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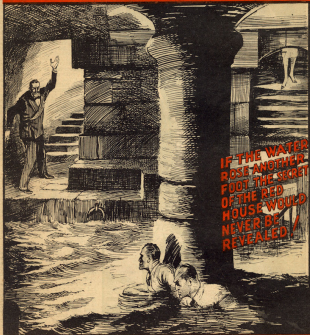
35,000 WORDS OF THRILLING ADVENTURE!

THE SECRET OF THE RED HOUSE

PETER MORGAN AND HERBIE ADAMS

IN A GRIPPING, LONG, COMPLETE STORY

By
M.E. MILES



**IF THE WATER
ROSE ANOTHER
FOOT THE SECRET
OF THE RED
HOUSE WOULD
NEVER BE
REVEALED!**

THE THRILLER

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EVERY SATURDAY
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2^d WEEKLY

The SECRET of

Chapter 4.

"ATTEMPTED MURDER."

THE Palace Court Hotel was a very superior and exclusive sea-coast hostelry. The palm lounge, in the hour following dinner, presented an attractive spectacle. The lighting was carefully adjusted so that the curving fronds of palm trees waving shadows about the groups of tables; the round glass dome was open to the sky, ivory blue and studded with stars; here and there in the soft shadows gleamed the white shoulders of women and the shirt fronts of their escorts; waiters in white knee jackets moved soft-footed with their trays, faintly, muted by the murmur of voices and the shuffle of feet, could be heard the stamp of "Billy Rollins and his inseparables" from the ball-room.

In a secluded corner, so placed as to be able to command all entrances to the lounge, two men sat at a table. One of them was dressed in grey flannel with solid stripes and in his hand he cradled a pipe tankard. Our old friend, Herbie Adams, was temporarily at peace with the world.

With a covert gesture he took a long, deep pull, looked at the empty tankard, and shook his head as a tribute to his own governs of reason. He sighed and absently helped himself from the cigarette-case on the table.

"Hi! of all right, par'nor. How 'bout a drink?"

Peter Morgan smiled, his teeth gleaming.

"My, my, we are making a night of it. We've been in this dump just a little under three hours, and since then you've consumed enough beer to float a battleship. Health, my vintage, it isn't great."

Herbie hiccupped behind a large hand. "I gotta drink," he explained, "and be the man ah. Do I get a beer, or do I hafta buy this one myself? We're on vacation, ain't we?"

"Have it your own way," said Morgan, with comic resignation, "but remember this—I'm not pulling you to bed to-night or any other night. I also need some relaxation, and helping you out of your pants is not my idea of a Big Time. Understand?"

Herbie snorted, beckoned to a waiter and ordered a gin and a double whisky. He started to tell the boss about a brilliant idea he'd had for the next day; they were to hire a motor-boat and go fishing. They could take a crate of beer with them to entice the proceedings.

But Peter Morgan wasn't listening. He was gazing across the lounge towards the main entrance from the hotel, and for all his negligent pose his eyes were alert.

"Take a look at the girl over by the door," he said softly, "she's one in black."

Herbie did so. The girl was sitting in a wicker-walk chair just inside the door. She was alone. She wore a full-skirted black frock and a broad-brimmed jacket. The light from the door fell across her, emphasizing the intensity of her gaze, rigid, expectant. In her lap she clasped a small bag. Each time anyone entered



Morgan studied the bank-note carefully. "It's a fake," he said, "if Benjie knew I'd found this, he'd be raving mad!" But Benjie Glahel was watching him all the time.

the RED HOUSE

PETER MORGAN WANTED TO KNOW

Why should a perfectly respectable young lady try to murder a crook? What was the crook, and his toughs, doing in the Red House?

PETER MORGAN MEANT TO FIND OUT!
ANOTHER BREATHLESS EXPLOIT OF
PETER MORGAN, AND THE ONE-
AND-ONLY HERBIE ADAMS

By **M. E. MILES**

the lounge from the hotel her head turned to give them a quick scrutiny. From the wait upwards she was in the shadows, and her face shined as a white oval.

"Nice little piece of homework," observed Herbie, as though endorsing his chief's choice, "but I'd say she was waiting for somebody. Lay off, gun'ner."

"Oad," said Morgan succinctly, "she's scared. Watch the war she jetses when any man comes in, and she keeps on looking at her watch."

"So what?" Herbie was not interested. Besides, the beer had arrived.

The girl by the door grew visibly more and more ill-at-ease. Her fingers began plinking nervously at the bag she held, and her feet twitched, one pointed slipper tapped nervously on the carpet. In spite of himself Peter Morgan found his interest increasing.

Suddenly the girl stood up. She was tall, slenderly built, and moved with an unassuming grace. A man had entered the lounge and was threading his way between the tables towards the exit to the garden. He was a big, beefy man, with smooth black hair. He wore a dinner jacket cut so as to accentuate the breadth of his beefy shoulders. In his button-hole there was a red carnation, and a long, thin cigar jutted from the corner of his mouth.

In a leisurely, unobtrusive manner he crossed the lounge. When he reached the exit to the garden he paused and turned around, so that Peter Morgan got a good view of his face. At the same time the girl stopped so that she was hidden behind a cluster of palms. She did not converge until the man had gone out into the garden.

Peter Morgan got up. The girl was following the man, and she evidently didn't want him to see her—a fact which the red-headed boss of Universal Investigations found doubly interesting, since he had recognized the man as Bernie Glinkel, a man-about-town with a dubious reputation.

Herbie removed his nose from his handkerchief in time to see his boss follow the girl out of the lounge. Bernie Glinkel had snatched his attention. Herbie looked at his taskard and then at the door. The taskard was still more than half full. What the hell? thought Herbie, in a daze-like, and stared where he was.

He missed an interesting little scene. Bernie Glinkel had cut across the lawn and was strolling along the gravel path that led to the cliff road. The fragrance of his cigar drifted behind him. He had his hands in his pockets, and appeared unaware of what was going on behind him.

The girl had paused behind a bush. She half-turned towards the lighted window of the hotel, as though to make sure her movements were unobserved. Peter Morgan stood motionless under a pergola.

She didn't see him. She began to walk quickly along the grass verge of the path. Morgan quickened his steps, crossed the lawn and came up behind the girl. She had something in her hand now, something that glittered in the starlight.

She halted, took a deep, audible breath, and stretched out her arm. Morgan reached her in half a dozen little strides, his hand closed around her tiny fist.

With a faint gasp she swung round against him. Morgan released her hand, and she stood away from him, with her hands covering her mouth, as though to repress a scream. Her eyes were deep pools, wide with horror.

Peter Morgan glanced quickly along the path. Bernie Glinkel had turned the corner.

