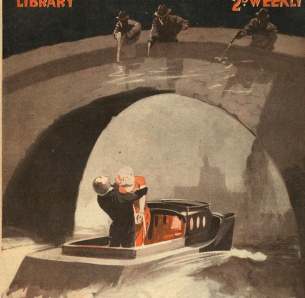


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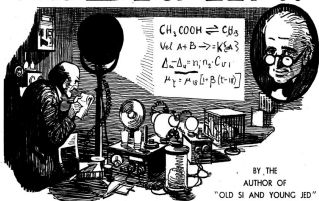
The

UNWILLING MURDERER

POWERFUL, LONG, COMPLETE MYSTERY STORY

BY M. E. MILES

The BRAIN!



BY THE
AUTHOR OF

"OLD SI AND YOUNG JED"

EARL DECIDES.

"I THINK, Professor Probyn, you forgot you had ordered me to be round with the car this morning," the chauffeur explained respectfully. "At my job, you walked out of the house without looking towards me, turned in the other direction, and presently got on a bus. So I followed, in the car."

Professor Probyn looked at him sternly. The professor was always most annoyed when he was confronted with evidence of his own absent-mindedness.

"May I ask, my good Frankie," he said sternly, "why you didn't prevent me doing all this? After all, I should have been at the works of the International Power Corporation an hour ago, and here I am stranded in the country five miles from anywhere!"

"I'm very sorry, sir," Frankie said. "But you've always cautioned the never to interrupt you when you are deep in thought, in case you lose the thread of something important."

"Very true, Frankie. Very true. But now your better driver me to the works."

It was true that the professor's thoughts were valuable. Indeed, they were beyond price to the shareholders of the Imperial Power Company. The professor had invented all sorts of things, from an improved Diesel-type engine to a fool-proof slot machine, and all his inventions were patented by the great company called the I.P.C. The company's works spread over half the town, and the most important building in the works was the white-tiled laboratory that had been fitted up for Professor Probyn.

Frankie set about starting up his car to drive the professor to the works, and it

was only then he discovered he was out of petrol. He tramped off with a trowel and tin, and then the other watchful ventured to speak to the professor.

This was a frightened, shabby girl, fair-haired and pretty. The professor, already lost in thought, swept her into the car, and it was only later that he learnt all about her. Her name was Penny Wain, short for Penelope, and she appealed to the professor for help because her mother had once known Professor Probyn.

The professor bought her a good meal and told her to see him that night. He had other things to see to by that time. He was in his beloved laboratory, where as many as a hundred young men worked out details of his various ideas. And in the private laboratory at the centre was his assistant, Bramble Brandt.

Brandt was a revelling little hunchback who was one of the most gifted scientists in the country, and he carried out all sorts of vivisection work for the professor. But just at present he was puzzled.

"I can't understand it, professor," he said. "You gave me those guinea-pigs to look after, three months ago, also that cage of rabbits and those mice. Do you know that none of them have had any young since they've been under observation?"

"I know all about that," the professor said blandly. "And do you know what has been happening to them?"

"I don't know," Brandt admitted sadly. "Only that you've had them focused for a few seconds a day under the rays from this wireless machine."

"Exactly," said the professor. "And then he told Brandt the secret of the strange rays admitted by that radio con-

stant. Rays that had the power to make any living creature that came under their power sterile. Brandt's little red-rimmed eyes widened when he heard this.

"But—but that means that with the secret of those rays you could prevent the whole world breeding! Any nation that owned that secret would be masters of the world, for they could wipe out their enemies in twenty years!"

"If they could control it," the professor said sadly: "But that is what baffles me: the secret of making those rays strike in the right place."

But later on the professor learned that he had been beaten. He had a brother, an even greater scientist than himself. But Boris Probyn lived the life of a hermit in the heart of the country, and he conducted research work only for his own amusement. Now he wired to tell Oscar he had scored off him again. He knew how to control the point where those rays would strike down from the Heurricane layer. That is, the awful curse of sterility could be directed at any nation he chose, at a single blow if need be!

The thought of this awful power frightened the professor. He smashed his radio set containing the secret. Brandt, the little hunchback, the man they called the Devil Dwarf, ground his teeth.

"The lost!" he muttered. "The sentimental fool!"

He crept down to his own supply. Here, in a special jar, artificially fed, he kept a chicken's heart that was still beating, although it had been taken from a chicken twenty years ago. It was an experiment he had seen performed in New York University, based on research work Lindbergh

This story is written by WALTER TYRER.

... There is no one living who can write a more dramatic story, full of unexpected twists and surprises, with characters who live and breathe.

—NOT THE SECOND EDGAR WALLACE...

THE FIRST WALTER TYRER

was following up. The heart of a dead creature still beating!

"It only," whispered Hamster Brandt, "— was a brain! If I had the brain of Boris Probyn in that jar, kept alive artificially, pulsing away, working for me. For me, Hamster Brandt! If I had Boris Probyn's brain and its secrets I should be Master of the World!"

"Why not?" The chicken's heart lives on, why not a brain? Why shouldn't I steal Probyn the Hermit's brain?"

THE professor knew nothing of the strange and sinister experiments of Brandt. He never probed down into the dissection-room. It caused him distress to think that animals had to be sacrificed in the interests of scientific knowledge. In fact, Professor Probyn had long known to cause the laboratory some inconvenience through his sentimentality. There was the occasion when he grew extremely fond of a guinea-pig that had been a resident in the laboratory for some weeks.

The professor called it Percy, and fed it lettuce-leaves through the netting in front of its box. He was restrained from taking it home and adopting it as a pet, when he was reminded that that particular-guinea-pig had been infected with the germ of a virulent disease that might have reached England a desert in less than a fortnight.

After that the professor left the animals to Brandt. Professor Probyn left the laboratory without a thought to his duffy little assistant. His mind was on that round-eyed girl with the desperate look in her eyes, the girl called Purity Wan, who had spoken to him that morning.

"Boris Probyn would look after her," her mother said," he reflected. "And the doctor's seem to know that there are two Professor Probyns."

Pringle was waiting for him. He looked at his master hopefully as he opened the door of the big car, and he cleared his throat and addressed him respectfully.

"I hope, sir," he said, "that you have had a pleasant and prosperous day among the wonders of science."

Professor Probyn stopped dead and blinked at the pale plump face of his chauffeur.

"My dear Pringle," he said sternly, "have you been drinking? Because if I were to administer to you the effect of alcohol on the human kidneys—"

Pringle's face was distinctly red.

"Thinking, sir?" he said. "Not me, sir."

"I thought I detected a certain wildness in your conversation, and over-indulgence in alcohol often impairs subsequent thought, particularly among those of feeble intellect. I wondered—"

"I can explain my remarks, sir."

Pringle said loudly: "It was a conversational gambol. I've been reading a book, a very good book. It's called 'How To Be Charming' and it teaches you how to make all men your friends and a great many women your slaves. Very useful, you must admit, sir. My remark was a bit of the first chapter, sir. It says you must always greet people with some laudatory remark having reference to their favourite subject."

"I see," the professor asserted. "Well, my dear Pringle, I'm not charmed. Rather the reverse."

"I see, sir. You are probably what the book calls the 'indignity, snark, or resistor type.' They're difficult. I believe you've got to read the appendix to disconcert them."

The professor signed, entered his car, "Take me home," he pleaded.

Pringle was a very good chauffeur, at any rate. He drove the professor to his high Victorian house, deposited him on the step. Then he sped away, for he gauged the car some distance away. The professor stood by the front door and fumbled for his key, and realized with a sigh that he hadn't got it. He might have rung, but he had had the bell disconnected because it disturbed him.

Patience he made his way round to the back of the house. He was not accustomed to entering his house through the kitchen quarters. To-day, however, he created a disturbance as he lifted the latch and walked in. There was a considerable snuffle, and two dark heads were lifted from the table. The foreign maid, Martha, looked very flushed and uneasy. She swept a newspaper over whatever lay on the table.

Her visitor, a cropped-haired young man with a face that looked as though it had been barked out of wood by an impatient carpenter, stood stiffly to attention. If it was possible for emotion to show on as dull a collection of features as it was possible to assemble, he would have been described as uneasy.

"Ah, Martha," said the professor amiably. "Martha."

He wondered—did he employ that young man? He couldn't remember engaging him. He could remember Martha, for she had been with him quite three weeks. Martha was the girl who brought his morning tea without milk and with an absurd slice of lemon floating in it, to look uncomfortably against his nose. The professor hadn't screwed himself up yet to tell her that he didn't like tea that way.

But Martha helped the professor out of his embarrassment.

"This," she said, as she indicated her stark-faced companion, "is my young man. His intentions are quite what you call honourable."

The professor beamed, glad to have the matter cleared up.

"Quite," he said. "Quite so. Of course."

"I hope," Martha said anxiously, "the Herr Professor holds no objection to me entertaining passengers. Karl, he is quite like myself. He is a comrade-water at the Magdalen. One day he will be managing director there."

A vaguely human expression flitted across Karl's face.

"And then we marry," he said happily. "Before," Martha corrected him.

The professor realized that something was expected of him. He stammered out a brief, blow-you-my-children speech, and he assured Karl he was welcome in his kitchen as often as he liked, as long as he liked. Karl beamed from the high; Martha beamed. She stepped forward gratefully and insisted on helping the professor out of his coat. She followed the professor upstairs and attended to the serving of his supper, so that he was thoroughly content.

Karl was bending over the table again when Martha returned. He was concentrating on the task that had absorbed them both when the professor appeared. They had taken the contents of the professor's waste-paper basket, and they were carefully piecing torn-up scraps of paper together.

"You progress, Karl?" Martha asked him softly.

Karl grinned.

"I am baffled, countless," he said. "Many codes I know, and many codes I have solved when others have given them up, but this one baffles me. It is made up entirely of ones and twos and crosses of things called aces and kings. It is evidently a very subtle code and beyond my skill. I shall submit it to headquarters to be solved."

He slid the pieces of the professor's torn-up football coupon into an envelope, sealed it up carefully. The girl called Martha looked on with respectful attention. When he had done, she opened her hand and showed him a roughly crumpled piece of paper.

"I took this from the professor's pocket," she said. "It is a telegram."

Karl snatched it from her, flattered it out. It was the telegram the professor had received at the works, the report of success from his brother Boris.

"After thirty-two hours' desk work I have worked out equation governing control of your motor's no. You have been lacking in application, my dear Boris."

"Boris."

Karl looked at this with frowning concentration.

"Who is Boris?"

The woman he had called countless answered him nervously.

"I told you. He is the professor's brother, much cleverer than my professor."

"And Boris, does he work at the laboratory?"

"Nah! This Professor Probyn, he does not work anywhere at all. It is as I told you. He lives in a bungalow in the heart of the town, with one old woman to look after him. He has a little laboratory, but mostly he works with pencil and paper and his brain. His mighty brain! Professor Oscar, when he is baffled, then he signs and he always says, 'I wish I had the brain of Boris! And this means that

the brain of Boris has beaten him again. It refers to the thing we are seeking."

"The thing we are seeking," sighed Karl softly. "That thing we were sent by our leader to find. Power over life and nature, power to kill the soldiers of the future! What power over our enemies that would mean to us now!"

"The girl listened to him respectfully, but there was an answering glow in her own eyes. She looked at the man and an observer who could have watched her eyes might have detected something. This woman didn't work for a leader or for a nation, she worked as women always work, for one man alone.

"What will you do, Karl?" she asked him.

"It is enough!" he said. "The secret is solved, and we must waste no more time. We must strike! Our faithful friends are waiting; all the time the youth lies at Brighton, with her engines running. Now at last we can tell them there is work to be done!"

"You will take the secret?"

Karl's eyes held the gleam of a fanatic. "We will do more," he said. "We will take the professor!"

FENELope's TASK.

PENNY WISE entered the professor's study with some nervousness. She had been waiting on the steps outside for some time before she realized the bell wasn't working, and ventured to knock. Then the foreign maid who answered the door had stared at her curiously, as though, thought Penny, she had no right to be there. And then, worst of all, she couldn't be sure the professor would remember her.

But she was reassured about that from the start. The professor seemed to be absorbed at his desk, surrounded by calculations, but he turned up at once when he saw Penny, and he came towards her with one hand extended.

"Welcome to my humble home, my dear Penny."

He glanced at his watch, standing respectfully by the door.

"Bring Miss Wise some tea, Nelly."

The girl sped away to obey, and the professor explained her vaguely.

"She's a dear little Devonshire girl, never been in London before."

"She—she looks rather foreign to me," Penny ventured.

"Does she? Well, perhaps I'm wrong. Nelly was the last but one. So, she wasn't. That was the one that had it. It doesn't matter, anyway. Take your hat off, my dear, and sit right down and tell me all about yourself from the very beginning."

"There isn't much to tell, and there's no reason why you should be bored with it. But mother made no promise, before she died, that if ever I desperately needed help I was to come to Professor Probyn. I would have come last week, but I still had half-a-crown, and I thought perhaps that wasn't desperate. But when I just hadn't anything at all—"

The professor's eyes were moist.

"You seem to be a very kind, very independent, and very plucky girl. Now suppose you tell me just what you are doing in London on your own?"

"I'm here studying music. At least, I was going to study music. Everyone said I should study. The violin, I mean. And London was the best place. But then, when I'd got it all planned, it turned out there wasn't any money. The scholar died, and when they looked for my money it just wasn't there."

The professor nodded. He asked her one or two penetrating questions, and he

didn't seem very widely minded now. He jumped up and started pacing up and down the room, and the girl sat and watched him, and gradually began to be afraid. When the tea was brought the professor fumbled at an old wardrobe in the corner. He sought vainly for a secret drawer with his right hand, and succeeded in opening another with his left elbow.

He pointed on a faded photograph, a picture of a young couple standing in front of a painted stile on a photographer's back-sloth.

"Is this your mother, my dear?"

The girl's eyes were watery.

"Yes," she said. "That's mother. Only—she was lovelier than that, really. And this other one—in that you, professor?"

"No," Professor Oscar said slowly. "That is Professor Boris Probyn, and he is much more entitled to the title of honour than I am. It is as I thought. Your mother played a very important part in my brother's life. In fact, you may say she influenced his whole life."

"But—but—she married daddy!"

"Exactly. She married daddy. And Boris Probyn became—Boris Probyn, the greatest scientist in the world to-day, the true successor of the great ones of the past. And—a darned deal. You'll find him living in a broken-down bungalow in the heart of Kewland Forest, where he doesn't have to see a human face from one year's end to another, apart from the old woman who goes in and spoils his food for him and mends over his clothes."

"There you'll find him, trying his wingless aeroplane models than fly better than anything known in aeronautical science. And then when he's flown them, he puts them on the fire. You'll find him scribbling his venomous notes by the light of a lamp that looks like any other lamp, except that the illuminating medium is—water. You'll find him working out in a flash calculations that have baffled me for six months, and then—tossing them in the fire."

"You'll know him. He'll be stuffing around in a flabby dressing-gown that he's worn for twenty years, with his toes protruding through his slippers. His hair he cuts himself, and he doesn't usually trouble to stand in front of a mirror to do it. He's clean-shaven, because when he was twenty he experimented with an electrical process that arrests the growth of hair on the chin."

"But you'll see him for yourself. You'll probably find him scribbling an irritating letter to me. That seems to be his chief activity."

"You mean—he's like a hermit?"

"The professor nodded.

"Because of my mother?"

"Because of your mother."

"Then—then I can't go and see him, if losing mother hurt him so much. I can't go and hurt him again. I'm—I'm supposed to be like her. And if mother jilted him for father—"

Professor Probyn came and put his two hands on her shoulders and shook her gently.

"Listen, Scottish one," he said, "your mother didn't jilt Boris Probyn. He jilted her. That's the tragedy of it. He was a pompous youth, acute of his own brain-power, despite his poverty. He was in love with your mother, but he had a burning passion for science, too. He thought of science as his mistress. That's why he broke everything off with your mother. He said marriage would interfere with his research. He said his heart

was unimportant, but his brain was unjilted."

