

A LONG, COMPLETE STORY EVERY WEEK



THE THRILLER

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2nd WEEKLY

BY
M.E. MILES

THE CASE OF THE SPANISH DANCER

The CASE OF THE

She had glamour and a heart of stone, charm ... and utter ruthlessness. She was beautiful ... and as tough as they come. She was as slick with her automatic as with her lip-stick.

Chapter 1. A CALL FROM THE DEAD

HERBIE ADAMS came into the office carrying a letter. His massive frame seemed to fill the doorway completely and colourfully; his suit was of a strident design in which large green squares predominated, his shirt was salmon pink, yellow shoes with knobby toes adorned his feet. He paused, a little apprehensively, and cleared his throat with a noise like an L-driver changing gear.

Peter Morgan went on reading, absently running his hand through his mop of red hair.

"Look at the time, you old soaker," he murmured; "you're tight again."

Herbie coughed and straightened his broad shoulders. He looked hurt.

"Who, me? That ain't a nice thing to say, guv'nor, not after what I been doin'. You oughter be ashamed o' y'self. Always on the job, that's me. I been playin' pool wi' some o' the boys. I gotta keep me contacts open, ain't I?"

Peter Morgan raised his head, and winced.

"It's no good," he said weakly, "I'll never get used to it without tinted glasses. It's like living next door to the Aurora Borealis."

"Never heard of the dame," said Herbie complacently, fingering the lapels of his jacket. "There ain't many blokes could carry a suit off like I can. It's an art."

"It's a crime. You look worse than a bookie's nightmare. What's new in the metropolis?"

Herbie lowered himself into a chair, slid one loglike leg over the arm, and tilted his hat to the back of his head the way he'd seen tough cops do on the screen.

"Jim Ferris is out," he said, "come out last week. Remission for good conduct—ain't that a laugh? I hear he's gone in with Big Mike's outfit; they's gonna be some fun among the swell hock-shops pretty soon, or I miss my guess. Which I don't."

But Peter Morgan had stopped listening. He had slit the envelope Herbie had dropped on the desk and was staring fixedly at the single sheet of paper it contained.

The neat, almost microscopic handwriting he recognised as soon as he saw it. There was no address to the note. It ran:

"Dear Pete,—I'm in a jam. If you're not tied up I fancy I can show you a job

AN ENTHRALLING, LONG COMPLETE
STORY, FEATURING PETER
MORGAN, AND THE ONE AND
ONLY HERBIE ADAMS

By **M.E.**
MILES

that will appeal to you—I can't handle it alone. I'm in the usual hide-out, been here for five days but couldn't get in touch with you. I can't tell you any more because I don't know yet whether I'll get this note through. I'm more or less in a state of siege.

"It's a perfectly legitimate proposition—as I see it. If you're coming make it at night—I'll leave a boat in the usual place. I'll be waiting.

"Yours,
"J. B."

Expectantly Herbie slid to a more upright position. He'd seen that look on the chief's face before. It promised things—the kind of things Herbie appreciated. He waited.

Morgan caught his watchful eyes and nodded.

"We're going places. The vacation is over."

"Suits me," said Herbie happily. "I ain't slugged anybody in weeks. Where we goin'?"

Morgan took the note, tore it into little pieces, and threw it on the fire. It was usually safer to do that with J. B.'s correspondence; it saved complications. He pointed a long forefinger at Herbie.

"We start in half an hour. That'll give you time to nip upstairs and get under a cold shower!"

Herbie shuddered, got to his feet, and ambled over to the door.

"Dark clothes and a jersey," Morgan called after him, "and if you're not stone

sober in fifteen minutes I'll cut your heart out and fry it!"

Alone in his office he stood for a moment pulling at the lobe of his left ear, his expression one of extreme pensiveness.

So J. B. was back again. Back again and announcing his presence in a manner that was truly characteristic of him. The last Morgan had heard of him, J. B., or, to give him his full baptismal title, John Byrne, had been personal bodyguard to Isidore Blampieder, the Pittsburg steel magnate, on a business tour of the more troubled areas in Central Europe.

But that had been two years ago. J. B. might have changed his job a dozen times since then. He never stayed long; there was always something else round the corner, or on the other side of the globe, some other proposition that attracted his adventurous nature by reason of its very dangers.

He was the perfect adventurer, soldier of fortune, the rolling-stone par excellence. The cash angle was only a secondary consideration with him. He could starve better than the next man, and be knee-high in doubloons a month later. It was all the same to J. B.

And now he was in a jam bad enough to be inviting collaboration. It was the best news Peter Morgan had heard for a long time. J. B.'s troubles were man-size, and any job he couldn't swing alone was worth looking into.

Morgan smiled softly to himself, and his eyes were dancing as he picked up the 'phone and got through to Lucinda's

SPANISH DANCER



The Senorita glared at the senseless tough, lying on her bed with a bunch of carnations on his chest. "It's Salazar!" she snapped. "Sebastiani shall pay for this—sending his cheap killers to mess up my place."

Beauty Saloon. He asked to speak to Miss Meredith. Fortunately she was free at the moment.

"Anne, my pet," he began coaxingly, "I'm terribly sorry and I hate to have to tell you this, but—"

"I know," interrupted Anne, "I can guess what's coming, it's happened before—you want to slide out of our dinner date to-night. Am I right?"

"Clever little girl," he said admiringly. "I knew you'd understand."

"I understand all right," she replied in a martyred voice. "Every time I buy myself some new pretties and get all-set for an evening of girlish rapture something turns up, and you leave me flat. I almost feel I'm married to you, you red-headed baboon. What's the yarn this time, somebody bumped off the Cabinet? Better make it good, because right now I'm a mighty sore woman."

"I love your voice," said Peter Morgan dreamily; "it tinkles like little silver bells. I made that one up all by myself. Listen, angel, I've just got an urgent call that will take me out of town this evening."

"Blonde or brunette?" asked Anne sweetly.

"Cross my heart—an old pal in a fix. J. B.—you've heard me speak about him. He's a great laddie. We've been pals for years."

"And I suppose I'm to go home and have a good cry?" she demanded. "Or a quiet evening with my knitting? I've got a much better idea—I'll ask Teddie Fanshawe to take me to the Blue Pigeon."

"That little tick? Don't you dare, my girl. Why, anything might happen."

"That's what I thought," she said demurely. Then she laughed. "Seriously, Pete—you will be careful, won't you?"

"Am I ever anything else?" he replied cheerfully. "Don't worry, pet, I'm taking Herbie with me, and he makes a much better target. I'll give you a call as soon as I know what's on."

"I'll be waiting," said Anne.

It was a little after six when the green Lagonda settled down to a fast cruising speed on the Portsmouth Road.

As they approached Guildford Herbie roused himself, extracted a cigarette from a flattened packet and ducked under the dash to get a light.

"What's it this time, guv'nor?" he asked. "Somethin' good?"

Peter Morgan drummed on the wheel.

"I don't know, pardner, but I'm thinking it won't be any rest cure."

"Rough stuff?" Herbie's voice was hopeful.

Morgan chuckled.

"I wouldn't be surprised. If the laddie we're going to visit is the man he used to be, there'll be enough knock-'em-down-and-drag-'em-out business to please even you."

Herbie settled himself more comfortably and sighed with relief. It sounded promising. Herbie liked action and plenty of it, and tailing around with the red-headed boss of Universal Investigations was usually the way to get it.

Herbie scaled over fourteen stone and was built like a wedge; his right ear

looked like a piece of chewed leather, and his profile showed little nose and lots of chin. He had a looping right swing that started from his knees and would most probably push a tram over. If it landed the recipient usually woke up wondering what bridge had fallen on him.

Peter Morgan topped Herbie by an inch and a half, and was as lithe and springy as the other was solid. His movements were smooth, controlled, those of an athlete in perfect condition. His face was finely-drawn with a wide engaging grin. His suits came from Conduit Street and he looked, in general, like a Guards' officer in muffin.

Through Haslemere, Midhurst, and on to Chichester the Lagonda travelled. Halfway along the secondary road to West Wittering Morgan made a sharp right-handed turn into a narrow lane. The stars were out now, and the unmistakable tang of the sea was in the air.

A quarter of a mile from the shore Morgan ran the car off the lane in between clumps of gorse that fringed the edge of the dunes. The sand dragged at their feet, deadening the sound of their footsteps.

Foxleigh, a little fishing hamlet with a score of cottages and half as many pubs, lay to their right. Keeping up against the shelter of the dunes they walked along the sands, Morgan's eyes sweeping the dark landscape ahead of them.

After ten minutes of cautious progress they came to a point where the sea ran up inland, making a narrow channel between banks of mud. A couple of dinghies lay drawn up on the beach, keels uppermost.

Morgan motioned to his companion, and between them they turned the smaller boat right side up. A pair of short oars lay underneath it.

"This bloke we're goin' to see," began Herbie in a hoarse whisper; "is he on the run or somethin', guv'nor? Kind of off the map, ain't it?"

Morgan's teeth gleamed in the darkness. "He just likes peace and quietness, my chuck. Let's get this freighter launched. I'll row, and you keep your eyes skinned. I'm aiming for that island around the bend. If we get stuck in the mud it'll be a long walk home."

"At Southend once me an' a jane went for a row, an' believe it or not, we hatta paddle coupla miles in the mud." Herbie sniggered and fingered his chin reflectively. "It was worse'n a slap with a wet fish the way that skirt carried on!"

Peter Morgan sculled quietly down the channel and then began to pull across the harbour. It was early in the season and they were on a deserted part of the water, but still Morgan did not relax his caution. Every few minutes he eased up and sat listening. But the only sound was the lapping of the water against the sides of their tiny craft.

Some twenty minutes later they drifted up against John Byrne's little island. Sea birds wheeled up into the sky with harsh callings as their keel grated on the pebbles. The island itself was little more than a mound of sand and coarse undergrowth that grew almost down to the water's edge. It was less than three hundred yards across at its widest point.

They pulled the dinghy up on the pebbled beach. The shingles scrunched under their feet as they turned inland.

"I hope this bloke's got some beer," said Herbie. "I could use coupla gallons."

A dark shape detached itself from the bushes and moved forward to block their path.

"You're out of luck this time," said a quiet expressionless voice. The steel of a gun glinted in the starlight. "Grab some air, fellers, and don't start anything."

They halted. Slowly their hands rose.

"Keep it like that," warned the stranger. "Now talk."

Peter Morgan cleared his throat. He was standing a few yards in front of Herbie.

"Weather's improving," he said pleasantly. "Nice night for fishing."

"Yeah—if you got the right bait. Fish-in' for what?"

It was a nasty voice, Morgan decided. "Oh, just this and that," Morgan said carelessly. "Anything but tiddlers."

The man with the gun drew in his breath sharply and took a half-step forward. In that instant Morgan dropped to his knees and scooped up a large pebble. Twice the gun spat, the echoes following fast, vibrating the quiet air.

Morgan's arm swung forward. He heard the plunk of the pebble against the man's face. Herbie had moved sideways out of the line of fire, and now shot forward, crab-like, his arms bent.

They reached the man together. He had one hand up to his mashed mouth, and dark blood trickled between his writhing fingers. He had forgotten about his gun.

He whimpered, spitting teeth. Herbie wrenched the gun away and thrust it into his pocket.

"If you will play these rough games you must expect to get bounced some time," said Morgan calmly. "Why the stick-up, hard guy? Or is that just the way you were brought up?"

The gunman said nothing. Involuntary tears glistened on his cheeks. He was a slender, undersized man with a dead-white face. Only now the lower half of it looked like raw steak.

Herbie fished out a length of wire, pulled the gunman's wrists behind his back, and fastened them, not over-gently.

"Cigars or nuts. They're all milky," he remarked. "You sling a nice rock, guv'nor. What do we do with this play-mate?"

"Fix his feet," said Morgan crisply. He had his gun out now. "We'll dump him here for the moment. If there are any more of them they'll have heard the shots. We don't want to walk into anything—once is enough to be going on with."

Herbie finished trussing their captive, rolled his handkerchief into a ball and wedged it into the other's mouth.

"You said something 'bout peace an' quietness jest now," he said. "I'd like to meet your notion of a busy time."

"You will," Morgan told him grimly; "that was the overture. Let's get in among the bushes—these pebbles may be useful but we're going to need all the cover we can get."

The tough gorse pulled at their clothes and tore their faces as they pushed in on hands and knees, moving a yard at a time.

J.B.'s cabin stood under a lip of rising ground which protected it on the seaward side. They could see it now, a small wooden structure with a shallow tarred roof and a miniature veranda running along the front. No light shone in any of the windows.

"P'raps the bloke was on his own," whispered Herbie. "I don't see any signs of an army—that the place we're aimin' for?"

Morgan nodded.

"We'll split up. I'll work round the side of the slope and come up at the back of the hut. You keep among the bushes here and wait for my whistle, then come up. Got it?"

"I got it," said Herbie, and then paused. From behind them came the phut-phut of a motor-boat. As they listened it rapidly faded away. From where they were they could see nothing, only a wide expanse of quiet dark water.

"So he wasn't alone," said Morgan thinly. "Come on, we'll stick together."

As they came out from the bushes and approached the hut Morgan saw that the door was open. It swung gently in the night breeze, and they could hear its creaking quite plainly thirty yards away.

At the veranda Morgan waited and whistled. But no answer came from inside. J.B. couldn't be asleep—not with the door open like that and a thug skipping about in the bushes. That wasn't J.B.'s way. Besides, he said he'd be waiting.

Noiselessly Morgan eased himself along the rough wooden wall towards the door. When it swung he held it back with his foot, covered the dark aperture with his gun, and waited long seconds. Herbie was squatting level with the ground, motionless, a gun in each hand.

There was no back door. The hut's only windows faced the front.

"J.B.," said Morgan softly, "it's me, Pete; I'm coming in."

No answer.

Like a cat managing the gap in a fence he slipped into the room. It was warm, in spite of the open door; the smell of tobacco clung in the air. A board creaked softly as Herbie came in.

Morgan reached forward, felt along the

edge of the table in front of him, searching for the oil lamp. He found it—and something else as well.

His fingers recoiled involuntarily as they touched cold flesh. He held his body in a rigid bending posture as he struck a match.

John Byrne had finished adventuring. He lay with his head on the table and his arms outflung, as though he had fallen asleep. The long curved handle of a knife stood up between his shoulder-blades.

"Crumbs!" muttered Herbie. "Is—that—that—"

Morgan's fingers were steady now as he applied flame to the lamp. His mouth was a thin narrow line, and his lips scarcely moved as he said:

"They got him. We were too late."

Herbie Adams gazed about the tiny room. He understood the signs; somebody had been looking for something. The room contained little furniture, just the bare essentials. The drawers of a small chest had been pulled out and their contents, mostly tinned foods, lay jumbled on the floor amid a heap of papers; even the floor boards by the empty fireplace had been wrenched up.

The murdered man's clothing was disarranged and the linings of his pockets showed.

Touching nothing, Peter Morgan cat-footed it into the next room, J.B.'s bedroom, struck a match and held it above his head. There was just a bed and a rickety wash-stand. The bed-clothes were on the floor; the mattress had been slit from top to bottom.

He went back and stood for a moment looking down at the sprawled body of the man who had been his friend.

Byrne's face was unmarked. Bending closer he examined the outflung hands. J.B. had always been proud of his hands—long sensitive fingers, the fingers of a musician or a surgeon.

Herbie caught what he was looking at and said in a strangled whisper:

"He's bin doin' a stretch somewheres."

The hands were calloused, roughened with work, hard manual work; the fingernails were broken off short, some of them blackened and split along their edges.

Morgan caressed the lobe of his ear.

"I should have heard of it if he was doing time in England, but it certainly looks as if he's been in jail, and recently. Come on, we've got work to do—that thug we left on the beach is going to talk, and talk fast!"

His voice took on a new edge, incisive, menacing. Herbie licked his lips appreciatively, turned out the light, and followed his chief.

Morgan said nothing until they reached the spot where they had left their captive. Then he swore.

The man was not there. The twisted piece of wire lay on the sand, also Herbie's handkerchief, sodden and bloodstained.

"Nobody got out of them knots on his own," said Herbie dispassionately, "not unless he was Houdini. Honest, guv'nor—"

"All right," said Morgan, a little wearily, "I know—they came back and got him while we were up at the hut."

He laughed bitterly.

"They took our boat as well. Look." The beach was deserted. The oars were there, but not the dinghy.

"Looks like we walked into somethin'," observed Herbie with unusual mildness, but not altogether without a note of hopefulness. Now the guv'nor would get started.

ENTER A LADY

MORGAN started walking along the pebbles with a jerky, hasty stride.

"Should be a canoe around here somewhere," he muttered, "unless they've found it. J.B. used to keep it under a tarpaulin along here."

Herbie took out a long torch and played it on the bushes.

"The dinghy we came over in was his," reasoned Morgan, half to himself. "He could have rowed over in it towing the canoe, and then paddled back. The canoe must be on the island."

They had almost made a complete circuit of the island before they found it. There were clear keel-marks in the sand.

They stripped the tarpaulin off and thrust the frail slender craft down to the water. It was a single-seater, covered fore and aft, with a round hole for the paddler's body.

"I'll go, gov'nor," said Herbie. "It's a new one on me but I'll manage."

Morgan nodded and steadied the canoe as Herbie gingerly lowered his bulk into the cockpit.

He pointed across the water.

"Foxleigh's practically dead straight ahead of you once you get round the point. You can't miss it; you'll see the lights. Dig up the cop and just tell him there's a dead man over here and you think he's been murdered. Don't add any details."

"Leave it to me," said Herbie. "I talk to cops as little as possible." He picked up the double-bladed paddle, dipped it, and pulled away.

His progress was erratic at first and he threw a lot of water about. But presently, under the thrust of his powerful shoulders, the canoe began to shoot forward at a commendable pace.

Morgan went back to the hut and relit the lamp.

In spite of the disordered state of the room, he felt certain that John Byrne had been taken by surprise. There had been no fight. The dead man had been sitting with his back to the door. And J.B. had been a wild cat at close quarters, Morgan remembered that. There should have been a broken chair or two, the table should have been overturned, the lamp smashed to atoms. J.B. would never have surrendered his life so easily if he had not been surprised.

Morgan wondered how that could have happened, until he saw the pallid face, sunken eyes, and puffy cheeks of his dead friend, and then he knew—a man can't keep awake for ever.

Alone, knowing that a mob was out after him and apparently hot on his tail, J.B. had probably had no sleep for nights on end. Then, when drowsiness at last overcome him, they had got him—a knife in the back.

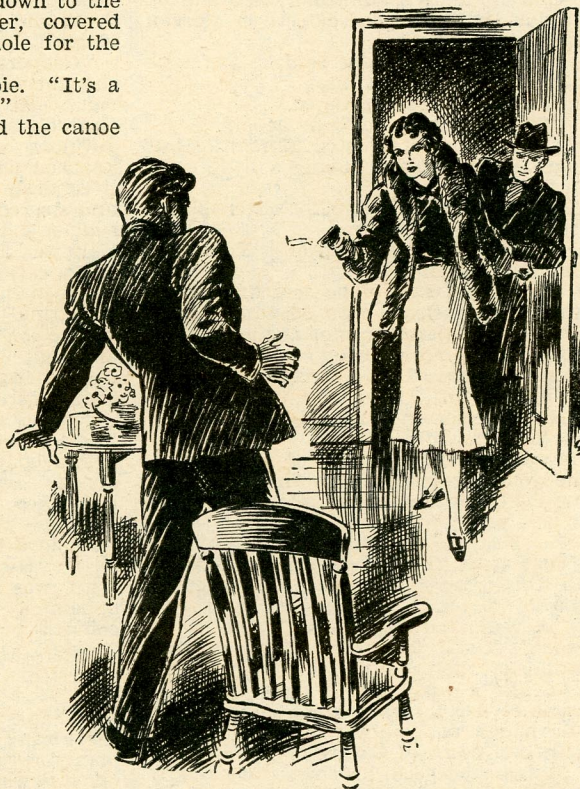
Cautiously Peter Morgan moved the body and satisfied himself that the pockets of the dead man's clothes were empty.