Morgan looked down at the tiny pistol in his hand. It looked like an expensive toy, inlaid with mother-of-pearl. But it was no toy. Morgan tightened it reflectively in his hand.

"Maybe it was a good idea," he said slowly, "but what did you intend to do afterwards?"

She stood immobile, staring at him. It was almost as if he had accused her of a crime. She said nothing.

"They'd call it murder," Morgan went on softly, "even though Bernie Glinkel is a slug. Had you thought of that?"

She nodded and gave him a quick, appraising look. Her voice was tremulous.

"You—you know him?" Then, backing away from him, she suddenly turned and began to run across the grass.

He caught up with her in front of the gate leading to the stony path down the cliff. She struggled for a moment, trying to push him away.

"You're one of his fifty-nine!" she parried. "I might have known it—he wouldn't go out without a—bodyguard!"

Alright, Peter Morgan fired her and propped himself up against the gate. He was grinning broadly. She glared at him and brushed the hair out of her eyes; it was lustrous ebony hair and looked very charming even in disaster.

"Don't stand there grinning at me!" she said. "Get out of the way—I want to pass!"

Morgan drew down the corners of his mouth.

"What, no more assassinations tonight? You're mean, put off."

She held out one slim white hand. "Give me back the gun and I'll show you! I'm not frightened of you, even if you are a fired slug! There was a real slug in her voice, and she faced him quite resolutely.

Negligently Peter Morgan tossed the gun up and down in one hand. He wanted to tell her she looked perfectly sweet now that she'd got over her initial fright. Instead, he said:

"What makes you think I work for Benzie?"

She gesticulated vaguely in the direction of the hotel behind them. Her voice sounded a trifle weary.

"It's pretty obvious, isn't it? You turn up just at the wrong moment, and—end speed everything. And you know who he is. I'm not a fool."

Morgan nodded gravely.

"I'm sure you're not—as a rule. But it wasn't very wise to wait for him in the palm lounge and then follow him out here in front of everybody. I can think of many better places than this to discuss Master Benzie; he really isn't worth swinging for."

"You should know," she said scornfully.

Peter Morgan sighed.

"Look," he said patiently, "I am not on Benzie Gilinski's pay roll. I can contemplate his speedy demise with extreme pleasure, just on general principles. But I'd hate to see anybody get into a mess on Benzie's account—he'll get what's coming to him soon enough."

"I wish I could share your opinion," she replied. "Now, would you move out of my way?"

Patiently he unlocked the gate, held it open, and took her arm as she went through. She stiffened.

"That isn't at all necessary," she said.

Morgan pointed to the dark, winding path below them. Blantly ignoring the fact that but a few minutes before he had prevented her from committing wild murder, he said:

"Very dangerous at night—not fit for young ladies to negotiate alone. Allow me to see you down."

She refused, but kept her face averted as they descended the steep, uneven path in spite of her fall. She was glad of the guidance of his arm. But as soon as they reached the bottom she released herself and began walking over the stretch of firm sand in where a car stood without lights. It was a large two-door, not new, but well kept.

Unhindered, Peter Morgan followed and helped her into the car. She sat for a moment with her hands on the wheel.

"I suppose you think I ought to thank you for what you did to-night," she said in a flat, dignified voice.

"Not at all," he assured her pleasantly. "Only too happy to oblige."

A twisted little smile crept over her face as she turned to look at him. A faint, chaotic perfume hung about her.

Peter Morgan smiled.

"Ironical situation, isn't it? Christmas gift saves lady from banging off tough guy, now lady wishes to tell gift to go to blazes and mind his own business. Am I right?"

She started the engine.

"Perhaps," she said.

Morgan thrust a long arm in and switched off the engine. His smile was insistent.

"I don't think I can let you go like that. It's a bad habit to go around pointing guns at people. You meant to hit him, didn't you?"

"Of course," she said evenly. "It's my affair or yours?"

"Why?"

Her fingers tightened softly on the wheel, but she made no reply.

"You realize I ought to hand you over to the police?" The question was casual, and seemed to have no effect on the girl. Her only reaction was a momentary brightness in her eyes.

"Well," she said quietly, "what's stopping you? You've got my gun, you know what you saw. I can't do anything about

it if you feel you must be a good citizen."

Morgan laughed shortly and stepped off the running-board of the car. He waved his hand towards the cliffs.

"Run along before I change my mind. Drop in again some time—without the artillery."

The two beams of her headlights lit up the rattled sand. She already had the car under way before Morgan remembered he still had her gun.

The two-door skidded along the sand for a couple of hundred yards and then swung right and climbed the bank where the cliffs were broken by a deep ravine.

The tide was coming in, and very soon the tyre marks of the girl's car would be obliterated. She had had sense enough to take that precaution, but the rest of her set-up was, Morgan reflected with a faint grin, not so efficient. Even if he hadn't noticed her in the lounge, somebody else must have—a waiter probably; she had been so obviously uneasy.

She took out the little gun and examined it. It was fully loaded. Let into the mother-of-pearl handle were the initials "J.M." in silver.

As he stroked back up the cliff path Peter Morgan was wondering what Benzie Gilinski had done to make Miss "J.M." so anxious to liquidate him. She wasn't married, or at least, she hadn't been wearing a ring.

One of Benzie's discarded girl friends? Hardly likely. Somehow or other she didn't seem Benzie's type. Benzie liked them a little more, really—right along against the kind of glamorous, sophisticated "lovely" who'd be useful to him in his dubious undertakings.

"J.M." didn't fit there; from what he had seen of her, Morgan was sure of that. At the top of the cliff path he stood for a moment looking out over the sea.

It was no business of his, of course, as the girl had made quite plain. And he was down here on a much-needed holiday.

A woman's holiday? He chuckled softly to himself as he swung on his heel and made his way back to the hotel. Herbie would have plenty to say about that.

HERBIE PICKS A LOSER.

HERBIE had a stroke of luck. He hadn't been left alone in the lounge for more than a couple of minutes when a blonde in a glittering sequin dress began to make welcome signals that she was aware of his presence.

She was sitting alone at a table on the other side of the room. Catching his eye, she gave him a wide smile of invitation and patted her elaborate coiffure with cream-tipped fingers.

Herbie took his machine shoulder and took a healthy swig at his beer. The girl wasn't the only bloke who had what it takes. Herbie wiped his mouth on a large handkerchief and considered what his next move should be. She was a high-class article all right, and a bloke 'ud hafta see his best "lickin'."

The lady eyed him the trouble. She got up and sauntered steadily through the lounge back into the hotel. She carried a long, thin cigarette-holder, which convinced Herbie she was a proper lady.