"Yes."

"Well, he jilted her. And a little while later she married your father. And then Boris realized what he had done, that his mighty brain had made an utter fool of him. He turned his back on his career that day. He snatched at his complicated apparatus."

"But—but that shouldn't have mattered."

"Perhaps not," the professor said dryly. "But, you see, he smashed it over the head of the man who happened to employ him. Anyhow, since that day Boris Probyn has been a recluse, and apart from a little help he's given me, a few things he has tossed off in his spare time, he has cheated the human race of all his great gifts."

"That's why I want you to go and see him, to give him your mother's message. Not because of what he can do for you. Because of what you can do for him!"

"I—I think I understand," Penny Wise said slowly.

THE GIRL AND THE HERMIT.

PENNY WISE advanced unasked as the blighted dogger into the heart of the woods. She'd seen no living creature since she asked the way at that cottage about two miles back, and she'd been sure that the old woman had looked at her straightly when she asked for the bungalow of Boris Probyn. It was eerie because of trees, a path to follow that was completely overgrown in some places, and undergrowth that clanked at your ankles almost as deliberately as a human hand.

"Professor Probyn wouldn't have sent me if it hadn't been all right," she told herself.

She went on doggedly. She kept in her mind the picture of a queer, embittered old man, and she remembered the way Professor Oscar's voice had softened when he spoke of his elder brother. The world thought Oscar a great scientist, but he was happy enough to give Boris head. Boris, who had wasted his wonderful gifts. What it too late now to stir him to make up for the wasted years?

The path widened here, and suddenly Penny turned a head and saw a gate before her. She hesitated, wondered if she would find the gate locked. But as she drew near to it the gate slowly swung open before her.

Penny ought to have been awed, but she smiled. It was just like the stories from Grimm's Fairy Tales her mother used to read to her.

"You can't find me, Professor Probyn," she said softly. "I know how that's done, with a rag of some sort. Why, they've got it in some popular restaurants for the service boys."

Her own voice cheered her; she pressed on. Whether late in the path, and she saw the bungalow without anything else mysterious happening to her. She bent back when she saw it. It was a remarkable old place that had once been surrounded by a veranda, but the veranda had completely collapsed at one side. Several windows were broken, the outer door sagged crazily on its hinges, and at the most prominent corner of the veranda there was a heap of discarded tin cans around which lies huddled body, as though aware that no attempt would be made to baffle with them.

Penny approached the veranda, keeping carefully away from that heap of tin. She peered into the darkness beyond the sagging door.

"Is anyone there?" she called.

There was no answer. She waited a few moments and then stepped inside. The room was immediately flooded with light, and Penny noticed that it had the same property she had seen in the lighting of expensive shops. The colours under its glare remained perfectly natural and unaffected.

She had entered an L-shaped room, and now she passed through into the other half of it. She found the professor sleeping on a dishevelled camp-bed, and she had time to regain her nerve, chance to take stock of him. She might have been frightened if she had come on such a man in such strange surroundings suddenly, but now she looked down at him, and she pitied him.

She saw a wasted little man who couldn't have weighed much more than six stone, emaciated as he was. But his head was out of all proportion to his body. It contained her of pictures she'd seen of Martians invading the earth. She wondered how that straggly neck could support such a ponderous head. It was nearly all brain, too, part of the horse structure above the ears. The face was negligible, the chin weak, the nose small but hook-like, the mouth was a mere mouth.

"I think," Penny said softly to herself, "that I'm glad it was daddy's mother married, after all for all your wonderful brain, Mr. Probyn."

Perhaps he caught the faint sound of his name. At any rate, Boris Probyn started suddenly to wakefulness, scratched his filthy dressing-gown closely about him; glanced down under his bedding white-crowns at Penny. She saw a faint resemblance to Oscar now, but it was Oscar without the kindness.

"What do you want?" started Boris. "Good heavens, you haven't struggled out here to tell me a vacuum cleaner, have you?"

"No, Professor Boris," Penny told him calmly. "This is a social call. I was sent here by your brother—Professor Oscar Probyn. He said you might be interested if I cared to visit you."

Boris struggled to his feet. He shuffled up and down the long room, and Penny suddenly realized that he was afraid of her. She couldn't be afraid of him, after that, shuffling up and down, muttering to himself, every now and then looking helpfully at her from under red-rimmed eyes.

"Why," she told herself, "he's just like Grandpa? I shouldn't be surprised to see six more like him come from somewhere!"

"My brother," said Boris, "is a blundering and tactless fool, and he'll never make a scientist so long as he lives. The fact that he sent you to me shows he has no regard whatever for my wishes. I explained to him that I was conducting an important scientific research that was not to be interrupted, and he proceeds to send a procession of impudences and bad-mannered stragglers to call on me. Will you please go back to him and repeat my exact words?"

Penny sat down on the camp bed. These didn't seem to be anywhere else.

"It'll be," she said. "But first of all, professor, does the name of Principle Morgan mean nothing to you? Because I'm her daughter. Perhaps Morgan is dead. But before she died, she told me that if I proved help, I was to come and see Boris Probyn. She said that Boris Probyn would help me. I see she was wrong. I'm sorry."

"Principle Morgan?" Boris said slowly. Penny rose to go.

"It doesn't matter now. I was a fool

to come. Even if you offered to, I wouldn't let you help me now."

"You're no right to say that," he said slowly. "I—I once hurt your mother. It's a cruel thing to hurt anyone as young and innocent as your mother was. But I realized it later on. But she wouldn't let me make amends. She would never let me make amends. So—I had to carry it with me, the hurt I did her. When she sent you to me it meant something. It meant that I was forgiven. Do you see? Are you going to take that away from me?"

Penny was shaken. She realized how deeply he had seen into her mother's motives. That was why her mother had begged her to turn, if she needed it, for help to Boris Probyn. It was meant to be the symbol of forgiveness from beyond the grave. And if she walked out now, she would rob Boris Probyn of a forgiveness that could never be offered again.

"What is a you want?" Boris asked her gravely.

"I want to study music," Penny told him bravely. "The violin. My father would have been a great violinist, but he never had the chance to study, to put in the hours of practice a great violinist needs. He had to work hard all his life to support my mother. That was why mother wanted me to have my chance. Because I have my father's hands, his gift. I want to study under Kompeted. I want money for his fees. I can earn enough to keep myself, but I can't pay Kompeted's fees, and he's the greatest teacher of all."

Boris Probyn frowned. For a moment she was angry, she thought he hadn't been listening. But then he turned away from her, and he recounted a dusty staircase to some left above. When he came down again he was carrying a violin and a box—carrying it before him—blowing thick dust from it. He thrust this out towards her, into her hands, dirty as it was.

"Play!" he ordered. For a wonder of wonders the strings were instant. Penny put the violin under her chin, tuned it hurriedly. Then she laid her bow across it. She played recklessly; she put her anger and her shame into her playing, and the fiddle responded. She didn't look at Boris Probyn; she had forgotten him; she always forgot everything but music when she held a bow in her fingers.

She stopped because the cheap fiddle irritated her, because it wouldn't respond as a good violin should.

"It's not my good," she said.

"I know," he said humbly. "I bought it for a mechanical man I was making once. But he couldn't play anything but simple things so I smashed him up. But you can play. You have it in you. You shall go to Kompeted. Now go away."

"You mean—you will pay for my classes?"

"I mean that you shall be Kompeted's private pupil, you shall learn everything he can teach you. And after that you shall go to Milan. But first—Kompeted. Go to him on Monday morning. By then he will have my letter. And my cheque."

"There were tears in Penny's voice now. "Professor, I was so made, and now you are so kind! I'll never forget—never! And I'll pay you back. I swear it. But how can I thank you now; how can I—"

His eyes were small and red-rimmed and hostile, like the eyes of a dog that has been chained up too long. He looked at her as though he hated her, but she knew he didn't hate her.

"Go away," he told her. "You are

spoiling my afternoon sleep. Go away and don't say any more."

She laughed. "I'll go," she said. "I'll do anything you say, professor. Anything, I thought you were a beast, but now—"

"Kompeted," he told her harshly. "Start on Monday. And remember to wear. No nonsense about falling in love."

"Who'd have me?" she asked him gaily. She almost ran along the path back to the village, where she could pick up the bus that would take her back to the station. Her heart was singing like a violin. She was going to study under Kompeted, and one day she'd go back to Boris Probyn, and she'd play to him, and she'd make him see he hadn't wasted his money.

BRAND'S LOOK

THERE were three of them from the yacht, but Karl was the leader, and he leaned most on the girl he called the countess, the girl who was the servant of Oscar Probyn. They had been in the woods for hours, ever since darkness came, the countess and Karl and the three from the coast, whispering to each other in their guttural foreign tongue, and now that it was pitch dark Karl judged it time to give the sign to move forward.

"Remember what I said, Max," he whispered. "The countess will disturb him, encourage him to talk, make sure he does not give the alarm. The three of you will be behind him then. You must seize him secretly, and make sure he does not cry out or give any signal. You understand?"

"I understand, colonel," whispered the man called Max.

Karl and the countess moved nearer to the almost darkling landscape. It was the countess who ventured inside, who started in fear when the whole place was flooded with blue-white light. But her nerve was good, and there was no sudden sound. She moved silently forward, and she came upon Professor Boris Probyn in his hard and narrow camp-bed. He lay there sprawling, flat on his back, a cover tucked carefully over him. His eyes were closed, his face was drawn and strange, even for his wasted little face.

"Professor!" whispered the countess sharply.

There was no movement, no sound but her own voice. The countess ventured closer, leaned over and laid her hand on his shoulder. She even shook him roughly.

"Professor!" she repeated.

She jerked at him, and the figure turned over under her hand, the limbs flapping as though he was no more than a stuffed guy prepared for Guy Fawkes night. Then, as he flopped over on his side, the countess saw something else, something that made her blood run in a chilling stream of ice through her veins.

She pointed, tried to speak, and no words would come, and then through her open mouth she started to scream.

It was Karl who silenced her. He darted forward and he seized her roughly, pressed his hand over her mouth.

"Pud!" he raged. "Cowed and fool!"

"Look at him!" gasped the countess. "Look at him!"

Still holding her, Karl looked down at the professor. He saw his short and skinny figure, his scraggy neck, his great head. And in the back of that massive head he saw something else. He saw a hole, not really out of the skull, and inside of that hole was—nothing!

The countess was trembling all over, and goodnight had risen on her arms.

(Continued on last page.)

The UNWILLING MURDERER



*He had orders from the BIG SHOT to
KILL HIS OWN BROTHER ...*

*It was a well-planned murder,
but it went astray*

Chapter 1.

THE FIRE IN THE FOREST.

THE Lagrada's headlights cut twin swaths of white radiance out of the darkness, illuminating the twist of narrow-tiled road and the high overhanging ledges.

Peter Morgan jerk-knifed his long legs with the agility of marsh practice, and got out of the car. Squinting on his hands, he peered once more at the roadside rear wheel. He'd been running on the rim for the last few hundred yards, and the bad surface of the road wasn't doing the cover of the rim any good at all.

Once more he cursed the light-angled opuntias in the re-entrance at Exeter; he had a perfectly good spare but no tools. It was, he reflected, a nice situation for an ex-Detective-Inspector to find himself in.

Without much hope Morgan strolled over to the antique of a signpost that stood on a patch of coarse grass just where the road forked. The lettering on the two weather-beaten arms he found almost indistinguishable.

This, he told himself as he lit a cigarette and went back to the car—this is what you let yourself in for when you try to be too smart in the New Forest. He'd have to risk it,—there must be some place along here where he could put up for the night.

He was reaching forward to the ignition switch when he heard the sound of an engine starting. Great whined shrilly as the shower covered up and changed in what sounded to Morgan like a considerable hurry; from around the bend of the narrower of the two roads appeared the lights of a car.

Morgan eased himself out into the road

and ran over beside the signpost, waving his hands. The approaching car swerved slightly but did not slacken speed. It came out of the side-road in a neatly controlled skid and dashed past him.

He lowered his hands and swore bitterly, gazing after the rapidly disappearing tail-light. The reckless dog had seen him all right; he had glimpsed the driver's face in the Lagrada's lights, and now he frowned, trying to recall where he had seen the man before. The face was certainly familiar—thin and angular, with a lined mouth and a flinted nose—and he had been driving an Alfa-Romeo, black with white wings, with the skill of a Brooklands top-liner.

Morgan traced his memory. And then he had it—Smiley Jordan! Smiley—who had once driven a cargo of smash-and-grobbers from Broad Street to the end of Edgware Road at 79 m.p.h.; Smiley—the

Cornelius Blane made the biggest mistake
any crook could make

AN ABSORBING LONG, COMPLETE,
MYSTERY STORY BY

M. E. MILES

twisted face behind the wheel in a score of hold-ups. Now what on earth was Smiler Jordan doing in the hinterland of Hampshire when officially he was supposed to be exercising his talents with a few outfit in Marseille?

Morgan gave himself just one guess, and broke into a run up the road from which the car had come. Whoever the Smiler left any place in a hurry it was a safe bet he was leaving a man-size headache for the police behind him.

Reaching the first bend Morgan halted involuntarily and then broke into a wild sprint. Tall yellow flames leaped and flickered between the trunks of the trees in a little hollow below the road. As he neared the fire he saw that it came from a wide-waked cottage.

Morgan took the low hedge in his stride, landed ankle-deep in the soft earth of the garden, and pounced across a tiny ill-lit lawn towards the cottage. A wall of heat met him, so though he had plunged headlong into the open mouth of a furnace of hot air. Bending back, he covered his face in the crook of his arm and groped for a handkerchief. The pungent odor of blazing petrol caught at his passing chest.

When he raised his head he stiffened with horror. The figure of a man was outlined in the doorway, swaying drunkenly to a background of fire. A sudden flurry of smokes blotted him out, and Morgan, pulling his coat collar up to protect his face, plunged forward. He felt the skin tighten on his cheeks and smell his own hair singeing. Two feet from the door he was on his hands and knees, crawling with his head close to the ground, seeking for cooler air to soothe his parched lungs.

The roar of the blaze sang in his ears like a waterfall. Blindly he stretched out, got a grip on the man's collar, and began to pull him back across the lawn, away from the inferno.

At last he passed, and lay for a moment with his face buried in the cool grass. The heat beside him stilled, and from his cracked lips came a low groan.

Morgan sat up and pilloved the man's head on his knee.

"Bounce up, laddie," he whispered hoarsely. "You're all right now."

The man's chest arched and lifted. His eyes came wide open and stared unflinchingly at the strange face bent over him.

"Who are you? You're not one of them, are you?"

Morgan grinned, though it hurt his jaw, too.

"At the moment I feel like a major error in the kitchen. How did the business happen?"

The other pulled himself into a sitting position. His blackened face contorted. He pressed his hands deep into the pit of his stomach.

"I'm going to trust you," he panted quickly. "I've got to—for God's sake don't let me down—." His voice died away and he bent double in a spasm of agony. The sweat trickled down his scorched face.

"Look," began Morgan, getting to his feet. "let me—"

"No—it's too late—they got me." With a roar and a shower of sparks the roof of the cottage fell in. Morgan stared at the patch of dark blood that was spreading over the other's clothes just below the waist.

"See who that was?" snapped Smiler Jordan over his shoulder. "Morgan—used to be at the Yard."

"Damn!" The man in the back seat coiled forward, frowning in the darkness.

"Talk about luck!" Smiler went on bitterly. "That means we don't get much of a start, boss—that bloke's poison. See that crook of his? I've had him on my tail before—ar' I give you my word—"

"Shut up!" Cornelius Blane set his mouth in a thin line and drummed with his fingers on the back of Smiler's seat. His eyes gleamed thoughtfully.