Systematically he began to go over the small desolate room. Somebody had been after something J.B. was supposed to have—something worth doing murder for.

There could be few secret hiding places in that unpretentious wooden building—no secret trap-doors or false fireplaces or sliding panels. Had they found whatever they were after?

As far as Morgan could judge the killing had taken place some time before their arrival, long enough for the dead body to grow cold. And yet the killers had not cleared out until they heard the shots of their colleague down by the shore. So they hadn't finished their search. Evidently.

There was nothing in the way of personal papers in the room—nothing to show where the dead man had come from. The shabby leather suit-case under the bed was empty and the labels had been carefully scraped off. In the cupboard there was a soiled shirt with no laundry mark or maker's name, and a cheap raincoat such as could be bought in thousands of shops all over the country.



"We'll meet again, I hope," said Peter Morgan. "I think not," retorted the lady—and fired. He dodged—

It wasn't going to be easy, Morgan reflected. J.B. had covered his tracks pretty well. And he had said little enough in his note about this business, whatever it was.

He stood with arms akimbo, cursing the precious minutes as they slid by. Soon the police would arrive—he had to pick up something while the scent was reasonably warm. He remembered enough of J.B.'s previous activities to know that police intervention mightn't be quite the best possible thing, even if the job was legitimate.

A slight sound behind him brought him swinging round on his heels.

"Please don't make me shoot," said a cool melodious voice; "I could hardly miss you."

A girl stood in the doorway. With one hand she held a fur coat closely about her slender figure. The other held an automatic, pointing quite steadily at Morgan's stomach.

She was tall, but even the bulk of her coat could not hide the willowy slenderness of her waist and the long curves of

her hips. She was hatless and her dark hair gleamed in the lamp-light.

Her eyes slid over the room, took in the dead man by the table as a thing of no moment, and returned calculatingly to the motionless detective.

Her tongue gleamed pinkly between her carmined lips. Over her shoulder she said:

"Come in, Carlos, it's all right."

The man who entered looked frightened. His face was oval, with high cheek-bones and a sallow skin; he wore his hair low down by his ears, and his belted overcoat was padded to give him extra breadth of shoulder.

"I don't think much of your taste, lady," said Morgan conversationally. "I mean the boy friend. Was he too scared to come in first?"

The sallow man said something that Morgan judged, quite rightly, to be uncomplimentary to himself. But it was in Spanish.

The lady tapped on the floor with a slender pointed slipper.

"Be quiet, Carlos!" she said harshly. "We have no time to waste." Two little spots of anger glowed in her carefully powdered cheeks.

Morgan yawned. He was watching the gun. But it didn't waver. Here was one lady who meant business behind a pop-gun.

"Search him."

The little gigolo might look frightened, but there was nothing amateurish in the way he frisked Morgan.

"May I put my hands down?" asked the detective politely.

The girl motioned to him with her gun to move over against the wall.

"You can sit down," she allowed sweetly, "but keep your hands on your knees."

Morgan did so.

"Well now we're all comfy, what's next?"

She watched him very closely, one hand was resting on the table; the perfume of her body drifted across to him. A dead man slumped between them.

"Why did you kill him?" she asked softly.

"What makes you think I did?" Morgan's voice was just as cool as hers; his grey eyes surveyed her appraisingly and with polite detachment.

"I see you don't understand." She smiled, her hand came up and the gun cracked. Splinters of wood exploded three inches from Morgan's right ear; blue smoke drifted upwards.

Probably the most impressed person in the room was the sallow Carlos. He had been standing biting his knuckles nervously. Now he jumped and all but choked himself with his own fist. It was evident he didn't think the situation was so hot.

Morgan half-turned his head, saw how close the shot had been, and grinned.

"I still didn't kill him. Score a bull next time and how does that help you? Besides, you're scaring little palsy walsy."

The girl's breathing had quickened. Her composure had begun to crack.

"Where did you get that knife?" Tremblingly one hand indicated the knife planted in John Byrne's back.

"I just happened to be short of bombs at the time." Absently Peter Morgan examined his finger nails.

Carlos oozed over. His face glistened. He moved as though all of his joints had ball-bearings. He slapped Morgan in the face, bouncing his head against the wall.

"Speak!" he said harshly.

Morgan transferred his gaze to the girl.

She was getting nervous, her long tinted nails beat a tattoo on the table; the ring she was wearing, a large emerald set in platinum, photographed itself on his brain. He knew now where he'd seen it before.

"If you don't call your stooge off I'll have to start slapping him around," he said to the girl, "and that wouldn't be healthy for him."

"You were looking for something when we came in—that means you know something. Who sent you? Was it Sebastiani?"

The knuckles of her hand whitened as she waited for his answer. It came promptly.

"Sebastiani? Why, who else?"

She laughed noiselessly and shook her head.

"Not good enough, my friend. You are lying, you have never even heard of Sebastiani."

Morgan pretended to think. He was listening for Herbie's return.

"Sebastiani? Of course I know him, he runs a flea-circus."

The girl's eyes became frosty. Her arched nostrils whitened.

"You are either a very brave man," she said softly, "or else a fool."

"Why not give me the benefit of the doubt?"

Carlos moved over beside the girl. His face was moist and his eyes shifted furtively towards the open door.

"More better we go," he muttered, and slipped into a flood of liquid Spanish. The girl nodded and backed towards the door.

Morgan smiled at her affably.

"We'll meet again, I trust, and without the ironmongery, then perhaps I can show you a few tricks."

"I wonder. Somehow," her lips tightened and she tensed her slender figure, "somehow I fancy not."

Morgan had his feet planted wide, crouching forward like a fighter in his corner eager for the bell. He saw the girl's trigger finger move. His sudden sideways shift was a masterpiece of co-ordination between mind and muscle. The gun belched and the bullet seared his ribs like a red-hot poker. He fell to the floor on his face, motionless. High heels clicked over the wooden veranda.

He waited a couple of minutes, and then sat up. Blood was trickling down inside his shirt. Slowly and painfully he stripped off his jacket and pulled his shirt up.

He examined the long four-inch graze.

"Some shooting," he murmured to himself admiringly. "I certainly must see some more of that little lady, bless her bloodthirsty little heart!"

MIXED GRILL IN BOND STREET

HE was binding his ribs with strips torn from one of J. B.'s sheets when they found him. Peter Morgan looked up and grinned as the tiny room seemed to fill with well-upholstered country policemen, including an inspector and his perspiring assistants from Chichester.

Herbie shoved his way through the press. From the waist downwards his clothes were stained with sea water and an overpowering odour of foreshore mud clung to him.

Evidently the canoe had got out of hand on the journey.

"You bin in a fight, guv'nor?" he inquired.

"It takes two to make a scrap," said Peter Morgan, quite without rancour. "Somebody was having a little shooting practice with me as target."

The inspector had been bending over

the sprawled figure on the table. He swung round.

"He's dead!" he shot out accusingly at Morgan. "What d'you know about this?"

Morgan finished bandaging himself.

"I know as much as you do at the moment," he said quietly. "That's the way we found him."

The inspector pursed his lips sceptically.

"Is that so?" he said heavily, moving closer. "And what did you happen to be doing here at this hour of the night?"

"Visiting," said Morgan placidly; "the murdered man was a friend of mine. His name was John Byrne, and I didn't kill him."

One of the sergeants had been staring hard at the red-headed detective. Morgan caught his eye.

"Hallo, Benham," he said; "long time no see. How's everything?"

Sergeant Benham grinned.

"Evening, inspector," he began.

"Not now," interrupted Morgan; "just plain Peter Morgan having a little quiet fun."

The inspector from Chichester glared from one to the other.

"What's this?" he rasped. "You know this man, Benham?"

"Very well, sir." The sergeant's smile was a little shy. "It's Mister Morgan. He used to be an inspector at the Yard. I worked with him years ago on the Uckfield poisoning case. That was before I got my stripes."

His superior swallowed hard.

"You should've told me!" he snapped.

He was remembering now—Peter Morgan, the youngest inspector in the history of the C.I.D. Public school man. Supposed to be a pretty live wire.

He cleared his throat apologetically. "That alters things," he said. "What is all this about, Morgan? Who shot at you?"

"A very charming lady. Twice, to be exact. You'll find both slugs in that wall over there. I don't know who she was, and I had quite a time trying to convince her I hadn't killed John Byrne. She had a nasty little squirt of a dago with her, name of Carlos."

Morgan tucked in his shirt and gingerly buttoned his waistcoat. He stood up.

"Funny story," he said to the inspector.

"Very," agreed the latter with definite emphasis. "Were you working for him?" He indicated the dead man.

"No. He asked me to come and see him; didn't say why. When we got here he was dead. I've known him for years. We were at school together."

"What was his business?"

Morgan shook his head.

"He travelled a lot, as a matter of fact until I got a note from him this evening I had no idea he was in England. I believe he had a little money of his own."

The inspector gave a meaning look around the shabby room.

"It doesn't look like it."

Peter Morgan let it go at that. The less he said the better it would be. A private detective, even if he were an ex-inspector of the C.I.D., was not too popular in official police circles in England, and, police or no police, Peter Morgan there and then was recording a vow to get to the bottom of this mysterious business.

He had no intention of being shoved around at the end of a gun even by a lovely lady. And there was J. B.—somebody was going to pay for that knife thrust in the back.

Politely Peter Morgan turned to the inspector:

"I am at your disposal. Anything I can do—"

The inspector grunted and tugged at his fleshy nose.

"I'll have to have a statement, Morgan. If you'll come along now I won't keep you longer than I have to. That wound of yours must need attention." To his assistants he gave abrupt commands not to disturb the body until the police surgeon had made his examination. Then they left the little hut. The oil lamp still cast its amber radiance over the bare table where the dead man lay; outside it was quiet and cool.

It was an hour later when Peter Morgan climbed carefully into the Lagonda and reached for the flask in the concealed pocket under the dash. He took a long drink and passed to Herbie. Herbie glugged, and took a deep breath.

"Coppers!" he said disgustedly. "I thought we was goin' to get slung into the can." He gave his chief a surprisingly shrewd glance. "Kind of gums the works, guv'nor, your buddie gettin' himself knocked off, don't it?"

Tenderly Morgan eased into low gear and steered over the rutted road. At any sudden jolt his ribs felt as though somebody was carving at them with a fretsaw, and a certain lady in a fur coat was very much in his thoughts.

Getting no reply Herbie lapsed into silence for a moment. His ears twitched, and that was always proof positive that he was engaged upon some startling process of cerebration.

"Funny thing," he announced casually, "how some blokes later fall for a skirt. Now if somebody come along yestiddy and told me my guv'nor had let himself be made a monkey out of by a skirt with a little pop-gun, well," he laughed sardonically, "I'd have beat his ears down. But now —" His expression indicated that his faith was severely shaken, like a disappointed teacher when her star pupil comes a purler in front of the vicar.

Peter Morgan helped himself to a cigarette. They were riding more easily now.

"Thank you for those loyal sentiments; they bring tears of mortification to my manly eyes. What you really want to know is what happened after you set out on your maritime excursion. Well," he grinned provocatively, "you heard me make my statement, and you know what a strict and reverent regard I have for the letter of the Law. I wouldn't fool the police; why, I used to be one myself." Herbie sniffed.

"If I had a quid for every time you've played tag with that fat copper Clayton at the Yard I'd retire right now an' buy meself a pub," he paused, and added reflectively, "two pubs."

He drew a deep breath, and with the air of a prosecuting counsel coming to a triumphant climax demanded:

"Who killed that bloke an' why? Who was the dame, an' why did she try to crease you?"

"Admirably put," agreed his chief; "now shut up and go to sleep. I've had a busy day. We'll start finding the answers to-morrow—I hope."

"Me too." Herbie turned up the collar of his coat and went to sleep. He was still asleep when the powerful car nosed out of Piccadilly up into Sackville Street nearly two hours later.

Among the opulent and imposing shops in New Bond Street the jewellery establishment of Paul Matouisse makes no very great show. It doesn't need to. If you are looking for stuff that costs

real money you go to Matouisse first of all—if you know your way around and if your bank account has an expanding bottom.

The shop-front consists of a single plate glass window draped in velvet. There will be one or two exhibits on pedestals—with no price tickets.

In spite of a tight swathing of bandages about his middle Peter Morgan presented his usual appearance of an elegant young man with time on his hands as he lounged through the smart throng of shoppers and fellow-idlers. It was mid-morning.

Standing on the pavement opposite the exclusive jewellery shop he flipped open his cigarette case and made great play of selecting Turkish or Virginian.

Ten yards down on the other side a man, unobtrusively dressed and holding an opened paper before his face, shot him a quick glance and began to drift towards a shabby saloon car that stood empty by the kerb.

Peter Morgan's grey eyes danced. He crossed the road with lithe, purposeful strides. The man had his back turned. He had folded his paper in rather a hurry and he had one hand on the car door when Morgan reached him.

"Well, well, if it isn't dear old Jimmy!" he said softly; "Jimmy Ferris back to his old stamping-ground!"

Ferris turned slowly. His face was thin, there was no colour in his twisted lips. When he spoke he showed blackened uneven teeth. The encounter plainly gave him little pleasure.

"Why can't you mind y'r own ruddy business?" he snarled, his mouth scarcely moving. "You got nothin' to do with me, Mister Nosey Morgan!"

"I wonder," Morgan's eyebrows arched politely. "Maybe I've got a nasty suspicious mind. You got three years last time, didn't you? I expect they'll send you up for seven the next time." He nodded, as though agreeing with himself.

Ferris swore. "I'm goin' straight now," he said hoarsely; "I gotta job. You c'n go to blazes! I'm on the square, I am."

"I suppose that's why you've joined Big Mike's outfit," reflected Morgan sadly. "I suppose that's why I find you warming the pavement outside—" His hand indicated the shop behind them. "Better be careful, Jimmy Boy, they'd run you in on sight in this alley."

The ex-con spat and opened the door of the car. He muttered an epithet that reflected upon Peter Morgan's parentage, but the red-headed detective only smiled more broadly. Ferris slid behind the wheel of the car and pulled out into the traffic. Big Mike Considine would give him hell for not lamping the dick first. They'd have to case the joint some other time—or maybe wash it out. That Morgan bird would get his some day, vowed Jim Ferris.

With a cheerful smile on his face Peter Morgan pushed back the swing doors and strolled into the hushed solemnity of the shop. A heavy curtain parted and Paul Matouisse waddled forward over the deep carpet. He was a little egg-shaped man in morning dress. A single diamond glittered in his cravat. His head was bald and pink. His little bird-like eyes lit up and his hands fluttered, waving his obsequious frock-coated assistant aside.

"A pleasure!" he breathed rapturously. "This is indeed a pleasure!"

"Nice to see you again, Paul," grinned Morgan. "how's the old hock-shop making out? Still unloading the fakes, eh?"

The fat little man positively twittered: "Ah, yes, you must have your little joke. You will join me in a coffee, no?"

Peter Morgan followed him into the office, dropped into a brocaded chair, and surveyed his tubby companion with a quizzical half-smile.

"Make the coffee into a shot of Scotch and maybe I'll tell you something."

"But certainly." Matouisse swung back an inlaid rosewood panel and disclosed a miniature bar. He slid a crystal decanter and glass over. "You will like it," he said confidently; "a present from my very good friend, Lord Beckhampton."

Peter Morgan savoured the liquor.

"Nothing like having a few palls in the peerage," he agreed. Then, over the rim of his glass, he said: "I've just bumped into the kind of customer you don't like. An ex-convict. He was looking your place over, and I happen to know he's just joined a tough mob. Smash-and-grabbers, safe blowers, all the usual tricks. Better put your stuff where it can't be got at."

Paul Matouisse puffed out his fat cheeks and sipped daintily at his coffee. He nodded.

"That is good of you, Peter, my friend, I will see to it. Yes, I will take precautions—I have with me at the moment some pieces that even I, Paul Matouisse, cannot price! They are superb!"

Peter Morgan crossed his long legs and accepted a fat cigarette.

"Remember that little ring I was looking at a couple of months back—square emerald in a platinum setting? I'd like another look at it. I might be able to raise the price of it."

The jeweller spread his plump hands.

"Indeed, it grieves me that you should ask for that." His voice was muted tragically. "Any—any other but that one—you have only to ask me. The price—pouff! We are friends, no? I will make you a present of it—any ring you care to choose."

"You mean you've sold the one I want?" demanded Morgan eagerly.

"Exactly. Only last week. Such a pity!"

Morgan sat up.

"Who bought it? Maybe I can buy it back."

Matouisse hunched his shoulders.

"Why waste your money? She will not sell it. Let me show you what I have—"

"No. It's the other I want."

"As you wish." The jeweller swivelled his chair and fingered a cabinet against the wall. He swung round again.

"Senorita Isabella Uraburu," he said, "of the Hotel Miramar off Oxford Street. A very chic lady. She paid cash." His eyes twinkled. "Better be careful, my friend, maybe she is dangerous."

"Maybe. It wouldn't surprise me." Morgan stood up, a faint smile on his face—if what he was thinking was correct the Senorita Isabella was due for a little surprise.

"Thanks for the information—and the liquor. I'll let you know how I get on. Perhaps the lady and I can do a deal. Look out for the tough eggs I told you about."

"Thank you," said Paul Matouisse as he trundled out into the front of the shop. "Already I owe you much, my

friend—I have not forgotten the Racquelle necklace and what you did for me then."

Peter Morgan set his hat at a jaunty angle and looked down at the plump little Frenchman.

"Paul, old scout," he said softly, "I've an idea you squared your account this morning. We shall see."

And he sauntered out into the sunlit street, leaving behind him a somewhat mystified little man.

Oh, but he was a deep one, that Peter, the jeweller told himself, and added with a little chuckle that the senorita had better beware. M'sieu Morgan had something of a reputation with the ladies.

AT THE HOTEL MIRAMA

"BLOKE to see you," said Herbie, meeting his chief at the door.

"You mean gentleman," reproved Peter Morgan. He had lunched with Anne Meredith, and, naturally enough, felt at peace with the world—almost. Anne had that effect on one.

"I don't," asserted Herbie emphatically, "it's that fat copper pal o' yours. Barged in here an' started tryin' to play tough with me—bout that bloke gettin' bumped last night. But I give him a basin-ful, I did!"

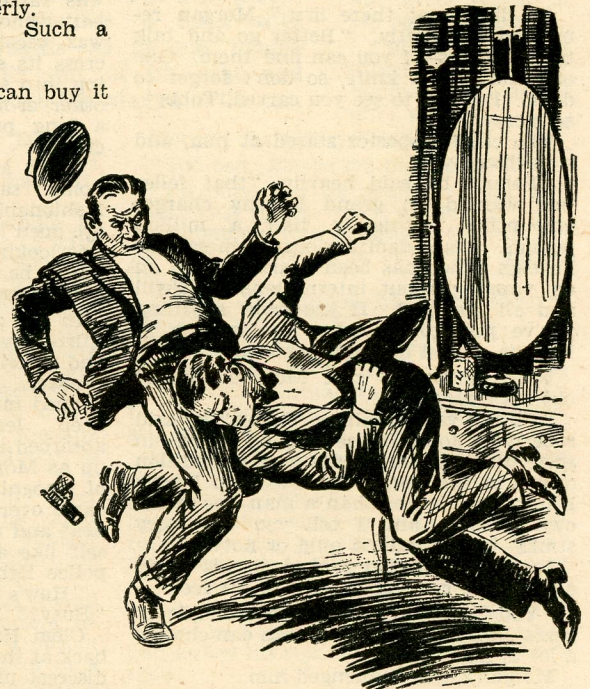
Morgan clicked his tongue reproachfully.

