask. He sniffed it first, brought it to the neck to his lips and drank. The next spirit revived him, and the blood, coursing through his veins, helped him to ignore that growling man at his back. He tried to think how the flask had got there, and put it down to the same mysterious being who had spoken to him so strikingly and bandaged his wound. His coat and waistcoat, together with the tattered remains of the sheet, reposed partly under the blanket. He drew on the first two garments, rose to his feet with the assistance of the bed-frame and began prowling around the room in his socks.

The door, as he had expected, was locked. Creeping along the wall, he came to the french windows, opened them as softly as he could and raised the iron stays that held the shutters. The wind caught them, slamming that on his left noisily, swinging the other back against the outer wall of the building.

Penitencot stepped on to a shallow balcony, watching his socks, noting rain that decreased from overcasted heavens as if it would never cease. He caught his breath. The sea was down there! Dark, troubled waters sloped with the jagged rocks right under him! From horizon to horizon there was nothing but the sea! And, with that astonishing revelation, the prison theory vanished completely from his mind. He knew where he was now—in Nardini's house, the villa on the rocks, the place where he had made his pact with the human vultures!

He went back and took another pull at the flask. This, and the shock of the discovery, were bringing him to his senses. Already he felt better, more capable of movement. Nardini's legs had found him out and brought him there. He wondered why. Revenge, perhaps, for the punishment he had given some of them, for thwarting them in their quest for Mrs. Van Wieren's jewels? They had carried him to a top room and dumped him there, believing him to be half dead already, intending to come back at their leisure to finish him! His watch was still working. He wound it, noting that the hands pointed at ten minutes past three.

The express on which Nardini had booked a berth had crept out of Monte Carlo an hour ago, with at least one empty sleeper. Presumably Mrs. Van Wieren had succeeded in making her escape. Nardini's plans must have failed completely. The hold-up had been a wash-out. There were broken bottles in plenty, but no spoils. Just two wrecked cars at a lonely stretch on the roadway to mark the spot where Penitencot and the Nardini gang had fought. He could imagine Dr. Emilio Nardini's feeling on the subject. Unless the gang had broken up and scattered already, he was sure to pay heavily for his timely intervention.

He crossed to the window again, endeavouring to map out a plan of escape. It was a sheer thirty-foot drop from the balcony to the rocks, as far as he was able to estimate. No creeps or stack-pipe offered assistance, and the rocks themselves looked uninviting. Two blankets, knotted

together, provided an solution to the problem. In the daylight, and in full possession of his faculties, he might have tried that method, gone down hand-over-hand as far as the blankets would have let him, and dropped the remainder, hoping for the best. In the present circumstances it would have been madness to attempt such an exit.

Walking more steadily now, he made for the door, his eyes searching every corner, looking for some impediment by means of which he might stop it. A whiff of tobacco-smoke, meeting his nostrils, told him that his hopes in that direction were shattered. There was somebody on watch out there, somebody whose job it was to see that he didn't get out!

Penitencot retreated from the door, moving more cautiously now, two deep furrows showing above his eyes. He wasn't loitering yet. He had been in tight corners before, and wriggled out of them. Perhaps he might wriggle out of this. He resolved to sit down for a while and husband his strength. In another ten minutes, say, he would put on his shoes and walk bravely across the floor. That should bring the sentry inside, to see what he was doing. He would wait behind the door and tackle him. If he was armed, so much the better! Penitencot wanted him to be armed. He would try for his throat, relying on the abnormal strength of his arms and fingers, elude any show of resistance out of him and possess himself of his weapon. In theory it sounded simple enough; in practice Penitencot realized that it might not work out according to plan. The guard outside might be stronger than himself, too cunning possibly to be taken by surprise. It was well within the bounds of probability that there was more than one.

Retreating to the trunk, he lowered himself on it, wincing at the pain, feeling through his pockets

to see what his captors had left him. Martini's set his fingers, a packet of cigarettes, some odd papers and money. He surmised from the presence of the last-named that his cronies were above petty pilfering and out for big games only. Zena's knife was missing, though. They evidently had made certain before leaving him that he had nothing of that nature in his possession. He lit a cigarette.

Something queer about the flooring on the far side of the bed brought him to his feet. Creeping closer, he made out an iron ring with a short length of chain running through it. The chain led to a staple let into the boards and a small padlock secured the two ends. Presently he crawled over a trap-door, a closed flap about a yard square. The padlock gave as he touched it. He drew out the chain and dropped it into a pocket. A current of cold air met him as he lifted the flap. Peering down, he saw



In the act of springing at Penitencot, Zena released his footing, slipped violently and then pitched helplessly over the cliff edge to the rocks beneath.

a dark slanting tunnel leading off into infinity. Some five feet below him, he thought he heard the treading movement of water. He lowered the thing softly into place and stood at a group of patches on the wood-dark stairs that looked like blood. An addict? The name whereby Eddie Martin disposed of his victims!

The sound of a key in a lock aroused him to action. He stole to a spot where the door would screen him when it opened. There was a pause, and then men's voices speaking outside.

"Get it over, eh?" said somebody.

"Not yet," came the gruff reply. "The chief wants to talk to him first."



"All right! He's coming up now!" Pentecost held his breath. The door was opening slowly.

THE DEATH INSECT.

THE door swung inward a few inches and closed again. There was renewed talking outside. He caught phrases in French; instructions, he gathered, concerning himself and the disposal of his body once they had finished with it. He calculated from the whispered conversation that there were at least four men on the landing, possibly five. He stared at the light, and from it to the switch on the far side of the door-frame.

Rather than sit out, he moved, and promptly changed his mind. Tiptoeing towards the light itself, he reached up and reversed the bulb.

The lamp was different in shade he had handled in England; it unswerved. His hands were cold, and he warmed them on it as he left his way back to the door.

The pitch darkness of the room was better for him than the light. But for that, they would have missed him from the bed on entering. He would have been discovered before he had a chance to do anything.

"That little devil Yvonne has gone," declared a voice he recognized as Nardini's. "I've just been in her room. She's bolted with her baggage."

The thin tones of the man in the tress came on top of the other.

"I told you she was in with Pentecost. That outside stunt was a rump. C.I.D. bloke, piece than likely, working with the French. We're a good twenty-thousand done, thanks to him."

Nardini made a curious sound in his throat. "Noname," he returned. "If he's in with the others, why aren't they here now? Answer

me that." A tapping laugh followed. "It he's got any secrets, we'll twist 'em out of him before we've finished. He's an amah, however, just a damned Britisher who can't leave other people's business alone. Open that door, somebody."

Pentecost, looking at the hinge-end, felt the door moving inward.

"Switch on that light," recommended Nardini.

Somebody whom Pentecost could not see tried the thing several times.

"Don't work," he muttered. "Looks as if the lamp's gone."

Nardini swore softly.

"Here, you! Slip downstairs and get another. There's a spare one on me desk."

Pentecost, fastened against the wall, gazed at the darkness. That would be one, at any rate, temporarily out of the way. Vague, shadowy figures passed him, moving cautiously. One of them fumbled and struck a match.