"Pull up, Smiler," he ordered. "We'll wait and see what this clever friend of yours does. Douse those lights."

They could see the reflected glow of the fire behind them. Blane was cuddling an automatic between his tapering, well-kempt hands. But there was no sign of Morgan.

"We're going back," said Blane, "you can turn on that piece of grass."

Smiler snarled, and his thin face became leaver will. The treated mouth jerked:

"You don't mean it, boss? It's a hell of a risk!"

"We're going back. Just to make sure."

Smiler obeyed. He recognized the incredible note in the chief's voice.

Furtively the dying man scabbled at his waistcoat with blood-stained fingers. His breathing was quick and shallow. Guessing what he wanted, Morgan tumbled his fingers into the pocket and drew out a small square of parchment with the in-

scription: "Lucress, Beauty Culture, Hanover Square."

"My daughter—works there, Anne—Anne Meredith—she knows nothing of this. Tell her—just tell her that I'm dead. She's all right—I haven't been much good to her, God help me—"

Morgan bent lower.

"Who shot you?" he whispered.

The dying man shook his head.

"Let's—let's call it outside. It's no use—I'm going, and I don't want any fuss afterwards—not for Anne. Tell her to burn the package I gave her—she'll know—don't drag her in the sack— You promise? Not the police?"

"Yes," said Morgan softly, "I promise."

"Thanks—I feel—." The man made a soft choking sound. His body became suddenly rigid.

Morgan knelt immobile for a moment, and then gently lowered the lifeless body to the ground. The creak of the gate across the lawn brought him to his feet.

"Hallo, there! Want any help?"

The newcomer was a tall, broad-shouldered man. He wore a long black overcoat and he kept one hand in his pocket. He was looking at the motionless man of the cottage as he approached.

"Good heavens! Is that your place? How did it happen? I saw it from the road."

"There's been an accident," said Morgan, a little wearily, and indicated the motionless figure at his feet. "He's dead."

The stranger gave him a swift appraising glance and then bent over the dead man.

"She's been shot through the stomach. Looks like a nasty business to me."

"It is," agreed Morgan curtly. "Have you got a car?"

"Yes, but, I mean—damn—I don't like the look of this. That man's been shot!"

The speaker looked away nastily, looking Morgan up and down, apparently ready for flight at a moment's notice.

"You've got blood on your hands," he said softly, his eye glowering beneath the brim of his hat.



Herbie Adams.

"Listen," said Morgan sharply. "I know what you're thinking. But I didn't do it. I saw the fire from the road just as you did, and ran up here. I saw this man stagger out of the cottage—I dragged him as far as here—and then he died. That's all I know about it."

"Didn't he know anything?"

Morgan caught the hint of suppressed suspicion in the other's voice and shook his head.

"Didn't you better bring your car up here?" he suggested. "Where is it?"

"Down by the cross-roads. I suppose you better drive this poor chap to the nearest police station. It'll help you to carry him down to the gate."

Morgan stepped across the body and bent to lift it by the shoulders. But, instead of taking the feet, the other man took a quick step forward—his right hand came out of his pocket and described a neat curve that ended at the base of Morgan's skull.

With something between a cough and a grunt of surprise Morgan pitched forward on his face and lay across the body of the man he had rescued.

Caroline Blane smiled thinly and replaced his automatic. He whistled, and Smiler Jordan's unimpressing face appeared above the hedge. Smiler stalked across the lawn and viewed the wreckage.

"You done pretty good, chief. Lucky we come back."

Blane, using his feet, thrust Morgan clear of the other man's body.

"We're going to take this one with us," he announced. "Just to tangle things up. We'll find some more convenient way to dispose of it. No corpse—no murder. It's very simple."

"I don't like it. Honest, chief, ain't it akin' for us?" pleaded Smiler hoarsely. "Dinner's ready with a stiff in the back seat ain't your idea of fun."

"Since I propose to act in the back seat with the stiff I don't see what you've got to worry about," said Blane. "Where's the stiff? We're in the middle of the New Forest, and it's after midnight. Getting scared of the whole business already? This is just the beginning—and you know what the end will be." Blane took out his automatic and toyed with it as he spoke. Smiler had seen that gift in action now already that night.

"Sure, sure—I'm with you, boss," he said.

"I thought you would be." Blane took a thank from his pocket, unwrapped it and emptied its contents over Morgan's clothes. The pungent aroma of brandy drifted into the air.

"That will delay matters still further, I imagine," said Blane pleasantly. "A funny story about a disappearing corpse by a man with a very bad hangover."

Smiler sighed, comforting his twisted mouth.

"Morgan won't 'arf be mad," he said.

THE CORPSE THAT VANISHED.

IT was just before nine o'clock when the Lagonda, now fully shod, pulled out from the White Hart at Ringwood and turned out on to the London road.

It had taken Morgan some little time to identify himself, first to the village P.C., and then to the Ringwood police. But once they had got through to the Yard, and had established the fact that Peter Morgan had been used recently a promising member of the C.I.D., and still had influential friends at headquarters, things went more easily.

The burnt-out cottage, it appeared, had been visited furnished two months before

by a Mr. Arthur Winter from London. He had paid a quarter's rent in advance, and had given a London bank as a reference. He had lived as something of a recluse, driving into Ringwood for groceries once a week in a small car.

From the charwoman who had "obliged" daily with a little sketchy housework the police learnt that Mr. Winter had been a silent and uncommunicative sort of man, and that he had been absent from the cottage for days at a time on more than one occasion. But a more significant fact was that no correspondence of any kind had been delivered at the cottage.

It looked very much like a hide-out. Morgan noted as he swept over the undulating road to Romsey. He frowned, trying to recollect the features of the man who had died in his arms last night—
—he had given his daughter's name as Anne Meredith, and yet Ringwood and district knew him as Arthur Winter.

And Arthur Winter's body had been spirited away by a gent who wore a long black overcoat, the same gent having presumably arranged the bombie in which Arthur Winter was to be inclosed. And Smiler Jordan was, at least, filling the role of chauffeur.

Before calling in at the Yard, as he had promised, Morgan paid a brief visit to the office of Universal Investigations, in Southville Street. The office consisted of one large room with the usual office furniture, and a smaller back room equipped as a laboratory.

When Morgan kicked open the door the only evidence of human habitation within was a pair of feet propped on the desk; behind them, as though suspended in mid-air, was an opened newspaper—the midday racing special.

The newspaper was lowered a fraction, and Herbie Adams looked thoughtfully over the top. Herbie was clad in a rugged mood; everything about him looked either untroubled or else overdone. Back in the days when Len Harvey was a fly-weight, approximately in the dawn of the boxing era, Herbie had been an aspirant after heavy-weight honours. Practically everybody who was anybody in late division had, at some time or other, had the doubtful pleasure of smacking at Herbie's chin, and Herbie looked like it.

Walking to make the top-thurs Herbie had drifted into small-time burglary, and had seen the inside of most of the popular goals. But that was all finished with; Herbie was now a reformed character.

"Hiya, big shot," he greeted his employer, and then went back to his appraisal of the Hurst Park entries.

"Don't talk York at me, and take your feet off the table," said Morgan cheerfully, seating himself on the corner of the desk and running through the post.

"I done that," said Herbie with some heat. "We got an invite to Lady Castleton's reception next week—in our professional capacity. Girrah' spilled again, she is, and we gotta watch the garden. I bet there won't 'arf be some kickin'." His eyes grew dreamy.

"If you're looking forward to a free home-up you can wash the notion right out of your mahogany skull," said Peter Morgan brutally. "Lady Castleton's bling is out—we've got something bigger in hand."

Herbie spotted the square of sticking-plaster at the back of Morgan's head.

"You been slugged?" he asked hopefully.

"I cut myself shaving." Morgan took out three pinned notes.

Accidentally Herbie's massive jaw edged forward.

"I reckon I 'ad a hairin comb!" he observed conscientiously. "Thanks, chief."

"Blimey," said Morgan severely. "It's in an investment, and I want to see some profit. I want to get a line on Smiler Jordan, and I want it bad. Now jump to it."

Herbie pocketed the money and got to his feet.

"Blimey," he said earnestly, "you leave it for me. For three quid Smiler's as good as in yer lap. My lady friend knows 'is sister." He narrowed a brow at an tin head, tilted it to a jaunty angle, and shuffled to the door. "So-long, Big Shot, be sorry yer."

"You'd better, you big ape, and make it siber or I'll tear your lights out."

Madame Lucinda's establishment occupied two floors of what had once been a dual residence. The atmosphere was redolent of expensive femininity.

Reverently Peter Morgan retreated his hat and approached what he took to be the reception desk, where a dainty blonde in a black satin frock cooed lovingly into a white telephone.

"I wonder," said Morgan politely—"I wonder if I might have a word with Miss Meredith?"

"She's engaged at the moment," said the receptionist, consulting a pad on the desk. "But she'll be coming out for lunch any moment now. Can I make an appointment?"

Before Morgan had time to ask if he might wait the curtains at the far end of the room parted, and a girl in a dark gown came forward.

"Anne," said the receptionist, "this gentleman has been inquiring for you."

"My name is Morgan," Peter began, and found himself looking down into a pair of friendly grey eyes. She wasn't strictly a beauty—the tip of her nose had a nasty tilt to it, and her mouth was full-lipped and generous. He matched her smile and said: "I have a message for you—from your father."

Momentarily the colour drained from her cheeks.

"I see," she said quietly, and walked to the door. Outside the aveng round to face him; her eyes were eager.

"Tell me, please—in he all right?"

"Perfectly," Morgan assured her. "Will you hitch with me?" She nodded, absently.

"Thank you." In the car she turned and gave him a frank, appraising stare. "Are you one of daddy's friends? I don't think I've seen you before. Forgive me if I seem rude, but I've been rather worried about him lately."

"Then you don't think the New Forest has done him any good?" Morgan's tone was casual; he appeared absorbed in his driving. But he noted the girl's start of surprise.

"Now Forest?" she asked. "But I don't understand—I thought he was in France."

This, Morgan decided, was not going to be so easy.

"I believe he had to change his plans at the last moment," he improvised. "I saw him last night and he asked me to look you up. Let's not get, shall we?"

"Very well," she agreed; "but I do think daddy might have told me he was over here. I haven't seen him for three whole weeks."

They managed to get a corner table at Florian's Grill. During the meal Peter gathered the impression that his part-

was an independent young woman, well able to look after herself. Further—and this perturbed him—she was gratefully devoted to her father.

When they reached the coffee and cigarette stage she said abruptly:

"I must be going soon. You said something about a message from daddy."

Morgan took a deep breath. "I'm sorry, Miss Meredith," he said softly, meeting the steady gaze of her troubled eyes. "I've got bad news for you—you must be brave."

"You mean—her death?" Her voice was little more than a whisper.

Blatly he nodded and pressed the slender hand that lay on the table beside him.

"Dead!" she whispered dully. "He warned me—he said it might happen—but I didn't believe it. I can't believe it!" Though her lips were tremulous her eyes were dry, bright with unshed tears. "I must go to him—where is he?"

Morgan explained as best he could.

"You'd better not go back to work," he suggested gently. "Haven't you any relatives you could stay with?"

"Only an uncle," she said, and added, with the ring of a smile, "he's in America. Take me back, please—I'll be better working."

"Well, let me call round and see you to-night," he urged. "I'm going to Scotland Yard, and I may have some news for you by then."

To that she agreed, and as he followed her slim figure out of the restaurant Peter Morgan registered a row that was not unconnected with the recent operations of Sinner Jordan and a certain gentleman in a long black overcoat.

HALF A PORTLAND

THE chief crooked as Chief Inspector "Tubby" Clayton shifted and executed the ponderous gymnastic of crossing his legs. Sixteen stone, bald of pate, Tubby was the picture of baldness. But there was not a better nor a more alert brain than Tubby Clayton's in the whole of the C.I.D.

"It's a queer yarn, Peter, my boy," he rumbled. "I know Sinner's back. We'll get him in for a talk. Blods by the name of Winter, eh? Client of ours?"

"Not to my knowledge," said Peter Morgan. "His reference might be worth checking—Arthur Winter, Eastern Counties Bank, in Lombard Street."

"The idea had crossed my mind," interrupted Tubby bluntly. "Even without you among us we are not altogether witless."

"I'll have to take your word for that," conceded Morgan. "I thought the piece looked decidedly shabby as I came in. I really must speak to the Commissioner about it. We taxpayers have some rights. I'll make an offer to you, my old ball-turret. Universal Investigators Unlimited, of which you may have heard, will elucidate the mystery of the missing couple and make you a present of it. I can't say fairer than that."

The chief inspector stroked his stomach with massage-like fingers.

"Young fellow," he boomed, "modesty was always your drawback. What you need is a spot of police protection. You'll be getting yourself hurt one of these days.



Morgan needed help, and was glad to see the stranger in black. But he was to change his mind very soon.

So help me, I'll have you looked on a charge of obstructing the police the first chance I get—you and that tramp of yours. I'm telling you for your own good. Now run along like a good boy and don't worry papa any more."

Peter Morgan grimaced impudently and got to his feet.

"Any time you're in trouble just give us a ring," he invited. "Universal Investigators Unlimited, and we'll be happy to oblige."

They were in Anne Meredith's tiny flat in Knightsbridge. Her face, pale and strained, was crossed with anxiety as she tried, for Morgan's benefit, to give him some picture of her murdered father.

Her mother had died when she was quite a child. Her father, Arthur Meredith, had been a prosperous lawyer until about ten years back, when unskilful investments had brought him and his daughter in the verge of poverty. Since then, as far as she knew, he had been employed by a number of firms as legal adviser. One of these appointments had necessitated frequent trips to the Continent, trips that had of late become more frequent and had lasted longer.

"Really," Anne confessed. "I know very little of what he was doing. I don't even know who his employers were. But all of a sudden I realized that he had changed, become secretive, as though afraid of something."

She sighed, her fingers lying and interlacing in her lap.

"I tracked him about it—but all he said was that we were going to be rich, very rich, one day."

"He didn't live here with you?" Morgan put in.

"No—he was away so much lately that he used to stop at various hotels in London."

"Pity," said Morgan. "I hoped we might be able to get a line on the people he mixed with. He had no correspondents sent to him in the New Forest."

"I know it looks bad," said Anne steadily, meeting his eyes courageously. "But I'm sure daddy wasn't a crook. He promised me that when he wanted me that he might just—disappear—one day." In spite of herself her voice was throaty, and she turned her head away.

Morgan crossed the room in a couple of strides and imprisoned her hands in his.

"I'm going to call you Anne, if I may. And I'm going to help you—if you'll let me. But I'll be honest with you. I'm a private detective, used to be at Scotland Yard. Before he died your father gave me a message for you, and begged me not to tell the police. I didn't tell them."

"Thank you," she said softly. "What was it?"

"You were to destroy the package he had given you. He said you'd know what it was."

"Just—that! Nothing more?"

Morgan shook his head, his hand torn at the pocket flap in her vest. She stood up.

"I'll get it," she said, and walked very quickly into the bed-room.

When Anne came back she held a thick, square envelope in her hand. It had no inscription. Spontaneously she named it over.

"He gave it to me two months ago," she said. "And asked me to keep it for him until he asked for it. He was terribly excited and talked me about it—he said half a fortune was inside. And now I must burn it!"

Morgan seated understandingly, and held her slim shoulders firmly so that she looked up at him.

"You'd like to see the man who persuaded him brought to justice, wouldn't you?"

She nodded, her eyes never leaving his face.

"Of course. You mean—I ought to open it?"

He relaxed her, strapping his shoulders.

"It may help us—you can burn it afterwards. If you wish, whatever it is, it can remain a secret between us. I don't want to persuade you against your father's command—"

"Don't say that!" she interrupted breathlessly. "You've been more than kind."

Abruptly she slit the envelope and drew out a folded square of thick drawing paper. Her fingers trembling she unfolded it.