"That's no way to treat a chief inspector from Scotland Yard, Herbie; they have feelings, you know, just like anybody else."

A deep rumble came from inside the office.

"Keep that thug out of my sight!" rapped a familiar chesty voice. "I've had all I can take from that blankety-blank jail-bird! C'mere, Peter, I want you!"

Chief Inspector "Tubby" Clayton heaved ponderously out of his chair. His round moon-like face was verging towards puce. It took a good deal of cloth to cover a sixteen-stone frame, and the



"I was looking in the safe," said Morgan. And as the gunman's eyes shifted from his face for a second he took that desperate chance, flinging himself forward recklessly.

inspector's jacket creaked at the seams as he shot out an arm like the leg of an elephant and pulled Peter Morgan into the room.

"I want some talk with you, m'lud. Sid down!"

"I pay the rent," said Morgan mildly, "but maybe I'm wrong—maybe this isn't my office. I wouldn't know—I can't see so much of it now you're here."

"Look, cut it out, I'm not laughing—I'm trying to do you a favour."

"That's nice," said Morgan politely. "How much does it cost?"

Inspector Clayton wagged a finger like a sausage. "Same old cocky Peter Morgan. I don't know why I bother with you!"

"Liar," said Morgan pleasantly; "you know jolly well—I'm useful to you. I bring you in stuff that your own flatties couldn't turn up if it kicked them in the face and said hallo. What's on your mind now?"

Clayton swallowed audibly.

"Listen, Pete," he said persuasively. "What's the inside story on that killing last night in Chichester Harbour? You were there."

"So were the police," said Morgan, "a whole raffful of them. I gave them a statement. I knew the murdered man, but somebody killed him before I got there."

"I suppose," said Tubby Clayton, hands on knees, "I suppose it wouldn't surprise you to know that we've identified the dead man? That an official from the Spanish Embassy identified him half an hour ago as the man General Franco's police have been after for weeks?"

"It wouldn't," agreed Morgan calmly. "There must be quite a bunch of Republicans on the run, now that Franco has cleaned things up, with the help of his pals. Why bring it to me?"

"Because you knew this man!" snapped Clayton. "Because he was in hiding on that island—and you went to see him!"

"I didn't get there first," Morgan reminded him softly. "Better go and talk to the others—if you can find them. One of them uses a knife, so don't forget to duck. I'd hate to see you carved, Tubby—so messy."

The chief inspector stared at him, and sighed vastly.

"Peter," he said heavily, "that feller was wanted on grand larceny charges amounting to nearly half a million pounds. It's a dam' serious business—the Foreign Office has been bearing down on us, yapping about international goodwill and all that guff. If you know anything you've just got to come across with it. Now be a good lad, and open up."

With meticulous care Morgan stubbed out his cigarette.

"I'll tell you one thing, Tubby," he said soberly; "John Byrne was no crook—in spite of all the warrants and extradition orders in the world. I knew John Byrne, I knew him better than a man knows his own brother, and I tell you the story stinks—half a million quid or not!"

Inspector Clayton sucked in his beefy cheeks and got stertorously to his feet.

"You hadn't seen him for a couple of years, Pete," he said. "A man can change a lot in that time."

Morgan's eyes challenged him.

"You don't really think that, Tubby," he said softly, "you're just being a thick-headed copper. Half a million is a lot of money, I know, but some men can't be bought. John Byrne was one of them. So don't get off on the wrong foot. I'll admit I'm interested, and if I uncover

anything in your line I'll pass it on. That's a promise."

A slow smile broke over the inspector's face. He gave Morgan a thump on the back that shook his vertebrae.

"That's more like it, m'boy. Just drop in any old time."

Morgan steered him towards the door, and then paused.

"Here's something for you to be working on—find out if Byrne served a sentence recently in gaol, and on what charge. It might prove important. He was probably a prisoner of war in Spain, but that's only my guess. His hands were badly knocked about, and that wasn't like him."

Chief Inspector Clayton rammed his large bowler over his ears and nodded briefly. Morgan watched him pound down the steps to Sackville Street and hail a taxi. That meant the visit was unofficial. No squad car.

He had plenty to think about, had Peter Morgan, as he paced up and down his office, hands in pockets, an unlit cigarette dangling from his mouth.

J. B. wanted on a charge of getting away with half a million pounds; it didn't click at all, not the way Tubby had told it. And where did those two parties on the island come in? Or had the girl been with the first mob who had done the killing? Not probable, Morgan decided; her cross-examination of him had been genuine. Nor did the lug who had held them up on the beach at all resemble the spineless little tick with the side whiskers. It looked like a version of the old situation—thieves falling out. But where did J. B. come into it? What did he have that the other so wanted? Half a million quid?

Peter Morgan wrinkled his nose incredulously. And who in the name of the prophet was Sebastiani? There were lots of loose ends.

The Hotel Miramar was a gigantic modern caravanserai in white stone that was rapidly rivalling in popularity the better-known hostels in Park Lane. It was becoming practically impossible to cross its spacious lounges without bumping into some visiting screen celebrity or other, or maybe an Eastern potentate with a long purse and a taste for Western culture.

Peter Morgan, looking very much at home, sauntered past the groups of fashionable idlers, keeping his weather eye open to avoid walking into the lady he was looking for. He intended that meeting to be of a special character, and, for preference, as private as possible.

In one of the billiards-rooms a group of shirt-sleeved sportsmen, mostly corpulent and elderly, were engrossed in a game of snooker. A burly, thick-set man with a clipped military moustache, lounged in a deep leather armchair, apparently absorbed in a sporting journal. He looked up as Morgan entered, and a quick smile of recognition flitted across his face. He came over to the door. His clothes were neat and unobtrusive and he carried himself like an athlete, as befitted a former police light-heavyweight champion.

"How's it, Clem?" said Morgan quietly. "Busy?"

Clem Harding, house detective, nodded back at the snooker table. His voice was a discreet undertone.

"Laddie in white shirt—trying the old come-on game; slickest customer with a cue I ever saw. The others are just mugs—he took eighty pounds off them this afternoon, calling his shots. It's plain robbery, and I can't do a thing if they don't complain."

"Give me a minute," said Morgan; "I want some information about one of the inmates."

They found a quiet table in a corner of the writing room.

"Shoot," said Harding, "it's O.K. with me so long as it doesn't throw any dirt on the joint."

"Isabella Uraburu—what does she look like?" asked Morgan. "Who is she?"

The house detective whistled softly and cocked an eyebrow admiringly.

"You do get about, don't you? Lay off, son, she's way up in the six figure class—I wouldn't want to see you get mixed up with her. Pick out any spot where the playboys are ten deep, and in the middle of it you'll find the fair Isabella. She's got everything except a heart."

"Just a tough baby," mused Peter Morgan lazily. "I'm disappointed."

"You're a helluva hard guy to please. Haven't you seen her dance? She makes Ginger Rogers look like a paralytic." Clem Harding made undulating motions in the air with his hands. "Drop in some night and rejuvenate yourself. She's on a ten-week contract at a hundred per, and believe me this dump gets what it pays for, she packs 'em in!"

"And the number of her suite?" pursued Morgan.

"Now look, Peter," said Harding earnestly, "you go right out to the chemist's and buy yourself a big bottle of some nice clean poison. It'll be better in the end, and I won't have to clear up the mess. Be a sport and play somewhere else."

"You frighten me," murmured Morgan. "Tell me some more."

"What do you want to know?"

"Who visits her most? Does she go out much at night? Did she dance last night? Is her partner a little dago named Carlos?"

Clem Harding sighed.

"I give it up. She didn't appear last night, lord knows why. Her partner's name is Carlos. She takes her fun outside somewhere, and I could write a book about the number of suckers who infest her suite, day and night. Now scram."

"The number? Of course I could get it at the desk," said Morgan thoughtfully.

The house detective became suddenly serious.

"Twelve B, first floor," he said. "What is it, Pete? Don't start anything without telling me, will you?"

"I don't propose to start anything here," Morgan told him, getting up. "I just want to make sure of things. Word of honour and wish I may die. If you see me drifting around to-night just look the other way. There won't be any kick-back for you, I'll see to that."

The other nodded.

"I'll watch out for her myself. Maybe I can lend a hand. I see plenty."

Peter Morgan smiled. They were at the entrance to the Palm Court, and a large and vivid photograph advertising the Miramar Midnight Follies confronted them. The shapely Isabella dancing the Tarantella was depicted in much detail; in the background was a chorus worthy of Cochran himself.

"I'll bet you see plenty," said Peter Morgan to his companion, "and you get paid for it!" He omitted to add that the last time he had seen the lovely lady with the castanets and the whirling skirt she had done her level best to remove him from this vale of tears.

Clem Harding stood and watched the elegantly-clad figure mingle with the customers, and he would have given a month's pay to know just what was going

on beneath that mop of red hair. By all the tokens, Peter Morgan was on a job, and if he crossed swords with Senorita Isabella Uraburu the house detective devoutly hoped he'd be there to watch the fireworks—in spite of the promise Morgan had given him. Clem Harding liked his fun as well as the next man.

NIGHT OPERATIONS

IF Peter Morgan had paid the not inconsiderable cover charges in the Miramar Restaurant in order to see the exotic Isabella do her stuff, his behaviour, as soon as the lights were dimmed, was odd in the extreme.

He had chosen his table with great care: a massive decoration of clustered ferns concealed him from the greater part of the room, and he was within half a dozen steps of the door.

The orchestra was muted. A gentleman in dress clothes that fitted him like a coat of varnish favoured the audience with a brilliant photogenic smile and announced that he took great pleasure in presenting—a theatrical pause—a dramatic gesture towards the darkened curtains beside the empty dance floor—La Bella Isabella!

The spot lights fixed the posed figure of the dancer; sequins glinted like a myriad diamond lights in a skintight costume that flared below her supple waist. She raised a curved, firm-fleshed arm, snapped her fingers, and stamped with a spike heeled green slipper. Then, castanets rustling, she glided on to the floor to the rhythmic strumming of a single cello.

Peter Morgan nodded approvingly. The little lady had personality-plus, and she knew how to put it over. Those sinuous waving movements, arms wreathing, head thrown languorously back—they did things to a man's arteries.

There was not a sound in the restaurant but the click of her heels and the softly insistent beat of the rhythm. Even the waiters stood discreetly motionless.

Nobody saw Morgan leave. His step was soft and unhurried as he crossed the vestibule and made for the wide staircase. Clem Harding was on his lawful occasions elsewhere.

Suite 12 B was at the end of a short corridor. There was only one other door and that was labelled "Service." Peter Morgan knew where it led, for he had tried it earlier in the evening and nobody had stopped him. It was a convenient route to a side door.

He rapped smartly on the door of 12 B and waited. But no maid came to answer his knock, and that took care of the one possible difficulty he had not been able to allow for.

He listened. The main corridor was deserted at that hour of the evening. His movements were deft and assured as he drew out from the pocket of his dinner-jacket a thin steel instrument. It was a relic of Herbie Adams' burglarious past, and Herbie had spent some earnest hours showing his boss how to use it.

The way the lock of 12 B responded was proof that Herbie's tuition had not been in vain. Morgan closed the door gently behind him, slipped the instrument into his pocket, and drew on a pair of thin rubber gloves.

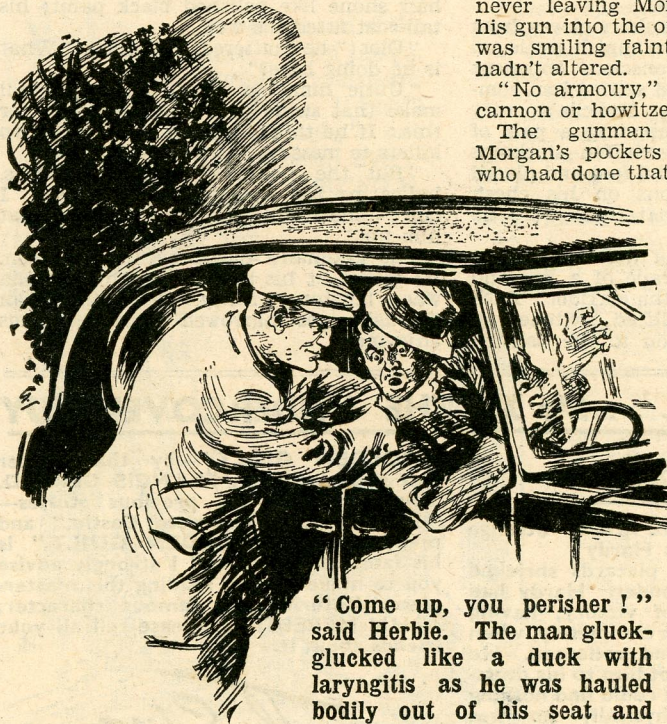
No doubt Clem Harding would consider his position offside, but Peter Morgan was not unduly worried: that was where he had the pull over the accredited investigators of the law. Legal niceties he blithely disregarded.

Switching on the lights he went to work. The suite consisted of a sitting-room, a

bed-room, and a superbly fitted bath-room. The odour of expensive femininity filled the apartment, mingling with the scent of hothouse flowers in tall cloisonné vases.

The first thing Morgan did was to cross into the cream-carpeted bed-room and open one of the windows at the bottom. There was a tiny balcony with a square stone coping; it might come in useful if the unexpected happened.

Then, starting with the sitting-room, he began a rapid systematic search. The bureau offered little resistance to Herbie's "tooth-pick." Morgan's fingers flipped through a pile of accounts, mostly from exclusive fashion houses; there was a file of press-cuttings that traced Isabella's triumphant progress from Buenos Ayres



"Come up, you perisher!" said Herbie. The man gluck-glucked like a duck with laryngitis as he was hauled bodily out of his seat and through the window of the car.

to Paris, Nice, and nearly every fashionable capital on the Continent. But of personal correspondence there was surprisingly little.

A lower drawer yielded a bundle of letters, numbered, and carefully tied with tape. A glance at the top one convinced Morgan that the fair senorita was not above a little high-priced blackmail, which caused him no surprise.

As an afterthought he thrust the letters into his pocket; it would cause a certain eminent personage some consternation when he received back his lurid correspondence with an anonymous warning to stay at home and be a good boy in future.

Thorough as was his search Peter Morgan turned up nothing of any value, nothing that would help to explain Isabella's presence at the hut on the little island last night.

Leaving everything as he had found it, except for the incriminating letters, he went into the bed-room. Under a pile of filmy underthings he located a gun in a chamois leather covering. He emptied it of its shells and replaced it. The slugs he dropped into the waste-paper basket.

Over the head of the low Renaissance bed there was a single water colour.

Morgan grinned. The designers of luxurious hotels showed little imagination when it came to wall safes. Stick it be-

hind a picture, was their invariable motto.

He had the safe opened inside thirty seconds. It was empty.

He had just replaced the picture when a smooth voice behind him said:

"Tough, buddie, but you saved me the trouble. Reach."

Slowly Morgan's hands rose, slowly he turned on his heel. It was getting to be quite a habit with him.

In the open doorway lounged a square-shouldered figure in a belted raincoat. A snub-nosed automatic was held waist-high in one hand. Beneath the tilted brim of a grey felt hat a pair of cold snake-like eyes warily surveyed the red-headed detective.

The newcomer moved forward, his gaze never leaving Morgan's face, and thrust his gun into the other's stomach. Morgan was smiling faintly, and his breathing hadn't altered.

"No armoury," he said, "not a single cannon or howitzer, believe me."

The gunman didn't. He patted Morgan's pockets in the manner of one who had done that little office many times before, then grunted, and stepped back.

The muscles at the side of his jaw moved tautly as he snapped:

"Talk fast, punk, before I turn on the heat!" His gun made little circling movements to emphasise his words.

"What would you like to know, brother?" Peter Morgan had braced himself spread-eagled against the wall. His voice was lazy and unruffled, but every sinew in his body was alert.

"What are you after? Speed it up, buddie, my nerves ain't good!"

Morgan clucked sympathetically.

"Too bad. Maybe it's night-starvation."

"I'll burn you for another crack like that. Talk turkey—what you lookin' for?" The gunman was slightly crouched forward so that the brim of his hat almost hid his eyes.

Morgan half-turned his head towards the safe.

"I was looking in there," he began. Momentarily the gunman's gaze shifted to the wall. Morgan raised a foot swiftly to the wall behind him and shoved himself off in a low dive.

His shoulders hit the gunman's legs just below the knees and swept them from under him. The gunman came down heavily, but a thick rug broke his fall. He rolled on his hunched shoulders away from Morgan. His gun had slithered under the bed.

Morgan plunged after him, dodged a vicious kick that was aimed at his groin, and locked his right arm round the other's neck.

With the suppleness of a trained wrestler the gunman doubled himself up and brought off a quick back flip that broke the hold and landed him on his feet.

He swung a pointed shoe. Morgan felt as though somebody had ripped the bandages from his torn ribs. He winced in

spite of himself, and with a quick oath the gunman plunged in to finish him off.

Morgan tugged suddenly at the rug with both hands, the gunman stumbled and fell against the bed, and before he could recover Peter Morgan was on his feet hooking him with crisp lefts and rights that had him tottering. In vain he tried to close in, to wreathe his arms about his elusive antagonist. The corner of his mouth was split, and a stream of breathless profanity came from his sagging lips. He started to cover up and back away towards the door.

Morgan fainted at his midriff, changed direction, and planted a stinging left on his opponent's throat. The gunman screamed faintly, his knees wobbled. A right cross dropped him.

Morgan stripped the rubber gloves from his hands, and with an impish smile on his face lifted his unconscious opponent under the shoulders and settled him comfortably on Senorita Isabella's very luxurious bed. Requisitioning a pair of the dancer's superfine chiffon stockings he tied the thug hand and foot and placed a bouquet of carnations on his chest, regretting the while that there were no lilies available.

He was at the door of the sitting-room when he heard the scrape of a key and the sound of voices in the corridor. Back into the bed-room he flitted, switched off the light, slipped out on to the balcony

and had the window lowered before he heard the dancer's shrill exclamation at finding the lights on in her apartment.

She swept tempestuously through the sitting-room. Turning on the lights in her bed-room she saw the bound figure on the bed. She backed to the dressing-table, opened the drawer and drew out her gun. Beneath her make-up her face was ashen. She still wore the dress of glittering sequins with the tight corsage.

The gunman groaned faintly and struggled to sit up amidst the crumpled bed clothes.

"Salazar!" spat the lady venomously, then, raising her voice, "Carlos—here, quickly!"

Her partner eased into the room. His hair shone like polished black paint; his tail-coat fitted too well.

"Dios!" he muttered, stiffening. "What is he doing here?"

"Untie him," snapped the lady; "I'll make that swine of a Sebastiani pay for this. If he thinks he can send his cheap killers to mess up my place—"

"But the flowers!" protested Carlos, indicating the bunch of carnations. "I don't understand this. Somebody has beat him up."

The gunman's dazed eyes came open. He picked at his bruised mouth. Isabella was laughing softly, surveying him through eyes narrowed with malicious enjoyment.

"The tough Salazar!" she mocked, strolling over to look down at him, one hand on her hip, the other swinging her gun.

Freed from his bindings, Salazar stumbled to his feet.

"What fell on you?" inquired Isabella sweetly. "You ought to get Sebastiani to buy you a bodyguard. Or a nurse, maybe."

"You c'n go plumb to hell!" said Salazar, trying to brush past. But the senorita's gun came up.

"I'm funny that way," she said softly, "but when a couple of guys stage a stand-up fight in my bed-room I'm curious. Who pinned the decorations on you, Salazar?"

"Little Bo-Peep!" snarled Salazar. Lithe as the pounce of a tiger Isabella's hand swung. The sights of her gun left a long ragged mark across Salazar's forehead, just above his eyes, from which blood began to spurt.

"I never seen the guy before," said Salazar thickly, "an' I don't want any part of him. I found him here—I guess I musta slipped on the carpet."