"The hell's magic!" he exclaimed, and at that moment Pentecost pulled off his foretop boots. The electric bulb left his fingers and clattered on the floor with an alarming pop. Heard in the stillness of that devilish room it might have been a pistol-shot. The effect was electrical. Men began shouting at once, crowding into one another in the darkness. As Pentecost slipped from behind the door and made for the landing, he heard:

"Look out, he's got a gun!" "If that window, you fool!"—and a real gun going off in the excitement.

A shadow by the doorway blocked his exit. He gave it a swift blow that set the wood in his back plating ages, darted through the opening, stumbling and locking the door behind him. He turned almost on top of Nardini himself at the head of a steep flight of stairs, a cigar in his mouth that was half smoked, and a large hand thrust behind him winking a gun from his hip.

"Get you, my friend," he grinned at Pentecost, and a second blow from the same fist sent him hurtling downwards.

Pentecost steadied himself, breathing painfully. That last smash, exhausting though it was, had done him a power of good. Nardini going down like that was as circumstantial as a tomb. The evil genius who had stopped him from outside! The man who had ordered to have him smothered on the Paris-bound train! In a flash he was after him, one hand on a polished rail that still trembled after the gangster's weight, his feet slipping over carpetless stairs like lightning.

Behind him the house was in an uproar. A crowd had been driven through. They were being at the back to try and burst it open. He leaped over Nardini, grinding on a lower landing, missing by a narrow margin the bedpost that tripped over him. At a head in the second flight he collided unexpectedly with the man with the front lamp, and the pair of them went down together.

They rolled into the same hall in which Nardini had brought Pentecost after his attempted suicide on the cliff, landing there in a tangled heap. Pain was gripping Pentecost again, aggravated by the bumping down many stairs. He fought with this fresh adversary with a swimming brain, struggling all he knew to throw him off and get to the door that spelled the open road and a chance of safety.

The other was French, like as a matter, an Italian, or a Greek, with stock, black hair and muscular side-whiskers. Pentecost fixed himself once but the gangster took a flying leap as his legs were pulled from under. Nardini was slumbering down the stairs, his eyes blazing fury. The man's body, too, had forced its way from the locked rooms and was hot on the descent.

Half a dozen men fell on Pentecost at once, foreclosing most of them. One of them lifted his head as he tried to lift it from the floor; his arms were twisted behind him, his legs fastened. Still half dazed, he felt himself being lifted and carried back up the flight. He gave up struggling presently. The fight had gone out of him. He had made his last effort, and he was open, broken. He appeared to be dead or groggy. He had fought a game fight, and been beaten by weight of numbers.

If he had been thirty seconds quicker he might have pulled it off. He was glad the girl had got away, as they would have murdered her as well, killed her very probably, and dropped her down that chute into the sea!

Opening his eyes from time to time, he noted that his captors were all in their costumes, and that on the first-floor landing there was a heap of suitcases. It looked as though the crooks were preparing to evacuate the villa, to carry last part of their original plan in light, winter and join up again in Italy.

Probably the kidnapping of John Penrose was to be their last crime perpetrated on that side of the frontier. They appeared to be off the skirts here, miles away from anywhere. Walking it would be a tedious affair. He wondered if they were waiting for cars to take them, wondering whether his coming that spectacular collision on the coast-road had upset their calculations badly.

The cottage, with Penrose in its midst, blended into the poplolar room through a doorway where the door hung ajar in its frame and bits of splattered paint littered the threshold. He was thrown roughly on the bed, a dozen hands held him there while somebody screwed in a new lamp. The light came up again, setting him blinking. "How dark were his eyes, and how dark his hair?" he thought. He recognized the man from the train, the crook who had fought with him in the hall. Nardini, a look eager between his teeth, loomed in the background. A man was bending down, pulling open the flap.

Dr. Nardini, alias Hildt, came slowly towards him, brushing the others aside. Penrose, sitting up, faced a semi-circle of menacing weapons, dark blue barrels held water high. Nardini hovered above him, with arms folded and a cynical smile on his lips. His beard was in evidence again, the most convincing false beard Penrose ever remembered seeing.

"So you went back on me, Mr. Penrose?" sneered the gang leader.

Penrose's eyes started him out.

"Well," he retorted, "what about it? I'm not returned at what I did."

The other came a step closer.

"You're a cool customer, Penrose," he resumed. "I'll give you credit for that, although it's beside the point. What really matters is that you and your damned interloper have been out on a small foray—and pretty who matters with me really pay for it pretty

hands." His gaze turned towards the hole in the door that admitted a current of cool-air into the room and the rustle of plashing of the sea. "You're going down there presently, my friend. Very soon. By English papers will be showing about the mysterious disappearance at Monaco of a young Britisher." His head jerked suddenly forward, and the hattering noise left his cheeks. "Who paid you to pry into my affairs, eh?" he thundered. "Had you to—our language, the detectives?"

Penrose shook his head.

"Neither," he stammered calmly. "I didn't want any money. I'd made enough at the tables last night. Nobody paid me to help Mrs. Van Wier. It occurred you and that other fellow talking in the wood, and tried to find Mrs. Van Wier to man her of the trap you had prepared. When you set drove away with her—I can offer it and be happy on."

Nardini removed the cigar from his lips and shot a significant glance at his colleagues.

"What happened to the steers?"

"Mrs. van Wier took them with her when she ran. They were in my railroad."

Nardini drew a knife from his pocket. Opening it slowly, he held the point of the blade at Penrose's throat.

"Were you sure of that?" he muttered. "You're sure you didn't have them and hide them somewhere?"

The throbbing of engines throbbed in at the open window. One of the gangsters ran across and leaned out into the night.

"There are lights down there," he called in French. "That'll be Agents with the car."

Nardini straightened himself, and the knife went with him.

"All right," he said. "Slip down and get that stuff we loaned. Get all you can get on the car and pile the remainder inside." He turned and moved towards the doorway, and the man Penrose had seen with him in the wood left the group at the bedside and followed.

Penrose, lying back on his elbows, heard them talking together in subdued tones. The lighter-built man had peered up a small square hole from underneath, and was holding it by a loop of wire fixed to the top. Penrose caught the phrase "Yellow Death," and saw Nardini nod his head several times.

The tension had relaxed somewhat. Two or three of the gangsters were smoking. One of them glanced at the bed, nudged the man nearest him and whisked something in his ear.

The other laughed. Surveying the group of faces, Penrose told himself that they formed the most villainous mob he had ever seen—men who would kill for the sake of killing, creatures who would find amusement in a victim's dying agonies.

There was a feeling in the air that they were waiting for something to happen. The Yellow Death, he supposed, and tried to think what it might be. Joe Zana had mentioned it to Yvonne during that grim scene on the rocks, referring to it as though it were something terrible.

He clenched his teeth. If he were only fit, he would have tried another bid for the landing, choosing getting rattled with his hands to his wrists. In any case a clean bullet wound would be preferable to being tortured to death by some subtle method contrived by Eddie Nardini.

Nardini and the other were approaching again.

"Well, Penrose," said the former, "I don't think we need keep you waiting any longer. Fate is a peculiar thing, as I dare say you've heard before. I had planned, when I arranged that delightful train journey for you, to provide you with a companion, one who I intended to do some poor sleeping with and to partake of my cigars. In any case a clean bullet wound to the gangster behind him, who tapped the box on Penrose's shoes. The doorman was started. At the second tap, the four sides of the box fell upwards, revealing a jumble of something that looked like stone—and a large yellow insect rising from it on its many legs. "A yellow scorpion, Mr. Penrose," teased Nardini.