So he followed. She had reached the cocktail bar and had perched herself on a tall chromeless stool in such a way as to display, perhaps, more leg than was necessary. They were nice legs, and Herbie noted the fact.

She looked quite surprised when Herbie lumbered in, and her eyes sided shyly over his machine frame. He coughed. She removed the cigarette-holder from

her garnet lips and fastened her eyes on him.

"Lo," said Herbie, leaving himself on to the next stool. "Have 'oat a drink, huh?" This was his Direct Method of Approach. It usually paid dividends.

"Why, that's very kind of you," she said hesitatingly. "I'll have a Maiden's Kiss, if you don't mind."

"Betcha life I don't mind. I could do with one of those myself," Herbie replied, with the meaning look of a guy trifter with hearts.

The lady inhaled. But there was nothing very coy or suddenly about the way she lowered the cocktail. Like a little girl, Herbie bought her another. He could have done with another beer himself—the Maiden's Kiss was doing things inside him.

"Didn't I see you in the lounge just now?" said the lady.

"Yeah," said Herbie expansively. "Only got in couple hours back. Nice place."

She agreed it was.

"Are you planning to stay long, Mister

"Adams," he supplied promptly. "Herbert George Adams, Oh, just a couple weeks, I expect." His manner was that of a gentleman of leisure as befitted the luxurious surroundings.

"And what about your friends?" She was taping idly with the stem of her glass and examining the tip of her pointed slyer as she spoke. "The gentleman who was sitting with you in the lounge," she explained. "I fancy I've seen him somewhere before."

"Mebbe. We get about quite a bit," said Herbie stolidly.

She wrinkled her brows and plucked at her lips.

"I feel sure I ought to know who he is, isn't he a fine sort of something?"

Herbie checked.

"I'll hafta tell him that, Film star? Blimey—how 'bout me for Robert Taylor?"

She pouted very prettily and slapped him on the shoulder.

"I think you're mean. Why all the mystery? I'll ask Benzie."

"Who's him? Never 'ard of the bloke."

"Are you trying to tell me your friend didn't walk out of the lounge into the garden just after Benzie?" She gave Herbie a direct stare, and there was nothing playful in her manner now.

Herbie shrugged his shoulders.

"I dunno what this is all about. Who's this Benzie bloke, huh? Friend o' yours?"

She slid from her stool.

"Let 'er rest. Maybe it was a coincidence. I'll be seeing you." And with that she exited out.

Herbie scratched his jaw. The lady's perfume, heady and pungent, hung to the air. He thought it had been going O.K.—and then she ups and leaves him flat. All on account of some blonde named Benzie. Herbie didn't get it at all. Slowly and in solitude he finished the disappearing Maiden's Kiss and ambled out of the bar. She wasn't the only dame in the joint, so what the heck!

Outside he ran into the boss, and Peter Morgan jerked his thumb upwards. Instantly Herbie abandoned the search for romance and followed upstairs.

Their rooms were adjoining, with a communicating door. Herbie draped himself on the chief's bed, in a cigarette, and composed himself to listen in comfort.

"Wassup, partner? You look kind of excited—ditta meel the dame?"

"Did I? Peter Morgan laughed softly and produced the first pistol. "—I'd been ten seconds late I wouldn't have

Just too bad for Bernice Glinkel—he was on a spot and didn't know it!"

Bernice sat bolt upright.

"Listen, gu'n'r, who the heck is this Bernice fellow? There was a dame downstairs shootin' off her mouth about him—seemed to think you followed him into the garden."

Morgan gave him a severe look.

"And how did you get into converse with a dame?"

Bernice smiled.

"You know how it is. She was a cute little trick—until she started askin' questions. Who's Bernice, and who used to bump him? Ain't we supposed to be on vacation?"

Morgan stroked the side of his nose thoughtfully.

"Don't ask me. I only know I saw that girl pull a gun on Bernice—and Bernice is by way of being something of a Big Shot in certain quarters. I'm surprised you haven't heard of him."

"What's his line?" demanded Bernice.

"Anything that pays two hundred per cent and over," said Morgan. "Just nice little high-class rackets with no risks—bucket-shops, the 'gold trick' business; even the good old 'badger' game when he can get a partner to suit him."

Bernice relaxed.

"A heck like that is bound to stop one sooner or later. Why didn't she let the little lady blast him down, gu'n'r? Maybe she had'n good reason."

"I'm sure she had. The point is the wouldn't it be what it was." Morgan straddled a chair and smoked pensively through the smoke of his cigarette. "Much as I dislike Bernice Glinkel's type, I could hardly let the girl pull a gun on him right there on the doorstep."

"What did Bernice say?"

"Nothing. He didn't see it. He just kept right on going, while I wrestled with the lady and saw her off the premises.

She wouldn't tell me a thing, and I'm willing to let her have another stab at it the first chance she gets."

"I should worry," Bernice yawned carelessly. "I hope she gives a time when you're not around. Why the heck should you spoil her fun?"

"Why, indeed?" asked Peter Morgan pleasantly. "What interests me is her motive."

Bernice grunted and rolled off the bed.

"I know what that means. Well, you can count me out this time. Let her drill this Bernice case so full of holes he won't cut no stubble. It's no skin off my nose. I'm going to bed."

Peter Morgan watched him go and sat smoking in silence. Then he put in a call to the desk and was told that Mr. Glinkel had not yet returned. War did the operator know when he was expected back.

Peter Morgan expressed his annoyance.

"Mr. Glinkel is still in the same suite, I suppose," he said.

"Yeah," said the operator promptly.

"Suite No. 24. Can I take a message?"

"No, thanks. I'll see Mr. Glinkel in the morning." Morgan put the phone down and stood up.

Bernice appeared at the communicating door. He was attired in pyjama trousers carrying vivid stripes of green and white. His hairy torso was bare.

"Where you goin'?" he demanded suspiciously. "You ain't tryin' any funny stuff, gu'n'r?"

Peter Morgan blew him a kiss and slid out into the corridor. There weren't many people on the upper floors at that hour. It was too early for a holiday crowd to be thinking of bed.

Suite No. 24 was on the first floor, overlooking the gardens and the sea. Morgan's movements were casual in the entrance. He tried the door, but it was locked. He coaxed it open after a very few seconds

with the help of Bernice's ingenious "lock-tickler," and slipped inside.

Pulling out a pocket-torch no bigger than an over-the-foreman-pin, he began to examine the room. He sat in Bernice Glinkel's sitting-room. From the open window came the soft murmur of voices below in the garden, with the incessant whisper of the sea as a background.

He looked in front of a bureau. It was unlocked, and a cursory inspection yielded nothing beyond a couple of brand-new decks of playing cards, a wad of hotel notepaper, and a letter in violet ink from a lady who signed herself "Batsie," entreating Bernice to be a sport and see her some time some place, next Tuesday. It had no address.