"Like hell you did!" jeered the lady. "From the look of your face I'd say somebody has been working over you with a hammer. So you didn't know him? What did he look like?"

"Kind of tall," Salazar mopped his bleeding forehead. "I'll say he's got plenty nerve," he added bitterly. "Wearin' a tuxedo, an' his hair was red. I'd know him again, an'—an' I'll beat his pan in!"

Isabella stared at him wide-eyed, and then shot a wondering glance at Carlos.

"It isn't possible!" she whispered. "It can't be the same one—why I saw him fall—I couldn't have missed. He's dead!"

"Listen, sister," said Salazar with some animation, "that was no corpse I tangled with, believe me. It musta been some other guy you blasted."

"Get out!" said the senorita curtly. "Go back to Sebastiani and tell him what happened to you. And tell him from me he'd better keep out of this and stop sending his lugs round here. If he wants to see me he can come himself!"

Salazar sidled out of the room. Carlos threw his hat after him and slammed the door. He looked rather shaken, and his hand as he reached for the decanter on the little table by the fireplace trembled.

"No more of that!" snapped Isabella. "We've got work to do. Go down and get the car out. I'll join you in five minutes."

Meekly Carlos obeyed. It was plain who was the active member of their partnership.

Peter Morgan, crouching on the narrow ledge outside the window, pursed his lips appreciatively as he saw the Senorita Isabella whip her dancing costume from her slender figure and hurl it into a corner. In scanty silk sheathings she pattered about the room, slipped into a dark severely cut costume, kicked off her dancing slippers, and replaced them with walking shoes.

He chuckled as she weighted the gun in her hand before thrusting it into her bag. She picked up the bunch of carnations that had adorned the recumbent Salazar, fingered them thoughtfully for a moment, and then crushed them beneath her feet, her face working viciously.

Peter Morgan waited a matter of a few seconds after the room went dark, eased up the window, and dropped inside. He reached the corridor just in time to see the Service door swing to behind Isabella. He didn't follow. Instead he gave himself a cigarette, and without any appearance

NEXT WEEK . . . Mr. X. THE UNDERCOVER GUY

To My Readers

BOXER DIES IN THE RING. Strange death of Hercules Hardy!

The newspaper placards shrieked the news. And no wonder. Hardy had been on the point of victory, having outclassed his opponent completely, when he stopped fighting and collapsed. He was dead before they got him to his dressing-room. The doctors could find nothing wrong with him. Physically he was perfection. But he was dead!

It wasn't the only mysterious case of that kind. An ice-hockey star, a teetotaler, non-smoker, marvellous athlete, suddenly went mad for no apparent reason. A girl, well-known in Society, was stricken down with a strange malady that brought her close to death. A famous footballer, strong, fit and muscular, collapsed and died on the field.

The authorities were puzzled. It took Xavier Knapp—known at Scotland Yard as Mr. X., the under-cover man—to suggest a solution. In every case, the victim had been purchasing cigarettes or chewing gum made by a firm known as Arcadian Products, Ltd.

Still, Mr. X. had his hunch and he followed it relentlessly. He missed death himself by inches, but he knew he was right. It was a drug that had wrought the damage and there was more to come, unless Mr. X. could stop it. It was a menace to British prestige, to the Empire itself. Mr. X. almost failed because he worked single-handed. Only when he found himself helped by a French girl—a Secret Service agent—did he win through.

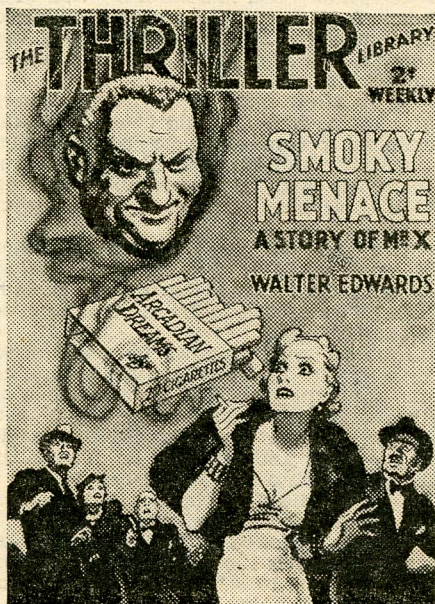
Next week's powerful long complete story by Walter Edwards—"SMOKY MENACE"—is one of the most intriguing and exciting yarns ever placed before you. Make a note of the title and don't miss it.

And here's news! In next week's THRILLER Library you will find the opening chapters of a grand new serial—

"GOLDEN GUILT"—by that writer you know so well, FRANCIS GERARD. You remember his previous stories—"Red Rope," "Concrete Castle," and many others. "GOLDEN GUILT" is his latest and best and I strongly advise you to make sure of reading this masterpiece, featuring the famous character, JOHN MEREDITH. Please tell all your friends about it.

The Editor

Letters to *The Editor* should be addressed to: "The Thriller" Office, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.



of haste, made his way downstairs to the main entrance.

"Keb, sir?" volunteered the bemedalled commissionaire in green and gold. Morgan shook his head. Out of the tail of his eye he caught Clem Harding bearing down on him with a purposeful look.

Pete, my boy, he said to himself, this is where we take it on the lam.

Just beyond the entrance to the underground garage provided for the Miramar's customers, a dark and not very smart saloon car waited, its engine turning over with surprising silkiness for such a shabby exterior. Herbie Adams was at the wheel. Up the curved ramp purred a black and white coupé. It was very smart and glittering. Isabella was at the wheel.

Morgan nipped in beside Herbie.

"Follow it," he said softly. "Nice of the lady to have such a distinctive chariot."

Herbie grunted and pulled out from the kerb.

"I saw a bloke come out the side door a couple minutes back," he said, "an' he looked like he had some trouble. You wouldn't know anythin' about it, would you?"

Peter Morgan climbed over into the back seat and stripped off his dinner jacket.

"Maybe," he admitted, pulling a long black sweater over his white shirt. "It wasn't anything you would have enjoyed."

"I git a ruddy lot of chance, don't I?" Herbie was bitter. Sitting behind the crimson-dyed wheel of an equally crimson-dyed car while the boss got all the fun was not Herbie's idea of a big evening. And he said so.

Morgan changed his patent-leather pumps for rubber-soled shoes and clambered back beside the driver. Reaching down between his knees he pulled out from under the seat a little sliding drawer that was certainly not a standard fitting. It contained two automatics. He shoved one into Herbie's pocket with the air of an indulgent parent giving a stick of rock to a clamorous offspring.

"You'll get your fun all right, my cabbage. The night is young."

The black and white coupé was in a hurry, but Herbie had little difficulty in keeping on its tail at a discreet distance, for the car he was driving, for all its dented wings and shabby coachwork, had an eight-cylinder engine tuned to racing pitch, and it had the further advantage of being much less conspicuous than the green Lagonda.

"They're headin' out of town," murmured Herbie, "if they ain't careful they'll git booked for tryin' to beat the lights, guv'nor."

"That's their worry," said Peter Morgan, closing his eyes, "you just tag after them—and don't get pinched yourself."

As they swept along the Watford bypass a heavy black saloon with curtains drawn overtook them and cut-in behind the coupé.

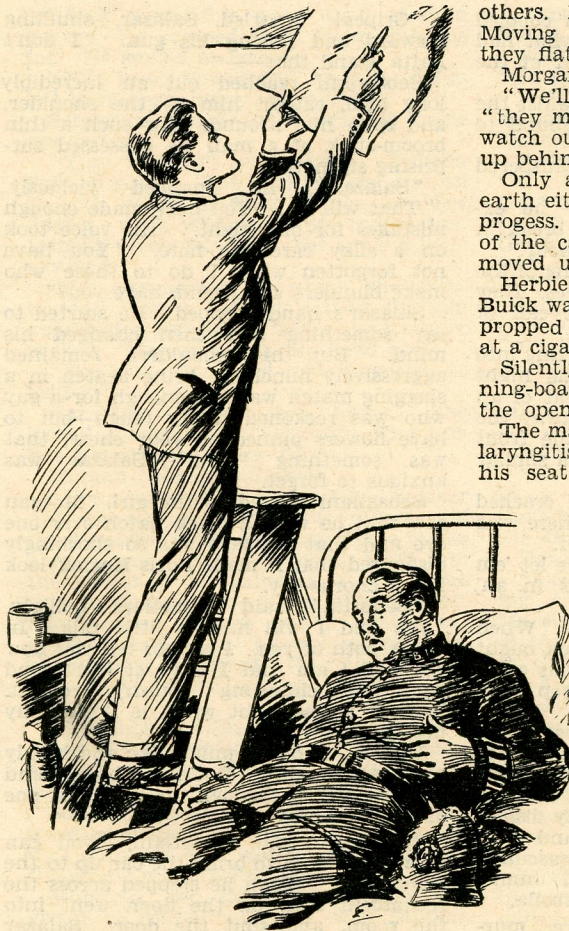
Herbie swore and straightened up.

"That's the car that bloke got into—the bloke who come out of the hotel like I told you. It was parked just in front of me an' I rekernise the number. It's a Buick an' a hot job at that. What do we do now?"

Peter Morgan's sleepiness evaporated.

"They're tailing the lady as well!" He laughed softly. "Keep your place, Herbie, and don't crowd them. This is going to be good."

"They's a bunch of tough eggs in that Buick," said Herbie thoughtfully, "five of 'em—as nasty a plateful as ever I see. I



The doped constable snored while Morgan retrieved the priceless canvases from their hiding place.

don't get it, guv'nor—whose side we on?"

"Neither," said Morgan, grinning with delight, "we're interested spectators: we just hang around, and, maybe, join in the fun later on. It's perfect!"

Herbie opined the boss might be right at that. All he hoped was that they wouldn't be spectators too long.

WHEN THIEVES FALL OUT

ACROSS Stanmore Common the procession turned right into a side-road. The coupé was some way ahead as the driver of the Buick dropped back. Herbie followed suit and switched off his headlights. For three miles or so they proceeded.

Peter Morgan was watching the lights of the coupé on the hedges as the road twisted.

When the lights halted, turned sharply off the road, and then disappeared, he signalled to Herbie to pull up. The Buick was a hundred yards ahead of them, crawling slowly.

Just in front of them was a gate leading into a field. Morgan got out and held it open.

"Run her in here and turn round," he said crisply, "leave her facing the road. I'll tie the gate back—we may have to leave in a hurry."

The Buick's lights had also vanished. Keeping to the ditch to soften the sound of their approach they worked along the lane.

Presently Morgan halted. The Buick was just in front. They could hear the low murmur of voices, or rather, one voice which was giving instructions to the

others. Footsteps crunched over the road. Moving away from where they stood they flattened against the hedge.

Morgan pulled Herbie towards him.

"We'll fix the car first," he whispered, "they may have left someone behind—so watch out. I'll cross over and we'll come up behind it together."

Only a faint squelching from the soft earth either side of the road marked their progress. They came abreast of the rear of the car together, and, bending double moved up on either side of it.

Herbie's luck was in; the man left in the Buick was on his side. He had his elbows propped on the wheel and he was pulling at a cigarette cupped in his hand.

Silently Herbie loomed up by the running-board and thrust a large arm in at the open window.

The man gluck-glucked like a duck with laryngitis as he was hauled bodily out of his seat and through the window; he clawed frantically at Herbie's restraining arm, the pressure of which threatened to crush his Adam's apple to pulp.

Herbie snorted and quite unnecessarily invited his victim to "come up, you perisher!"

The other kicked Herbie in the shins and swung a left hand well below the belt. It might be considered what in diplomatic circles is called "an unfriendly act." Herbie thought so, too. He planted his victim against the side of the car and looped over his right swing. There was a double impact: of Herbie's fist against the target, and the target against the car. The target lost.

Herbie drew out the convenient lengths of wire that he always carried on their nocturnal exploits, and by the time Peter Morgan had lifted the bonnet of the car and had wrenched out the leads to the distributor Herbie had the unconscious sentry bound and gagged, and had dumped him into the back seat of the Buick.

"That fixes one of 'em," he observed with satisfaction. "I'm jest beginnin' to work up a sweat, guv'nor. They's only four left now, not countin' the dame an' her boy-friend."

Peter Morgan padded up the lane, found a gap in the hedge, and broke into the field beyond. A high wall faced them, apparently surrounding the house towards which the black and white coupé had turned. The four men from the Buick had taken the more open course of entering by the main gate from the lane. At least, there was no sign of them along the wall.

Peter Morgan was gambling that there would be a side-gate into the field. He was running, with Herbie lumbering in his wake over the tuft grass. Twenty yards along they found what they wanted: a side-door, from which a straggling path ran across the meadow. It was locked, and the lock was rusted, the wood flaky and crumbling.

The door sagged at their first concerted charge, the wood splintering softly. In a matter of seconds they found themselves in what had once been a fairly extensive kitchen garden, now overgrown and knee-high in weeds.

Between the trunks of fruit trees they could make out the darker mass of a house; a light shone faintly from one of the windows.

Through the tangled vegetation they moved, until they came to the edge of the

miniature neglected orchard. A cobbled yard lay in front of them, and what had once been the stables at the rear of the house.

Two men, barely discernible against the dark background, were coming round to pass in front of them.

"Do we knock 'em off?" whispered Herbie. Morgan shook his head.

"They're the flanking party," he explained softly. "We'll let them break in first; I think this is about zero hour."

Suddenly, above the quiet rustling of the night breeze through the leaves, they heard a shrill whistle, like the call of some night-prowling animal.

The two men lost no time in getting into the house. The quietness of the night was rent by the staccato tat-tat-tat of an automatic as one of them shot away the lock on the back door. From the front of the house came the sounds of a similar assault.

From inside the house a rifle cracked sharply three times, and then there was silence. Herbie looked at his chief.

"I get it," he said sagely. "We let 'em blast each other, then we nips in an' finishes off what's left."

"More or less," agreed Morgan. "When thieves fall out honest men, like us, ought to cash in. I fancy the assault has come off. We'll take a look-see. Keep your cannon handy."

Silently they moved up to the back door and slipped inside. They were in an old-fashioned kitchen, stone-flagged; from this room the light had come—an oil-lamp on the table amidst a pile of dirty dishes. The door opposite was ajar, and they caught the low rumble of masculine voices, punctuated by the shrill unmistakable tones of the Senorita Isabella.

"That dame sounds kind of sore," murmured Herbie. "She don't like it much."

Peter Morgan grinned as he tiptoed across the room. Three times in the last forty-eight hours he had found himself looking down the wrong end of a gun. In fact, when he came to think of it, he had done precious little else since the beginning of the mysterious affair of the murder of John Byrne. It was good to have somebody understudy his part.

The passage from the kitchen was dark, save for a triangle of light that streamed from an open door at the far end.

Treading close to the wall, weighing each step like a cat stalking a sparrow on a lawn, Morgan moved up and brought his face to the edge of the door.

He was looking into a square panelled hall. He could see the beginning of an uncarpeted staircase to the left of him. There were rugs on the floor, but they had been kicked out of place, disclosing bare oak boards.

Four men stood in a curved line. Each of them held a gun. One of them Morgan recognised as Salazar. Next to him stood a tall thin man in a long black overcoat.

Against the wall were the Senorita Isabella and Carlos; at their feet lay the crumpled figure of a man, face downwards, his fingers still curved round the stock of a short rifle.

Carlos was abjectly frightened, but Isabella looked magnificently defiant. She posed with hands on hips and stared malevolently at the tall man in front of her.

"You are a great fool, Sebastiani," she said. She pointed to Salazar. "Look at him, look at his face—did he tell you how it happened? How your best killer got himself tied up with carnations on his chest? Carnations! Dios!" She threw back her head and laughed. Her white teeth gleamed.

"Cripes!" snarled Salazar, shuffling forward and raising his gun. "I don't hafta stand that—"

Sebastiani reached out an incredibly long arm, caught him by the shoulder, and spun him around. For such a thin broom-stick of a man he possessed surprising strength.

"Salazar!" he snapped viciously. "That will do! You have made enough mistakes for one night." His voice took on a silky caressing note. "You have not forgotten what I do to those who make blunders, my friend, have you?"

Salazar's hand dropped. He started to say something and then changed his mind. But his shoulders remained aggressively hunched; being beaten in a slugging match was bad enough for a guy who was reckoned pretty tough—but to have flowers pinned on your chest; that was something "Slug" Salazar was anxious to forget.

Sebastiani turned to the girl. Morgan saw that he wore a black patch over one eye and that his face was so shockingly disfigured that it made Boris Karloff look like a chorus-boy.

"Senorita," said Sebastiani politely, "you and I will have a little talk. In there, both of you. I cannot tell you how gratified I am that I have at last found your so charming country retreat. Retreat is the right word, is it not, my pretty one?"

Isabella made an unladylike and highly provocative reply. But she obeyed, and followed Carlos through the door that one of the men held open.

"Salazar," said Sebastiani, "you can go and tell Sam to bring the car up to the front door." Then he stepped across the recumbent body on the floor, went into the room, and shut the door. Salazar thrust his hands into his pockets and slouched over to the front door. His attitude plainly indicated that he thought a guy of his eminence oughtn't to be used as a messenger-boy. Besides, he was anxious to take it out of that skirt for the cracks she made.

Herbie looked wonderingly at his chief. "That tall bloke 'ud break awfully easy," he whispered. "One good poke inna snoot—"

Morgan's hand fastened on his arm with a grip of steel. Behind them came the creaking of boards. They whirled about, one on each side of the passage. The door opposite the kitchen slowly opened and a dark shape appeared. All they could plainly see of it was the faint glimmer of a pair of legs. It waited, and then tip-toed stealthily across the passage to the kitchen door. It looked like a small slender man.

Morgan reached it first, got one hand over a gasping mouth and the other round a waist that proved alarmingly supple and small. He carried his wildly struggling burden into the dim light of the kitchen, and then released it with startling abruptness.

It was a girl, a very frightened girl. She stared up at him through masses of tangled hair, her eyes wide and piteous. She looked little more than eighteen. Her lips trembled.

"Please," she whispered, "please let me go! Do not hurt me any more!"

Herbie gulped noisily and shut the door to the passage. The girl watched the black-jerseyed figure in front of her. She had one arm raised as though to ward off an expected blow.

"We're not going to hurt you," said Morgan gently; "You must believe me. Were you staying here with Senorita Isabella?"

She nodded, and brushed the hair from her face. "She kept me here. They beat me many times." She extended her thin arms, around each wrist ran a deep purple weal, the skin was chafed and raw. "She came up to see me to-night and untied me. She was going to beat me again—then there was shooting, she ran downstairs, and after a while I tried—"

Morgan nodded. "You wanted to get away." There was more tenderness in his voice than Herbie Adams ever expected to hear from his chief.

"You don't have to be frightened any more—we'll take you away, anywhere you want to go. But you must do exactly as I tell you."

She nodded, her eyes bright with unshed tears.

"Anything," she whispered brokenly; "anything to get away from that—that horrible woman!"

"Splendid. Take her back to the car the way we came, Herbie, across the field. You'll find plenty of rugs in the back. Start your engine and be ready to get away in a hurry. Oh, and I'll have your gun."

There was a dangerous glitter in Peter Morgan's grey eyes that belied his careless grin.

"But, gov'nor," protested Herbie, "what about you? They'll find that bloke I slugged an' there'll be a helluva battle!"

Morgan took the second gun. His grin widened.

"I hope so," he said. "Now you push off and do as I told you."

Herbie swallowed hard for the second time.

"O.K., you're the boss. Seems kind of crazy to me—mebbe I c'd dump the kid an' come back," he finished hopefully.

Peter Morgan pushed him towards the back door.

"Don't take any notice of him," he



"Grab some air, fellers, and don't star again." He heard the plunk of a

whispered to the wondering girl. "It's just that he's scared of being left alone in the dark with a lady."

The vestige of a smile crossed the girl's pallid face.