"The most venomous insect I have been able to discover!"

The thing emerged several inches, then shot out as if Penrose's trousers had, and passed there, twisting all over. He reached out with his hands to it, and found it on his hand from all sides, snapping his limbs. Nardini brought the lighted end of his cigar to the creature's tail—and it was in a series of short, jerky movements across to Penrose's chest.

"You dirty louse!" he stammered, and tried to drag an arm free.

A burst of laughter followed. Penrose, spinning down at the thing as it fascinated, seemed that his tormentors edged backwards from the bed, giving the scorpion a wide berth.

The man from the trees had a thin pipe in his hand, and was reaching over the foot of the bed, apparently to assure the light on him from its tiny gutter. The tail drooped. Penrose struggled no longer. The beetle was angry, tired of being teased. It was preparing to sting where it was—and sting!

A revolver shot rang out, coming from somewhere beyond the circle of lamps. One of them uttered a cry and stooped down, clutching at an arm. The scorpion had vanished, been flung into space as surely as if Nardini or one of them had done it with a finger and thumb. All eyes were turned upon the faded curtains at the far end of the room. They were parted slightly, and two barrels peered through the opening, covering the group by the bed. From one of them barrels a thin wisp of smoke curled upwards.

There was a pang, and then a general rush for the doorway. Penrose, slipping from the bed in a dash, heard hoarse uttering downstairs and the jarring opening of the hall door. The curtains were being back suddenly.

"Oh!" contained a hoarse voice. "I was half stilled!"

He stared into the smiling face of Yvonne Lovetree!

BACK FROM THE DEAD:

JOHN PENROSE passed a hand across his forehead like a man waking from a dream. "What?" he exclaimed, and began laughing weakly.

The noise of a car starting up outside met him creeping across the room to the balcony. Looking there, he saw headlights glaring on the rocks, sweeping away again. The car drove off into the night; he heard it change up into second, and knew that Nardini and the pack of cutthroats that had just now hovered around the bed were gone.

He found the girl by his side. Her teeth chattered.

"It's cold out here," she said. "Come inside and keep warm. I'll be back in a minute."



Penrose was aware of a figure springing on to the running board as the car bounded forward, and in the hand of that figure was a gun.

She slipped away again, and Pontecot saw her sitting across the lighted room and out by the doorway. He moved to the landing presently, peered down into the stair-well, listening. The single note of a bell drifted up to him, as if somebody in that house of mystery had lit a telephone receiver. Returning to the bed, he sat there, weak as a cat, musing over the events of the past thirty hours.

Two minutes ago he had been within an arm of dying miserably, tortured to death by a crowd of poison mosquitoes and a hideous insect! The trap in the flooring by which he had been destined to disappear for ever still gaped; the trick box with its tangle of hay lay on the blanket where his feet had been. The odour of gunpowder, with a faint suggestion of the smoke from Maudin's cigar, hung in the air. In spite of so much evidence, however, the reality of it all had gone. He felt as if he had been in a theatre, watching some responsible drama from the stalls. The lines of it hardly seemed to have been invented.

Steps sounded on the stairs, and a Yeoman re-appeared, carrying an overcoat and a small tray. There was a bottle on the tray, glasses, some French rolls and cheese. She set it down on the case by the bed and dropped the coat over her shoulders.

"Bis that on," she commanded. "You women! catch cold." She moved off at a tangent, shutting the flap and the French windows. "As soon as you feel you can walk," she continued, "we'll go downstairs to the warts." Unconscious the bottle, she poured red wine into two tumblers.

Pontecot took his glass and drank, watching white fingers as they cut a roll into slices and bestowed them. He watched in silence, glass in hand from time to time as the dim, very capable little person who had been responsible for most things.

Indisputably, she was attractive—more so if possible in the next best get-up he now saw her in than in her elaborate dance frock and blue cloak. She did not strike him at those quarters as a girl with a marked past, as anything at all, in fact, than an extremely pretty woman who had certainly exceeded his expectations. To come down so cold, hard facts, he had handed her twenty pounds in the room, a sum of money which he could well spare at the moment, and which certainly he had never expected to see again. Whatever else it had done, that loan had proved a thundering good investment. It had saved her life.

"I almost went, you know," she said suddenly. "They'd left me out of the job, alone in the house. I packed as quickly as I could, knowing that they might return at any minute, meaning to catch the next train to Paris. It was a good thing I didn't, wasn't it?"

"Provisionally," agreed Pontecot, with his mouth full. "I was just thinking something like that."

"Where came back with a broken arm," she pressed, "and I had to fix it for him as best I could. He told me there had been a hitch, and that Mrs. Van Wier had brought a maid with her who seemed to bear a charmed life! His language was terrible!"

Pontecot laughed.

"The madman, of course, was myself."

"Of course. I didn't realize that then. Two other men came in—some of them with blood all over his face. I didn't know what to do. I couldn't leave them like that, and I knew if I didn't leave soon my job chance would have gone. I was packing up Schwarz when he mentioned your name. He said it was you who had accompanied Mrs. Van Wier, and that Nardin knew I had been talking to you, and was going to 'put' me for giving the game away. I took Schwarz's gun when he wasn't looking, and Wrenner's. I had actually left the house and was in the garden, when a whole crowd turned up, carrying you. I got in by the back door and hid."

Everybody seemed depressed. The police might be along at any moment. I slept in hats and bonneted, propped the door open and ran air always on the stairs. Nardin came back and set a guard outside, but by this time I was in the next room again, hiding on the balcony, with the shutters closed to save anybody come in."

Pontecot gave her a cigarette from his pocket and lit it, applying the match presently to his own. Wrenner's story interested him greatly. She was filled to the gills, explaining what had been happening all the time he was unconscious.

"When did you get behind the curtain?" he demanded.

The girl smiled.

"It was when they all came up the stairs together and opened the door. It was dark, if you remember. I had heard those coming and had left the balcony. I slipped in just after the last man. When the gun went off, I remembered the curtains and slipped behind the curtain in the confusion. You looked them in when you ran, and I didn't dare come out after that. I hoped you would get away, but you didn't."

Pontecot shook his head.

"I was shocked," he admitted. "They stopped me right by the hall door." He flashed her a look full of admiration. "That was a great shot of yours," he added.

The girl met his gaze.

"I was scared," she declared, "scared stiff! I was afraid I should shoot you."

Pontecot nodded. Bold, clever, better, all were gone. Half a bottle of wine remained, but he had had his fill of that. All that he wanted now was to get back to the hotel and sleep. He remembered that he had given up his room, and hoped that they could find him another. He rose and stretched himself, discovering areas of pain all over him, things that in the excitement of the past half-hour he had either overlooked or forgotten.

"I can imagine your feelings," he returned. "It wanted a cool head, looking-off at that time."

"I don't know," she said. "It was no distance at all really. I learned to shoot ages ago in our garden. We used to stick up bottles, old radio tubes, anything."

"Where was this?" asked Pontecot.

She looked away from him.

"In England."

"Before you met Nardin?"

"Yes."

There was a long silence.