He met with no better luck in the bedroom. Bernice went in for pyjamas of belting silk, and his wardrobe was cluttered with an odd selection of suitings as Peter Morgan had ever seen. He looked in vain for a safe, and then gave it up. On the way out he took one of the decks of cards.

Back in his room he found Bernice waiting for him. Morgan took out the cards and examined them, pressing his fingers lightly over their printed backs. They were marked with minute little pin-points. All the ace and picture cards had slight, almost imperceptible, variations in the designs on their backs.

"Next time we play ponson I'll use these and skin you to your back teeth, my pet," said Morgan cheerfully. "Our little Bernice thinks of everything, doesn't he?"

Bernice grunted and scratched at the hairy mat on his chest.

"Looks funny things goin' on round here," he opened mopey. "Maybe we'd better move on some place else."

"Not on your life. We're staying right here," his boss told him. "I like the look of things. That doesn't include your pyjamas, so beat it before I get bifious."



Bernice Glinkel paused to light his cigar, little guessing how near he was to death. Morgan darted forward. Could he prevent murder being done?

BENNIE GINKEL IN WORKING.

BENNIE GINKEL came back from his stroll just before dawn. He was carrying a black leather portfolio, and with him was another man, slight, slim-looking, with a dead-white face and an expressionless slit of a mouth. He wore a light raincoat over his dinner clothes and kept one hand in his pocket.

When they reached the suite Bennie unstrapped the portfolio and began taking out wads of notes secured by rubber bands. They made a satisfactory pile on the table.

Bennie poured them both drinks. His feisty face was more florid than ever.

"Quite a big night, Sam," he said softly. "We're on a good thing here."

Sam Hartigan nodded briefly, drank the whisky as though it had been milk, and tipped a cigarette into his mouth. Against the pallid background of his face his eyes glowed darkly.

"Yeah, level set-up." His lips scarcely moved.

A door opened softly. Herbie's blonde maid for a moment, deeply narrowing the two men. Her eyes widened at the sight of the wads of money. Herbie, lips twitching, she came into the room. She was wearing a flimsy negligee over wide-legged pyjamas of green silk. It was a revealing costume, but neither Bennie nor the pallid Sam showed much interest. Languidly she fluffed out her tangled hair and strolled into a chair.

"Thanks for the recognition committee, boys. So nice to know you're appreciated. I'll have a little drink, Bennie."

"Curse it, Sam!" Ginkel exploded. "I thought I told you to keep out of this! You'd better push off back to bed. We're busy."

"Evidently." She waved her hand towards the money. "Very, very busy, Bennie. Where's the necker this time?"

Ginkel took a drink over to her. "Drink this and then beat it!" he snapped.

She poured up at him over the rim of her glass.

"Is that gentlemanly? I see my sleep to come and tell you something, and all I get is a push-around."

"Well, what is it?"

"Damn! She tipped the drink. Her wrap had fallen open, and one crimson-lined hand had smeared the silk over her knee.

"You tell me first where all the jolting money came from. Then perhaps I'll tell you something."

Sam Hartigan got up from his chair and walked over to the door. He caught Bennie's eye, shook his head slightly, and disappeared into the corridor outside.

"Look, Sam," said Bennie persistently, placing his hands on her also, half bare shoulders. "Be a good girl and finish that drink. I've got to get some sleep."

Thoughtfully she polished her nails on the arm of the brocade chair.

"Meet anybody out in the garden tonight?" she asked softly. "I watched you walk out of the lounge, and you had company."

Bennie swung round and stared at her. "I was alone. What do you mean?"

She smiled up at him provocatively.

"What about the brunette in the black frock? You didn't see her? She was looking for you." Her voice hardened and she stood up. "I'm not standing for that, Bennie—I'm to meet's second string, and it's time you knew it. If you think you brought me down here while you play about with any other bit that takes your fancy, you're a long way out!"

"You've got it all wrong," said Bennie

urgently. "I tell you I didn't see the girl. I walked straight through the garden and picked up Sam in the car at the bottom of the path."

She laughed scornfully in his face. "You expect me to believe that? I know you, Bennie. And I suppose the red-headed girl was a stranger to you?"

Bennie Ginkel pursed his lips, his eyes narrowed.

"Now let's get this straight. You're taking a lot of guff, Sam; what's got into you tonight? I haven't been meeting any woman—I was out on business." He indicated the money on the table. "That's a good enough proof, isn't it? I don't propose to tell you how I got it, that's not your affair. Here"—he took out his wallet, emptied it, and tossed the flat bundle of notes to her—"that's your cut, and there'll be plenty more, satisfied?"

She took the money readily enough. Her lips parted when she saw the denomination of the notes. Bennie smiled indolently and put an arm round her shoulder.

"Tell me about these two people," he said. "I'm interested."

"The girl was a brunette, very dark. Her clothes were smart enough—black frock and broad-brimmed jacket. She was sitting by the door, looking sort of scared. The minute you showed up I thought she was going to faint. Then she followed you out into the garden. I'd say she had some pretty urgent business with you."

Bennie shook his head slowly. But the description of the girl was giving him ideas—he knew now who she was.

"Oh, no," he said.

She walked away from him over to the door of her room, she turned and propped herself against the jamb.

"As soon as the girl went out a tall, red-headed man followed. He had been sitting with a laugh over watching the girl. It looked funny to me. I gave her a rough a little encouragement in the bar, but he wasn't talking. He didn't seem to know you."

Probably Bennie Ginkel took out and lit a cigarette. He walked up and down the room with his shoulders hunched.

"There's something sneaky about this," he muttered. "I didn't see either of them. Nobody spoke to me. You must've been mistaken, Sam."

She purred.

"Maybe. I'm going to bed. I just thought perhaps you might like to know. Funny things happen sometimes—"

Bennie smiled blankly.

"You're true," she murmured. "I can't take any chances. I'll look into it in the morning. Thanks, kid."

Peter Morgan, wearing a brightly coloured wrap over his hatching trunks, thrust his head into Herbie's room and winced at the atrocious stench that emanated from the crumpled heap on the bed.

He advanced with a purposeful stride, took a handful of Herbie's hair and pulled contemptibly.

"Gee, kid, wake up. We're going swimming!"

Herbie grunted and turned over. He opened one eye appreciatively.

"Wasn't that?" he murmured.

"Swim," said Peter brightly. "Nice cold plunge."

"Not really likely. I'm asleep, I am." He tried to pull the sheet up over his head. But Morgan ruthlessly stripped it off and patted him rascally to the floor. With some muttered profanity Herbie coasted out his trunks and appeared into

them. This early morning swim was 90 per cent of his plans for a restful vacation.