"I don't know why you're doing this," she said softly, "but I—I think you're a pair of darlings!" With that she flitted through the open back door and out on to the cobbled yard.

Herbie looked scowlingly back at his chief. Morgan waved both guns and blew him a kiss.

"Night, night—darling!"

Herbie swore monosyllabically.

MORGAN SETTLES AN ACCOUNT

THE hall was still empty. From his position in the passage Morgan could hear the rasping bark of Sebastiani's voice and the Senorita Isabella's equally angry replies. He would have given a lot to be able to listen-in to that argument for a few minutes.

The front door burst open and Salazar appeared, supporting the drooping Sam.

"Kerm on!" snarled Salazar. "Untangle y're feet, we gotta see the boss."

Sam was cradling his jaw in the crook of his arm, his legs weaved drunkenly as he skirted the dead man sprawling on the floor.

Peter Morgan watched them enter the room where the others were. There was a sudden hush. Morgan could imagine the tableau. Then Sebastiani broke out into a rapid fire of questions. Sam, holding his broken jaw, began to explain how he'd been overwhelmed by half a dozen men armed with black-jacks and tommy guns.

The door opened silently and a black-jerseyed figure slid in, holding a gun in each hand, waist high.

"Evening everybody," said a lazy voice, "hold it like that, and drop those guns to the floor."

Three guns thudded on the worn carpet.

"Kick them this way," said Morgan gently. He scraped them back with his toe. He smiled at Isabella.

"Nice to see you again," he said. "You left in rather a hurry last night."

Sebastiani glared at the girl; his single eye glittered.

"Who is this?" he snapped. Isabella took no notice. She held her bag clasped in both hands in front of her, and her fingers were sliding over the catch. Isabella's face was bleak, her smile a little strained.

"An unexpected pleasure," she murmured. With a deft little twist the gun appeared in her hand. Twice the hammer clicked. Morgan shook his head sadly.

"Too bad. You must have forgotten to load it."

Her face twisted with anger. She looked suddenly old, haggard. The useless gun dropped to the floor.

Morgan addressed Salazar.

"Your cannon," he said softly. Salazar had moved apart from the others and stood nearest to the lounging figure in the black jersey. His right hand dived into the pocket of his raincoat, at the same time he ducked. The gun in Morgan's left hand moved. There was a double explosion. Salazar sat heavily on the floor, his shoulder shattered. He rolled against the wall. Blood seeped between his fingers.

"You'll never learn," sighed Morgan. "Now we can get on with the conference. I trust nobody else has suicidal tendencies?"

Sebastiani and his three other men stood motionless. Carlos was against the wall with his eyes closed. He looked as though he was praying.

Morgan's two guns swung over the group in half-circles. He was smiling. One of Sebastiani's men had a badly-swollen mouth. Morgan pointed a gun at him casually.

"You were on the island last night, my friend. Was Frankenstein with you?"

Sebastiani stiffened. The muscles in his thin neck stood out.

"Who the devil are you?" he spat, showing sharp pointed teeth beneath a scarred lip.

"Ask the lady," suggested Morgan. "She doesn't like me either. Believe it or not," he went on confidentially, "she tried to kill me last night, in a little hut in Chichester Harbour. It must have been just a little while after you left."

"I don't know what you're talking about," said Sebastiani slowly and distinctly. "What hut?"

"You wouldn't know anything about a man with a knife in his back, would you?"

"Naturally not," Sebastiani's voice had taken on its soft note, and his angular figure had tensed.

Morgan looked at the dancer.

"You recognised the knife," he stated in a matter-of-fact voice, "and you thought I'd come from Sebastiani to do the killing. I can add that up."

Her lips twisted.

"Colonel Sebastiani has a most interesting collection of weapons. Collecting Moorish knives is, I believe, quite a hobby of his. You must get him to show them to you sometime, when you're not quite so—busy!"

Sebastiani's shattered face gleamed damply in the lamp-light. It was as though his breathing was suspended. His eyes were fixed on Morgan's guns.

Abruptly, as though the floor had opened beneath him, he dropped to one knee. His right hand streaked into the sleeves of his coat.

Morgan shifted to one side, firing instantaneously. A long thin steel blade quivered in the wall, an inch from his right ear.

Sebastiani stumbled to his feet. His mouth had sagged open; both hands clutched at his stomach. His long legs twisted, scabbled at the carpet, and he fell forward on his face.

"Old habits die hard," said Morgan thinly. He slipped one gun into his pocket, reached behind him and opened the door. It was to the senorita he spoke: "I'll take good care of the little girl you had upstairs. Really, Lizzie, I'm disappointed in you, treating a child like that."

Senorita Isabella Uraburu ground her teeth. Her chest heaved. She looked like a tragedy queen in a big act.

"You're storing up a lot of trouble for yourself," she said, "this doesn't finish here." She walked towards him, her hips swaying. "Why don't we get together over this? You're pretty smart, but you don't know what it's all about yet, do you? Is it money you want?"

"Keep your distance, lady. I'd hate to have to turn you up and spank you—you'd bruise awful easy, and that would spoil the dance act, wouldn't it? Think of your public."

With that he slipped out into the hall and slammed the door. He tore down the corridor and through the kitchen. Behind him he heard angry voices in the hall.

Making excellent time over the courtyard he sped in among the trees. He had reached the splintered side-door when the sharp crack of a rifle came from the house and a slug whined over his head. He could hear Isabella screaming as he swerved into the dark meadow.

At least one of Sebastiani's men was a fast mover. Morgan was not dawdling himself, and he hadn't reached the hedge before a rapid fusillade made him zig-zag and bend double.



anything," ordered the gunman. Morgan dropped to the ground, then shot up stone against the man's face. Then Herbie was busy on him, with his fists.



“Grab some air, fellers, and don’t start anything,” ordered the gunman. Morgan dropped to the ground, then shot up again. He heard the plunk of a stone against the man’s face. Then Herbie was busy on him, with his fists.

Herbie had eased the car out into the lane. Morgan burst through the hedge and swung himself into the open door. Gears whined shrilly. Herbie got away to a flying start. After fifty yards he switched on the lights.

"Have fun?" he asked. "Sounded kind of noisy up in that shack."

Morgan twisted round. The girl lay curled upon the back seat, covered in a thick rug. Only her face was visible. She was asleep.

Herbie passed over a flask of rum.

"I give her a shot o' this," he explained, "an' she jest heeled over. Pretty well played out, I reckon."

Peter Morgan lowered the flask and sighed.

"Been quite a big evening. Now I think we'll go home. I fixed it with the laddie who stuck a knife in J.B.'s back. It was Sebastiani; the tall one with the awful mug. I think I've broken him of the habit of throwing knives."

"You meantersay you held up that bunch o' sloggers an' let 'em heave cutlery at you?" demanded Herbie in shocked accents.

"Only one," said Morgan apologetically. "He was pretty smooth. I had to drill him."

Herbie stepped on it.

"They was seven of 'em, countin' the dame," he snorted, "an' she was no blinkin' modest violet from what I hears!"

Peter Morgan chuckled and settled himself comfortably.

"You don't know the half of it. She's in this business up to the tips of her pretty ears. A very, very tough baby."

"Where do we take the kid? Who is she, anyway?" Herbie jerked a large thumb over his shoulder. "Looks like she could do with some proper grub if you ask me."

"Poor kid," murmured Morgan. "She can't very well stay with us. We'll take her to Anne, she'll look after her for the night until we get things straightened out."

Forty minutes later, in a silk kimono over her pyjamas, Anne Meredith sleepily pattered to the door of her Knightsbridge flat. She pushed back the raven locks that tumbled over her forehead and undid the latch.

With grave courtesy, Peter Morgan bowed from the waist. Herbie looked sheepish.

"Oh, my lord," said Anne, "I might have known it was you. Bit late for a social call, isn't it? My reputation, you know."

Peter waved that aside as a mere bagatelle.

"We come on an errand of mercy, my sweet. We appeal to all your tender womanly instincts."

"I'm crying my eyes out," said Anne. "Do be sensible, Peter, and come in out of that corridor."

"Fetch her up," said Morgan to Herbie. Turning to Anne, he went on: "We've got a girl in the car, only a youngster. Be an angel and put her up for the night. She's had a tough time of it. I'll tell you all about it later, at least—as much as I know myself at the moment."

Anne smiled and walked back into her sitting-room.

"Help me make up a bed," she called over her shoulder. Peter caught up with her, and swung her off her feet.

"This is my night to howl," he declared. "Have I ever told you how very sweet you are?"

"You put me down and fetch some sheets out of that cupboard," demanded Anne, struggling vainly.

Herbie came in with the still-sleeping

girl in his arms. He stared at the other two and grinned.

"Kind of catching, ain't it, guv'nor? Where do I put mine?"

Peter Morgan released his protesting armful. Five minutes later Anne tip-toed out from her tiny spare bed-room and gently shut the door behind her.

"She hardly stirred when I undressed her. The poor thing's completely exhausted. Peter, her back is a mass of bruises, I never saw such a sight! Who is she?"

Morgan tilted a generous dose of whisky into a tumbler, handed it to Herbie, and helped himself again. Anne refused, but took a cigarette.

Morgan told her what had happened that night. He kept it down to a narrative of the bare essentials. Anne sat in a corner of the settee with her legs curled under her. When he finished she wrinkled her brows.

"I can't imagine what that poor girl has to do with this terrible affair," she said. "She's not a criminal, Peter, or I'm very much mistaken."

Morgan finished off his drink and stood up.

"You're a great little rescue worker," he said, patting her shoulder. "Let the kid sleep as long as she likes and give me a ring the minute she wakes in the morning. With what she'd most probably tell us I fancy we can begin to fit the pieces together."

Anne followed them to the door and watched them begin to descend the stairs. Of the two, the burly Herbie looked infinitely the more tired. Peter moved as jauntily as ever. In that tight black jersey he looked like a character out of the Russian ballet. Except for the red hair.

Half-way to Sackville Street Herbie broke a long silence.

"I could eat a steak," he ruminated, "coupla pounds, with all the fixins. I feel like I ain't eaten for a week."

"We'll try Bernie's place," said his boss, "I hear his steaks are excellent."

TUBBY CLAYTON IS ANNOYED

IT was just before ten o'clock, and Peter Morgan was savouring his first cigarette of the day over a third cup of coffee. From the hall below he heard Herbie's voice rumbling in protest, answered by an equally chesty tone.

Strolling to the door of the flat the red-headed detective called out:

"O.K., Herbie, show the inspector up."

The vasty bulk of Chief Inspector Clayton pounded stertorously up the stairs. He still had his hat on. The solid banisters shook under his grasp.

"Come in, Tubby," said Morgan with the utmost cheerfulness, "have a cup of coffee?"

"Coffee be—" thundered the inspector, shoving him into the room. "I got something to say to you!"

Morgan allowed himself to be propelled into a chair. The inspector stood over him, like a Colossus in tweeds.

"Where were you last night?" he erupted savagely. "Make it fast!"

"Oh, around and about," said Morgan airily, "here and there. Who wants to know?"

"The Foreign Office and the Home Office, that's who!" Clayton tilted back his large bowler belligerently.

"Dear, dear," murmured Morgan, "we're becoming quite celebrated."

The chief inspector exhaled noisily. "Suppose I told you that the Spanish Embassy is kicking up a lot of dirt about certain incidents that took place in a

country house near Stanmore last night—would you be surprised?"

"I might," agreed Morgan placidly, "supposing I knew what those incidents were and how they concerned the Spanish Embassy—which I don't know."

"No, you don't know," said the inspector heavily; "you wouldn't know anything about a certain person being abducted from that house, would you? A person who was in the custody of an accredited agent of the Spanish Government?"

"Why, no," said Morgan innocently. "Is that very wrong of me?"

"The description given by the Embassy fits you!" snapped Clayton. "You can't disguise that hair of yours."

"Look," said Morgan gently, "sit down and take the weight off your bunions, and then tell me just what it is I'm supposed to have done. Who is this Spanish agent, and what's all this hot air about abduction?"

"Who the agent was doesn't matter," said Clayton shortly. "That's confidential. But the Embassy vouches for the information. You'd better come across, Pete. Turn the girl over to me and I'll see your part of it is soft-pedalled."

"So I'm supposed to have abducted a girl," fumed Peter Morgan, and added earnestly: "Tubby, is she good looking?"

"Look here!" raged Clayton, shaking a fat finger. "I've given you as much rope as I can, I've given you the chance to do the decent thing—but you think you're too smart, you know all the answers!"

As he paused for breath Morgan looked across at his assistant lounging in the doorway.

"Herbie, have we got any kidnapped young girls on the premises?"

"Course, not!" said Herbie, in tones of shocked piety. "We got no girls here—it wouldn't be right, why, we ain't married!"

Chief Inspector Clayton stared hard at them for a moment, breathing noisily through his nostrils. His large fists clenched and unclenched. He walked towards the door.

"I'll be back," he said thickly, "and it'll be just too bad for you, Pete, if you haven't decided to talk."

They watched him go. Heard the front door slam.

"Now I wonder what he meant by that last remark?" said Peter Morgan mildly.

Herbie scratched his jaw.

"Speakin' from experience, guv'nor, I'd say he's gone to get a ticket, an' if you ain't good he aims to sling you in the jug. He's as sore a copper as ever I come across."

"Dear old Tubby, he really ought to watch his blood-pressure." Morgan strolled over to the window and looked down into the street. There were two men on the pavement opposite. Morgan knew both of them.

Herbie joined him and sucked his teeth disgustedly.

"Flatties! Planted at our front door! It ain't right, guv'nor, it lowers the tone of the place."

Peter Morgan fished in a cupboard and drew out a broad-brimmed black hat. It all but concealed his flaming hair. He also put on a pair of horn-rimmed spectacles.

"I'll leave you to deal with our fat friend," he said quickly. "Don't let him rile you, and whatever you do, don't take a swing at him in front of witnesses. Just stall him along—and keep near the 'phone."

"I don't know a thing," asserted Herbie.

Morgan went down to the basement, which was untenanted, let himself out into a tiny square yard, opened a door into the alley, and took a quick look up and down.

Five minutes later he was rolling up Park Lane on the top of a bus.

Anne stared when she saw his attire, and then burst out laughing.

"The master of disguise! Come right in, Sherlock, we've just finished breakfast."

Morgan removed the spectacles and the hat. The girl rose as he entered. She was wearing one of Anne's dressing-gowns, and her face had recovered some of its natural colour. She looked younger than last night.

"I know your name now," she said, "Mr. Morgan—I want to thank you for what you did last night. "I—I'd almost begun to think such people didn't exist."

"Here, hold on," grinned Morgan, "you'll have me leaning over backwards with righteousness. I've just been talking to a gentleman who doesn't share your good opinion of me. But we'll come to that. Feeling better?"

"Much." She smiled up at him with child-like confidence. "Miss Meredith's been more than kind—you all have."

Anne came out from her bed-room, dressed for the street.

"I must fly," she said, "I'm late already. Don't brow-beat Rosalie, Peter. Ring me at lunch-time and we'll make a threesome."

She blew them a kiss from the door, and was gone, en route for a beauty salon in Hanover Square.

Morgan sat down on the settee beside the girl. He offered her a cigarette. She took it, but the way she handled it prompted him to ask:

"How old are you, Rosalie?"

She drew on the cigarette, coughed, and said:

"Nearly seventeen, Mr. Morgan."

He laughed.

"You don't have to smoke it unless you want to."

With evident relief she stubbed it out.

"I've smoked before. But I don't like it very much," she confessed.

"Neither did I, at your age, though I pretended to. It was a point of honour." He lowered his voice dramatically. "We even drank beer in pubs out of bounds. We were regular devils!"

She giggled. She was a normal school-girl again.

"Stupid of me," said Morgan, "but I don't know your name yet."

"Rosalie Castelana," she said simply.

"Spanish? You speak very good English."

"Mother was English, and I was brought up at an English school in Roehampton. Mother died five years ago."

"And your father?"

She sat very still, her tiny hands clasped in her lap. The fingers twitched.

"He was killed at Madrid, fighting against the rebels. Against Franco." She kept her face averted.

Morgan got up and walked over to the window.

"I only want to help you," he said softly. "If you want me to stop, just say so. Did you ever hear of a man named John Byrne?"

"J. B.?" she whispered. "Why, yes—he was our friend. Do you know him? Is he here?"

She stood up. Her eyes were bright and eager. Morgan caught her slender shoulders.

"He was my friend, too, Rosalie. He's

dead. He was—murdered, two nights ago. That's how I came to find you. He sent for me, but I was too late."

"Dead?" she echoed dazedly, and all the animation drained from her peaked face. "Murdered? Then I—I— She did it, that horrible woman! She did it!"

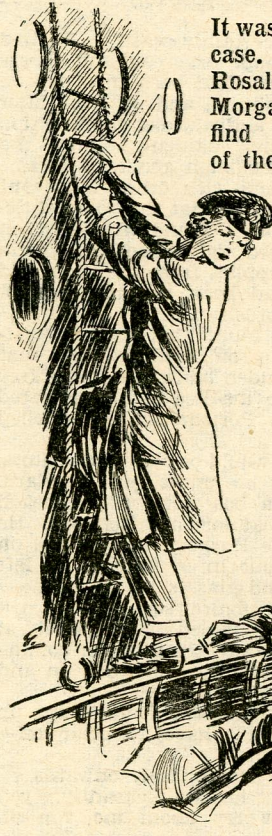
"You mean Isabella? No. She didn't kill him. It was somebody else."

"Sebastiani?"

He nodded.

"He was dead when she got there. She works for the Spanish Embassy here, doesn't she?"

"A spy!" Rosalie's head jerked up and her eyes flashed. "She took me away from school by a trick and kept me in that house. She tried to make me tell her



It was the end of the case. "Up you go, Rosalie," whispered Morgan. "You'll find Smoky's one of the best. Everything's O.K. now."

where our pictures were, the Castelana pictures. The rest of our property they confiscated. They called my father a traitor because he fought with General Miaja, defending Madrid—that's where he met J.B.—he was in the International Brigade. He was a very fine fighter, my father said."

"None better," agreed Peter Morgan, gently leading her back to the settee. "So when Madrid fell your family lost all its property, except the pictures. They are very valuable, I suppose?"

"The Castelana collection is the finest in Spain," said Rosalie proudly.

"And you don't know where they are now?" he suggested.

She spread her hands and lifted her shoulders in a gesture truly Spanish, for all her English education.

"Before my father died J.B. promised to get them out of the country. He must have succeeded, or that Isabella woman wouldn't have beaten me so often to try and make me tell where they were hidden. I couldn't tell her—I didn't know. But, the day before yesterday, I had had nothing to eat or drink for a long time—I was very weak—it was wicked of me—I told her about the little island in the

harbour. I knew of it from a letter he had sent me a month ago. He said all arrangements were complete. It's my fault he was killed!"

She flung herself against the cushions and burst into a paroxysm of sobbing. Peter Morgan sat and stared at his hands.

So that had been J.B.'s last stunt—tricking the victorious General Franco out of a collection of pictures worth half a million pounds, salvaging the remnants of her family fortune for a helpless school-girl, orphaned by the civil war. It was typical.

But if the dancer Isabella was the accredited undercover agent of the Spanish Government in England, where did Sebastiani and his thugs come in?

Private speculators, Morgan surmised. Probably got wind of what John Byrne was doing and tried to hi-jack Franco's people.

One thing was certain: neither Isabella nor Sebastiani had found the pictures. If J.B. had accomplished his mission, and his presence in England and his note to Morgan suggested he had accomplished at least part of it, he had died with his secret locked in his breast.

The hut on the island had been pretty thoroughly searched, first by Sebastiani and his gang, then by Morgan himself, and lastly, and probably most thoroughly of all, by the police.

It was then that Peter Morgan recollected with a wry smile that the inquest on John Byrne was fixed for the next day, and that he was billed as the star witness.