All that was to be seen on the paper was a thin, wavering line, drawn in ink, that crossed the paper from side to side. At one place, where the line dipped sharply, there was a cross, and from it a straight-ruled line ran diagonally across the paper; perched along this line was the number 22. That was all. The rest of the paper was blank.

Morgan took it from the girl and studied it, frowning.

"Doesn't convey much to me," he muttered thoughtfully.

"Poor daddy! It doesn't look much like a fortune. He wore the figure in pencil. But what on earth does it mean?"

"It might be a map," suggested Morgan doubtfully. "Perhaps that straggling line marks the coast—but it doesn't tell us much—there are its place-names. Do you mind if I make a copy?"

"You can keep the original!" answered Anne, with a shy smile. "I can't imagine why daddy wanted me to burn it."

"It means something," said Morgan, "otherwise he wouldn't have bothered it."

you haven't got it, it can't cause you any harm. Now, I'm going to be fatherly, and advise you to go to bed and get a good night's rest; you look pretty well done-up."

Listlessly she acquiesced. At the door of the flat he turned.

"I wonder if you would have lunch with me to-morrow? Shall I call for you?"

"It's making an awful nuisance of myself," she protested.

"Nonsense," he hardly the word, he assumed her gently, and felt his heart skip when he saw the colour come back into her face.

The first intimation that anything was wrong was the open door of the flat. Herbie hadn't a key, and Morgan was quite sure that he had locked the door before leaving.

Instinctively he fastened himself against the wall. But there came no sound from the darkened room within. Cautiously his hand stole toward the door and groped for the switch.

As the light flooded the room he passed on the threshold, and then darted inside with a fervent:

"Damn!"

The room was in confusion. It looked as though a tornado had swept through

He remembered that curious scene last night—how anxious the stranger in the long overcoat had been to find out if the dead man had said anything before he died.

He thought of the pending drawing that Anne Meredith had given him just half an hour ago. Was that it? Was that what the searchers had expected to find in the flat?

Across the chair, ready to go to the cleaners, lay the suit he had worn last night. What a careless fool he'd been! Practically he searched the pockets. But the little piece of parchment had gone, and, with a groan, he remembered he had noted Anne's address and telephone number on the back of it.

He looked into the sitting-room and grabbed the "phone. Again and again he dialed, but there was no answer.

BLANE TAKES THE SOUND.

ANNE MEREDITH sat with her chin cupped in her hands, staring at the fire. Try as she would she could not prevent her thoughts straying to the father who had drifted away from her, and who was now dead in some mysterious, horrible fashion. All that Morgan had told her was that her father had been shot and that his body had been missing. Of the fire she knew nothing.



Morgan and Herbie hastened out, just in time.

it, leaving a trail of ripped cushions, emptied drawers, hurled papers, disarranged upholstery; wide strips of paper had been torn from the walls; the fireplace was a litter of smashed chairs and crumpled heaps of paper.

Morgan stood and surveyed the wreckage.

"Blimey!" said a familiar voice behind him. "We kin laugh!"

Herbie Adams lunged into the room and tilted his bowler to the back of his head. His hatless face glowed with indignation and abashed. Morgan shot him a quick glance and smiled sympathetically.

"Enter as a ruddy beast," declared Herbie viciously. "What's all this, chief—in lookin' for someone?"

"Somebody has," said Morgan thinly.

"Search me," insisted Herbie helpfully. Morgan stepped over the debris and went into the bedroom, where a similar sight met him. The bed had been stripped; the mattress lay on the floor, slushed in half a dozen places; the pockets of all his suits had been turned inside out.

"You got something, an' somebody wants it," stammered Herbie. "Or you did 'ave something," he amended positively. "Looks like a Bratton's Job for me."

Something clicked in Morgan's brain.

Warily the man walked into the bedroom, knowing full well that deep would be out of the question. Then, sharply, the door-bell rang.

Perhaps he had forgotten something. Rapidly she went into the tiny vestibule and opened the door. But it was not Peter Morgan's smiling face that confronted her.

Corianna Blane inclined his head, his impassive eyes never leaving the girl's face.

"Miss Meredith?" he asked anxiously.

She nodded, an unspoken query in her eyes. With a surprisingly swift movement Blane thrust himself through the doorway, clapped one hand over the girl's face and held her pinned against the wall. A second man, stout and broad, but agile as a cat, slipped into the vestibule and shut the door.

Anne Meredith was no Victorian masher like young body was dimly smacked. But it was no use. The smaller of the two men caught her round the waist, swung her off her feet and carried her into the sitting-room.

Blane held her down on the settee, one hand still over her mouth.

"If you make any noise," he told her with quiet deliberation in which she knew instinctively there was no bluff, "I will strangle you. Quite simply." The fingers of his free hand crossed the soft,

white skin of her throat. Then he released her.

She sat up, her eyes flashing with anger.

"I don't know what this means, but if you aren't out of here within ten seconds I'm going to call the police. I haven't anything worth stealing."

She stood up. Blane, not over-gently, thrust her back on the settee again.

"Sit down," he said. "You're going to answer some questions. If you're a wise girl you won't make any trouble. Fix the phone, Loopy."

Loopy Lopes grunted, and with one quick twist of his powerful wrestler's arm ripped the wires from their connections. His mouth loosened as he looked at the disheveled girl.

"Lemme look her, now, I'd enjoy that," he suggested, wiping his mouth with the back of a hairy hand.

Blane, watching Anne Meredith with a smile in which there was little amusement, shook his head.

"Not yet, Loopy." Then, to the girl: "You had a visitor here to-night—what did he want?"

"Find out!" Anne's eyes met his unflinchingly. Her voice was crisp, controlled.

Blane's smile became fixed.

"I see," he said softly. "I admire your courage, young lady. But if you force me to adopt extreme measures it will not be pleasant for you."

"What did Morgan come here to-night for?" persisted Blane, a silky edge of menace in his voice.

"Why shouldn't he?" replied Anne calmly. "He's a friend of mine. I don't see what all this mystery is about—yourself better go."

"You met him for the first time this morning," said Blane. "You had lunch with him. He left here ten minutes ago. What did he tell you? What did he give you?"

Anne felt her wrists caught in a cruel, bone-crushing grip. Blane's amber eyes searched her pale face avidly, intently.

"Nothing," she said faintly, and bit her lips as the constricting pressure increased. "Leave me alone, you—you beast!"

"What did he tell you about last night?" Blane's mouth was a thin hard line. "What did Morgan tell you about Arthur Winter?"

Anne shook her head, sick with pain.

"What should he have told me? I don't know any man with that name—I tell you I've never even heard of Arthur Winter!"

Blane's eyes left her tortured face and swept round the room. He saw the crumpled envelope in the fireplace, and, releasing the girl, went over and picked it up.

"So, Morgan gave you nothing? What was in this envelope? Wasn't that what Morgan got from Winter last night?"

She had been sitting, huddled in a corner of the settee, massaging her wrists. Now her eyes came wide with horror as she realized the import of what he was saying.

"Winter? You mean—my father? But his name was Meredith."

"Spends!" said Blane softly. "So you're his daughter?" He nodded to his assistant. "Make it quiet, Loopy. No fuss."

"Oh," Lopes crossed the room. "Oman, take." He yanked Anne to her feet. His right fist jerked upwards. There was the soft click of bone on bone. Anne Meredith clumped back on to the settee.

Blane thrust Lopez aside and ran his hands over the unconscious girl's body.

"Nice, eh?" commented Lopez.

"She hasn't got it!" snapped Blane. "Tear the place up—we've got to find it." Five minutes later Anna's car looked very much like Morgan's. The search had been thorough, but fruitless.

Blane swore. Morgan would be back at his own place by now.

"We'll take her with us," he said. "She knows more than she says."

They got her into a coat. Blane cautiously opened the door.

"If we meet anybody put an on-act make her look like a drunk."

"Sure," agreed Lopez. "It's a cinch."

Herbie Adams grabbed at his bumper. "We ain't none place!" he howled along the roar of the engine. Morgan nodded, tight-lipped. His jaw jutted, and Herbie was content that meant a scrap in the office. And a scrap—the sort the boss provided—was usually well worth afternoons.

They reached Clarionade Mansions in an illegally short space of time. Anna's door was locked. Morgan kept his finger on the bell for seconds on end. Then, taking a couple of steps back, he launched his muscular frame against the door. It bounced him back with a bruised shoulder.

"I say, old boy, you can't do that sort of thing."

A young man in dress trousers and a white waistcoat but no jacket stood in the open doorway behind him.

Morgan spun round.

"You saw her go?"

"Rather. Nice job. Didn't think she was in for that sort of state."

"What do you mean?" jerked Morgan.

The young man recoiled, visibly disconcerted at Morgan's rebuffance. Or perhaps it was the reinforcement of Herbie's face peering over Morgan's shoulder.

"Well, I mean to say, lad—'n' I met her on the stairs, and I'd say she was as right as a drum. Fairly sound in it. No business of mine, of course; but I mean to say—"

"Who was with her?"

"Dashed if I know. Just a couple of chaps. Now that I come to think of it—one of 'em looked a pretty tough egg. There was a spanking car outside—an Alfa-Romeo."

"Thanks—sorry to bother you," Morgan turned away, sick at heart, blamming himself. They must have traced her by the cord he had left in his suit. Drunk! His eyes closed at he realized what that meant—drugged, helpless, in the hands of the wiles who had murdered her father.

Herbie Adams had been bending over the door, and now he straightened his broad back, and with a proud smile on his face gave the door a push, and it opened.

"Not so dusty," he commented, thrusting a corner contraption composed of wires into his pocket. "I can't need more practice." Seeing the disordered state of the flat, he shook his head sadly and observed that it wasn't right—stuff him full of cod's heads—it wasn't right!

Morgan's fingers were biting into the palms of his hands; a pale throbbled madly in his temple.

"Damn!" he said between his clenched teeth. "Herbie—we're on a job. We've got to get that girl—and if they've hurt her we'll—scow—thar—they mean!"

"Anything you say, gov'ner," said Herbie fervently. "I ain't had a scrap in months—when do we start?"

The information went in the white waistcoat caught them outside the door and started to tell them that, dash it all, they couldn't go busting into people's places just because a girl had gone on a leg. Not really.

"Not!" said Morgan nastily. He placed his hand flat on the young man's still bosom, gave him a push, and watched him sail backwards through the open door of his room. A crash and the breaking of furniture announced that he had arrived.

"Lassus have the best, chum," bellowed Herbie as they ran down the stairs. "You're all the best."

"You'll have your share," snapped Morgan. "This is only the prelude. Did you get a line on Smiler Jordan?"



From the open window of a taxi came a quick tat-tat-tat.

The quiet backwater of Clarionade Mansions was deserted at that hour of the night—almost. As the two men came down the steps to the pavement a taxi, that had been stationary at the kerb twenty yards away, suddenly lurches into motion and accelerates violently.

Morgan halted, his hand on Herbie's arm. Somehow he was in a daze of a hurry. Then, without a word, he caught Herbie's solid body round the waist and hurried him to the ground by the iron railings. From the open window of the taxi came little shafts of orange flame, and a quick tat-tat-tat punctuated the roar of a racing engine.

There was a splintering of glass, and little puffs of dust rose from the back-work of the house.

With tyres screaming the taxi swung down into Dumbarton Gardens, and was gone.

Morgan plucked himself up. In the lamplight his hair seemed more fiery than ever. Pursuit was out of the question—the Laguna was facing the wrong way. Herbie Adams dived himself down, breathing hoarsely.

"Cripes, chab!—somebody don't like us much. Thanks for the tip."

Morgan laughed softly as he strode to the car.

"You're welcome. Unless I'm very much mistaken Smiler Jordan was in charge of that joy-ride. It's right up his alley. Let's go before we have to pay for the broken glass."

SMILER JORDAN TAKES THE REAP.

SMILER JORDAN shuffled uneasily on his feet, his eyes glued on the automatic that was being pushed over the table towards him.

"There has been one blunder to-night already," said Cornelius Blane. One long finger flicked at the barrel of the gun and set it spinning on the desk. "Don't let there be another—or don't come back, Smiler."

"Well, honest, gov'ner, I didn't tell him anything."

Smiler's face was roiled, and his eyes flickered unhappily about the room.

"You told him enough to hang yourself and the rest of us!" snapped Blane, rising to his feet. "It's your brother or yourself, Smiler, choose."

Smiler gulped, and picked up the gun.

"O.K.," he said huskily. "I'll do it." "You've got an hour," said Blane briskly. "Take the book, and see nobody gets a look at that face of yours—they'll be looking for you. Morgan didn't visit the Yard to-day for the fun and games. You, Lopez, go with him—in case sentiment gets the better of him."

Lopez straggled into his overcoat, patted his satchel, and nodded. Lopez was a killer, pure and simple; human emotions, apart from the laser ones, found little room in his make-up.

"It's in line, chum. The guy's a stiff right now. C'mon, Smiler—for Peter's sake, what's a kid brother, anyway?"

Cornelius Blane watched them go, and then went across and unlocked a door by the fireplace. As he switched on the light Anne Meredith sat up, blinking.

The bed she lay on was covered only by a coarse blanket. Her hands and feet were free, but the single window to the room was slantly barred. There was a dull, insistent ache in her jaw, and a bitter taste in her mouth.

With careful estimation she moved away when Blane came and sat on the edge of the bed.

"What are you going to do with me?" she demanded in a voice blurred by pain.

"Nothing—if you're a good girl," said Blane in what was meant to be a soothing voice. "As I told you before, I don't like violence." Some thought of the snatches of conversation she had heard through the door before he came in, and shuffled with haste.

"How can I believe that?" she asked, frowning him reproachfully. "You burst into my flat, seized me, and—drag me here. And then you talk of not liking violence! Did you kill my father?"

"Why, yes, I did," he said, in the voice of one admitting to a brutal fact. "It was like you—no mistook ordinary for courage. I should like to see you go the way he did. When this is all cleared up you and I might take a little holiday together—"

Her hand came up in a vicious little swing, raking his head back on his shoulder.

He stood up. Half-frightened at what might follow, her eyes stared up at him.

"You'll talk," he said evenly, "when I'm ready for you. I like a little spirit—it makes my eventual victory less barren."

Not until he had gone, and she heard the key grate in the lock, did she fling herself on the bed and bury her face in her hands. Her shoulders shook. There was no escape.

"Something on the ball. The town's busy with fluffies, old folks, so careful-like, for Smiler Jordan." Herbie

smashed his formidable jaw and looked sideways at his chief. "I ain't the mosey kind—but Smiler's sorta popular all of a sudden, ain't he?"

Felix Morgan looked the Legends gently into the korb under the trees. They were in the park.

"Spill it, Herbie," he said, "and I'll tell you what it's all about. Did you get a line on him?"

Herbie nodded his teeth and roared. "In a way, I did. But I ain't very loopy on it. It was young Alf Jordan told me. He's a good kid, chief, an' I don't want to get him mixed up in anything. Nicest little light-weight I ever in years. And straight. Not like Smiler."

"We'll keep the youngster out of it," said Morgan with a touch of impatience. "I want Smiler."

"Well, it was like this. I run up against him in Dutch Joe's—he's got a job there—an' we got talkin'. I pressed him proper—y'know, the old-time fighters, an' all that guff. The kid lapped it up; easy on his feet, he is. Then I walked round to Smiler, an' he let out that Smiler was in the mosey again, drinkin' for a raw outfit. He'd been round to Joe's place, talkin' pretty big when he got a drink inside him. Then the kid got sorta frightened an' closed up. So I come back."

"Where does this kid live? I've got to find Smiler. If the police pick up the kid—and you can bet your life they will sooner or later—he'll have to talk. Better let him in talk to us—we'll see if I don't back it." Morgan was already reaching for his gear lever.

"You're the boss," said Herbie. "Down! Deflated way—couple streets from Joe's. We got 'here now!"

Always was superfluous. Once more Herbie checked his previous hat. It looked like an all-night session.