"All right," he growled, "let's get it over with, guv'nor."

But early as they were, they found the pool already in use. A slender figure in the briefest of swim-suits was poised on the top board. As they crept on to the concrete surrounding the pool she raised her hands and took off in a perfect swallow dive.

"Nihil, eh?" commented Morgan, slipping out of his wrap. Herbie caught him by the arm.

"That's the june I was telling you about, guv'nor—the one who tried to pump me last night!"

The girl's head broke the surface, and she went down the length of the pool at a fast, neat "crawl."

Morgan swung Herbie around, facing the way they had come.

"You're scared, my pet. Beat it—I'll handle the lady."

By the time the girl pulled herself up to squat on the edge, Peter Morgan was alone. She watched him climb to the top-most rung of the diving stage. She slipped, deep-dusted, he balanced himself. She did not roll over on her back in gracefulness. He came down the pool at a fast clip that brought him splashing up against her feet.

He shook the water out of his eyes and grinned up at her.

"Grand, isn't it?"

She nodded, smiling and trailing her cherry-tipped toes in the water. He pulled out to sit beside her. She noticed his breathing was steady—Bennie got out of breath clanking behind the wheel of a car. She might have some fun here, on the side. Bennie was out every night, so why not?

One all-embracing look was enough to convince Peter Morgan that Herbie's taste in playmates had remained up to standard. He reached back, pulled his wrap towards him, and offered her a cigarette.

Their eyes met directly while he bent towards her with the match.

"I understood we have a friend in common," said Morgan, "which makes it all the nicer."

She looked at him wide-eyed.

"Oh? And who is it?"

He exhaled a cloud of smoke.

"Bennie Ginkel. Great chap, Bennie—we've won quite a lot of each other at one time. We'll remember me—just tell him Peter Morgan sent his love."

Her smile was as though fond to her face.

"I will." She stood up and walked over to where a linen beach jacket hung on a peg. As she slipped into it her eyes were on him, appreciative, wary.

He flipped her a brief salute and did a sliding dive that brought the water up over the side. When he climbed out at the far end she had gone, and he rather thought he knew where she had gone.

He was right. Bennie Ginkel got up with a start when he heard the news.

"Peter Morgan," he echoed softly. "Now what is he doing down here?"

"Was scared scared!" She said, with a sharp edge to her voice.

Bennie fingered his stubby chin.

"I'd sooner he was some other place just now. He might make things awkward. I wonder if he really was following that girl last night?"

"Why not ask him?" snapped Sam. "He said you were such pals!"

Bennie's face flushed.

"Oh, he did, did he? The interesting

Now made an unladylike noise indicative of contempt, and went back to her room. Berne had no time in getting dressed, and judging by the housekeeper's remarks that accompanied this operation, one could assume Peter Morgan was no friend of his.

THE RED HOUSE.

TOM BLANNING the house detective at Palace Court was an old friend. As soon as breakfast was over Morgan covered him.

"You know the little in Suite No. 24, Tom? Name of Glinski?"

"I know 'em all, son," said Blanning. "What's he been doing?"

"I don't know. But I'm going to find out."

Blanning raised a pair of bushy eyebrows. He had retired from the force with the rank of detective-sergeant and the reputation of a cold and palatable officer.

"No monkey-tricks here, Pete," he said shortly. "I can handle anything that turns up. Let's have it."

Morgan grinned.

"You know what Berne Glinski is, Tom?"

"He occupies one of the best apartments, and he pays his rent in advance. That's good enough for me—and the management. As far as we're concerned he's a good customer, so don't you scare him off, Pete."

Morgan took out the pink of cards he had appropriated the previous night and dropped them into Tom Blanning's hand.

"Take a peep at these some time when you're alone—they're one of Berne's special files. If you see any of the other cash customers get into a poker game with Berne you'll better break it up nice and quietly if you don't want a stink."

Blanning nodded.

"Thanks, Pete. I'll watch out."

"One other thing—do you know who owns a Franklin two-water around here—registration DMU 79? Couple of years old, black body, cream wings?"

"That sounds like young Rodney Marsh's bus," said Blanning slowly. "He runs a Vauxhall with that bodywork, but I couldn't tell you the number."

"Is he staying here?" Morgan spoke casually, as though the question were of no importance.

"A knowing smile broke over Tom Blanning's face.

"What are you trying to get at, Pete? You're crazy if you think there's anything criminal in that family; why, the Marshes have been squares at the Red House, Bramholt, since I'd ever known them. Like many of the other old country families, they haven't as much cash as they used to, and I did hear that young Rodney Marsh had been writing a bit of a figure, but in local Society and for miles around they're the tops."

"There's a sister, isn't there?" Morgan went on innocently. "Dark girl, rather a good-looker."

"There's eight. Know her?"

"After a fashion." Peter Morgan omitted to mention that he was carrying her gun in his pocket at that very moment. His nimble brain was trying to link up a shady character like Berne Glinski with the aristocratic Marshes of Bramholt—girls of Miss Marsh's class don't go after a man with a gun just for the fun of it. The problem had intriguing possibilities.

Tom Blanning tapped at his sleeve.

"You're up to something, son," he accused. "If it's anything to do with this

place I want to know. Come up, Pete—why all the curiosity?"

Morgan grinned at him.

"Just habit, that's all, Tom. The slanting instinct dies hard—you know how it is."

"I do," agreed the house detective grimly. He'd had some experience of Peter Morgan's methods while he was in the force—trust that rusty-headed tornado to come out a spot of trouble!

Bramholt village lay some three miles inland from the Palace Court Hotel. It was mid-morning when Herbie and his boss set out along the path that wound over the downs to the village.

When Herbie had inquired why in heck they were walking when there was a perfectly good car waiting in the garage, Peter Morgan had told him with all sweetness that it would be very good for his figure.

Which was by no means the real reason for the stroll. After leaving Tom Blanning Peter Morgan had not failed to observe that wherever he went a slim, pale-faced little man had been unobtrusively close at hand. He was still there when they had crossed the downs and were descending the path to the fringe of Bramholt Wood. Some thirty yards behind them he stroked, swinging a walking-stick and patiently admiring the beauties of Nature.

As soon as they were beneath the leafy canopy of trees Morgan told Herbie, and Herbie was indignant. This was the rotten limit, when a couple of blokes couldn't take a quiet little stroll without another bloke tailing after them!

"Lemme give him a nice poke inna neck, guv'ner," he suggested. But Morgan pulled him along the path.

"Nothing to do, old. My check. We must adopt finesse. I don't want the lads to suspect we know what he's after—I fancy his presence is due to my conversation with the blonde lady at the pool this morning. How let us think."