Most awkward, he reflected, there was a hell of a lot he wanted to do before then. And to cap it all, Tubby Clayton was possibly at that very moment steaming up Sackville Street with a warrant for his arrest, or, at the very least, with an urgent invitation to the Yard.

Distinctly a tough proposition. A wicked light danced in his eyes as he bent over the quiescent girl.

"Buck up, Rosalie," he said, drawing her into a sitting position, and drying her eyes with a large handkerchief. "J. B. wouldn't want any tears, you know that. He died on active service, just the way he'd want it. Now tell me some more about those pictures."

THE GETAWAY

MORGAN waited a full hour before ringing Herbie, and when he did so he was careful enough to adopt the formula he had devised for use when an interested third party had to be circumvented.

"Is that the Mayfair Luxury Laundry? I want to speak to the head shirt-splitter."

"'Crect," said Herbie softly, "the bulky goods has just left. But they's a sample left behind—it's upstairs, I give it some beer."

"Very tactful," agreed Morgan; "having a nice time?"

Herbie's chuckle came through.

"Guv'nor, you missed the time of your life—that fat copper near bust hisself. Left strict instructions you was to be brought along to the Yard soon's you showed up here. Quite nasty about it, he was. I hadda speak to him pretty severe. Hold on—"

The distant sounds of an argument came along the wire. Morgan waited. Then a new voice asked:

"Who's that speaking?"

"Syd Walker," said Morgan, basso profundo, and rang off.

The next call was to the garage where he kept his two cars. Fred Davis, the foreman, answered.

"Listen, Fred," said Morgan quickly, "I want you to do me a favour—bring my V-Eight and leave it opposite Barker's. Can do?"

"Right away," said the foreman briskly, "I'll come meself. Oh, by the way, Mister Morgan, there was a bloke round here just now asking if your Lagonda was in. I showed it to him. He wanted to know if it was out last night, but I played dumb. I think he was a copper."

"I'm sure he was," agreed Morgan with much cheerfulness. "Thanks, Fred, you're a good citizen. See the bus is full up. I'll be waiting for you."

Rosalie Castelana came out of her room. She was wearing one of Anne's frocks; it was a reasonably good fit and made her look quite charmingly grown-up.

Morgan took some notes from his case, folded them and pressed them into her hand. When she hesitated he told her to look upon it as a loan.

"I'm going to be pretty busy for the rest of the day, Rosalie. Here's what I want you to do: buy yourself a suitcase and whatever clothes you need and book a room for to-night at the Great Western Hotel. Better call yourself Rose Carter. I'll get in touch with you there some time this evening. Here's Anne's number—call her at lunch-time, but don't meet her—they may be watching her. That's why I want you to get out of here."

"I understand," she said quietly. "I'm afraid I'm making a lot of trouble for you—"

"Think nothing of it." His grin was infectious. "I suggest you spend this afternoon at a cinema—there's a good one at Marble Arch. Now you run along and enjoy yourself. I expect I'll have good news for you this evening. Keep among the crowds—it's better."

A few minutes after she had gone he followed, wearing the black hat and the spectacles.

The car was waiting, and Fred Davis didn't recognise him at first.

"Strewth, you do get up to some capers, Mister Morgan," he said, vacating the driver's seat.

"Just a bundle of fun," murmured Morgan. "Thanks, Fred, I'll buy you a beer if I can keep out of jail."

Fred Davis watched the powerful saloon swirl into the traffic.

"A fair caution, that bloke," he ruminated. "Now I wonder what he's up to this time? Anyone who gets in his way is liable to find themselves ironed out. No, sir! I wouldn't want to be on the other side when Mister Rusty Morgan cuts loose!"

Quite a few other people had come to the same conclusion as Fred Davis. Precisely at that moment a painful little scene was being enacted in a very ornately furnished room in the immediate vicinity of the Spanish Embassy.

The Senorita Isabella Uraburu was being told where she got off by a very elegant gentleman in a frock coat with a diamond pin in his silk stock.

In the choicest Spanish he was telling her exactly what sort of a ham-handed bungler she was for leading the pestiferous Peter Morgan to the house at Stanmore last night. And Isabella wasn't liking it at all. Her record as an undercover agent during the civil war was a pretty good one, and if Scotland Yard itself couldn't fix that red-headed interloper

she considered a little slip like last night might be forgiven her.

"You appear not to understand," the eminent one pointed out. "Art treasures belonging to the enemies of the Government have been declared confiscated. The Castelana pictures must be recovered, they are to form the nucleus of a great National Gallery, such as there is here in London. It will be symbolic of our glorious triumph."

There was lots more in the same vein, and Senorita Isabella went back to the Hotel Miramar a very savage woman. All she had to do, she told herself bitterly, was to find Rosalie Castelana and Peter Morgan—that's all; out of London's teeming millions she had to pick up two people! And they probably weren't in London at all.

One of them certainly wasn't. He had lunch, in the shape of bread and cheese and a pint of excellent beer, in a pub on the road to Midhurst, and an hour later was conducting a flirtatious conversation with the plump maiden behind the counter in the Foxleigh general stores.

From her, along with other irrelevant details, he discovered that the poor gentleman who had been found murdered on Stubbs Island two nights ago had bought all his scanty supplies from the shop, and among them had been a small sack of whitening and a brush.

Peter Morgan found that very interesting, and, fending off a direct hint that the talkative maiden had the evening free and wouldn't be insulted if he suggested the pictures in Portsmouth, he strolled out.

Stubbs Island would be closed to visitors, the hut would be under police guard. Morgan found a boatman on the beach and hired his boat for the afternoon. He pulled across the Harbour, and landed on the island without interruption. He left his black hat and glasses in the boat.

A blue-coated figure squatted on the little veranda and pulled disconsolately at a pipe. When he saw the intruder coming up through the bracken he stood up and waved him away.

"No visitors!" he bawled, buttoning up his tunic. "You'll have to clear off—official instructions!"

Peter Morgan kept blithely onwards. "Hallo, officer," he said pleasantly, "you don't have to worry about me, I'm all right."

The constable recognised him then. He'd heard his superiors discussing this red-headed bloke.

"Well, seein' that it's you, sir—but rightly I ain't supposed to let anybody land. Those newspaper fellers were swarmin' all over the place yesterday—don't give us a chance!"

Peter Morgan nodded sympathetically.

"I know what it's like; they muck up all your clues and then jump on your neck if you don't solve the case straight off the reel. But I expect you've got things well in hand now."

The constable swelled importantly.

"You're right there, sir. Not much we don't see."

They sat down side by side in the sunshine. It was very warm and peaceful; the sea glittered invitingly.

The constable took off his helmet and mopped his brow.

"I would click for a job like this," he complained. "Bloomin' watch-dog, that's all I am, while that there sergeant goes ridin' round with the fellers from the Yard, bless yer heart, as if they needed his help!"

Tactfully Morgan agreed there was a deal of injustice in the world, and

lamented that honest worth was not always recognised.

Absently he drew out a silver-topped flask.

"I don't know whether you'd care to try some of this," he suggested diffidently, "it's pretty good brandy. Wait, I'll see if I can dig up a couple of glasses."

"You can't go in there," said the constable, "they sealed it. Might try the other room, the bed-room."

The bed-room door was open. Morgan's pulses jumped as he saw that the ceiling had been recently white-washed, and he also saw something else remarkable about the ceiling, something that confirmed the suspicion that the tubby damsel in the general stores had, all unconsciously, sown in his mind. He knew now where the Castelana collection was.

He unearthed a thick tumbler and an enamel mug, dusted them out with his handkerchief, and half-filled them with brandy. His hand fumbled inside his waistcoat pocket and flitted over the tumbler. There was a tiny plop as a little pellet dropped into the brandy.

The constable loomed in, filling the door-way. He accepted the tumbler and sniffed lovingly at its amber contents.

"Very kind of you, sir, I'm sure. Mind you, strictly speakin', I ain't supposed to do this, but seein' that you used to be at the Yard, well, I reckon it'll be all right."

Morgan raised his mug. His eyes were dancing.

"Here's to Law and Order—the most respectable toast I know for a police officer."

"Bottoms up," said the constable, and took a man-size swig at the brandy. "Blimey!" he ejaculated reverently. "That's got a snap in it all right. Couple o' them an' I'd be tellin' the super where he could go! Phew!"

He sat on the edge of the bed, unhooked the collar of his tunic, and loosened his belt. His speech thickened as the brandy in the glass lessened. His head lolled back against the wall. Inside a minute he was dead to the world.

Morgan arranged him on the bed.

"I just hate doing this," he murmured softly, "it's a pretty dirty trick, I know." He registered a mental vow that when he'd cleared things up he'd do what he could to see the constable's indiscretion was treated as lightly as possible.

Then he turned to the immediate business ahead of him. He found a step-ladder in the wood-shed and carried it into the bed-room. He could reach the ceiling comfortably. He took out his pen-knife and began to prise up the heads of the rows of tacks that showed through the white-wash.

What had looked like the ceiling began to peel away in his hand—square strips of canvas—the Castelana pictures!

J.B. had tacked them to the ceiling, painted side upwards, and had white-washed their backs. With considerable ingenuity he had arranged them so that they fitted, like the pieces of a jig-saw puzzle.

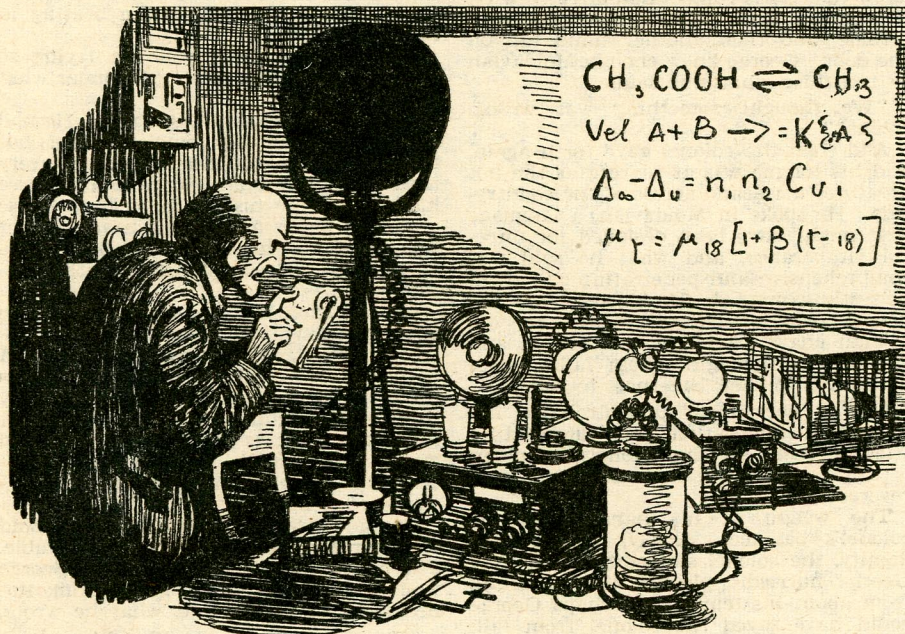
Morgan worked as fast as he could, being particularly careful not to damage the precious canvases as he drew out the tacks. The recumbent constable was soon sprinkled with flecks of white-wash.

The ceiling in the other room yielded a similar harvest, the pictures this time being nearly all of the same size—portraits about two feet square.

Although Peter Morgan was cheerfully a Philistine where Art was concerned he recognised at least one of the pictures as

(Continued on back page.)

The BRAIN!



RESCUED BY THE BRAIN

FOR a moment they stared at one another, like two figures in a tableau at Madame Tussaud's. George was the first to regain the power of movement; he remembered it afterwards with some pride. He was just a split second before Colonel Guttenberg in realising that this was an enemy and something must be done about him.

Guttenberg went for his gun in his back pocket, so his hand had to travel about eighteen inches. George, who was unarmed, went for his enemy's legs. George remembered all he had been taught about an efficient and devastating Rugby tackle, so he flung his whole weight at Guttenberg's legs and tensed his arms about the Moldavian's knees, arriving at about the moment that Guttenberg gripped his gun-butt.

Guttenberg went to the floor, tackled hard and low. The object of that type of tackle is to see that a man hurled at force down to a grassy surface will not for a little while afterwards take much interest in what is going on around him. Guttenberg arrived on a concrete surface, and his interest in surrounding affairs ceased promptly.

George dragged him inside and slammed the door. He would have secured it, but there were no bolts on the inside. George looked about him wildly, remembering that the house adjoining was filled with enemies. He must find something quickly to barricade this door, and he could see nothing readily portable save the crates containing the dead Chinamen. He dragged these over, and with considerable effort piled them up one on top of the other against the door.

George had sufficient sense to realise that his position was insecure. He was surrounded by his ruthless enemies, his companions were three dead men, not counting Bannister Brandt—and a Brain. Outside that door was a number of people

whose only interest in him could be to desire his death. Inside was the unconscious Guttenberg.

George looked up wildly to the wireless aerial that crept over the glass roof of the conservatory. He didn't even know if his message had got through—if there was any hope of relief from friends. It seemed to him that he had merely staved off an evil moment and incurred a certain amount of unpopularity when he laid out Colonel Guttenberg.

"He asked for it," he muttered.

George was feeling pretty crazy himself. Like, he thought, being interned in a cemetery at midnight, with one of the customers insisting on talking to you. There was no one here on his side, unless you could count the Brain of Professor Boris Probyn. And George could scarcely bear to look at the Brain in its glass jar, throbbing rhythmically and ceaselessly—a Brain in slavery.

"I don't know what you'd do, old man," George said exhaustedly, "but I seem to be in a pretty almighty jam myself."

He swung round quickly. He had heard a step in the passage outside; he knew that someone crouched there, listening at the barricaded door. But what use was that barricade if the force of a dozen men was used? There was someone listening outside, one of Guttenberg's men.

George dived for Guttenberg, rolled him over without ceremony. He found the bulge in his hip-pocket and investigated, and found a very evil-looking gun of blued steel, charged in every one of its eight chambers. This, George realised, was the gun he would have been arguing with if he hadn't moved that split second earlier than Guttenberg.

"Nasty!" George breathed.

He cocked the gun and watched the door. Eight bullets in his hand, and he had about enough skill to use three of them accurately. That left a whole lot

AN AMAZING STORY OF
A RUTHLESS SCIENTIST
AND THE MOST DAN-
GEROUS EXPERIMENT
EVER KNOWN

By WALTER TYRER

(Author of "Old Si and Young Jed.")

of people prepared to keep right on coming at him, if that door were open. George was conscious of a certain dryness of throat.

He waited, saw the knob of the door turn slowly and then slip back. Someone outside was listening, they had tried the door. Maybe they had heard the brief struggle before he had laid out Guttenberg. George could hear them whispering softly outside now, and he knew what they argued about.

They'd heard something that disturbed them, and they wondered if Guttenberg needed their help. But they knew Guttenberg, and he had ordered them to leave him alone. If they butted in out of turn they were liable to run into trouble, grave trouble.

George waited, and down at his feet Guttenberg lay still. Then George heard the soft sound of feet moving away. Were they reassured, outside there, or had they gone away to confer? He waited in the stillness, and the hand that gripped Guttenberg's gun grew wet with sweat. Then he heard the sound of feet returning, and this time they weren't furtive. Someone was walking confidently down the passage.

George started violently. Someone had struck the door hard. Then a crisp voice called out in Moldavian. George didn't speak Moldavian, but the tone told him what that voice said.

"Are you all right, colonel?"

George didn't answer, and the colonel couldn't. Maybe the one who had knocked would take it Guttenberg didn't want to be disturbed and go away. There was a sound like whispering outside, and George could picture five or six heads bent together, discussing the next move. If they disturbed Colonel Guttenberg when he didn't want to be disturbed, it would be bad for them. But if he needed them and they didn't do anything about it, it would be worse.

There was another knock, a quieter knock this time, and the voice that called out spoke English. It was the silky, ingratiating voice of Miroasaki.

"Are you all right, colonel? We heard sound, very strange sound, as you came in

laboratory. Think perhaps you have accident, all feel much grief. A word from you, a single kindly word, and we go away."

There was nothing but the stillness, a stillness that could be felt. Colonel Guttenberg hadn't heard Mirosaki's moving plea. He had been dropped down hard on a concrete floor, and a lump the size of an ostrich egg was rapidly taking shape on the back of his head.

But the stillness caused concern outside. The knocking at the door was louder now, Mirosaki's voice was more urgent.

"Colonel Guttenberg, you desire assistance, yes?"

For once George deplored that he had never received any early training as a ventriloquist. Those outside were thoroughly alarmed now; they were beating insistently on the barricaded door, they were calling out loudly for the colonel.

George glanced wildly round. Behind him was nothing but the Brain, throbbing away ceaselessly. The mighty brain of Boris Probyn, but in the scrap George felt was coming a husky nigger would be more use.

Or would he?

George turned, and snatched up the discarded skull-cap that was connected with the throbbing brain. He raised it with trembling hands, lowered it over his forehead, and instantly he heard what Boris Probyn was thinking, trying desperately to communicate to him.

"You are a very obtuse young man. Give the Moldavian to me."

George took off the skull-cap and darted a look of dislike to the Brain. It might be right, but it expressed itself rudely, and it is much more shattering to hear a criticism of your intelligence throbbing through your own brain than to hear it expressed by someone who obviously fails to appreciate you.

But, of course, the Brain was right. George stooped, and he took hold of Colonel Guttenberg by the armpits and hoisted him up and dropped him in the vacant chair in front of the Brain. Then he took hold of the skull-cap and placed it over Guttenberg's head, making sure the copper surfaces made good contact with the temples. The unconscious colonel in his head-dress slumped to one side like a weary Queen of the May at the end of a carnival procession.

They were hammering at the door outside now; there was wild excitement in their voices. Most of them were calling out in Moldavian, but above them all was the shrill voice of Mirosaki in English, doing his best to ingratiate himself with Guttenberg.

"What is wrong, colonel? We are coming, colonel! Hold on, colonel, and we will save you, whatever it is! We are going to break down the door!"

And then Colonel Guttenberg spoke, and not, George concluded, before it was time. He moved jerkily, like a marionette controlled by wires, and when his eyes opened they revealed only glazed and unemotional pupils. His jaw dropped, and George saw that behind those cruel eyes and that jutting jaw that commanded so much respect there was merely a stupid man.

But he spoke in the rasping voice of Colonel Karl Guttenberg!

"What do you people think you are doing? I'll send for you if I want any help. For the present, all I want is to be left alone."

There was a stillness. The hammering on the door ceased. For the first time

George knew what hope was. That had been Colonel Karl Guttenberg himself speaking in one of his brusquer moments, and any Moldavian who had served him would have recognised it.

"Bravo, colonel!" George breathed.

The colonel's head had sagged forward on his chest. But behind him the Brain throbbed away ceaselessly, and George knew that Boris Probyn had directed what the colonel said. There was that hush outside, and then another timid tap on the door. George knew enough Moldavian to recognise what was said.

"We thought something was wrong, colonel."

And then the colonel gave forth again, and his tongue was as searing as the hot breath of a volcano across a fair countryside. He spoke in Moldavian, a language that might have been designed for forceful vituperance, and what he said was comprehensive and penetrating and flamboyantly expressed. He blasted away the people outside that door like an old woman chasing mice with a broom, and George could imagine them falling over backwards in their eagerness to get away.

George obeyed an uncontrollable impulse of admiration. He dropped a friendly hand on the colonel's shoulder. "Good for you, colonel," he said reverently.

The weight of his hand upset the colonel's balance. Slowly, almost with dignity, the colonel swayed sideways, and George hurriedly plucked that skull-cap from about his temples. Perhaps George could have saved the colonel from falling with a crash to the floor again, but George saw no reason for haste. Guttenberg hit the floor with a thud and lay still again.

George looked reverently at the Brain, realising that it had saved him again.

"Buddy," George said reverently, "if you had a hand to shake I'd shake it."