"How did you get in with this crowd?" queried Pontecot, raising a question that had been hovering on his lips for some time.

She went a few paces towards the door, and turned.

"Like you did," she declared.

The man started.

"You mean you tried to kill yourself?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"It wasn't quite like that. I came out here



Up the stairs they carried Pontecot's battered and senseless body.

six weeks ago on holiday. I had a job in the City then. My parents were dead, and both my brothers had gone abroad. I came to the Riviera because—well it seemed the most sensible place to come to where one had to take one's holiday in the winter. I stopped at Nice first—and, of course, I had to see Monte Carlo. The tables intrigued me. I did what everybody else did—played."

"At first I was lucky. I won five hundred francs on the first evening. The next day I made more. And then everything seemed to go wrong. In a moment of madness I put everything I had on the second—believing it to be my lucky number. The same came up instead, and I wandered out into the garden knowing that I hadn't a cent in the world. A man followed me and spoke to me—"

"Dr. Nardin?"

"Yes. He said that he had been watching me for some time, and had been afraid this might happen. Nardin isn't very young, you know. He talked about having daughters of his own. In the end he persuaded me to have supper with him. We went to the Casino to dance. Just as we were leaving, I missed my bag with my return-ticket to London. Nardin pretended to be very upset. He went into the office and made inquiries, but it never turned up."

"He insisted on lending me money for my hat, and made an appointment to meet me in the morning. I went to the place he had told me and found a car waiting. The chauffeur had a note saying that Dr. Heist, as he called himself then, was busy, and would be

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glad if I could lunch with him at his villa. All unimportant. I went through the house of course. Zena was there and another man. I was given a typewriter and put through a sort of examination. Naturally, I signed an agreement to be Nardini's secretary for a year.

She let her lip.
 "If I had realized then what it meant, I should never have agreed. But, you see, there was no money change to be considered. I was on my home-leave in a strange country. I was sure that I should have gone to the consul and explained my position. I still think of it, but I hated the thought of being beholden to anyone. Nardini had mentioned a salary higher than I was drawing in England. I told myself I would work hard, pay back the money he had lent me, and go home when my contract with him terminated. It didn't dawn on me at first what they were doing, not until I was too far involved in their schemes to draw out. Gradually, cunningly, Nardini began using me as his tool, posing as a doctor trying to work up a practice with rich Americans and English. I was sent out to scrape acquaintance with wealthy visitors, to invite them here to dinner. The discovery of a woman, dragged and bound in a cupboard, opened my eyes. There was a terrible scene with Nardini, who threatened to kill me if I breathed a word to a living soul. That was two weeks ago. My proposed salary didn't materialize. Nardini insisted on only cash payments, never sufficient for me to buy a ticket. And one of the gang was always close at hand, watching in case I should try to get away. When I spoke to you that evening in the garden, I was desperate—"

Pontecorvo laughed grimly.
 "So was I," he said.
 She came back and took his arm.
 "Come on," she cried; "we'll get downstairs, if you can manage it. I tried to phone for a car just now, but couldn't get an answer from the garage. I'll try again in a minute; if you like for you two to make a better deal of a room that had once been Nardini's study, and sleep. It was light when Yvonne woke him. He sat up, and the girl took of a cloak on the mantelpiece confronted him, telling him it was almost half-past seven. Yvonne was dressed for going out; in one hand she carried a small bag.

"Time to go," she said. "The taxi's outside now."
 He tried to rise and the effort pained him. A third attempt brought him to his feet. He stumbled down the double flight outside, walking like an old man on Yvonne's arm.

He sat down in the car and dozed off again, waking only when they came to a halt before the white front of an hotel. The girl paid the driver and helped Pontecorvo to get up. It was not the hotel Pontecorvo had known previously; he supposed it was the one Yvonne Lorraine had stayed at after leaving Nino. An elderly man, who might have been the proprietor, consulted a large register and offered them rooms on the second floor. A tired-looking creature in a green hair apron was sweeping the foyer, with chairs stacked up on tables and a cloud of dust following him wherever he went.

"I don't be stopping," whispered the girl, as they waited for the lift. "I'll just wait a hour at the doctor's, and then I'll take the first train to Paris. You'll be all right here. You won't want me any more. You see, the police are looking for Nardini—and they may have had their eye on me, too."

She jumped suddenly and clutched his arm. Following the direction of her gaze, Pontecorvo saw a white oval face peering from the glass pane of the main door—the bandaged face of Joe Zena, raised from the dead!

YVONNE VANHORNES.

The elevator came down. Pontecorvo, looking past the attendant as the gates closed, noted that the grim figure in the entrance-way had vanished.
 The girl's lip came close to his ear.
 "Joe Zena?" they said. "You see him? He isn't dead!"
 Pontecorvo shook his head, but said nothing.

The main body of Nardini's gang had gone; he was not particularly startled at the reappearance of Joe. In a way he was relieved to know that he had survived, that their encounter on the cliff edge had had a less serious outcome than he had supposed.

The marriage of a nobody was not pleasant. As it was, no suspicion of such a crime could ever be attached to him. His resolve, as soon as he was fit enough to do it, was to get into touch with Mrs. Van Wier and the police, to go to them with a clear conscience and lodge his statement regarding the affair. If Joe Zena, as any of the gang for that matter, chose to show their faces in Monte Carlo, so much the worse for them!

At the door of his room he parted company with Yvonne, giving her money and a list of the things he did most in need of.

A hot bath revived him wonderfully. A warm sun, streaming through the windows, reminded him that it was good to be alive. Refreshing the bandage was a long and painful business; he was satisfied, however, that the lack of his injuries was superficial. There was a neat pile of things on his bed when he got back—pajamas, underclothes, a shirt—and the very essential safety razor. He turned in and slept.

A doctor—an earnest little man in platinum spectacles—turned up during the morning, looked him up and down, and he would walk again. Pontecorvo awoke for a second time in the dark, sweating on the light and got up, showed at the basin near the window, and sent a boy who answered the bell for an outfit. He inquired if Miss Lorraine had gone. The youth, after some hesitation, admitted that she had.

"No message for me?" asked Pontecorvo.
 "The other should be dead."
 "Nothing, mistress; nothing at all."
 Pontecorvo fastened his shoes, donning strips of adhesive plaster, and felt a little better. He looked at his wrist and found a small measurement, and departed. Pontecorvo sat in his underclothes, feeling fit in himself, but depressed. Yvonne Lorraine was beginning to seem a great deal more to him than he had believed possible. He had thought at least that she would have written a farewell note, giving him an address at which he could communicate with her. Vanishing like that into the blue struck him as being singularly heartless. At least, she should have made it possible for him to let her know how he was.

The doctor returned with a collection of notes and a writing paper protruding from a pocket. Pontecorvo looked at the paper, a little curious to know how they had reported the discovery of the two wrecked cars. Headlines on the front page attracted his notice, telling his head swimming.

ROUND-UP OF INTERNATIONAL CROOK GANG! MYSTERY OF BURNT CARS.

Standing under the light, momentarily oblivious of the presence of the tailor, he ran through the notice from end to end. The fight on the coast-road was there in almost every detail, himself mentioned by name. He guessed that Mrs. Van Wier had been mainly responsible for that. The sentence that affected him most, however, was contained in the Stop-press News:

"A woman, believed to be a member of the gang, was arrested at the station this afternoon in the act of taking the Paris-bound express."