Half-way through the wood they came to a stream crossed by an improvised bridge of loose planks. There was about six feet of water and a plentiful growth of weeds.

As soon as they had crossed Morgan lifted up the loose planks and tipped them into the stream. Then he broke into a sprint, Herbie following.

"Simple, but effective," said Morgan. "Yeah," nodded Herbie, "but I shoulda give him a poke inna neck, all the same."

The Red House lay just outside the village. The house was not visible from the road, and a high, moss-grown wall of flint bounded the estate. The drive needed attention, and the wrought iron gates were shabby and rusted.

Expectantly Peter Morgan fingered the gun in his pocket, and then made up his mind.

"Hey!" protested Herbie. "Where are you goin'?"

"Social visit," said Morgan lithely. "Ting along, brother, and keep your hooks off the silver."

The Red House was a long, rambling building that had been added to and extended in a variety of architectural styles. It stood on a slope, with a dark background of trees; in front was a stretch of rough turf and some ill-tended flower-beds.

Under the heavy portico, the front door was of massive oak, heavily matted with moss, forbidding in the extreme.

"Some joint," muttered Herbie. "Like a ruler's fortress."

Peter Morgan gave the bellhop a couple of energetic taps and straightened his tie in anticipation. But the man who opened the door was no dignified retainer. He was sleek, from his polished head to the tips of his shoes. He wore a lounge suit of impeccable cut, his linen was exquisite, and a single diamond glittered in his breast. His face was triangular, with a pointed chin and long, narrow jawbones. It was impossible to guess at his age. Peter Morgan surmised that he would be an awkward customer to tackle—with his shoulders were compact, and the elegant habit brought out the athletic slenderness of his waist.

"Good-morning," said Peter Morgan politely. "May I see Miss Marsh, please?"

The door was opened wider, to disclose a large hall paneled in rich oak. A dim light streamed in from a lofty diamond-paned window over the landing, where the wide staircase curved away out of sight.

"I'll see if Miss Marsh is at home. What name shall I say?"

Morgan gave it to him and followed him over the hall, through a door at the foot of the stairs. The room had evidently once served the double purpose of billiard-room and library, and, like the rest of the house, displayed a melancholy faded splendour. The billiard table was good, but the baize was faded and patched; a cursory examination of the book shelves revealed nothing more modern than bound volumes of sporting journals and a series of directories.

"Miserable the damn iron in this dump!" muttered Herbie. "Be moderate, ain't it, guv'ner?"

"Watch the door," said Morgan. "Tip me the wink if anyone comes."

Peter Morgan picked up a heavy silver Jacobean candlestick. It was of solid metal, beautifully worked. His lean face was thoughtful. He couldn't place the man who had opened the door—he quite obviously wasn't a servant. A smart West End club was more his setting than this gloomy mansion. Maybe he was the girl's brother.

Morgan moved to a bureau, opened a drawer. Inside lay a five-pained note. He took it and scrutinized it carefully. It seemed phoney to him.

Unfortunately, while they waited, neither Herbie nor his chief noticed what was happening to one of the oak panels beside the wide fireplace. A small aperture appeared in the middle of the carved design. It was cunningly placed so as to escape notice.

In the adjoining room a man stepped out from a recess made by a section of the wall that swung quietly out on steel hinges. It was Berne Glinski. Two other men waited for him, one was the elegant gentleman who had admitted the visitors, the other was little more than a youth—he wore a gelling outfit, his features were regular, almost handsome, save for a delicate suggestion of weakness about his chin. He smoked ill-timed, and he was puffing jerkily at a cigarette while he watched Glinski.

Berne nodded.

"It's Morgan," he said abruptly. "I'd like to know what the devil he's doing here."

The youth fingered his tie.

"Is he the police?" His voice was hoarse.

"He's worse," said Berne. "Gaps don't break the law—Morgan does. It'll help him to drag you in. He's tough. What does he want with your sister, Rodger? I didn't know he knew him—you ought to have told me."

"But she doesn't!" insisted Rodney

Marsh. "I'm sure she's never met him."

"Something creepy about this," said the third man slowly, his eyes fixed on young Marsh. "What'll we do, boss?"

"First out what Morgan wants. You go and see, Rodney—my your sister's out. Keep your head. Morgan doesn't know anything."

Rodney Marsh hesitated. Plainly the job was not to his liking. Then:

"All right," he said jerkily. "I'll do it. Give me a drink first, my nerves are all shot to hell. What—what shall I see, Bernie?"

Glinski poured him a brandy. "Be polite, say she's out for the day, ask if he'd leave a message—and far heaven's sake don't act as if you're interested."

Rodney Marsh swallowed the brandy and walked to the door. Bernie Glinski was watching softly, off key. His face was a mask.

"Big old-guy, Freddie," he said. "I'm wondering what I say Tom Hartigan for—I told him to tell the pair of them before I left."

Freddie Ambroy stretched his chin. "Sam does his thinking with his trigger finger. It's the kid I'm worrying about—his little bloke to blow up."

"Not him," Glinski smiled contemptuously as he moved back into the room. "He likes the cash. We've got him where we want him. Let's see how he does."

THE LADY WON'T TALK.

RODNEY MARSH had introduced himself and had dutifully carried out his instructions. His sister was not at home. Was there any message?

"Oh, no, there's all right," Morgan smiled pleasantly. "Just tell her I called. I'm staying at the Palace Court."

"Charming place," said Rodney Marsh in what was meant to be a conventional tone. "Staying long, Mr.—Morgan?"

"I hope so." They were moving towards the door when it opened quietly, and Joan Marsh stood looking at them. She wore a simple linen frock and her dark hair was brushed smoothly back from her white forehead. Her eyes fixed on Peter Morgan.

"Why, hello, Joan," said Rodney Marsh gently. "I—I thought you were out. Mr. Morgan just dropped in to see you. This—this is my sister, Mr. Morgan."

The girl inclined her head slightly.

"Mr. Morgan and I have met. That will be all, Rodney, thank you."

Rodney Marsh thrust out his hand. He was evidently glad to finish his part in the meeting.

"Good-bye—do call in again!" The door banged behind him.

Joan Marsh walked to the window and stared looking out over the stretch of turf.

"Is it necessary that we have a waitress?" she asked quietly.

Herbie coughed behind his hand.

"O.K. with me, lady. I'm on my way. I'll be waiting upstairs."

When they were alone the girl turned round. She had her hands clasped, the knuckles showing white. Yet her voice was composed.

"I hoped you wouldn't trace me."

Peter Morgan leaned against the edge of the billiard-table. He took out his cigarette-case and offered it to her.

She shook her head.

"How did you find out where I was?" she asked.

Morgan exhorted smoke to extinguish the match before replying.