The Brain throbbed on ceaselessly, unemotional.

THE BRAIN RESTS

FOR a while George had been saved, but for how long? George had no evidence that the Moldavians had tapped out a wireless message, no evidence that it had been intercepted. That was just a wild hope he had to cling to, although the Brain had been pretty smart when it tipped him off how to adjust those ether signals to the wave-length of Scotland Yard. But would the Scotland Yard wireless receptionist realise what it was all about, or would they assume that someone was rather laboriously pulling their legs? Or—could the Brain be wrong?

George moved nearer to the Brain. It didn't look important, but it had proved itself a powerful ally, and George was conscious of a certain reverence. He knew now what he was in the presence of, and he wondered why he hadn't seen before the despicable purpose of Bannister Brandt. After all, he had had the evidence.

The way Probyn's body had been mutilated, the account he had heard of Brandt's carefully preserved chicken's heart. If you could keep the heart of a living organism alive, as had been admittedly done in several instances, there was no reason why the human brain shouldn't be kept living—and thinking. But there seemed something profane about it, an intrusion on sacred human privacy.

"I'm sorry for you, old cock," George murmured.

And then he winced at his own crudity. If he had met Boris Probyn in life he would have been awed at his penetrating intellect; he would have been stammering and shuffling in his presence. And now, all that was left of Boris Probyn was a bit of grey matter pulsating in a jar of chemicals. George looked at it with frowning intensity, and the Brain seemed indecent in its nakedness. But as it pulsed George felt the same rhythm beating in his own brain.

"There's something you are trying to tell me," he said slowly. "I wonder what it is?"

He took up the skull-cap again. He had clasped it about his temples before, but it gave him a shudder of horror every time he took it up. George had to force himself to raise his hands, to place those cool steel plates against his head. But it was something he owed to Boris Probyn, to link his helpless brain with the outside world.

George shut his eyes as he felt those powerful thought impulses throwing themselves like waves against his head. A brain too powerful for his own skull to hold, a brain that had burst its way through the skull of a living man. But the Brain of Boris Probyn knew him and would be merciful, wouldn't submit his ordinary brain to the searing thought-waves of genius.

George reached out his hands, took hold of paper and pencil from a nearby table. The brain had bidden him write. George waited, staring straight before him, not needing to look down at what he wrote.

"This," Boris Probyn willed him to set down, "may be the last message I have to give the world. I give this message to Britain, and I charge you, young man, to see it is not delivered to her enemies. These are the thoughts that have come into my head since I have been a brain without a body, cut off from emotion, from resentment, from pride. These are the things I can give my country, and I count on my brother Oscar to see they are made available at my country's need."

So much George could understand. Then suddenly he found his pencil flying, and he shut his eyes, dazzled by a glaring intensity of thought behind the pupils. Sheet after sheet of paper George covered with intricate calculations, expressed in higher mathematics that George couldn't even approach. His hand ached, but still the pencil flew over the paper and George could only obey.

And then suddenly George felt relief. The pressure of thought behind his forehead was eased.

"It is enough," the Brain told him. "There is enough there to remember Boris Probyn by. I will rest now. There are one or two private matters I want conveyed to my brother."

George had a feeling of chill. He knew he was recording the last will and testament of a dead man, weeks after his death.

"Tell my brother," the Brain said. "To look after Penelope Wise. And if you survive, young man, my brother will help you. England still has need of your sort, burly and muscular, loyal and brave. And, of course, completely stupid."

George felt himself registering some resentment as he set that down. And then suddenly he found his communion with the Brain interrupted.

All this had taken place in dead stillness. The silence was broken. George heard the tinkle of glass. He looked round, and found one of the small square

panes of glass in that painted conservatory had been shattered. And in the gap that was made was a face, peering in. The face of Mirosaki, staring.

It is rare that an Oriental face shows emotion, but Mirosaki's face showed horror and amazement then. He stared at George, linked with the brain, and then his small black eyes travelled downwards, and he saw Colonel Karl Guttenberg lying unconscious at his feet. His mouth went into a round ring. George heard him give a cry of horror, and his yellow face was suddenly withdrawn.

George spoke out loud, as though it was a living man with whom he was in communion.

"Professor," he said, "we're sunk! That darn Jap is on to us."

He blinked at the suddenness with which the answer travelled in thought-waves across his own brain. George had never realised that there were people who thought as quickly as that, with the lightning speed and accuracy with which some people add up a dart score.

"They will, of course, attack this laboratory," the professor told him. "The panes of glass are too small for a man to crawl through, and the whole structure is too stoutly built for them to smash it down. The attack will, therefore, come through the door."

There was a stillness. No thought made itself clear on the blank screen which George had made his mind. His heart sank, his own thoughts took shape, and it seemed to him that he would never see Penny again. He remembered her shyness, the slim beauty of her, and the fact that only once he had held her in his arms. A pity, he thought unhappily, to die so soon after finding there was a girl like Penny in the world.

"Yes, she is very beautiful. Her mind is beautiful as well as her face and the shape of her. Her mother was like that."

George felt the thoughts of Professor Boris Probyn spreading over his brain like the tide spending itself on a beach, and he blushed. But the Brain was suddenly hard and realistic again.

"You must remember precisely what I say. You will remove this skull-cap, and you will go to the cupboard on the left wall, and in it you will find a gas mask. You will don that and see it is securely fixed, and after that you will proceed to compound the following chemicals."

George let his thought processes be led. He felt the complicated chemical formula that followed was printed in letters of fire on his skull. Slowly he raised his hands, prepared to take off the skull-cap. And then the Brain registered a last strange thought.

"Good-bye."

George laid the skull-cap down. He went to the cupboard indicated, and in it he found a gas-mask, the ordinary civilian type. He donned it, and moved more clumsily with the mask over his eyes. But he went round the laboratory, reaching down jars and bottles, forgetting nothing, remembering chemical symbols he had never heard in his life before.

George put a large glass beaker before him and began to pour in chemicals. His hands trembled a little when the mixture began to seethe and bubble, and the beaker grew hot under his hand. But the Brain had given him his orders, and George ignored the chemical changes that were taking place.

Then, quite suddenly, trouble came.

Came from behind that locked door. The people outside must have crept quite silently down the passage to prepare their attack. The first warning George had was a terrific thud, and the sudden cracking of the door panels. George saw the door bulge, saw the uppermost of those cases slither to a dangerous angle and then fall with a crash.

Another thud. A panel of the door yielded. The lock tore away suddenly, for those outside had brought a huge baulk of timber and were using it as a battering-ram. Through the shattered door George glimpsed dark and evil faces, red eyes. And then the cases that secured the door slid back, and the door swung wide, and George saw half a dozen armed men rushing him at once, with Mirosaki urging them on.

Deliberately George added the last ingredient to the chemical combination.

The consequence was surprising. The beaker shattered with a crack, the seething liquid spilled. From it came pouring out a dense blue cloud, some heavy gas that fell to the floor and multiplied itself, that rolled ponderously towards those maddened men. George stared in wonder through the eye-pieces of the gas-mask. He saw the Moldavians fighting it, writhing in it, their faces distorted. He saw Mirosaki turn to fly, saw him fall on his face, try to keep the gas from his nostrils with his hands.

Suddenly all was still. Mirosaki was still, the men about him were motionless. The gas was thinning now, it lay in scarves of thin blue smoke about the floor. None of the men moved, and George realised with a dull horror that they were dead. Boris Probyn had showed him how to defend himself. He had instructed him how to prepare a gas that meant instant painful death!

George turned back to the Brain, that handful of grey matter in a jar. The Brain was still, it throbbed no more. Boris Probyn had found peace at last.

WANTED—A MARRIED MAN

PENNY WISE came with the police. Scotland Yard had received the strange message, and they had decided that it was the work of a madman or a humorist. It had been earmarked for attention by the local police. But George's frantic telephoning set things moving, and when the police at last arrived they came heavily armed in speedy cars, with bells clanging to clear the roads before them.

And, because of the importance of Professor Oscar Probyn, Penny Wise came with them. George had stumbled out of that house, into the deserted grounds, with a feeling that sudden lunacy had come to him, but presently he might wake up. He saw the police cars pull up with screeching brakes, saw Penny tumble from the first of them.

"George!" she cried.

She ran into his arms. He would have kissed her, but he found he couldn't. Penny laughed and cried, and lifted her hand.

"You'd better take off that gas-mask!" she said shakily.

George threw the gas-mask to the floor and kissed her effectively. A police inspector was surveying him with admiration when this business was done.

"Where's the gang?" he demanded.

George waved his hand airily.

"Lying about," he said. "Go and find 'em for yourself. Can't you see I'm busy?"

As far as George was concerned the job was done, but there was, oddly enough, considerable explanation required. George was asked to explain many things he didn't understand himself, and he was



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relieved at last when he was able to turn it all over to Professor Oscar Probyn. It took the prestige of Professor Probyn's name to convince the police that such things as George Harris related were possible.

George spent the next few weeks in a whirl of interviews, and signed statements to the police, and solemn talks with high officials, and he received considerable attention from the Press. George selected the highest offer made for his own personal story, and found himself owning more money than he had ever owned before. The reporters followed George and Penny around because they found Professor Oscar more unapproachable than his brother ever had been. But one day Oscar Probyn sent word that he wanted to see Penny and George.

They went along to the magnificent laboratory in the works of the Imperial Power Company. They were received by a somewhat chastened Pringle, who told them that the professor would see them in a few moments.

"We," said Pringle ponderously, "have a great deal on our minds at present. Bracketing, that is, my mind with the professor's mind."

"I shouldn't think," George said blandly, "that that would make much difference." They went in to Oscar Probyn presently. They found him older and thinner, less vague than they had known him. He rose from his chair and he gripped George Harris by the hand.

"I've a lot to thank you for, young man," he said. "But most of all I thank you for my brother's last message to me. I don't suppose you understood it, or a quarter of it. But those calculations you jotted down represented the distillation of a life-time's work. They covered all my brother has personally been able to offer to science."

"I thought it might be something like that, sir," George said humbly.

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"I sent for you," Professor Oscar said, "to talk to you about your personal affairs. My company have a post to offer you, young man, a responsible post, calling for a certain amount of personal courage. We have no reason to fear that you are lacking in that. Unfortunately, we have one stipulation to make. This post is only available to a married man."

George flushed.

"That might—I mean—if only—I—if Penny here—if— Oh, dammit!"

Penny slipped her hand through his arm and smiled blandly.

"You understand, professor? George is trying to tell you that we are going to be married."

"Is he?" Oscar Probyn said gravely. "I am sorry if I didn't find the explanation lucid. Well, I am sure I wish you both happiness. That—that settles the other charge that my brother laid on me. He said that I was to do all I could for Penelope Wise. If there is anything—"

Penny looked at George with shining eyes.

"No, professor," she said, "there isn't anything more."

They left him then. They sensed that Boris Probyn wanted to be alone. He was much alone these days; he hadn't a lot of time to spare for his fellow-men. In his own dreamy way he found his hat, fumbled at the wrong side of the door for the knob, and blundered out of his laboratory.

Pringle was waiting, the door of the car open.

"The same place, professor?" he said.

"The same place."

They drove rapidly out of the town, along a broad high road, and then turned into winding country lanes. Presently woods closed about them, and the big car heaved over a narrow, uneven track. The car stopped at last, and the professor dismounted and went on on foot.

He came to a green clearing in the woods. Here had once stood Boris Probyn's bungalow, but that had been taken away, stone by stone and plank by plank. There was nothing here but a single stone, and Oscar Probyn took off his hat as he approached it.

A plain stone, undated, with a simple inscription. Oscar stood with bowed head before it.

"The Brain of Boris Probyn," it said.

"You can sleep well, brother," Oscar said. "I don't think you need be afraid that Penelope Wise won't find happiness. She's picked a man for himself. No one will ever covet George Harris' brain, but I'd give much for his courage and his steadfast worth."

"All's well, Boris. All's well."

THE END.

(What do you think of this story? The Editor would like to hear your opinions. Address your letters to The Editor, The THRILLER Office, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.)

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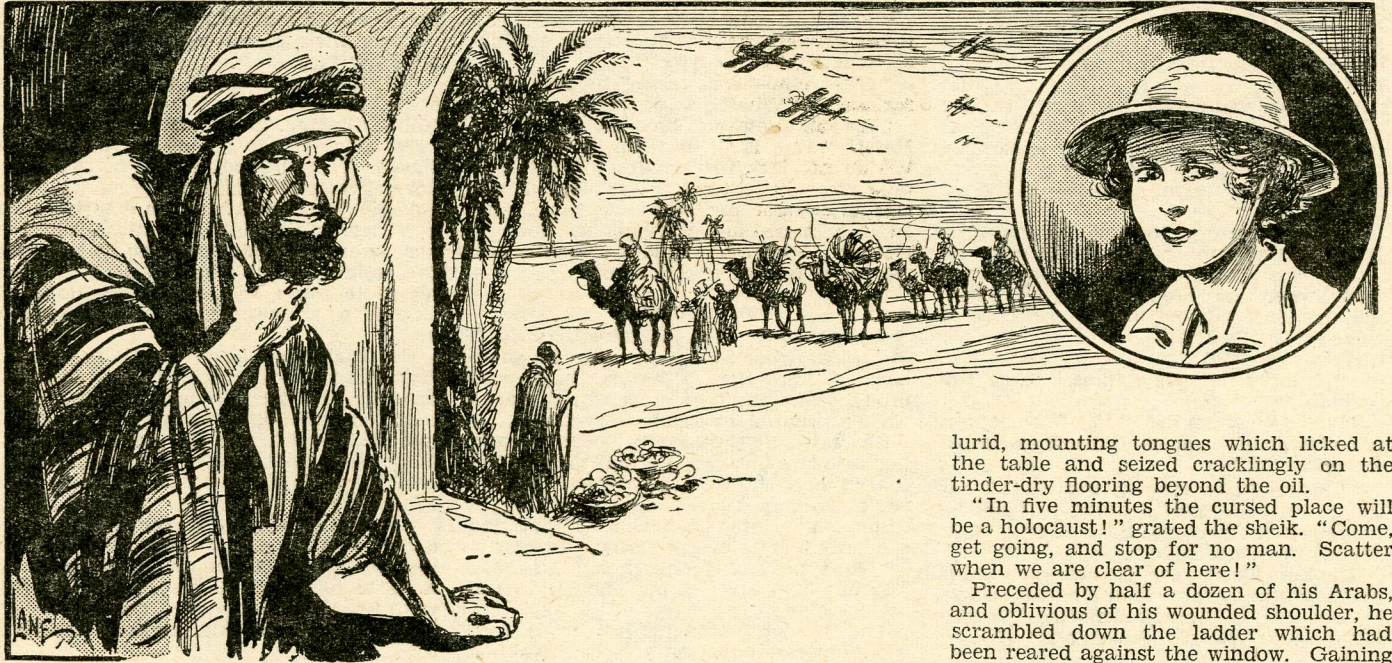
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THE EDITOR.

WHO IS THE MADMAN WHO INTERFERES WITH BEN OULED'S PLANS ?

The BLACK CAMEL



THE STORY SO FAR.

SOMEWHERE in the desert, east of Suez, RAMA BEN OULED, an Arab sheik, known as THE BLACK CAMEL on account of a hump on his back, is plotting to attack the British Empire. Under the command of another renegade Arab, EL JAUF, he has a secret aerodrome, with huge hangars constructed in the heart of a sand-hill, complete with innumerable planes and bombs.

Rumours of this reaches Telekba, where COLONEL LAYTON, the C.O., is in conference with a loyal Arab sheik, SIR HAZAR SAUD. They guess that Rama ben Ouled is the man behind the troubles in the desert. They send a secret service man, HILARY GREENE, to find out more about him. Meanwhile, Sir Hazar decides to ride with his Arab legion to attack Rama ben Ouled's camp. But before he leaves Telekba, one of Rama ben Ouled's spies rides out to warn the Black Camel.

Rama ben Ouled kidnaps Sir Hazar Saud's daughter YASMIN, as a hostage. Yasmin's friend, an English girl, EDITH WYNGARDE, seeks the advice of an Arab chief, AHMED BEN HASSI. Despite Hilary Greene's protest, he persuades her to ride with him into the desert to rescue Yasmin. They arrive at the camp of Rama ben Ouled, who swears that Yasmin is not there. While drinking coffee Edith suddenly falls asleep. She has been drugged!

Ben Hassi leaves Edith at the camp and flies to Egypt, where he bargains with certain foreigners for the sale of his secrets. They treat him treacherously and would have killed him had not his own men rescued him.

(Now read on.)

THE RETURN.

RELEASED from his bonds, Ahmed ben Hassi stood a moment massaging his wrists and surveying the now crowded room.

"The treacherous jackals have been mercifully served," he grated, his handsome face contorted with passion. "Had I had my way with them they would have died a thousand deaths ere I sent their craven souls winging their way down into the nethermost pit of hell."

Abruptly he broke off as there came a sudden thunderous pounding at the door downstairs.

"That is the police or else some alley scum roused by the shooting!" he rapped. "What lies below the window?"

"A patch of waste ground, lord, between the rear of this building and some others," replied the giant Arab quickly.

"Then we will go!" rapped the sheik. "But first we will provide these treacherous dogs with a fitting funeral pyre!"

Snatching down the hanging oil lamp, he whipped off the oil cap and splashed the oil over the dry, bare floorboards. Then snatching out the burning wick, he held it inverted a moment until it was well ablaze, then flung it to the floor.

Swiftly the flames spread, running hungrily over the oil-soaked floorboards with

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By
George E.
Rochester

lurid, mounting tongues which licked at the table and seized cracklingly on the tinder-dry flooring beyond the oil.

"In five minutes the cursed place will be a holocaust!" grated the sheik. "Come, get going, and stop for no man. Scatter when we are clear of here!"

Preceded by half a dozen of his Arabs, and oblivious of his wounded shoulder, he scrambled down the ladder which had been reared against the window. Gaining the waste ground below, he pulled his burnous closer around him and vanished into the night at a run.

The giant Arab and another kept close to him, and dropping to a swift walk when they had gained the dark and tortuous streets, they reached the spot where the four horses were waiting on the outskirts of the town.

A few moments later Ahmed ben Hassi was in the saddle and riding like a madman through the night to where he had left his aeroplane, whilst behind him a ruddy, fiery glow above the poorer quarter of the town showed that the fire which he'd started had indeed obtained dread hold.

Flinging himself from the saddle on reaching his machine, he spoke a brief word to the Arab guard on duty there, then struggling into his flying kit he swung himself up into the cockpit and switched on.

One of the Arabs, evidently with a knowledge of these things, swung on the propeller, and the warm engine picked up with a sudden shattering roar which startled the horses of the guards, causing them to rear and plunge.

Swinging the machine into the night wind, the sheik gave her open throttle, and she swept forward to lift and go boring up and up into the night.

Swinging on the climb, Ahmed ben Hassi thundered back the way he had come, and in the dim illumination of his cockpit dials his face was murderous in its fury.

His journey had been wasted. Nay, more than that, he had been brought perilously close to torture and to death. But the dogs had paid, by Allah, they had paid, and in the paying had learned they could not trick Ahmed ben Hassi.

The fools he thought savagely, to imagine for one moment that in the dangerous game he was playing he would trust them or anybody or leave aught to chance.

From the moment the meeting with the three Europeans had been arranged, certain picked tribesmen of his had drifted into Aswan and his orders to them had been simple.

"If I am not out of that house in thirty minutes, come and find me," he had said.

And they had come. By Allah, they had come, but just in time. When Schaumvorge and those other two dogs had him lashed to the table he could, of course, have played for time by apeing the craven, he reflected.

But that was never his way. No, by Allah, it was not, and he would rather have suffered the torments of the damned than bow to them and sully his proud spirit by even feigning to be afraid of them.