"A shocking affair, minister," murmured a voice at his elbow. It was that of the waiter, endeavoring to call Pontecorvo's attention to the trousers he was wanting him to try on.

"Yes," agreed the other absently, and searched through a printed list of names. Familiar names came up at them: Bekwaro, Angelo, Warren. Nardini was not among them, nor Zena.

He stood at the window, with the little tailor patiently at his heels, drew aside the curtains and stared out at Monte Carlo, all flood lights and beauty. He heavy pulled on his coat. He knew it for a while's splendor.

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THE world's record picture-puzzle prize is at stake in our stupendous "Grand National" competition. And this colossal prize may be yours if you take full advantage of this offer. Over £1,000 a Year for Life, or £5,000 in one cash sum, will definitely be paid to someone in a few weeks' time, and just for solving a few sets of easy puzzles. If you are not already competing, then make up your mind to start right away—NOW! The directions for newcomers, below, tell you how to enter for this huge prize. Remember, someone must win, and the only charge is the small one of threepence, to be paid in stamps at the end of the contest, as a checking and registration fee.

HOW YOU CAN WIN.

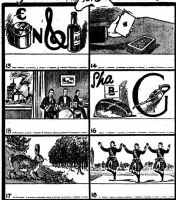
All you have to do is to solve a few sets of simple picture-puzzles. In a week or so the Grand National, most dramatic of all test contests, will be run—and therefore we are representing in these puzzles the names of National winners and runners and other well-known steeplechasers.

Each puzzle denotes one name. The first two puzzle-sets have already appeared, and here you have the Third Set to solve. They are all quite simple and, to help you still further, we gave last week the puzzle list from which all the horses' names used in the competition have been taken. Thus you really have only to fit the right name to each picture to win that stupendous first prize.

In the space underneath each picture write IN INK and in capital letters the name you think it denotes. Then cut out this set and keep it carefully with the other sets until next week, when we shall give you six more of these fascinating puzzles to solve—and so on, for only seven more weeks, making ten in all.

With the tenth and final set we shall tell you how and where to send in your entries. No claims will be asked for in this competition, as every entry received will be fully examined. The general competition rules were given last week and will be repeated later.

'Grand National' SETS



Competitors who wish to start an extra attempt for our great prize should note that the competition is also appearing in "ANSWERS" and "UNION JACK," where they will find extra copies of our "Grand National" puzzle-sets week by week. (Owing to a misprint in the competition rules, it was erroneously stated in our previous issues that the offer was also appearing in "FILM FAVORITES." This great contest is only open to readers of "The THRILLER," "ANSWERS," and "UNION JACK," and we regret any inconvenience this error may have caused to readers.)

NEW READERS

You must not miss this colossal prize offer on any account. If you are not already competing, ask your newsagent to get you a copy of last week's "THRILLER" (dated February 13th), which contained the first two of our "Grand National" puzzle-sets and the "key" list of names, and you—

CAN START NOW!

(Continued from p. 118.)
—the place where people trade loads of themselves, lured by the lights, hypnotized by that little jumping ball. The Moses of facts, of potential mischief: The city of false hopes! The fortune awaiting him at the bank had lost its thrill. Yvonne Lovemoor—the pathetic little figure in the blue dress borrowing money to make good, the desperate little breadwinner of two revolvers—was arrested, imprisoned, out of his reach! And, now that she was out of reach, she had suddenly become the most deplorable thing to him in all the world.

He turned nervously, and in a whisper, assumed the task of selecting clothes with an outward calmness which by no means tallied with his feelings inside. After all, clothes were important. He could not go out without them, could not interview people like Mrs. Van Wierw and police officials in the suit he had rented last night. Eddie Nardini, still at large, Joe Zena, brooding over that stiff face-

ever, sitting up as a shadow revealed by pale light in tones. The lady rose and held out a hand to Penrose, a hand heavy with so many diamonds that it dazzled him.

"I have been hoping to meet you again," she declared, in a strong American accent. "I'd been telling Captain Richards how marvelous you were last night."

"We want people to look for you," put in Richards; "but couldn't find you anywhere. It was some time, of course, before—Mrs. Van Wierw got back. We'd rather like you to stay with us."

A car was outside. It deposited the three of them presently, not outside a luxurious hotel, as Penrose had rather imagined, but before a white, plain-fronted building in a narrow street. Captain Richards led the way into a small room, where dinner was laid for three. He closed the door softly after them and turned the key, leaning against it with folded arms. Penrose listened, suspecting

there, there was only the remains of two hours' work. They had merely located the villa, you must understand. Many people had complained, but nobody had been able to tell exactly where it was. However, we had the road patrolled, and bashed in quite a number of the gang while they were trying to get away.

The man who had posed as Mrs. Van Wierw was uncorking a bottle. He tipped some of the contents into three glasses and passed them round.

"Your health, Mr. Penrose," he cried, Penrose drank. A quantity of something he has never named in the villa helped him.

"Monseur Rossi?" he suggested.

The man with the moustache bowed and sipped his drink.

"And the fair lady by the fireplace is my colleague, Monseur Lemmo. He regrets—we both regret—having to leave you in such a predicament last night. But, as you will remember, his period had passed. Besides, you had achieved so much up to that moment, that he quite counted on your picking him up in the car. Your health, Mr. Penrose!" He bowed again, lifted his glass and drank.

Penrose sat down. He could read between the lines now, and tried to fill the gaps that the two detectives, Lemmo and Rossi, had played. According to Yvonne's story, Nardini's principal victims had been English and American women. Rossi had been picked for the job, beyond a doubt, because of his facility for language. The gang, of course, were clever technicians, clever enough to detect a practiced jewel-thief.

Their joint scheme had partly succeeded, but of one thing there was no doubt at all: Lemmo owed Penrose his life. He had got to trade on that, use it as his lever to ensure Yvonne's release. He felt, too, that it was a strong card.

Rossi unlocked the door and a man came in, bringing with him the first course.

"We are looking for somebody," admitted Lemmo presently, "somebody who knows this man Nardini—or Hider-well. We thought perhaps—"

"Do you know where you can find him?" asked Penrose.

The other glanced at his colleague before replying.

"There is a certain house in Ventimiglia that is under suspicion, close to the Italian border. It is known to be the haunt of robbing. The frontier is being carefully watched. We are going there, in fact, immediately after dinner."

Penrose placed his card.

"I have seen Doctor Maraldi both with and without his beard—in the latter case only in the dark. Miss Lorraine would help you—the Englishman you arrested this afternoon."

Both men started.

"We arrested no Englishmen," declared Rossi.

Penrose's face fell.

"But," he remembered, "the paper said—"

"Exactly," chimed in Lemmo from the end of the table. "A woman believed to be a member of the gang." It was found to be a mistake afterwards, and she was released. She was an Austrian, as it happened. Not a very outgoing sort of woman, Penrose, but we had nothing definite against her."

Penrose, consenting to accompany the two detectives to the frontier town, persuaded Rossi to drop off with him at his hotel. He was beginning to be worried about the girl. It was possible, of course, that she had left for Paris, as she had intended. On the other hand, he was growing more and more suspicious that something untoward had happened—something connected with the reappearance of Zena in Monte Carlo.