Under Herbie's directions Morgan parked the Legends—over-romantic in that petalain neighbourhood—in a garage off Deptford High Street, and they continued their journey on foot.

Young Jordan looked in a room over a baker's shop, conventionally handy to the Paradise Sports Club, where he did his training. There was a narrow corridor along running behind the shop where the baker kept his vat, and up here Herbie turned.

He knocked at a door half-way along the alley and then waited. He knocked again, and a light appeared in the dusky twilight. The door opened, and a young man in faded pyjamas, over which he wore an overcoat, looked out at them.

"What the hell!" he began, and then recognized Herbie Adams.

"Sorry, kid, but we got to have a word with you," said Herbie.

Young Jordan looked rather relieved, and invited them inside. Herbie introduced Morgan as a friend of his, and they ascended the creaking stairs to the youth's bedroom.

Herbie sat on the bed and eased his leather back.

"It's about Smiler," he said. "I hate to tell you this, kid—"

"I know," said Jordan bitterly. "You don't have to tell me, Herbie. What's he done this time?"

Morgan spoke. He liked the look of this kid, with his square jaw and compact little muscular body. "I'm afraid your brother is in with a rather gang than usual. Something worse than grabbing jewelry that are adequately covered by insurance. I mean murder."

Jordan's mouth went slack, and he sat

down as though his legs had been cut from under him.

"Murder!" he whispered hoarsely. "But Smiler never did any killing—! So that's what the cops are after! They were looking for me in Joe's—but I skipped out."

"Don't get scared. If you'll co-operate we can do things." Morgan patted the disconcerted youth on the shoulder. "I want some information from your brother—I ain't by a minute think he did the killing. If he gives me what I want maybe things can be arranged. I've got some pull at the Yard."

"He's been so cocky lately," said Alf Jordan. He caught at Morgan's arm and went on urgently: "He's not a bad bloke—he just likes cash without working—I don't believe he'd kill."

"Where is this racket operated from?" asked Morgan casually, though his pulses hammered. "Who's running it?"

Jordan shook his head unhelpfully. "He never told me who his boss was, but I—I followed him back one night. It was a lousy thing to do to your own brother, but I know Smiler—"

From down in the passage came the click of a key turning in the lock and the scrape of the door opening.

Jordan sprang up, his shoulders bunched.

"Is this a dame-up?" he whispered fiercely at Morgan, his eyes flashing helplessly. "If that's the police you

"No, no!" Morgan caught his raised fist and restrained him. "The police would knock—who else has a key?"

"Only Smiler," Jordan blurted irresolutely, looking from one to the other.

"You get back into bed!" snapped Morgan softly, slipping the overcoat from his shoulders. "Herbie, hide on the other side of the bed." He closed off the light and stood by the wall so that when the door was opened it would mask him.

The sounds of stealthy progress up the stairs drew nearer and nearer.

"Gwan!" snarled Loopy Lopez in the darkness, prodding the reluctant Smiler with his gun. "We ain't got all night."

Slowly the door opened and the light was switched on. Young Jordan sat up in bed, acting as though he had just been roused.

"Lo, Smiler," he said sleepily. "How's under?"

Smiler advanced a step into the room, his ugly mouth twisted more than ever as he tried to suppress a welcoming smile at the brother he had both led to kill.

"I—I sorta dropped in," said Smiler in a choked voice.

"Let's have some action!" roared Loopy, lunging in the background, watching the scene with what was far his evident appreciation. "Give the young punk his an' let's beat it, I gotta catch up on my sleep."

Neither Morgan nor Herbie Adams could see Smiler's hand come away from his pocket clutching a gun. But young Jordan saw. He lunged himself forward and out of the bed. Smiler's gun roared. Smiler Jordan coughed sharply, spun round on his heels and dropped. Even as he fired Loopy pulled the door shut and ran down the stairs.

Morgan was out on the landing in a flash in time to see the door below open. Lopez took a shot at him, but the bullet ploughed a furrow in the plaster just above Morgan's head. He took the stairs four at a time, risking a broken neck in the darkness, but when he pounded out to the street it was only to hear the shrill

whine of Loopy's Bullock as it tore down the street and round the corner.

Young Jordan sat with Smiler's head on his knee, and Smiler's drooping eyes were glazed.

"I wasn't going to shoot you, kid," said Smiler faintly. "Couldn't warn you with Loopy there—thought I'd plug myself—but Loopy saved me the trouble. I—"

His head lolled back. Smiler Jordan was finished with racket for good.

"Tough luck, kid," said Herbie Adams with the gruff awkwardness of his kind when expressing sympathy. "I didn't even see the scene where it was."

He lifted Smiler's body and placed it on the bed. Alf Jordan turned away, stripped of his pajama jacket and began to dress. His movements were deliberate and unhurried, but in his white face his eyes flashed.

"You heard it," he said thickly. "They sent him here to kill me—but he wasn't going to do it. Smiler wouldn't do that. I know he was in some crooked game, but—his' dead now."

Morgan came back into the room breathing heavily. He took one look at the figure stretched out on the bed, and then at young Jordan's face, paled in the harsh light.

"It's sorry," he said simply, "I didn't expect that would happen."

Jordan buttoned his jacket. Quietly he said:

"If you're out after the mob that did



Blaze clapped one hand over the girl's and held her pinned against the wall another man cautiously slipped into the v and closed the door. "If you make any said Blaze, "you'll regret it."

that "pointing to the bed—"I'm with you. I know where they hang out."

"Good man," said Morgan curly. "Well arrange about your brother as we go."

In the interval Corrells Blaine had been far from idle, and now he was sitting on the edge of Anne Meredith's bed showing her something that brought the blood to her face.

It was a picture of a young woman in her underclothes, bound to a wooden frame. Around her body curled the chains of a whip wielded by a brassy man in striped and trousers. In the agonized face of the girl, Anne, with a gasp of horror, recognized herself.

"Composite photography can be very useful, can't it?" murmured Blaine. "Just think how the children Morgan will feel when he finds a nicely mounted-up copy of this in his mail tomorrow morning."

"You wouldn't dare!" said Anne with a conviction she was very far from feeling. "It's—it's too beastly! You couldn't do that!"

Blaine smiled bloodily, incredulously.

"Why not? I think it's most effective. With the picture I shall add a polite little note telling what I want—the contents of that envelope you say so obstinately about." He examined the picture again. "The figure hardly does you justice, my dear; but I flatter myself the face is a master-

piece. Yes," he added thoughtfully, "perhaps we had better enlarge it just to make sure that none of the expression on that pretty face is missed, and, maybe, remove just a little more of the clothing."

"Stop!" Anne stood up and faced him, looking and cursing in every line of her sweet figure. "If I do what you want, if I tell you what Mr. Morgan came to see me about to-night, what guarantee have I that you won't go on with this—this filthy abuse?"

"Only my word," answered Blaine lightly.

"All right," said Anne bravely. "I'll tell you. There was a kind of map in the envelope—at least, that's what we took it to be. I gave it to Mr. Morgan."

There came the sound of a door being slammed and the pounding of feet. Voices were raised excitedly in question and answer, and Loopy Lopes burst into the room.

"We gotta skip, chief!" he panted. "Things is bustin' open. They was two other guys in the kid's room, an' Smiler tried to pull a fast one, so I plugged him an' bit out."

"Damn! Did they tell you?"

"I dunno, but one of them was fat, red-headed dick. I took a bet on him, but I guess I musta been too excited. I fixed Smiler, the double-crossin' swine!"

"If the kid talks this place ain't gonna be healthy," said Lefty Rawlins, a sloop-pipe of a man with big eyes and no forehead.

"Grab that girl!" shouted Blaine. Anne, who had seized her opportunity, and was as far as the open door into the hall, screamed as Loopy's hurrying body caught her round the waist and flung her to the floor. Loopy yanked her to her feet and stopped her face.

"Pipe down, babe, or I'm gonna get tough."

Blaine emerged from a room along the corridor carrying a small suitcase and wearing his overcoat.

"Get the car," he snapped at Lefty Rawlins, "see she's hauled up—and get a move on." Turning to Lopes he murmured, sucking in his breath, "Pip, you didn't get the kid as well."

"How was I to know how many guys they was in the room?" asked Lopes edgily. "I reckon it was pretty hot gettin' Smiler the way I did—ho was skinnin' to shoot backwards under his armpit, but I saw it in the mirror on the wall opposite."

They heard the crumpling of tyres on the gravel as Rawlins brought the car round to the front. Lopes pinioned Anne's arms behind her back and thrust her forward. The three of them went down the crumpling messy steps from the front door, the strains skirting the blocks drive waved ghostly arms in the light from the car.

Lefty Rawlins seemed anxious to be on the road; the Alfa-Romeo's powerful engine emphasized the absence of the night as he roared her up.

"Say, how about Herkimer?" said Lopes, as he and Blaine bundled the girl into the back seat.

"What the hell! He's mine, anyway," said Lefty, shifting into first gear and letting in the clutch so that gravel spattered under the wheels.

"I don't fancy Oscar Herkimer will be much use to anybody," said Corrells Blaine, "that is—if they find him."

"If!" echoed Loopy Lopes, his confidence restored.

WARM SCENT.

BEFORE they picked up the Lagonda, Morgan put in a call to the Yard. Luckily, the sergeant who took the call was an acquaintance, and remembered his voice.

"Listen, Ross," said Morgan. "This is urgent, and you'd better shoot it over to Inspector Clayton as quick as you can. Smiler Jordan has been shot in a room over a baker's shop in Adelaide Terrace, Deptford. Yes, I saw it—sorry, I'm in a bit of a hurry at the moment, but I'll get in touch with you later on."

Herbie Adams raised a shaggy eyebrow as Morgan came out of the kiosk. He'd been expecting to hear a rash call put in for a squad. Morgan enlightened him.

"You've seen what this mate is like—Smiler was one of them, and he was rubbed out the instant he got out of line. They've got a girl—you heard how they kidnaped her from her flat. Probably drugged, if we beat in on them with a squad the chances are there'll be a packet of shooting—and that mightn't be too good for Anne. When we locate them we'll bring in the reinforcements if we can't handle the job ourselves."

"Suits me," said Herbie. "I'd like to take a crack at a job that sends a quiver to stout his own brother, awfully me!"

"That was Loopy Lopes with him," said young Jordan between clenched teeth.

"I met him with Smiler down at Jack's. He frunched his compact shoulder aggressively and down in a lung, quivering beneath. When I got my hands on that little Yankee I'll take more than a power to stop me."

Morgan swung himself behind the Lagonda's wheel and kicked the engine into life.

"Barney Coomson!" jerked Alf Jordan.

Barfield House stood in a quiet road off the common. It was a square, substantial building with a number of wide bay-windows; everything about it suggested that its builder had intended his work to last.

Morgan made a rapid preliminary survey of the terrain, and noted with some satisfaction that there was a telephone booth at the end of the road where it joined the main road over the common.

Putting the other two into the shadow of the trees that fringed the quiet thoroughfare he said to Jordan:

"Here's your job—if anything goes wrong, and they spot us and start shooting, I want you to get like hell to that phone and get on to the Yard. Ask for Chief Inspector Clayton, and tell him you're speaking for me—Peter Morgan."

Jordan nodded.

"I get it."

"Right. Now the first thing we do is to find their cars and if that so there'll be no mistake. Then we'll see how things come."



With Morgan leading they pushed through the bushes towards the dark mass of the house. There was no light to be seen, and all the lower windows were heavily shuttered on the inside.

The drive swung left in front of the house, and they followed it round. At the rear there was a cobble stable-yard with brick-built outhouses.

Maintaining to the others to remain where they were, Morgan slipped across the stable yard. A moment later he was back.

"There's a Buick saloon here," he whispered, "and she's still warm. It looks as though there ought to be another car in there as well—in a big garage. I'm afraid we're too late."

"It isn't a big mob from all I heard," said Jordan, slowly. "Lopez must have bolted back here as 'warned' you."

"All the same, we're not walking into anything," said Peter Morgan, slipping Herbie's automatic out of his pocket. "We'll give it a look-over, and for the love of Mike, Herbie, don't start anything until I say so."

They moved round the side of the house in silence.

"Shall I crack one o' these, chief?" Herbie offered, indicating the broad bay-window and producing his little kit. Morgan nodded, and Herbie went to it. The window cracked as he eased it back, and all three of them froze against the wall for long moments. Then, with an eagle twist of his long legs Morgan was astride the sill and dropped into the room.

It smelt musty and unclean, and the floorboards under his feet were uncarpeted. Feeling his way round the wall Morgan knelt at the wide fireplace and felt the bars, and satisfied himself that they were in a room that had not been occupied for some time.

There was only one door, and, opening it, they found themselves in a wide passage. Morgan tiptoed down and discovered the kitchen. He came back, and they moved on towards what they took to be the front of the house.

Herbie tapped at his sleeve, he whispered, "I feel it in me tomes."

Ten minutes later Morgan was agreeing with him. Three of the rooms on the ground-floor had been turned into bedrooms; one of them contained three camp-beds and a couple of dirty chairs; one of the other two was furnished with a little more comfort with a single bed, the corner of which was crumpled; in the third room the remains of a fire still glowed dimly in the grate.

Morgan smiled wryly. He was thinking of Anne Meredith in these unkempt surroundings.

"All right, Jordan," he said, "you can put in that call. We've missed them."

While they waited he and Herbie went over the rooms again. They made two discoveries that brought back the snap to Morgan's brow. One was a heap of torn-up paper in the room that had been used as a dining-room—and the papers were parts of an Ordnance Survey Map. The other was in the single bed-room, where Herbie's prying fingers found a short brown hairpin among the tumbled bed-clothes. At the sight of this Morgan's jaw shut tight. She had been there. Anne—helpless, drugged.

When, with elephantine tread, Chief Inspector Clayton changed in with a retinue of bowler-hatted minions he found Peter Morgan absorbed in what

looked like a large jigsaw puzzle. Morgan was kneeling on the floor surrounded by scraps of paper which he was trying to fit together.

"Oh, hello, Tobby!" said Morgan, squatting on his heels. "They were a jump ahead of us."

"Who's they?" asked Clayton, peering at the scraps on the floor.

"The mob that killed that feller down in the New Forest last night and shot Senior Jordan less than half an hour ago. And they've kidnaped Anne Meredith, daughter of the disappearing corpse."

"The hell they have!" Clayton leaped himself into a chair and straddled his knees wide. "Who's running this energetic outfit—Al Capone?"

Morgan told him what he knew, and when he came to the part about Anne Meredith, Clayton shook his head respectfully.

"That isn't the way to do it, Peter, eh?—if you'd told me about her at the start—well—!" He spread his massive palms. "You say she knows nothing of what her father was doing?"

"Not a thing—rather do I, at the moment. They think she knows, or they wouldn't have grabbed her to-night."

Clayton scratched the vast area of stubble on his chin.

"Marshall and Watson, go over the place inside—I want pictures of any prints you find." Turning to Morgan, he frowned. "Looks like quite a case. You know this Loozy Lopez?"

Morgan shook his head.

"Imported Yankee killer, from all I've heard. This is what Meredith left with his daughter—it looks like a link-up with these pieces of torn map. There are at least three different sections in the map, and they're all part of the coast of Devon and Cornwall."

Morgan carefully collected up the scraps of paper from the floor.

"There's a Buick in the garage at the back. It was an Alfa-Romeo that Sinder was driving last night. A saloon—this year's model. Black with white wings."

Chief Inspector Clayton nodded at one of his subordinates.

"Put a call out for it—there ought to be a woman in it as well. All stations south of Birmingham ought to cover it. You can't hide a car like that."

Detective-Sergeant Watson strode into the room with Herbie Adams and young Jordan close on his heels.

"You'd better come, sir," he said to his chief. "There's something funny about the cellar. There's somebody down there—and they're laughing. Come in quite a turn."