"It wasn't difficult," he said lightly. "Your car is rather distinctive. I was very discreet, I assure you."

"Thank you. But I don't see why you had to come."

He took his hand out of his pocket and held it out to her, palm open.

"I forgot to return this last night," he said softly. "I'll lock it up, if I were you. Or, better still, throw it away. It's empty."

She took the little gun from him and turned it over in her hand. She said nothing. The sunlight streamed in from the window and backed her slender figure in a warm radiance.

Morgan straightened and moved over beside her. She didn't stir.

"Why not let me help you, Miss Marsh? What's the trouble?"

"I can't tell you," she said woodenly, her face averted. "Please go now."

"Does your brother know about last night?" he said. "Does he know you tried to shoot Glinski?"

She shook her head, then looked steadily at him. Her mouth was tremulous.

"Won't you please believe me when I tell you that you can't help me? Nobody can."

"Well, I hate to butt in, but this sounds pretty serious. Finkov, Miss Marsh, much as I dislike Bernie Glinski, I really feel I ought to drop him a hint that somebody is out gunning for him. That seems to be the only way to stop you getting yourself pulled in as a murder charge."

Her eyes ran his. "I don't think you would do that," she said breathlessly. "Not after the way you've behaved so far."

Morgan nodded and picked up his hat. His face was grave.

"If I were you I wouldn't let my neck up, Miss Marsh," he said evenly, "not for a slug like Glinski. If you change your mind and want any help, I'll be waiting." Good-morning.

She came out to the hall with him. Herbie was examining the oil-paintings that hung against the dark walls. To him the portraits of bewigged squires of the Red House appeared irrevocably comic, but in front of the lady he restrained the impulse to tell the painter what a fancy looking bunch of lasses they were.

They were half-way down the drive before Peter Morgan said anything.

"Social visit, huh?" remarked Herbie. "First the guy says she ain't in, or then she pops up and tells me to take a powder. Malesy little blighters, aren't they?"

"Little cabbage," said Morgan gently. "The lady don't want an audience, because she's just been trying to commit a murder. She's sensitive that way."

"Yeah," said Herbie sourly. "you told me about it last night. She tried to bump this Bernie bloke. As I still say why not? Let's keep outta this, guv'ner. It's a private matter, so why do we hafta pick it up?"

"Why, indeed?" Peter Morgan grinned happily and breathed his stride. "We're in it, and we're staying in it until I know just what makes that very charming girl so anxious to lockhouse dear Bernie. Now, I wonder why brother Rodney doesn't lead her a hand?"

"What, that little tick in the fancy bloomers?" Herbie asserted. "He's scored once through, that bloke is!"

"So I noticed. The girl said he didn't know what happened last night, and I fancy she was telling the truth. But we'll see."

Through the little aperture, Bernie Glinski had watched the interview between Morgan and the girl. When he turned back into the room again his face was set

and his eyes snapped. Freddie Ambroy pursued his lips.

"Just as I said—the kid blew up!" Glinski shook his head.

"It's the girl. She came in and saw Morgan. We'll have to do something with her, Freddie."

"Haven't I said so all along? She'll tumble to it sooner or later."

Bernie Glinski flipped his chin. He shot a quick sideways glance at his companion.

"She tried to erase me in the garden up at the hotel last night. I just heard about it. Seems Morgan was there and grabbed her gun. That's what he turned up here for, to give it back to her."

Freddie Ambroy whistled softly.

"And you didn't notice a thing? Lucky break for you, Bernie. No wonder Morgan is looking around. What did the girl tell him?"

"Nothing. That's the funny part of it. Not a thing. Too proud of the family name, I suppose." Glinski laughed harshly. "But Morgan isn't going to let it stop at that. He'll keep after her and drag it out somehow. We've got to think up something fast, Freddie."

Just then Rodney Marsh came in. He looked at Glinski apprehensively.

"I couldn't help it, Bernie," he murmured. "You saw how it was—the girl came in. I—I was sure she was up to her room."

"That's all right. No harm done, old boy," Glinski smiled amiably. "I've got a job for you. You need a change of scenery. You're going up to town right away. Just get in touch with the boys and keep an eye on things up there—I can't afford the time right now."

"But what about Morgan?" The urgency of his face accentuated the slender lines of young Rodney Marsh's face. "What did he want, Joan first?"

"Now, don't you worry about that, old boy. We'll take care of Morgan—he doesn't know a thing."

Glinski pulled out his wallet. It was fat. He took out a bundle of notes and gave them to Marsh.

"Watch out where you spend it. When you've finished you might take a trip over to Paris. That you, eh?"

Marsh's mouth became slack and moist. He thrust the bundle of notes into his breast-pocket.

"That's about it, Bernie. As a matter of fact, I've been looking pretty well tapped out the last couple of weeks."

Glinski patted him on the shoulder.

"Paris is just what you need, old boy. You pack off and give the girls a whirl or two. I'll come up and help you pack—always don't understand these things. She wouldn't know. I'll tell her you're away on business. Freddie, get the car out. You can let Rodney have your M.O."

Within fifteen minutes Glinski and Freddie Ambroy stood in the quadrangular courtyard at the rear of the house watching Rodney Marsh start off down the drive.

Glinski exhaled with relief.

"I'm glad that little swimmer's out of the way for a bit. He's had enough to prove upward if we teach that precious sister of his while he's around. By the time he comes back we'll have a nice little story all ready for him."

Freddie Ambroy inspected the end of his cigarette. His voice was casual as he said:

"Need he come back?"

Bernie Glinski considered the suggestion for some ten seconds before answering.

"It's a good location we've got here. It's perfect. Morgan's the trouble. As long as he's in the neighborhood we'll be low—he's got a nasty habit of sticking his

rose into things. I'll have a talk with the boys. Maybe we can cross Morgan and that pup of his in walk into something that'll suit their traps. The girl won't be any trouble—we'll put her where she can't talk, and then we'll be in put pressure on young Herbie if he gets too inquisitive." He smiled softly as though to himself. "That's quite a notion—we'll play our off against the other."

Ferdie Ambrose agreed.

"In the meantime, we use this place just as long as we please." It works out nicely, Benjie.

They went back into the house. Rodney Marsh's lavatory apparatus had not gone unseen. Jean Marsh came away from the window of her bed-room and sat listlessly on the side of the bed. She had seen the luggage in the back of the car, and as he throbbed past, her brother had shot a quick, fearful look up at her room.

"If only he wasn't so weak, such a coward," she thought wearily. "What was that beastly Glinkel man planning now?"

On a sudden impulse she got up and walked quickly out into the corridor. The phone was in the lobby under the stairs. She tried hard to keep her voice steady as she asked for the Palace Court Hotel. So intent was she on what she was doing that the slight creak of the lobby door opening behind her passed unnoticed.