At the police office's request the boy was suitably forthcoming. The boy gave the appearance that it had been kept in. The youth Penrose had first interviewed provided the information that the lady had gone out during the afternoon, and that a man had come into the hall shortly afterwards and paid her bill. He had shortly taking her bag down to the taxi.

"The lady looked ill," he said. "It was the man who did all the talking. I thought that she was asleep."



To their horror, they saw, peering in at the window the face of Joe Zena, whom they thought to be dead.

dent—both had slipped his memory. He had got to exert himself on Yvonne's behalf, get the American woman interested. If everything he feared, he would take the "row" to the British Consul, and see if he could do anything.

The outfitter loved his way out, with Penrose's cheque in his pocket, the pile which he passed to an assistant outside two suits lighter than when it had been brought up in the elevator. He expressed the hope that Penrose would patronize him at some future date.

Left to himself, John Penrose surveyed his own reflection in the mirror. He still looked somewhat hattered. His dinner-jacket mild, wicker-shower though it was, fitted him comparatively well. Ten minutes after the tailor had gone, he descended to the ground floor. He was half-way across the hall when a hand fell on his shoulder.

"Mr. Penrose, I believe!" a low voice intimated.

He swung round, to see Captain Richards, the man with the moustache, standing just behind him.

"Might we have a word with you?" continued the other. His colored hand indicated Mrs. Van Wierw herself, reclined and glowering at

another trap. To his amazement, Mrs. Van Wierw began remarking her guilty of previous stories and denouncing it in the nearest manner. A big fellow, revealing himself, well-groomed hair beneath. The suddenly transformed Mrs. Van Wierw looked pipe and tobacco pouch from the mantelpiece and turned to Penrose with a broad grin.

"And there we are, you see!" he laughed. "I've afraid we treated you very badly last night, Penrose, very badly indeed! We're very much obliged to you, of course, all the same." His English was extraordinarily good; not quite so perfect perhaps as his American, for it carried more than a trace of French accent behind it. "You see, the mischief was quite a surprise. We had counted on the usual dinner at a mysterious villa on the coast—got Captain Richards, who unfortunately was reticent, carried the gang."

Richards nodded from the doorway.

"After you made your spectacular run after the car," he said, "I found myself involved in a street row and received a bit on the chin which had not set for a valuable half-hour. That was the reason there was no much delay in rushing men to the spot. When we did get

THE LAST BEGGING.

The presence of the hotel corroborated some of the boy's story. People were always coming and going, he insisted, it was no affair of his to give out other people's affairs. The lady's bill had been paid, and that was all that had interested him.

Penzance doubted in the waiting car, feeling more depressed than ever. The man who had opened Yvonne away had not been identified as Zena, but Zena had been behind the kidnapping beyond a doubt, and behind him again Eddie Nordal. The motive was all too evident. However, certainly, for the part she was believed to have played in the failure of his plans, it was important, too, that she should be prevented from giving too much away.

It was now on dawn when the big car came out at the front door. Lennax, big nose, thin in a coat blue-wool suit, got out first. Penzance followed, with Zena close on his heels. A group of men not them in the road—photographers, officers, Penzance guessed, sticky Frenchmen who folded their arms when they talked. There was a long conversation held on the pavement, while Penzance looked up the sidewalk, checking at the delay. He knew little concerning the French police, had heard nothing of their methods. Russ and Lennax appeared convinced that they were on the right track, but Penzance was not so sanguine.

Regarding the man mistaken? Nordal, as far as he could discover, was a big man in the crook world, somebody for whom the police of the five continents were looking. It would be astounding, in the circumstances, if he were actually untraced in this drab little town. Looking Nordal did not interest him nearly, either. He wanted Yvonne, the girl who had been cunningly reasoned while she slept.

The conference on the pavement broke up at last. Lennax beckoned to him, and the three made off together, crossing a tree-lined thoroughfare and diving into a maze of narrow streets by the waterfront. Quiet, garish places showed here and there on the walls, strange characters lolled at corners, staring at them curiously as they passed. They dived presently through the low doorway of a drinking-house. Through a door now wanted to their feet as they came in—as well as hands as Penzance ever wanted to see. A stout woman in a shiny apron folded her arms and stared at the newcomers defiantly.

Russ's automatic covered the group. "So just where you are," he recommended. "If anybody moves—"

A knife panned Penzance's head and struck, quivering, in the wall behind him. He just saw Zena's face, bandaged and everything, as he dived through a doorway out of sight. Hope, that had died down to its lowest ebb, burned again. Russ & Co. weren't such fools after all. They were on the right track.

A door shut out to trip him as he made for the opening, but he was in time and jumped. Other police were appearing at the back of the bar. He sensed, as he shot up a crazy stairway, that the real was definitely in progress. The news evidently had spread to the upper building. A lady came in a cap and muffled dried rickety from a room, saw Penzance and turned sharply, scuttling for an upper story. A woman slammed another door in Penzance's face, and retreated. Letters, appearing on the landing beside him, pushed a gun into his hand.

"Go quickly," he murmured. "You don't know who you're going to meet here."

Penzance faced him squarely. "Nordal?" he whispered. The other shrugged his shoulder. "Who knows? People who believe they know the man we want say he was seen here this afternoon."

Russ came up, and two more. They began hammering on doors, pulling men and women roughly out, lying them up and going over them. Somebody, squeezing through like a snake, switched off the stair light. It was turned on again and two shots rang out, one after the other. Penzance saw a detective holding his side as if hurt—and the Zena lying in a corner, hidden up.

The crook's glazing eyes rested on Penzance.

"You, is it?" he muttered. "That's right—oh! You don't—remember—me." He

gesticulated towards the ceiling, indicating somewhere higher up. "She—was?" He fell back, rattling his hands.

Penzance sat and sat, and he was seeing red now. Zena had been trying to tell him that she was dead. Joe Zena was dead, anyway. If he had had a hand in it, he had paid.

She strikes took him up. Blue-disinherited walls showed bare, cracked and damp. Odors not his, food and nauseating—a queer contrast to Nordal's luxurious quarters at the villa. A pale light revealed four doors, all in a row. He opened the first and went in, gun first, ready for anything. The switch would not function, but there was nothing there; only a bed and some old furniture.

A message came again to his ears and he collapsed. It took him time to realize that he failed to open when he tried it. He hesitated, then drove the flimsy woodwork in with his knee. A shot passed him as he flattened against the wall inside. A stamping foot came after it—Nordal's lieutenant, the man he had been with in the town! Penzance's gun jabbed from the shadows into his stomach. There was a wild cry, and two areas shot upwards against the light.

Penzance let his hand and passed on over his. He had seen Yvonne, too up on the floor, with a scar knotted across her mouth. A man's boot, hovering? A second by the ceiling, side-tracked his attention. It was a paired leather boot, well shined and expensive. That and the odor of cigars gave him his clue. He grasped the boot a split second before it could disappear, hung on to it with all his strength. The bulky form of Eddie Nordal, alias Holt, was snatched from its moorings and pitched unceremoniously to the floor. The gang leader, bareheaded and more vulgarized than ever, bounced to his feet with a string of oath on his lips. He came at Penzance like a bull, both arms raised stiff as if to beat him down. The other side-stopped and hit out. Nordal tottered backwards and crashed in the angle of the wall by Yvonne's door.