The cell was large, its floor was thick with coal-dust, odds and ends of lumber littered the corners, a rat scuttled frantically out of sight at their approach.

"It came from over in that corner, sir," Marshall explained. "It sounded like—"

Before he could say what they were able to judge for themselves, it was a shrill, hoarse cackling, rising to a frenzied crescendo, and then stopping abruptly. It was eerie, inhuman, the cry of a lost soul. In spite of himself, Peter Morgan could not repress a shudder, and Herbie Adams' battered countenance registered stark horror.

Chief Inspector Clayton grunted and moved forward. The light from the gas barely reached the far corner from which the cry had seemed to come, rattled and indistinct.

"Gimme a torch!" snapped Clayton.

He focused the broad beam of light so that it illuminated the wall. There was a door. It had been whitewashed over like the rest of the wall. A large key was in the lock, and there was a hole as well.

Clayton shot the bolt back and it moved without fuss or squeaking. He opened the door and directed the light inside. Morgan saw him stiffen, and heard his muttered:

"My God!"

"So you're back again!" said a thin, cracked voice. "But I won't tell you! I won't, I won't!"

They crowded in behind Clayton. The air was hot and rank inside. There was an iron bedstead with a mattress, and on it, glaring nastily at them, was a man, his knees drawn up to his chin. He was unshaven, and his face had the unhealthy pallor that comes from lack of air and sunshine. His eyes glittered cunningly over them and he bared his teeth.

"No," he whispered, "I won't do it!"

"Crazy," muttered Herbie Adams, half under his breath. "Gawd! What a stink!"

The figure made no move as they drew near, and they saw that his hands were fastened to a short length of chain that was riveted to a staple in the wall. Animal-like, the eyes watched them from under slung eyebrows.

It was then that Morgan noticed that the man was barefoot, and across the sole of his feet ran ugly marks, brown and pink and blistered—marks where the skin had been scorching.

"We're not going to hurt you," said Clayton grimly, "we've come to help you. How do you get here?"

"It's a trick, that's what it is," whispered the man, as though to himself. "It's another trick to make me talk." Suddenly he sat up and looked straight at Clayton. "It's no good, Blah—no you can't make me do it—you know you can't!"

The Yard chief turned to Sergeant Marshall.

"Get an antedance," he said curtly, "and a couple of male nurses—the poor devil's out of his mind. Harry, man!"

All their attention was concentrated on the pallid figure of the man on the bed with his wild, staring eyes—the eyes of a frightened and beaten animal.

"Don't move, any of you," said a soft voice from the open door. "Keep that torch where it is—I can see you all."

Sergeant Marshall had turned to execute his chief's order. Slowly his hands rose above his head at the sight of the figure that had silently appeared in the doorway—a vague shadow of a man in whose hand glared the barrel of a gun.

It was Morgan who answered: "You must be in the wrong suite, my friend. This is Inspector Clayton of Scotland Yard and his entourage."

"No kidding! The cops! Me sticking up a bunch of fatheads! Amusement and incredulity were equally blended.

Marshall caved forward, his hands swinging down. But this change came a second too late—the door slammed and the key turned.

"One hell of a situation!" asserted Chief Inspector Clayton wistfully as he lumbered around. "Who in heck had the nerve to do that?"

Behind him the man on the bed began to cackle.

"Blimey! I'm going off me unless myself," said Herbie Adams, "locked up with a bunch o' coppers! Let's get outa here." The "coppers" themselves had the same idea, and with the assistance of

Peter Morgan's not inconsiderable frame were banging themselves against the door which, with a splintering of wood, capitulated. They streamed across the collar and up the stairs.

Whoever he was, the intruder had made good his escape by the back door. The grounds of Elmfield House were dark and silent.

"There's quite a crowd of people after this little Blane," said Peter Morgan, "and, somehow, I don't fancy the last color dropped in for tea and toast."

Morgan retrieved the fragments of the map and accompanied Clayton to the door.

"I'll come along to the Yard with you, Tubby, and make a tracing of that sketch I gave you. I know a bloke who may make something of it. The poor wretch in the collar—somebody's been treading him, had you see his feet?"

Clayton nodded.

"I did. This looks an dirty a business as any I've ever across—a man doesn't go stark, raving mad with good reason." He made one lunge for against the palm of the other. "Who's this Blane? What the devil is the whole thing about—tormenting and kidnapping and murdering?"

BULLION.

MORGAN was still in the process of shaving, after the retirement of sleep, when a call came through from the Yard with the information that the body of a man with a stomach wound had been found in a pond on Putney Heath, and that papers on the man showed that he was Arthur Winter.

After giving Horrie Adams strict instructions to stay close to the phone, Morgan threw on the rest of his clothes, swallowed a cup of coffee, and fifteen minutes later was confronting a very heavy-eyed Chief Inspector Clayton in his office at the Yard.

"And that isn't all," said Clayton. "We had a report from the Berkshire police—one of their constables was run down and pretty severely injured just beyond Reading on the Pangbourne Road by a large black saloon with white wings. It happened at 1.50 this morning."

"That's the mob," said Morgan. "If they're running down a policeman that means they know we're after them." "And now they're safely tucked away in some inconspicuous spot on the Cotswolds," said Clayton heavily, "and the next time the car appears it'll be a bright green touring driven by an old lady in a lace cap."

Morgan cheerfully repressed him for such a pessimistic turn of imagination, though he had to confess himself that he saw little to rejoice over.

"I'm going to the Ordnance Survey Office to see if I can get anything out of that map," he said, rising. "Heard anything about that letter we found in the cellar?"

"Unpleasant," grunted Clayton. "They had to give him enough dope to put an elephant to sleep. Drop in on your way back and we'll take a look at him."

When Charles Strathwick, manager of the Leigate Hill branch of the President and Investors' Bank, returned from his usually solid lunch, his chief clerk politely remarked that it was a bad business, that, in the middle paper, and added that he hoped that Arthur Meredith was not the Arthur Meredith who had been a client of theirs.

"Good—Heaven!" exploded the manager, grabbing the paper. "Good

Heaven!" he repeated in a lower key. "It says the letter was a solicitor. Might be the same one. I'll have to inform the authorities. But this is terrible! Inland it is!"

The chief clerk watched his manager bustle into his private office and shook his head sorrowfully.

"Barny!" was all he said.

But when, half an hour later, he was summoned to witness the opening of a sealed package from the mails in company with the greatly excited manager and a mountainous chief inspector from Scotland Yard, he revised his opinion of his superior's behavior.

"Been a depositor for years," puffed the manager. "Between ourselves—a pretty thin account lately. He brought me that a month ago. 'Don't bother about it unless you hear I've died.' Not another word. Walked out so large as life—and now he's dead. Shot through



Morgan was uneasy. The house was far too quiet for his liking. Had the crooks gone?

the stomach—terrible! Terrible! 'Give it to the police,' he said. 'Well, here it is.'

The package was a thick foolscap envelope, Clayton turned it over in his hand, and, ignoring the bubbling anxiety of the banker, signed the necessary receipt, wished him good-afternoon, and left.

Back in his office at the Yard he slit the envelope, took out some sheets of paper covered with a h.c. handwriting, and began to read.

It was a most illuminating document, and he was going through it for the second time with renewed interest when Peter Morgan came in and slumped dejectedly into the nearest chair.

"It's no good, Tubby," said Morgan. "They're all working on it, but it looks pretty hopeless. I never realized before how much constable there is." Perceiving that his announcement was not getting the attention it deserved, he politely hoped that he wasn't intruding.

"Not a bit of it, sir," said the chief inspector, putting down the document and easing back in his chair so that it creaked alarmingly. "I'll tell you why Arthur Meredith, alias Winter, was murdered by Cornelius Blane. I've got it all down in

black and white, Meredith's own version of the business. It's a queer story."

"Let's have it," said Morgan, "and make it snappy."

The chief inspector sighed at this lack of respect, but continued:

"At the end of 1907 Germany was beginning to feel the pinch; the Allied blockade had closed in, and eventually the Central Powers were pretty hard hit—"

"What the hell—" began Morgan, interrupting. But Clayton raised a large and commanding hand.

"Listen, you ignorant pig! As I was saying, certain loyal Germans resident in North and South America considered it was about time they did something for the Fatherland. They were wealthy men with important connections, so when they started to collect gold bullion to ship back home on the quiet they were able to carry it off. They were bank presidents and the directors of large organizations, and the British Government guaranteed them against loss, and they were promised all sorts of nice things when the Fatherland had triumphed. It was a big business. They operated from Caracas, in Venezuela, and in March, 1914, their first instalment, half a million, was crossing the Atlantic in an inconspicuous tramp steamer, the San Jacinto. The mate was Oscar Herkimer, and only he and the skipper knew what their cargo really was."

"They had a rendezvous off the Sicily Isles with a U-boat to get the latest reports on the blockade; the idea was to slip into the Baltic by way of the Skagerrak under the Swedish flag. It didn't work. The San Jacinto was spotted talking to the U-boat by a naval plane and ordered to heave-to and account for herself. There was a fog coming up, so the skipper decided to run for it and change his hat. The weather got worse, and they fringed up somewhere on the west coast between Penzance and Liverpool. The skipper, a South American, got the wind up—there was a destroyer after their suspicious behavior."

"One of the crew had served on an Anconmouth coaster, and recognized the spot where they were. There was a tiny bay with a high cliff and some caves; back from the cliffs was a farmhouse that formed a sort of landmark. They worked all night, unloading the bullion and stowing it in one of the caves where they covered it with sand—the skipper told the crew it was ammunition to be used for a rising in England.

"The destroyer found them as soon as the fog cleared. The skipper made up a yarn, but it didn't go down very well, so the San Jacinto was ordered to steam under secret into Falkmouth. On the way she struck a mine and sank; the mate, Herkimer, was the only survivor. He and the captain had marked the position of the caves on the chart; they made a copy, cut it in two, and each took a half. Only by joining the halves could the position be identified.

Herkimer was no fool. When the explosion took place the skipper was killed outright, but Herkimer knew where the second half of the map was. We got it

"Easy on it, Sam—I wouldn't do that again."

Blane spun round, rising to his feet. One hand straining to his armpit—and then halted, as though paralysis had overcome him.

"Why, hell, Sam—I didn't—"

"You didn't expect me, eh? Too bad." Sam Costello stepped into the room. His thin face was expressionless; but his eyes blazed, and the gun in his left hand was very steady.

"Listen, Sam," began Blane urgently, thrusting out his hands as though to ward off the expected bullet. "Let me explain—"

"Hell with that! You talked too much already, but I'm not being a sucker any more. You got your nerve, trying to pull that on me—using my name as a hush-out, and all. Figures! I was still in that Frenchy just where you had me framed, eh? Costello's bit of a mouth opened.

"It taken more than a couple o' frogs in uniform to keep me in the can. And now I'm here, and I'm good and ready to eliminate the competition."

Blane's steady face glowered.

"It was a mistake, Sam—I swear it was!"

Costello's eyes flickered to the bed and took in the girl's huddled figure. He picked up the piece of paper from the bed and put it into his pocket, watching Blane all the while. He seemed very much in possession of himself.

"Can't we—can't we do this up?" asked Blane, licking his lips and speaking with an urgency born of desperation. "There's plenty for all of us, Sam. You can't swing this alone, it's too big."

"You thought you could," remarked Costello thinly. "Think a hell of a lot of yourself, don't you? Beating up a dame—what's she got to do with it?"

"She's his daughter—Winter's—we had to get rid of him. I wasn't hurting her. Listen, Sam—the man seen the second half of the map."

Suddenly Blane moved a step forward, and at that moment a voice was heard outside—the voice of Lopez Lopez.

"Hi, chief, we can't do nothing with this crate—come on out here an' take a look."

Before Blane could open his mouth Sam Costello went into action. With a swift movement of his wrist he clotted his gun, swung his arm up and brought it down sideways on Blane's temple. Even before Blane's toppling body had reached the floor Costello was into the bath-room.

A startled face appeared at one of the windows by the dressing-table and then vanished. Anne heard the sound of four shots in rapid succession, and then Lefty Rawlins burst in.

"Cripes, chief," he muttered, "what's gone on?"

Blane sat up and swore. Blood streaked jaggedly down the side of his face.

"Costello," he said thinly, "must've got in through the bath-room. Where the hell were you two?"

"But ain't Sam in good? I thought you had that!" Lefty's yellow face went a shade paler, and his eyes darted shifty about the room. "Lopez saw somebody skidder round the side o' the place an' started shootin'. I don't like this, chief. If Sam's after us I reckon I—"

"Shut up!" snapped Blane angrily. "Get out there and help Lopez."

But Lopez Lopez was beyond help. They found him crumpled over by the steps leading to the My-pod. By him lay his gun. He had his hands clamped over his shattered chest.



A figure suddenly appeared in the doorway and a hard voice cut in on the detectives' deliberations.

"Don't move, any of you!"

"I got mine," he panted. "It was Sam—better watch out—in—"

Lefty Rawlins, with manifest nervousness, kept scanning the shadows beyond the lawn. The lifeless bundle of clothes at their feet was a reminder that the double-cross sometimes backfires, especially when the victim is himself an expert in that line.

Blane stooped and caught the body under the shoulder.

"We'll get this out of the way in case somebody behind the shooting from the lawn."

With considerable haste they dumped Lopez in a garden's shed and covered him with snow.

"We gotta get out," said Lefty; "we gotta get out quick, chief. Sam's liable to be in on us as hell. Boulder's gone an' Lopez's gone—I don't aim to be the best."

Blane looked and balked the front door behind them.

"Don't be a fool," he said harshly. "Why don't you see it the way I do—the split now is just between you and me. Just the two of us—not four or five. Sam won't show up again until it's dark—and by that time we won't be here."

"How?" asked Lefty solemnly. "If you think we'll get far in that car you're crazy. Every cop in the island is after us. Ain't you been readin' the paper? Why in hell did we have to use an Alibi-Romero?"

Blane took out his roll-case and counted out twenty five-pound notes.

"This is how we're going to get away: You take the motor-boat and run it a couple of miles down the river till you come to the bridge. You can get a bus from there into Pangbourne. Buy a second-hand motor—a big one—"

"Yeah, ah? get pepped off drivin' back. Not me. Why don't we beat it like we are?"

"Because we've got to take the girl with us," explained Blane quickly. "We're going to use her to collect the second half of the map—and that means enough money to us to be worth a little risk. You park that car somewhere near the bridge and come back with the boat. We load up the girl and it's all easy. We put on the pressure, collect the map—and

then think up some way of getting our hands on the gold. Half a million—think of it, Lefty—half a million, and just the two of us to share it!"

Lefty thought of it, and his breathing quickened.

"Sam won't be back yet," said Blane persuasively. "He's no fool—and he doesn't know how many of us there are. He won't risk it until night. We've got two hours clear."

"Gimme one a get an' I'll do it."

"Good!" Blane handed over the money and an automatic. "Take a name—but for Heaven's sake talk as English as you can. I'll look after Sam Costello, it's my bet he won't be back at all—he took our half of the map, but it was a cop, and it won't help him much. We've got the girl, and she'll pay dividends."

(Continued next page)

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THE ROYAL NAVY

Behind the bungalow a wide lawn sloped down to the river, and across this Lefty Hawkins sprinted down to the boat-house. Five minutes later a small launch nosed out into midstream. Blaine noticed as he noticed how little of Lefty was visible in the tiny cockpit, and surmised that Lefty was lying flat on his stomach.

When the boat was out of sight, hidden by a bend in the river, Blaine climbed up to the flat roof, from which he could survey the approach to the bungalow. It wouldn't be long, he was surprised a second time by Sam Costello.

MORGAN GETS A LEAD.

PETER MORGAN and Chief Inspector Clayton came out of the Chiswick General Hospital. The inspector climbed into the Lagona's bucket seat, breathing scornfully.

"Well, there it is," he said deliberately. "Sherkimer's only fit for a asylum. You heard what the doctors said."