The stars were paling and the first grey light of the coming dawn was creeping across the limitless desert of rock and sand when he brought the aeroplane gliding down to land on the outskirts of the camp at Es Jran.

Rama ben Ouled was waiting there to greet him as he swung himself from the cockpit.

"Well, what is thy news?" burst out the hunchback eagerly. "Have they agreed to our terms?"

"I will talk to thee in thy tent!" cut in Ahmed ben Hassi harshly. "Have the aeroplane housed at once before that Wyngarde girl is astir!"

The hunchback gave the necessary order to his waiting Arabs, then shuffled swiftly by the side of Ahmed ben Hassi as the latter strode towards Rama's tent.

"Something has gone wrong!" burst out the hunchback, as the black and silver curtains dropped into place behind them. "I can see it in thy face. What has happened?"

Swiftly and tersely, Ahmed ben Hassi told him.

"The dogs!" screamed the hunchback, his face more repulsive than ever in its black and murderous passion. "The foul and treacherous carrion. So that is how they tried to serve thee, but, by Allah, thou served them well in return. May they rot in the bottomless pit of hell!"

He fell to pacing the floor, his head thrust forward, his hands clapping and unclapping behind his back.

"What now—what now?" he demanded furiously. "What is to be done now?"

"We sell elsewhere," replied Ahmed ben Hassi. "That is all that can be done now. We do not lack for a market, but it will take some little time to arrange. I will ride to-day for my own camp at Oskab. In the meantime you might summon Haroun. I have a wounded shoulder and require it bathed and dressed."

THE MADMAN

IT was later that morning that Edith awoke from deep and dreamless slumber to find her breakfast had been brought into the tent by one of the Arab women allotted to her as servants.

She lay a few moments, looking about her wonderingly, for she had no recollection of how she had got to bed. All she could remember was sitting talking to Ahmed in Rama ben Ouled's tent and suddenly feeling overpoweringly drowsy.

"Good heavens!" she thought, aghast. "Surely I wasn't stupid enough to fall asleep there!"

The thought brought her to instant wakefulness, and after a hasty breakfast she rose, washed, and dressed and quitted the tent to find Ahmed ben Hassi waiting for her outside.

The sheik's shoulder wound, neatly dressed and strapped, was hidden beneath his snowy, bold-embroidered burnous, and in his handsome face was not the slightest trace of his ordeal of the night hours. He greeted Edith with a smile, and said:

"Good-morning, Miss Wyngarde! I trust you have slept well. I did not wish to disturb you earlier, but if you are ready we will ride at once."

"I feel an awful ass about last night," confessed the girl. "What exactly happened?"

"After three days in the saddle, you were so tired you fell asleep over your coffee," explained the sheik, with a smile. "I carried you to your tent, and your women put you to bed."

"Ye gods, so that's what happened, is it?" said Edith, flushing slightly and with a rueful laugh. "Well, I'm very sorry."

"There is nothing at all to be sorry about," returned the sheik suavely. "I only trust that you now feel thoroughly rested."

"Yes, I feel absolutely fit, thanks," replied the girl; then her face became troubled and she said: "But where are we riding?"

"To my camp at Oskab," replied the sheik. "You will be more comfortable there than here, and we will remain there a day or two to learn what news the riders bring of Yasmin."

He studied the girl intently as he went on:

"If you wish, on reaching Oskab, I will provide an escort for you so that you may return at once to Israz. But I myself, as I promised you, am not leaving the desert without the poor child."

"Nor I," said Edith valiantly. "But are you—are you sure she is not here somewhere?"

"I give you my sacred oath she is not," returned the sheik quietly. "If she were, I would know it."

"Poor Yasmin," faltered Edith. "I wonder what has happened to her?"

"We will soon learn," replied the sheik. "And when we do," he added harshly, "I will take an ample vengeance on the scoundrels who have carried her off!"

Ten minutes later he and the girl were in the saddle and riding out of camp at the head of their troop. Rama ben Ouled watched them go, a triumphant leer on his repulsive face.

"'Tis said of me that I am as cunning as a snake," he said, turning to the powerfully-built Haroun standing behind him. "But what thinkest thou of Ahmed ben Hassi? Truly my cunning is as that of a dove compared to his, for he lures yonder golden-haired houri into the desert to find her friend when he knows full well I have her here; then, having sworn to her that the maiden is not here, he rides on with her to his camp, and even yet she does not suspect what is in his mind concerning her."

He laughed evilly, and with a word to Haroun to follow him, he entered his tent. Passing through the main part of the tent in which Edith and Ahmed ben Hassi had dined with him the previous night, he pulled aside heavy black and silver curtains and passed into the inner part of the tent.

An Arab woman, crouched by a low divan, rose at his entrance and made a low obeisance. But the hunchback paid no heed to her. His slitted, glittering eyes were fixed on the figure of a girl lying on the divan, gagged and bound hand and foot.

The girl was Yasmin.

No longer was she in her riding-kit, but was wearing a gaily-coloured vest beneath a short embroidered silk jacket. A silken sash was wound around her slim waist, and a pair of wide, silken trousers completed her apparel.

At a word from Rama ben Ouled, Haroun removed the girl's gag and severed her bonds, then retired from the tent. But Yasmin did not stir. Instead, she lay looking at the hunchbacked sheik with terrified, piteous eyes.

"Thy English friend has gone," he sneered, "riding with her handsome Arab lover to his camp at Oskab. But by virtue of her presence here thou hast spent an unhappy, wakeful night in thy bonds, so sleep now, and I will return to thee anon."

Then abruptly he broke off and whirled round, as a deep, sonorous voice boomed out behind him:

"Yea, thou wilt return, Rama, but if 'twere any other maiden than the daughter of that thrice-accursed, crawling renegade Hazar Saud, I would tell thee that 'twere better if thou gavest thy mind to sterner things than this!"

WITH THE NIGHT

"TIS thee, Sasan!" grated Rama ben Ouled, the anger dying in his eyes as they took in the wild, gaunt figure of the madman, stark naked save for his dirty, ragged strip of loin cloth. "By Allah, had it been any other than thee, he would have paid dearly for this intrusion! How comest thou here?"

"I have but ridden in on my pilgrimage amongst the tribes, preaching to them the Word of Islam, and exhorting them to rise in their might and sweep the cursed British from the desert on a tide of blood," cried the fanatic, his eyes blazing. "Blood

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—blood! That is the watchword! Blood and fire and the flaming sword of Islam. But the spark is kindled, the devouring fire of uprising burns fiercer every day, and, I tell thee, Rama ben Ouled, it will not be quenched until the last drop of British blood has sizzled on its holy embers!”

“Yes, that is the talk!” rasped the hunchback. “By Allah, but thou preachest a righteous cause, and may the blessing of Islam rest on thee and all thy work. But, come, if thou hast but ridden in, thou wilt need refreshment—”

“No, wait!” blazed the fanatic.

Thrusting the hunchback roughly aside, he flung out a skinny, pointing arm at Yasmin.

“Hark thou to me!” he screamed through frothing lips. “Thou art the daughter of that jackal Hazar Saud, and if thy thrice-accursed father had not sold himself body and soul to the British, Allah would not have visited his wrath upon thee and cast thee where thou liest now. No matter what thy fate, no matter what befall thee, it is thy father Hazar Saud who has brought thee to thy doom, and may thou be dealt with in such manner that, when word of it is borne him, he suffers the torments of the damned!”

With that he swung on his heel and strode through the curtains into the outer part of the tent, followed by Rama ben Ouled.

“And thou hast had that fork-tongued serpent Ahmed ben Hassi here,” he sneered, turning to the hunchback. “For a man of thy stature of mind, thou showest little wit in the choosing of thy friends.” His voice rose to a yell, and his eyes blazed with maniacal fury. “For I tell thee this, Rama ben Ouled, the day will come when he will rob thee of thy name, of thy goods and of thy life itself!” Abruptly his voice dropped to a growl: “He even covets her in there!” he sneered, jerking his wild, unkempt head towards the curtains.

“What meanest thou by that?” snarled the hunchback, his face dark with sudden passion.

The madman laughed harshly.

“I know what I know, and I hear what I hear,” he cried. “’Tis borne to me on the winds of the desert, and I hear it whispered in the shifting sand, and I tell thee, Rama ben Ouled, that back yonder in Telekba and Israz, Ahmed ben Hassi casts covetous eyes on the beauty of Yasmin, daughter of Hazar Saud, and would have had her for his own. Live not in the paradise of fools, thou blind one, but awaken and guard thyself and all that is thine against that snake thou callest friend!”

Within the hour he had gone, riding on his way, but he left behind him a man torn with doubt and fear and rage.

For long that day Rama ben Ouled paced his tent, his hands clapping and unclapping behind his back, as was his wont when profoundly disturbed. And as he paced he cursed aloud the name of Sassan for having implanted in his heart the foul seeds of doubt and suspicion, and cursed aloud the name of Ahmed ben Hassi, the man whom he had indeed called friend.

He flung himself down at length on a divan in the outer part of the tent where he was pacing, and because he had had little sleep during the night hours when awaiting the return of Ahmed, he drew his black burnous closer about him and slumbered fitfully until the dusk.

He awoke weary in mind and body, and still torn with gnawing doubt as to whether Ahmed ben Hassi was his enemy or friend. He ate his evening meal alone, wolfing it in savage, brooding thought. When he was finished he rose and stepped to the tent

entrance. The night outside was dark and still.

“Thou and Basra remain here on guard,” he said to Haroun. “Let none disturb me until morning.”

“Yes, lord!” answered the servant.

Dropping the black and silver curtains back into place, Rama ben Ouled passed through into the inner part of the tent. A growled word dismissed the Arab woman servant, and he was left alone with Yasmin.

The girl, crouched on the divan, watched him with the terror-stricken eyes of a trapped fawn, as, with head thrust forward, he stood staring at her in the soft illumination of the oil-lamps.

Then as he moved towards her she shrank away, one tiny hand outstretched as though to ward him off.

“No!” she cried piteously. “Please—please, leave me alone!”

The hunchback halted by the side of the divan. As he stood there glaring down at her, he seemed to the terrified girl like some nightmarish, monstrous bird of prey.

“Leave thee alone!” he repeated harshly. “Yes, that is what all such as thou cry out to me. Yet even now,” he went on, his voice thick with fury, “thy proud and haughty English friend, who looked at me last night with eyes of loathing, may be yielding herself to the arms of Ahmed ben Hassi!”

“No—never!” cried Yasmin, loyalty to her friend outweighing her terror.

“But I say, yes!” grated the hunchback, his eyes blazing. “No maiden can resist his handsome face and subtle tongue. He boasts of that, and tells with scornful laughter how he has trampled on a hundred hearts which were his for the asking, to love and serve him with devotion. Yet I, because I am what I am, have known not one such faithful heart. No woman yet has looked at me with eyes which held not fear and loathing.”

With fists clenched he beat at his chest in mounting fury.

“Is it my fault I am the misshapen creature which I am?” he shouted. “Did I ask to be cast in this hideous mould when I was born of woman? By Allah, had the one who bore me known the hell in store for me, it would have been a mother’s act of loving tenderness to have stabbed me to the heart and buried my poor, misshapen body in the sand!”

His voice dropped, holding a strange, fierce note of earnestness as he went on:

“Hast such as thou, blessed by Allah as thou art with grace and beauty, hast such as thou, I say, ever thought how cruel the world can be to a malformed creature such as I? Hast such as thou ever known the scorn, contempt, the sidelong glances, the sneers and jeers which are my lot?”

He paused a moment, his face working; then hoarsely he went on:

“It is said that the heart of woman is capable of an understanding unknown to that of man. By Allah, I have never found it so, but if indeed it be, young maiden though thou art, thou may find in the cruelty of the world to me the reason for those cruelties of which I myself so often am held guilty. Thou knowest my name—the name which cowardly curs call me behind my back. The Black Camel. Yes, that is me. Humped like a camel through no fault of mine, but yet a target for the cruel wit of those who say that I am cruel when, like a goaded animal at bay, I turn and repay the world in some way for what it has done to me!”

He was silent a moment, and when he resumed his voice was harsh and menacing:

“Thou canst believe it or not, but until to-day I had it in my heart to spare thee, and to hold thee inviolate as a hostage. But to-day the last faint shred of faith I had in man was broken, for I have been warned that one whom I have held as trusted friend is nought but treacherous enemy. Even he is false to me, the only one whom I have never doubted, so now, utterly friendless and alone, I will drink to the bottommost dregs my cup of vengeance against the world, and when Death comes, no matter what foul hell may be in store for me, it can hold no torments greater than those of the bitter, lonely hell my life has been!”

He broke off, panting with the violence of his outburst, then stooping swiftly, he seized the girl’s gaily-coloured vest with one hand and tore it savagely downwards.

She screamed aloud, beating at him in terror with her tiny fists, but he had her in his arms, crushing her to him.

So intent was he on his fell work that he did not see, behind him, a tall and silent figure glide swiftly forward from out the shadows. Silently possessing himself of a heavy brass candlestick standing on a low table, the figure stepped swiftly forward and brought it crashing down on the back of the hunchback’s head.

(Don’t miss next week’s instalment of this gripping story.)

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The Case of THE SPANISH DANCER

(Continued from page 88.)

an El Greco. It was probably worth fifty thousand pounds.

In all he had collected just over forty canvases. It took him three journeys to get them down to his boat and stack them under the thwarts. Then he pushed off and sculled across the harbour to where he had left the car hidden among the clumps of furze behind the dunes.

When at last he backed the car out on to the side road he had his cargo safely stowed and covered with a rug. Nobody, seeing the rather severe-looking gentleman with the horn-rimmed spectacles and the black hat behind the wheel of a nondescript black Ford, would take him to be anything other than a not too successful commercial with a bundle of samples in the back.

He reached London at dusk, bowled along the Embankment, and cocked a snook as he passed the forbidding buildings of New Scotland Yard. To the constable on duty at the tram junction he gave a sweet smile and a respectful salute.

It was a great pity that his route did not take him past the Spanish Embassy.

"You want the best pictures," he crooned happily. "I have them! Lifted from under your jolly old noses!"

Dutch Joe's place in Deptford was a combination of pub, eating-house, and club, patronised mostly by the less reputable of those who go down to the sea in ships. Husky-voiced, reefer-jacketed figures propped up the bar; bronzed, hard-faced men sat round the tables in the curtained alcoves or swayed up the rickety stairs to the "private" rooms.

Queer things went on in Dutch Joe's. Ask the River Police. If Dutch Joe's closed up they could retire and grow cabbages.

Peter Morgan bought himself a whisky from a barman whose forearms were as thick and hairy as those of a baboon. He had a lot of chin and no forehead.

"Lo, Rusty," he said without moving his lips and still mopping down the glistening bar, "lookin' fer someone? Why'nacha bring Herbie? Owes me coupla bucks, the big lug!"

Morgan slid the money across the bar. "It's a dead loss," he said quietly. "Smoky Johnson about?"

"Upstairs. Number 4. He's pullin' out t'night."

"Thanks. You haven't seen me." Morgan drifted through the crowded saloon and out into the passage.

Number 4 was at the head of the stairs. He knocked softly, a curious double-knock, repeated twice. The door opened and a weather-beaten face looked out. A mouth without any teeth opened and said:

"Crumbs! Rusty Morgan! Come on in, pal."

Smoky Johnson got up from the table.

He was a little hairless man with a gentle voice and the mournful confiding eyes of a St. Bernard dog. A crew of his mutinied once, three days out from Rio. When they made Liverpool they had to be taken to the seamen's hospital in stretchers. All but the stokers—and they collapsed the minute they tied up in the Mersey. That was the kind of skipper Smoky Johnson was. He had the demeanour of a Presbyterian Elder. But he was dynamite if you crossed him.

"You can go, Parker," he said mildly. "Give Mister Morgan a chair."

The toothless one grinned and bobbed himself out.

"I want to get somebody out of the country," said Morgan, leaning forward. "A young girl—sort of political refugeee Spanish."

Smoky eyed the ceiling pensively. "I leave on the first tide in the morning. Pernambuco and Bahia. After that—" He spread his hands. "Who can say?"

"If you could make it Rio—she has an uncle there, Manuel Orejano."

"Why not?" The little skipper smiled gravely. "Manuel Orejano I have done business with many times. Money? I'll arrange that when I take the little lady to see her uncle."

Morgan explained briefly about the pictures he had outside in the car. Smoky appreciated the narrative.

"Parker will see to that. You'll find him down in the bar. Shall we say, half-past nine at the wharf below the stairs?"

Morgan stood up and thrust out his hand.

"You're a great scout, Smoky."

"It is business," said the latter. "Good business for me—Manuel Orejano is a very wealthy man. We will make the little lady as comfortable as possible. It will perhaps be better if she appears as a boy—Customs officials can be so tiresome."

"I get it. She'll make a handsome addition to your crew. Till nine-thirty, then."

Promptly at nine-thirty-five a boat pulled away from the dark wharf. Morgan sat in the stern, and beside him was a slender raincoated figure. In half an hour they scraped alongside the rusty plates of the s.s. Golden Thistle. Silently a rope ladder came over the side and thudded into the swaying boat.

Peter Morgan caught and steadied it. "Up you go, Rosalie," he whispered, "you'll find Smoky's one of the best—everything's O.K. now."

She clung to his arm. Her face glimmered whitely under a peaked cap.

"I don't know how to thank you—you and Anne—you've been so kind—"

Her soft lips brushed warmly across his cheek, and then she was pulling herself up the ladder as handily as any cabin-boy. Arriving at the top she paused, fluttered a white hand at him, and was gone.

Peter Morgan dropped back into his seat, lit a cigarette. That was that. It would be interesting to hear what Chief Inspector Tubby Clayton had to say about it.

The elephantine Inspector had plenty to say when a tall, cheerfully smiling figure strolled into his office, followed by a very tired plain clothes man.

"Where've you been? Didn't you know I wanted you? Didn't I tell you this morning I wanted you? What sort of a game d'you think you're playing?" A massive fist punctuated each question, pounding on the desk till the brass inkwell danced a fandango.

"You'll ruin your arteries," said Morgan placidly. "Take a look at this. Read it carefully. You'll find it an interesting insight into the methods of a certain Spanish agent operating in this free country of ours."

He took out a long envelope from his pocket and extracted three sheets of paper covered with a round girlish handwriting. Rosalie Castelana had written it before she left the hotel that evening. It was a plain statement of what had happened to her from the time Isabella Uraburu had taken her from the Roehampton convent by false pretences up to her rescue by Peter Morgan.

When Tubby Clayton had finished reading he stroked his jaw meditatively.

"I saw her back," said Morgan quietly. "We give them hard labour for much less than what that poor kid suffered, Tubby."

The chief inspector put the papers into a drawer.

"I'll pass them on to the right quarter in the morning," he said shortly. "That woman will be out of the country this time to-morrow, and the diplomats can make what they like of it. Where's the girl now?"

Morgan pursed his lips. "France, maybe. I sent her back to her people. She's all right."

Clayton favoured him with a long searching look.

"And the pictures?" purred the inspector. "The Castelana pictures they were looking for? You wouldn't by any chance know where they are, would you?"

"Who wants to know? Tubby Clayton or the secret agents of the Spanish Government?"

Chief Inspector Clayton shook his head slowly. A smile crept over his broad fleshy face.

"You wouldn't kid an old pal," he said. "We'll write the pictures off, we never saw 'em. Y'know, Pete, one day you're going to stick your neck out so far I'll just have to drop on you. You can't go round playing monkey-shines with the Law."

Peter Morgan got up and stretched. "Says you, fatty. I've done nothing else for the last couple of days, and I've enjoyed it. Now do you mind if I shove off and get some sleep?"

"Not at all," agreed the inspector with devastating politeness. "If only you'd sleep for ever, my boy, I'd have a chance of growing old in peace."

THE END.

(Write to The Editor, The THRILLER Office, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4, and let him have your opinion of this story. Full details of next week's story are on page 82.)

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