"Don't move!" said Russ softly from the doorway. "We've been looking for you, Dr. Holt!"

Stepping backwards, holding that pipe in his back again, Penzance tried on a flimsy lace affair that was lying on the boards. He looked down at a mass of mud and wire and something speared in between what looked like

hair. A cold feeling running down his spine, he turned to the spot where the girl lay.

"Look out!" he cried. "The Yellow Death!"

Looking low, he came with the flat of his hand at something yellow and venomous that had drifted from some corner on to the girl's white throat. His fingers met it and carried it away, shrilly gaspingly, to Nordal's corner. He tried to follow it with his eyes, but he felt it should escape him.

"You're tough, tough," he called. "Bring it here! There!"

Dr. Eddie Nordal emitted a yell of mortal agony, rose to his knees and fell. The scorpion, appearing by one of his hands, shot across the floor like a yellow streak. Penzance flung at it and missed. The importunate Russ knocked it when it was two feet up the wall, and carried it neatly with his shoe. He looked at Nordal, turned his eyes and shrugged his shoulders. Penzance had Yvonne in his arms. He watched Russ help Nordal's lieutenant up with his foot and drive him towards the stairs at the second-point.

"Quite, eh?" said the girl weakly, eyes on an irregular stain on the floor. "You ought to be in bed, you know. You're no longer here."

Penzance laughed. "Come back and look after me," he retorted. "You always, though," he added. "I mean it."

"You mean me to make that seriously?" "Why not?" he returned. "I've been crazy about you ever since I learned you had disappeared."

"What right have you to say that?" "A stuffing of many boats ever here Borg-gave warning of the approach of the stretch-party sent up for Nordal."

"Well," demanded Penzance quickly, "what about it?"

"You're mad!" insisted Yvonne again. "Mad, mad, mad!" She slipped away from him, making with swift steps for the door. "I've been crazy ever you much longer than that. I should's have said I wasn't in the town, if I hadn't been. You've a whole lot to learn about women, Jack Penzance!"

Penzance, fuming after her painfully, found her waiting for him in the next room.

THE END.

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THE PAPER WITH A THOUSAND THRILLS

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CROOK HOTEL By John G. Brandon

CAN YOU DISCOVER—

WHO KILLED MARION LEROY?

Here's another mystery for you to solve in

BAFFLERS The Popular Detective Story Game



Detective-inspector Grahame's diagram of the fatal sitting-room.

It was one o'clock on Sunday morning, the 12th, when James Burton, the oddsmonger of Flat 1, Grosvenor Mansions, Kensington, heard two sounds which might have been shots from an automatic. Quite naturally Mr. Burton did not think they were anything of the kind, for the very simple reason that one simply did not think of such things as automatics in such a highly respectable neighborhood. However, although various unusual sounds came to him from above, he did not concern himself unduly, and dropped off to sleep until nearly a hour later, when he was awakened by a distinct and loud crash from the part of the back of the premises.

During a dressing-gown, he made his way to the rear of the flat, and, peering out through a window, he saw a dark figure pick itself up from the foot of the fire escape which terminated there and stagger away through the door at the back of the part to the north, way that he passed. He heard the sound of a motor as it accelerated, then that died away to silence.

Feeling that there was something that was not quite right, Burton determined to go up and see his neighbor in the flat above, Miss Marion Leroy, an actress, to find out if she was quite all right, for it was from her flat that the sounds had come.

His ring at the bell brought no answer, and he remembered that the maid was away on a visit to an aunt and that Miss Leroy was alone the next night, and when he still got no reply, he got on the knock. No answer whatsoever!

Worried, he decided to seek the advice of Mr. Anton Girella, a restaurant proprietor, who lived in the top flat, but was told by a sleep and snoring look-alike manœuvre that Mr. Girella was not at home. Thoroughly alarmed, Burton awoke the janitor, and together they entered Marion Leroy's flat.

A scene of terrible tragedy and chaos met their eyes in the lounge at the back of the flat. Burton's bed-rooms were in the front, where the main traffic went, but the door on the heavy pattern had fallen from the wall and lay broken on the thick carpet, and stretched out grotesquely by a big arched was the body of Marion Leroy, a crimson stain over the heart on her white evening dress. The rest of the flat was empty, but Burton noticed that the window which opened from the lounge on to the fire escape was open.

Burton phoned for the police at once, and it was not long before Detective-inspector Grahame arrived on the scene with the Mr. Burgess.

An examination showed that Marion Leroy had been dead about an hour and a half, and had been shot by a bullet through the heart. The doctor estimated at about five or six yards range. Searching round, Grahame was unable to find a gun on the floor beneath a

book-case. One shot had been fired. Then he discovered that the brass picture, which was at the opposite end of the room to that where the body lay, had been brought down by a bullet, and the bullet was still lodged in it. This proved to fit the gun he had found, but as only one shot had been fired from the gun, it seemed that the shot which had killed Marion Leroy must have been fired from another gun—an examination of the bullet taken from the body later proved it to be of an entirely different calibre. There were vague fingerprints on both the butt and the barrel of this gun, and Grahame sent it away for these to be photographed.

He noticed on the edge of a low book-case and on the carpet beside it several dark smears. Blood—and adhering to these on the book-case he found several short light-colored hairs. He observed that the book-case was quite close to the screen by which Marion Leroy's body was found. (See diagram.) Grahame examined the window which had been found open, but, beyond a few scratches, discovered nothing of any value. At the bottom of the fire-escape, however, he picked up a handkerchief on which were the initials "R.S." Back in the flat, Grahame searched the girl's bed-room. A locked black box on the dressing-table interested him and, forcing it open, he found it filled with cigarettes of a brand unknown to him. He picked one out casually, and found to his amazement that within the smoke were filled with tobacco, the contents contained a quantity of a potent drug. So Marion Leroy died! (This was proved in the medical examination later.)

In a drawer in a bureau Grahame found a bundle of letters. They were of recent date, and were passionate love-letters from a man who signed himself "Dick." One letter, dated only two days previously, interested Grahame particularly. It contained the lines: "I am frightened for you. What I proposed to you last night horrifies me now. Who did you not tell me before things went so far? To kill is a ghastly thing, yet this Girella man is a fiend, and for you—how can I resist?" The letter becomes rather incoherent, as though written under great stress, but one more line drew Grahame's attention. "Would it not be better for us to tie together?" Grahame frowned.

Girella was the name of the man in the flat above! He would see that gentleman later. Searching deeper into the bureau, he discovered several pale tickets for articles of jewelry, and this set him on a new line.

He left the flat to make various inquiries, and discovered the following facts:

Marion Leroy had been in great financial trouble. She had paid over enormous sums to Anton Girella, and was now considerably overdrawn at the bank.

An investigation of some of Marion Leroy's stage friends brought out more interesting information. Apparently she had been secretly engaged to be married to an immensely wealthy American of long name, named Mervyn Holt, and Holt had a key to her flat.

Grahame gathered that the principal attraction about Mervyn Holt, however, had been his millions, as he was a hard-spoken-tempered man, and his ruthlessness had made him many

enemies, and several people were able to tell the detective that Marion Leroy had been carrying on an affair for some time with a young artist named Dick Sherrington. Apparently Mervyn Holt was jealous.