Peter Morgan's jaw jutted grimly as he swung out from the gates and into the traffic.

"I heard," he said. With one glared that he pounded on the car's wheel and his voice was harsh. "I'm thinking of her—of what they may do to her. When they burn the sides of a man's feet, and enter the skin of his chest, what will they do to a woman? And we're no further than we were last night when they gave us the slip at Barnes. Where to?"

"We'll find you," Clayton sighed and passed a large hand wearily over his face. "Masta'll be your feelings trip you up. Peter—I know what it is. Fog the brain."



WHY
NOT
A

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"Tell me to keep cool and I'll kick your stomach in!" Something of Morgan's urgency communicated itself to the car, and their passage back to the Yard was memorable. Clayton said nothing more, but acted phlegmatically at his pipe, but acted to escape sudden dissolution.

As soon as they entered his office a sergeant brought in a report that had just arrived from Paris.

As he scanned the typewritten sheet Clayton's bulky figure became alert, and he exhaled noisily.

"DON'T miss these, these fellows. Listen to this Peter—it's a list of American visitors furnished by the U.S.A. Department of Justice for the Service—all of 'em known crooks or suspects. Corrollus Blaine, Louis Lopez and Lefty Hawkins—all been living together in Paris and all left the same time for England last month. That's our man."

He looked across at Morgan.

"Did you ever come across a Sam Costello over here? A Yank, supposed to have been in the bootlegging business in the States?"

"Corrollus?" Morgan frowned a moment. "Why, yes—I remember him. He made his pile and settled down over here like a model citizen. Minutely and I tapped him for a month to see he didn't slip up."

"Well, he's slipped quite a dose this time," said the chief inspector. "This report says he's wanted on a double murder charge in Roulogne. He was under escort in Lille to serve a stretch for burglary, but he beat up one guard, shot the other and a railway porter—and got away. The curious thing is that he's been hitting the gay places with Corrollus Blaine, and when he was arrested in Roulogne it was on information given over the phone—and Blaine and company were staying at the same hotel, and left in some hurry. The police found in Costello's room a case full of stolen jewellery—that doesn't sound much like a model citizen to me!"

"It's a frater," said Morgan, "it sticks out a mile. The stuff was planted. Wouldn't you say, now, that perhaps Blaine might have—"

The door opened.

"Excuse me, sir," said the sergeant. "But this has just come through from Roulogne—it's urgent."

Over the inspector's shoulder Morgan read the brief message:

"Have apprehended American reported by bullet stop Helices to account police Clotches French Roulogne maker stop Advice investigate Westfield Herks Costello stop."

Morgan grabbed his hat and was out of the door three paces ahead of the Yard man, who barked a rapid order at a waiting constable as he hurried along the corridor.

When they reached the Lagona they found Herbie Adams and young Jordan in the back seat, and Herbie was just concluding a passage of words with a uniformed constable who, apparently, didn't like Herbie's face or his pretence as near the Holy of Police Helix.

"I got something," Herbie opened deviously as he met Morgan's baleful eye, "come by the afternoon post. I sang up, but you wasn't here."

Morgan took the square envelope. It was addressed to him in block capitals, and the postmark was Paragonne. Inside was a picture of a girl being flogged. Morgan's fingers trembled. Clayton heard the sharp intake of his breath, felt

the sudden tensing of the little figure beside him.

Without a word Morgan thrust the picture into his pocket and jammed his long body behind the wheel.

"Bad!" Chief Inspector Clayton glanced sideways at the thin face beside him, and was answered by one with look from Morgan's blazing eyes.

"Corrollus" he swore. Morgan's voice was thick and harsh. On a sudden impulse he tapped out the envelope and placed it on Clayton's knee, while he scanned the car into first gear. "Posted at Paragonne this morning," he stopped. "If this wounded American is Corrollus he'll be on the trail—if he's been double-crossed he'll talk."

"So what's on the back?" Instructions following—name writing as the envelope. They knew she gave you the map—and this is their way of putting on the pressure.

Peter Morgan, his eyes on the traffic of the busy Embankment, swore with concentrated venom, and reached a van with the calculated awkwardness of a first-class expert. The tyres screamed. Herbie Adams clasped his knees and leaned at a startled traffic cop who escaped annihilation by a display of agility that would certainly have won him the police record for the standing jump.

"He'll," said the driver of the squad car that followed, deep admiration in his voice. "Somebody's taking old Turkey for a spin. You, sir!"

Sam Costello was reckoned pretty quick on the draw. He had just turned the corner of the bungalow, and was making for the shrubbery when two men appeared in the door of the garage. Sam, like a wise flogger, preferred to know the strength of the opposition before he opened hostilities, otherwise Mousa, Hawkins and Lopez would most assuredly have become corpses on the spot.

So he held his fire, and slipped round the angle of the building towards the lawn and the drive. He could hold-up in the bushes and watch them.

Unfortunately Loney Lopez had other ideas. He glimpsed the sprinting figure before it reached cover and fired as he ran.

Costello threw a quick glance over his shoulder and swore as a sudden pain staked at his left arm.

Lopez recognized the face, and halted momentarily. Sam Costello was meant to be in jail in France. It didn't make sense. Too late he realized his blunder, and when Costello plunged in among the bushes, raising one man in a hand that still held a smoking gun, Loney Lopez was gasping out his life by the lily pool.

Costello had a car parked in a lane a quarter of a mile away. He had stolen it from outside a doctor's house in Chiswick that morning. But that, at the moment, was the least of his worries. His arm was bleeding profusely. He improvised a bandage out of a cluster he found in the pocket of the car; he'd have to ditch the damn thing, and as soon as he found some place where he could lie up and straighten things out.

Changing gear was sheer torture. He was getting giddy; every now and then his vision blurred. He'd been on the run for four days, ever since that lucky break at Roulogne.

The steering of the car seemed to become sluggish and heavy, and the road wavered in front of him. Instinctively his foot came down on the brake pedal; but there was a sudden jar, and the car

lifted, throwing him over on to his wounded arm.

And that was how P.O. Beaud of the Berkshire Constabulary found him—a wounded man in a dead faint, and in a stable or with its front wheels in the dock.

Sam Costello turned his head as Peter Morgan came in behind Chief Inspector Clayton, and a sudden glint of fear flickered into his eyes, for they hadn't connected him with the Boulogne job, in spite of his French clothes. All he had to do was to play dumb and take a short stretch for pinching the car.

But now he was cornered. Hell to Loopy Logan!

"The madman, American, eh?" Morgan looked across at Clayton and nodded briefly. "So they caught up with you at last, Sam Costello?"

The man on the bed said nothing; only the muscles in his neck twisted as he swallowed.

Morgan seated himself on the side of the bed and twisted Costello's face so that it looked up at him.

"O.K.," said Costello softly, "let it go at that. You know me, Morgan, so what?"

"A little matter of killing a couple of Frenchmen, that's all," said Morgan pleasantly. "But his eyes were fiery. 'What brings you down here?'"

"I like the scenery."

"It wouldn't be because you had any dealings with a certain Cornelius Blane?" suggested Morgan slowly.

"You're nuts. I never even heard of the guy." Costello's jaw clamped tight; but he had begun to sweat, and his eyes swerved away.

"Funny that you were asking for him only last night—in a cellar in Harrow. You didn't seem very pleased about it—did he, Inspector?"

Morgan closed his tongue sympathetically.

"Tough on you, Sam. You had they framed you over there."

"You can go plumb to hell!" spat Costello. "And take that big palooka with you!"

"And then to go shooting holes in you as well," Morgan went on, unperplexed. "Blane must have quite a way with him." Morgan passed. His eyes snagged. Then, as though remembering something that had been at the back of his mind all along, he said "You mentioned the scenery last now. Thanks for the tip, Sam—but I'm afraid it wasn't for the sake of the scenery that you bought that charming little bungalow on the river." He stood up. "I think I know where Loopy stopped that bullet. Come on, Inspector."

Sam Costello opened his mouth to say something at their retreating backs. But what was the use—they had him booked, anyhow. Presently, he hoped Blane got what was coming to him. It was a heavy set-up for one of his entrances.

Down in the wide courtyard of the Royal Berkshire Infirmary, Chief Inspector Clayton plucked Morgan by the sleeve; but, before he could frame his question, Morgan whipped round on him, his face slight and eager.

"It's a hunch, Vicky. Costello used to have a work-and place on the river up beyond Pangbourne. I've only been there once, but I think I can find it. Sam was a whale of a man for fancy ladies, and it's my bet he was shot there. Remember that he turned up at the Harrow hang-out last night, looking for Blane."

"You're sure that was Costello? We didn't see him."

"I'm sure of it, absolutely," answered Morgan. "I recognized the voice as soon as I heard about that French report. Ever since last night I've been trying to place the voice. It was Sam all right. Now, suppose he made for this Riverside place of his, either to hide or because he guessed Blane and the mob would make for there—"

"Right, we'll try it." Before inserting his bulky frame into the Legends—no small, graminette fast—Chief Inspector Clayton signed to the driver of the squad car that had been waiting with engine running, and the Yard men thrilled with anticipation as they recognized the signal to tick close and be ready for action. Furthermore, young Morgan's tenacity lately were still remembered in the C.I.D. Devoutly the squad hoped that private practice had not lessened the lanky red-head's appetite for a scrap; any fears they had to the contrary were soon to be dispelled.

CORNELIUS BLANE ANTIHATES.

IT was late afternoon when Lefty Ravlin strolled the motor-launch, alongside the tiny landing-stage and made fast. Before venturing up to the bulwarks he slipped his hand into his pocket and brought out his gun. Beyond the sloping bank his eyes searched the shrubbery on one side. Then, dobbing up, he ran zig-zag across the grass, half-expecting any moment to hear Sam Costello blaze away at him from behind some bush—and he had a healthy respect for Sam's marksmanship.

But he reached the garage at the rear of the bungalow without incident. The kitchen door opened, and Cornelius Blane beckoned to him.

"It's all right, Lefty," he called out. "You needn't act so cautious—Costello's gone."

Lefty was panting as he slipped into the kitchen.

"You mean you seen him go?" he demanded feverishly. "That don't sound like Sam to me, quite a job when he's mad as Blane at us."

Blane walked back into the lounge, and there was a new jauntiness in his stride. He was smiling as he picked up a bottle of Courvoisier and poured a stiff dose for each of them.

"Here's to us," he said. "Drink, Lefty, and forget Sam Costello. We've got plenty of time."

"Say?" Lefty drained his glass and put it down as the thoughts came to him. "Don't tell me you bumped him, chief?"

Blane shook his head, but he was still smiling.

"Loopy was no slouch with a gun," he said slowly. "While you were away I did a little exploring, and I found a trail of bloodstains in the path leading down to the side. I followed them

down the bank—Sam must have been bleeding pretty heavily, and he wasn't too steady on his feet. The trail stopped where a car had been parked just off the road. Loopy got him, Lefty. We can count Sam Costello out."

Lefty Ravlin took another swig at the brandy. An optimistic glow was spreading over him.

"Swill," he breathed. "Where do we go from here, chief? I wanna get my books on that hood."

Cornelius Blane lit a cigarette and took a long pull.

"I've got it all figured out now," he said purringly. "I've got a busy afternoon, Lefty, and I fancy I've looked the bag where they dumped the stuff. The girls got a good memory—they drew a sketch of the map she gave Morgan last night, and it fits with ours. I had to use a little pressure." He smiled reminiscently, and Lefty staggered. "I shouldn't have sent off that picture, after all. Now we can go right ahead. You get a car?" Lefty nodded.

"Ford V Eight. No trouble, I left it in that lot by the top end of the village. Do we clamp the damn nose?"

Blane stroked his chin with a white, well-manicured finger.

"I think not." The look he gave his companion was full of significance, and Lefty understood. "She's a cute piece," he concluded. "Plenty of girls air what have you, I could go for her myself."

"As soon as it's dark we'll drive all night—Trenchard Cove is the name of the place if I've got it right on the map. As soon as we're certain the stuff is there one of us will have to get in touch with Antwerp and get him to bring his boat round so that we can load up. He's going to wait at Fode all this week."

"Suppose that dame's been pulling a fast one?" asked Lefty earnestly.

"Not her," said Blane rashly; "not after the score that photo threw into her. If she has well, we'll just go back to the original idea and squeeze Morgan good and hard. It's all wired-up, Lefty. We'll have to give Antwerp a cut, but even then we'll be waiting in."



The fate of Loopy, the professional killer. He was dumped in a garden shed.

loose-lipped, said, Letty Haselins listened to him.

"We gonna split, evens, chief?" he demanded hoarsely.

"Of course," Blane assured him gently. "We're partners, aren't we? Fifty-fifty in everything, Letty." Privately his mind was already toying with an idea. Although would that wouldn't be much trouble tipping a man over the side in mid-Atlantic. That a million was a lot of money.

Reverent at the prospect of certain success Blane went back into the bedroom, and Rowling followed.

Anne Meredith closed her eyes as she heard their enter. Blane had untied her hands, but her feet were still secured to the foot of the bed by knots that had dried her most frantic efforts.

The backs of her hands throbbled as though they had been plunged into boiling water, and little round ugly blisters marked the smooth white flesh. Blane's "torture" had been simple but effective—the glowing end of a cigarette pressed against the skin while a knee in the small of her back kept her madly squirming body face-downwards on the bed.

But it had not been the pain alone that had made her do what he wanted. Far more effective had been his threat to send one of the photos, wickedly touched-up, to Peter Morgan. Little did she guess that the threat had been already carried out. And so she had done the sketch from memory.

Letty Haselins took in the slender contours and his eyes gleamed. Fifty-fifty in everything, Blane had said. Letty began to look forward to the next few days—there'd certainly be a chance for them to get absolutely rich a swell pace.

Anne felt the warmth of the greedy gaze, and pitifully tried to draw together the torn fragments of her back. She was sick with horror as well as fatigue.

Blane went out and brought back a stiff measure of brandy which he forced between her colorless lips.

"You'll need to keep your strength up," he said, exposing long white teeth in an evil leer. "We're going on a long, long journey, and I don't like a little girl to look like a washed-out rag—I told you I was tender-hearted. Have some more."

Controlling her revulsion Anne took the glass from him with steady fingers, then, with a deliberate movement, she tossed it all in his face.

Blane stopped his snarling open. The cords on his neck stood out and his face became rigid with passion.

"Admirable!" he whispered between his teeth. "When I have the time it will give me the greatest possible pleasure to return the compliment—in my own way."

With his hands on her shoulders he forced her back on to the pillow. Her throat connected as his long, tapering fingers caressed the soft skin.

"Yes," he repeated, his eyes narrowed, "I deserve much pleasure."

She lay motionless for a full minute after he had left her. Her hands were tightly clenched till the snarling skin seemed ready to split with pain.

A long, dry sob lifted her chest, and her eyes came open to the gathering gloom. Letty Haselins stirred.

"You didn't come, did you, kid?" he said quietly. "You got him pretty sore at you now. We're sure poison when he gets that way."

Anne struggled into a sitting position. A cascade of bright hair tumbled over her pale face. Warily she pushed it back.

"If I promised you every penny I have," she said in a low, urgent voice, her eyes fixed pleadingly on his immovable shadowy figure—"If I promised not to say a word about this to anyone—wouldn't you undo my feet and let me go? Oh, please!"

"How much?" asked Letty hoarsely, well aware of Blane's stony stare from behind the door.

"I—I could give you three hundred pounds," said Anne quickly. "I promise you I—"

"Talk sense!" Letty laughed. "Make it a quarter of a million, baby, or we might talk turkey. Three hundred? You're killing me! Better get wise to 'yawl' or' act nice to the chief. You're in one helluva jam."

Anne watched him drag the glowing end of his cigarette to the carpet and get up. Her shoulders drooped as the door closed.

Morgan switched on his lights, and as they rounded a bend a foot came hard down on the brake pedal. The tall figure of a policeman on a bicycle approached them. He recognized the squad car, and dismounted hastily.

Tubby Clayton beckoned to him without impeding hand.

"I'm Chief Inspector Clayton; we're looking for the burglar of a wealthy American—goose by the name of Costello. Know it?"

"Yes, sir—you're pretty well on top of it. About fifty yards up—you'll see the entrance on the right-hand side. The Willows is the name."

Morgan shut off his engine. They began pling out into the road.

"You keep out of this," said Morgan to young Jordan, "there's liable to be shooting."

"I'm coming," replied the young boxer doggedly. "They did for my brother—"

I'm going to be in this as much as any of you."

The constable dropped his bicycle into the hedge.

"May need you," jerked the inspector, "better get along. How much cover is there before you get to the house?"

"Quite a bit, sir. The lawn's only about a hundred feet wide in front of the house. It's open at the back, right down to the river."

"Right!" Clayton turned to the four squad men. "Three of you cover round to the back of the house and close in. Let 'em shoot first, and keep your eyes open—I don't know how many there are."

"For Heaven's sake wash your shooting," added Peter Morgan. "There's a girl they're kidnaped. Don't make a target of her whatever happens!"

The wide, white gate that bore the name, the Willows, stood open. They split up into two parties so as to advance through the bushes on either side of the curving drive.

Everything was still in the evening air, save for the quiet rustling lap of the water behind the house. Something told Peter Morgan that they were nearing the end of the track. His muscles tensed, and he could feel the palms of his hands moistening. Desperately he prayed that his guns had been right, and that they had not come too late.

When they reached the edge of the bushes it did indeed seem as if all their elaborate precautions were in vain.

The bungalow stood silent and unlighted. The windows were tightly shuttered.

Morgan, with sinking heart, watched the dim shapes of the squad men skirting the lawn to reach the rear. But when he saw the foreman, ahead of the house, break into a sudden run, he rose to his feet from a crouching position and sprinted after him. The air was no longer still. Quick, staccato cracks sounded from the river, answered by the heavier boom of the detector's gun.

When Morgan reached the corner of the house it was just in time to see one of the detectors slip short in his tracks and roll head first down the slope.

Down by the river's edge, in the half light, little sparks of orange flame indicated the position of their quarry.

The motor-launch was moving out from the landing-stage, and from its stern came a vicious fire, spraying the lawn with lead.

Plaster - plaster - plaster - plaster! The engine picked up rapidly, and the boat whirled out into midstream.

It had all happened so quickly. Even now Clayton and Herbie Adams were only just catching up with them.

The detectives had been kneeling, picking their shots, aiming at the crouching figure in the stern.

"They had a girl with 'em!" shouted one. "They just got to the landing-stage as we turned the corner. I think Treadwell's been hit."

The wounded detector sat up on the grass and snore.

"Clean through the call! Blast my luck!"

With a parting shot that bounced perilously close over their heads the launch swung round the bend on full throttle.

THE BATTLE BY THE BRIDGE.

"THERE'S a bride a mile and a half downriver, sir," volunteered the constable.

"They can't break for the open as long as they've got the girl with them,"

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By MURDOCH DUNCAN

pointed Clayton. "Most of it must be private property. There's a chance we can head 'em off at the bridge. You O.K., Treadway?"

"Better carry on, sir—you can park me up later."

Back down the drive, with Morgan and young Jordan well in the lead, they pointed to the cars.

With the constable clinging to the running-board, the Lapetola's guns roared as Morgan lurched on the left, swinging into the driver of the Wilsons, and roared into the lane. The squad ran forward, picking up the chief inspector and Herbie Adams in full flight.

Then, against the grey evening sky, they saw the signal curve of the bridge ahead of them and to the left. A field of rough, tufted grass stretched in between.

"You'd better cut across, sir," the constable bellowed in Morgan's ear. "The lane doesn't join the road from the bridge till lower down!"

There was no bridge now. The Lapetola bounced over the bumpy ground and skidded on the damp grass with locked wheels. Morgan snapped off his lights, and was cut across the roadway almost before the engine had quietened.

There was an open stretch of water above the bridge, with meadows on either side. The bridge itself was lamp-backed and narrow with a triple arch.

Scrambling behind the end of the stone balustrade Morgan's ears strained to catch the sound of a motor-boat engine. "Ain't at the main steering," rapped Morgan. "There'll be some girl in the cabin—two of you get over to the other end of the bridge. Wait till they're almost under the bridge—and for the love of Heaven don't aim!"

Two of the detectives, guns glinting in their hats, sprinted over to the other side. Bitterly lamenting his lack of a gun, Jordan followed them.

Detective-Sergeant Treadway had just finished landing up his leg when he was hailed from the river by a youthful voice cordially demanding what the hell all the shooting was about. A long, slender launch was nosing alongside the landing-stage, and in the stern stood the muscular figure of a young man in the sweater and blazer of an Oxford Rowing Club.

The detective leaped down to the water's edge.

"I'm from Scotland Yard," he explained rapidly, "we're after a mob. I got plugged. Can that boat move?"

"Can she what?" exploded the young man. "Hop in and I'll demonstrate. Upstream, eh? Downstream?"

In a fever of anxiety Morgan waited.

Then presently there came the unmistakable sound of an engine, and round the bend ahead came the launch, twin sprays of white foam at her stern prow.

"That's it," whispered the detective who had formed one of the advance-guard at the bargepole, "she's hot and low."

It was then that Lefty Hawkins' sharp eyes spotted the two cars parked in the meadow, and though the light was rapidly fading, he had no difficulty in identifying the long, snaky lines of the Lapetola.

With a frantic oath he spun the wheel and opened the throttle, aiming for the middle arch of the bridge.

Blame thrust his head out of the cabin. "We're there!" he snapped. "What the devil are you doing?"

Before Lefty could voice his fears the ambush opened fire.

Lefty saw the row of heads silhouetted above the edge of the bridge. Timber

splintered around him. He had the wheel jammed under his shoulder, and returned the fire with the energy of desperation. Blame, like the rat he was, had ducked back into the cabin, and Lefty, snapp-shooting for his life, sobbed out curses to his chief to come and lend a hand.

Morgan had run up to the middle of the bridge.

He brought his gun to bear down and held it for the critical split-seconds as the launch swept up under him.

Lefty Hawkins jerked as the bullet ploughed its way down through his shoulder.

Clayton peered along the right bank, firing as he ran; but the two detectives and Jordan, on the left bank, found their way barred by a high fence that ran right down to the river.

Without a word Jordan tore off his jacket, swung himself up on to the parapet, and plunged into the water in a most splashy dive.

As the shooting slackened Blame ventured out from the cabin on all-fours.

"Lefty!" he whispered hoarsely, catching sight of the stumped figure by the shore. Elvety Lefty Hawkins raised his head.

"Shank!" he said with remarkable directness, then his head lolled forward and he tumbled to the floorboards.

The launch swung round crazily and veered off towards the left bank. The crew man's hand still gripped the short brass spokes of the wheel.

It was already too late when Blame tore the wheel free. With an ugly jarring sound the boat's prow ran full full into the bank, and the engine stopped.

On the opposite bank Morgan and the others halted. Detective-Sergeant Whimlow, repaid the crack shot in the torso, plain or fancy, grunted and raised his gun.

"I'll get him now—soon's he shows outside the cabin."

But when the dim figure of Cornelius Blame emerged into view he was holding Anne Meredith in front of him, using her helpless body as a shield while he worked his way along the stranded boat to the bank.

Anne Meredith, her hands still bound, felt Blame's hot breath on her cheek and sensed as his grip tightened round her waist. He began to drag her along the tilted deck.

With the frenzy of despair she lowered her head and drove the sharp heel of her shoe against his shin. Involuntarily his grasp relaxed and in that moment she tore herself free and plunged headlong into the shallow water.

Blame swayed on the edge of the deck, and all but followed her. Then, recovering his balance, he ran along the deck and jumped for the bank. He reached it and pulled himself up. Bullets whined past his head as he staggered for the bushes. Twenty yards away a small figure clambered up the bank; Al Jordan was on the trail.

Peter Morgan, standing as though frozen to the bank, saw Anne's swift action, and even before Blame had reached the top of the bank he entered the water in a flat racing dive and was thrashing his way over in a fast crawl.

Anne was standing knee-deep in the water.

He caught her up in his arms and waded to the bank. His hands shook as he stumbled for his pocket and cut away the cords. There came the sound of two quick shots from the direction in which Blame had run.

"You got—'E's back!"

With her teeth tucked clinging to her slender figure she stood, her eyes shining, and watched him disappearing into the bushes.

Cornelius Blame reached the car that Lefty Hawkins had parked so snugly, and

Sexton Blake's Master Stroke!

Talking down the hillside upon which the Monastery of Lu Fa was built, the holy brothers picked their way towards the river below. With great care, each carried a package, and finally placed it into a waiting net-pole, at the time knowing with savage delight to the booming of the guns of the approaching Japanese army. This part of the task completed, the precious treasure was taken across the river to the town of Lu Fa, to be cared up by Mr. Dimmer, of the East & West Emporium, Ltd., and handed over to a waiting British destroyer. There was no time to waste, for it was clear the Japanese bombers were expected. At the last moment Dimmer was begged to include in the case, money to the tune of five hundred thousand dollars. It was done, and the conveyance comprised only just before the town of Lu Fa fell in ruins. When the treasure, duly arrived in England more trouble started, and presented Sexton Blake with a cunning plot to unravel.



THE MONASTERY MYSTERY

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curved fingers she sprang straight toward Cranston.

He had a choice of hurting the mad-dazed girl—or taking his chance with the three men in the living-room. Edith's shrill scream had warned them of peril. All three were racing toward the dressing-room.

Cranston whirled to meet them. His fist caught Pike squarely on the jaw with a terrific impact that dropped him in a quivering heap to the floor.

Blue Chip Deegan dived from his pocket. Flasher sprang as the dog burst back in the wall.

Turner was excitedly jangling the hook of a telephone in the living-room.

"Help! Police! Murder!" he yelled.

Cranston had his hands full with the sniping partner. Blue Chip Deegan was not a big man, but he was as strong as a bull. He lost the fierce battle for possession of his gun, but he managed to lock both hands on Cranston's panting throat.

A sudden writhing, the quick pressure of fingers, saw Deegan tottering with a jolt of agony.

All the same instant Ned Turner dived for the gambler's fallen gun.

Cranston didn't have time to rise from the floor. He propped wearily on his spine. He lost control Turner in the pit of the stomach. Turner flew head over heels from the impact. He was stunned momentarily.

Cranston knew that police cars were already speeding to the flat. Yet he used a few seconds in a grim effort to find Pike's book that had been slid into a concealed recess in Turner's bookcase.

It was a vain effort. The shelf mechanism was locked. It would take too long to open it.

He contented himself with examining the duplicate book which Turner had allowed the duped Deegan to examine. He saw on the flyleaf a rather-stamped advertisement:

JOSEPH BOND'S BOOK MART.

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Turning, Cranston led. He darted boldly on at the front door of the flat and rang the lift bell. He passed only long enough to retrieve the brief-case he had left in a dark angle on the roof stairs.

It was Lawrence Cranston who slipped out of a side entrance of the block of flats. No one took any notice of the correctly garbed gentleman who hailed a taxi.

The shadow decided that very soon he would take a trip up the Thames and visit a performance of the Floating Police about Turner's showboat.

Meanwhile, he had a more urgent task. Lawrence Cranston sped swiftly towards the Maritime Building.

A BEAUTIFUL MARRIAGE.

WHEN Cranston approached Hollister's office, he was genuinely startled to observe something he had not anticipated.

That something was a girl. She was sitting the knob of Hollister's suite. No one answered from within.

Her head turned immediately and Cranston saw her face. Again he had a cold shock of amazement.

It was Pip Wiley, the glamorous dancing star from Ned Turner's showboat. She was the mermaid who danced with an actor impersonating a drowned sailor in the expensive underwater stage setting called "Davy Jones' locker."

Cranston had never heard Pip's name linked with that of Roy Hollister. But another name leaped instantly into his brain: Blue Chip Deegan! Pip and Blue Chip were reputed to be sweethearts.

The whirl of the ascending lift warned the girl. She straightened and began to look to powder her nose. Blue Chip Deegan stepped from the lift.

"The door's locked!" Pip cried. "Hollister hasn't kept his appointment."

"We've got a better market than Hollister," Deegan growled. His eyes blazed with excitement. "I've just come from Ned Turner's flat. I rushed over here, hoping to catch you before you wasted your time with Hollister. I've got something big! Bigger than we ever dreamed of!"

"What do you mean—big?"

"I've got my fingers on Ned Turner's throat!"

He leaned closer and whispered to Pip. His hand covered her plant figure. She paid no attention to the carven. Her eyes flamed with greediness at his words.

"Let's go!" Blue Chip finally said. A lift took them swiftly downward. Cranston made no attempt to follow them. He'd have given his right arm to have heard what Blue Chip had whispered to his shapely girl friend. But anxiety was tugging at Cranston.

Hollister's door opened easily under his skilled fingers. Not a sound was made as the barrier swung open and closed behind him. But there was no sign of Vincent at anyone else. The office was empty.

Every piece of furniture was in place. No struggle for life had taken place in this richly furnished office. An inner door, however, suggested a different answer. Its ground-glass panel bore an ugly crack. Could Harry Vincent's shoulder have done it?

Cranston picked the lock with swift skill. He advanced cautiously into the safe of offices that adjoined Hollister's.

This room, too, was empty of people. But Cranston's eyes narrowed as he noted the disorderly appearance of the chamber. A desperate light had taken place here.

Harry Vincent had been struck down after a gallant battle. He had lost that battle. His body, unconscious or dead, had been swiftly spirited away from the Maritime Building.

But where? And how? (Don't enter next week's installment of this gripping story.)

THE BRAIN

(Continued from page 409)

"They've murdered him and cut him up!" she gasped. "They've murdered him and cut him up! Who has done it?" "That isn't our business," Karl said sternly. "We are not the police. We were sent here by our leader for Professor Boris Probyn."

The officers had ranged themselves alongside him now, looking down at that figure that lay bare, backwashed on the bed, looking down—into the head. The man called Max had turned pale. He was only young. He eased his collar with his finger.

"What are we going to do, colonel?" "Do!" said Karl coldly. "We shall do as we were bidden. We shall take the professor back to our own country. This, he is dead, but we can obey orders. And we can show our leaders that at least he no longer lives to serve England."

"Yes," Max said sadly. "That is good. We cannot serve England."

He turned his head away as he helped the others to handle up the professor. They took the body up and carried it like a sack, a very small sack, of into the darkness. And now the strange white light glowed down on an empty bed.

Nothing moved for twenty minutes. Then a door-latch lifted. The door slowly opened. The door to the professor's neglected bathroom. A small, stooping figure with a manch-buck ran lightly across the door—Bannister Brandt, stooping and sinister. He looked down at the empty bed, looked out into the wood as though he had no fear of the ralders coming back.

"So," he said. "So they have taken the body. As though it matters. The body—a poor, shrunken thing that a negro could have smashed with one blow. They can have the body."

He darted away softly on the tips of his thin, patent leather shoes. Now he stooped before the big white refrigerator. He opened the door gently. There was fruit in here and breadstuffs, and bottles of milk—and something else.

Something in a glass jar, something grey and strangely alive, and somehow horrible, pulsing away in that chilled air. Yet Bannister Brandt looked at it as though it was beautiful.

"Mine!" he whispered. "Mine! Let those fools take your poor, shrivelled body Mark Probyn. I can find a million better. But your brain, your wonderful brain, the best brain in the world—that belongs to me! Your brain will have no secrets from me!"

(So Brandt has succeeded in the first step of his quest for unalloyed power. In a little while this ungodly genius will dominate the world. He fears no one—certainly not Probyn. But next week you will see how the professor's girl stands between Brandt and his desires.)

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