Grahame sent two of his men out, one to interview Holt and the other to see Sherrington. He gave three instructions that they were at all costs to get samples of their fingerprints. With a little strategy he knew this should not be difficult.

The first man to return was the one who had been to see Sherrington. Sherrington was, apparently, a Finnish young man of about twenty-eight. He had appeared white and nervous, and had been wearing a black beard which he had worn all the time the detective was talking to him. He had said that he knew nothing and had not been out the previous evening. The detective had obtained his fingerprints on his cigarette case.

When the other man returned he said that Mervyn Holt, a big, broad, grey-haired man, had been terribly upset and shocked at hearing the news. He had apparently retired to bed early on the previous night. The detective produced a number on which were the "wanted" prints.

And in the wardrobe Holt's hat, Grahame learned from a servant that he considered had seen a man answering to Mervyn Holt's description leave Grosvenor Mansions and drive off in a two-seater at about 1.15 a.m.

Grahame decided to see Girella upstairs. He went up to the flat above but could not get any answer to his ringing. Entering the flat he found hurried signs of departure and the place empty.

Calling the janitor, Grahame learned that Girella had not returned but that his servant had left early carrying two packages, one of which he recognized as belonging to Mr. Girella. Returning to the flat he searched in and found in a cupboard a large box full of the dope filled cigarettes such as he had found in Marion Leroy's flat. These cigarettes were done up in little bundles of about twenty. The telephone in the flat gave him an inspiration, and within a short time he discovered that a call had been put through about 3 a.m. that "phone to a number in Lambeth. Tracing it to its source, an East End cell, Girella was in time to catch Girella, and his man on the point of leaving. Grahame recognized the servant as a wanted criminal, but Girella, nervously, ducking unaccounted for, he did not know. Arresting both on suspicion in connection with the murder, the detective made his way back to the "flat."

In his office the detective found that the photographs of the fingerprints on the gun discovered in the murdered girl's flat were ready. These on the last were obviously quite different to those on the barrel. The prints on the barrel being thick and heavy, while those on the gun were much lighter and thinner. He compared them with the prints of Holt, Sherrington and Girella.

The questions to be answered are:—

1. Whose prints were on the butt and barrel of the gun found in the flat? (2 marks)
2. Who killed Marion Leroy? (5 marks)
3. What is your theory, derived from the facts given, of the crime and the circumstances which led up to it? (5 marks)

(The rules appear on the next page.)

SINISTER HAPPENINGS THIS WEEK IN—

A SENSATIONAL NEW
MYSTERY NOVEL

THE MYSTERY OPENS.

Having seen his sister Edith off on the R.M.S. Wallrose, bound for Colombo, Matt Kearney was surprised to meet his friend, Detective-superior Dawson Haig, in London. Haig had come down to the Wallrose much earlier, and by now should have been back at the Yard. Yet here he was still in Dockland. Could this have anything to do with the fact that the Wallrose was shipping a million of gold for Australia, or—

It was in a little public-house a short while later, however, that Dawson Haig spoke to him in a low voice, not of gold, but of dope-running, of a firm calling themselves Messrs. King & Co., and a mysterious person named Jo Lang. It appeared that Messrs. King & Co. had by mistake sent a number of cases on board the Wallrose and afterwards had returned there in a hurry. They were now stored in Messrs. King's yard, and this yard adjoined the mysterious premises of Jo Lang.

Haig is called back to the Yard and Kearney takes his place in investigating the premises of Jo Lang, who is a known fence. Accompanied by Detective-sergeant Norwich, Kearney enters Jo Lang's place, but finds nothing of any value and does not even see the fence. One thing only does Kearney get, and that is a little notebook which he picks up from the floor and slips in his pocket. A short time later Norwich is found horribly murdered.

Dawson Haig calls at Kearney's flat and finds him out, but stops to examine the notebook. It is in code, but Haig finds certain references to the Wallrose and various criminal enterprises. While studying the book Haig hears a sound and hides. He sees a horribly deformed, terrifying creature slip into the room and watch up the notebook. His attempt to stop it fails and the "thing" disappears into the night.

Meanwhile a curfew has been put round Jo Lang's place, but it is not known that killing in the building is the mysterious and sinister genius known as Y'u'an Hoo So, beside whom Jo Lang is an nothing. It is Y'u'an Hoo So's notebook which Kearney found, and, setting their traps, Y'u'an and

his confederates succeed in shooting the police and escape to the river. There they board a rowing-boat, and are pulling out into the stream when suddenly they see a *speed* police patrol approaching.

(Now read on.)

ON THE RIVER.

It is the fence who the cabin-d thrashing of the screw of the river police boat grow angry and more audible; and:

"You will end by destroying us, little blighter," came the sing-song voice. "It was your folly which has brought me here upon the river at this hour." He spoke to the coolly beautiful woman by his side.

"Good! They would hear the oars. The tide is carrying us down to those barges. Stay by my friend, with the book, and when we reach the first of them, swing lightly. Should the patrol pass inside—we may be detected. But they will probably pass outside."

"They will see us before ever we get there?" the woman whispered.

"Be silent, tender one. It is a virtue which I desire you to cultivate."

"Out outside those barges, Ma'am," said the officer in charge of the River Police launch. "I want to get a closer look at

that smart motor cruiser lying in the Reach."

"It belongs to Mr. Van Steyn, the American sportsman. It has been under repair in Bullock's yard."

"How do you know?"

"Stevens told me at the depot a while ago. He found out yesterday."

"What's it doing out in the stream, then?"

"I suppose the repairs have been completed, and they meant to go down this evening but were held up by the fog."

"Where the fence are they going? This is no season for motor cruising?"

"I don't think there's anybody on board except a scratch crew. They intend to take her round to Cowes, I expect."

"Is that so? Well, edge in close, dead slow, and let's have a good look."

The River Police drifted alongside the sport-looking craft—a forty-foot motor cruiser. Her paintwork was very new, but of a queer, lathwork grey, unusual in pleasure boats. She had four lights on; but there was nothing to show that there was anybody aboard.

"Want me to hail 'em?"

"No. A thing like that can't be a trader. There's probably only a watchman there, Garry on."

But when, half an hour later, Jo Lang's party drew alongside, two very active Asiatics appeared above the bows of the motor cruiser. Having ascended Y'u'an and the woman on board, they rapidly hunted up and disposed of a great number of small packing-cases stored in the stern of the boat.

These contained the opium destined for Australia—which Dawson Haig had been carrying.

It had been recovered that night under the very nose of the police, and was now safe from their custody!

In the luxuriously appointed little cabin of the cruiser, Y'u'an drew from the pocket of his fur-lined coat a string of blazing fire

RULES

The rules are absolutely strict. On the previous page you are given details of a *Blazing Problem*—have you it another already? Well, you are told the story of a crime, and given ALL the clues necessary for its solution. In your own opinion, read the problem through very carefully, giving consideration to every detail, then try to answer the questions at the end.

Exact observation marks are indicated after appropriate text passages with these given on Page 104. These answers are printed below you so that they may not catch your eye before you have had a chance to test your skill. Remember, it is the *score* of your solution, and *not* its exact meaning, that counts.

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