With paralyzing suddenness the phone was wrenched from her grasp and her mouth covered by a man's hand. She tried to twist around to face him, but Ferdie Ambrose was not burdened with any fancy notions of civility. His right fist described a short, efficient arc, and the girl slumped in his arms. He carried her out across the hall and through into the room where Glinkel and the others were.

He dropped her on to a padded couch.

"She has rung the Palace Court," he said. "Evidently changed her mind about Morgan. Lucky I was watching her."

Bennie Glinkel nodded. "It was. Take her over to the wing, Shiner, and fix her up."

"You bet." Shiner Quinn looked three parts ape. He picked the girl up as though she were an empty handbag and slung her over his massive shoulders. "She's a good looking beauty."

"You come right back," warned Glinkel, "and no funny business or I'll kick your nose off. Hear me?"

"Yeh, boss," said Shiner meekly. "you said it."

Bennie Glinkel turned back to the others. "I'm going over to the Hotel to see what the hell Hartigan is doing. While I'm away I want you all to be at your stations. You can't miss the two men—if they show up round here I want them brought in—particularly the red-headed one. Most important of all; see that nobody goes near the wing. That's all. Now get on with it, and don't shoot unless you have to."

The men filed out. There were seven of them. Some wore in mechanics' overalls, others wore in appearance last plain things—a tough bunch of boys, to borrow Herbie's phrase.

Glinkel nodded to Ferdie. "Keep an eye on the girl, I'll be back."

CAMOUFLAGE.

THEY were packing again. At last, Herbie was. Peter Morgan groined on the bed with an ordnance survey map of the district spread out before him. He was deep in thought. He was giving the vicinity of the Red House a very close scrutiny.

Herbie slumped the lid of a case and dumped it on the floor. He was glad the givnor had changed his mind—they were pulling out immediately.

Morgan folded the map, thrust it in his pocket, and stood up.

"Let's go, money."

The lock-up garages were behind the tennis courts. Peter Morgan grinned as he saw the rear elevation of the man who had so unobtrusively shadowed them that morning. He was leaning over the open bonnet of a Morris saloon, diligently peering into the interior.

But as Morgan's Lagonda rumbled down the drive the Morris was fifty yards behind. They swung out into the main road and Morgan put on enough speed to make things interesting for the following driver.

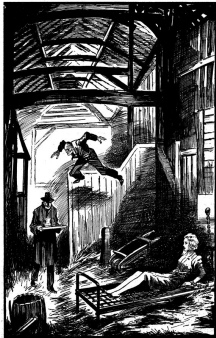
They reached Euster in under an hour.

Morgan leaned towards Herbie. "About time we attended to the girl behind."

"Yeh!" Herbie brightened considerably at the prospect. Making sure they were seen by the shadower, Morgan left the main road and began to cut across country northwards. Reversing a sharp bend he pulled up with locked wheels and the two of them piled out and snatched a field gate that broke the line of the high hedge.

Cautiously the Morris edged past the empty Lagonda. Sam Hartigan was worried. The boss hadn't been very pleasant about his failure that morning. But where in the heck had the two blokes gone? There was a cottage thirty yards up from where they had stopped. Doubtless Sam crawled along the lane, turned at a junction, and came back.

He reared up to the field gate and waited for five minutes. His quarry didn't



The creek was grinning. "There's nothing I like better than looking after young ladies," he said, but Herbie Adams preferred a scrap, and he was going to get it in another second.

appear. They must be inside the cottage. He got out, shuffled over to the gate and peered on top of it with his back to the light.

Herbie ran from his crouching position by the hedge. Noiselessly he approached the man on the gate. He cocked his right fist. He coughed. Sam Harrington, startled, swung round. Herbie's bayonetted plunked home. Sam stuck off the gate into the ditch. He didn't even twitch.

"That was a poke into your chest," explained Herbie calmly. "The bloke had it coming to him."

Peter Morgan climbed over the gate. "She's having quite a busy day. Fix the car, sweetest."

Herbie already had the bonnet of the Morris open and was removing the distributor lead. A minute later the Loggona was shooting off down the lane the way they had come. They stopped in Essex and bought a collection of fishing tackle including waders. Herbie wandered into a nearby bar while the boss did a spot of phoning. Then they continued back in the direction of Bramshott village.

"Wosall that junk for?" asked Herbie, indicating the rods in the back seat. "We shan't gain fisher."

"And why not? The Prime Minister does it when he's got things on his mind—so does the curate, they say, gives me that nice philosophic outlook."

"O.K., O.K., but where's the gear?" "Local colour," said Peter Morgan. "We've just two single fishermen. Don't tell me you've never heard of Frank Walton."

"Sure I have," said Herbie placidly. "He was a fly-wright out of Whitechapel way with a glass leg."

Peter Morgan gave it up. "Where the road forks to Bramshott village they were straight on and then turned left up into the hills along a road that was in reality little more than a cart track."

Presently Morgan eased through a rickety gate and pulled up. He indicated the building in front of them. "Temporary headquarters. No cooked bar, no swimming pool, no little canteen to play with, but plenty of nice scenery."

Herbie sniffed obsequiously and gave it as his opinion that they were going to have a ruddy nice time and no mistake.

"Whatta we playin' at—Robinson Crusoe or somethin'?"

"We're going fishing," his boss told him sweetly, "maybe we'll catch something."

Old Down Farm had certainly little to recommend itself. The house was a grey stone ramshackle building with a cluster of barns and outbuildings in the rear. The bare hills swept down to it from all sides. But, for Peter Morgan's purpose, it had one supreme advantage—the Red House lay less than a mile away over the hills.

Red Harrington, the farmer, was not doing too well, and jumped at the chance of a couple of boarders who'd probably be out most of the time, especially when Peter Morgan then and there took out his net and said for a fortnight in advance at a truly exorbitant rate.

Red Harrington, normally a stolid, slow-moving man, mellowed, and to Herbie's intense satisfaction disclosed a barrel of home-brewed in his white-washed stone-flagged kitchen. He further gave three what should have been most helpful advice as to fishing in the neighbourhood. Bawley Lake was, apparently, the place, and Bawley Lake, as Peter Morgan very well knew, lay partly inside the boundaries of the Red House.

"Well stroll over there this evening,"

he declared. "In fact, we'll probably make a night of it, eh, partner?"

Herbie looked over the rim of a marine primer lamp and nodded. It was O.K. with him so long as there was this beer to come back to.

They set out at dusk, rods and baskets and all. Morgan ducked into the barn where they'd parked the Loggona, and when he emerged, the basket slung over his shoulder was the heavier by two perfectly good automatics.

When they reached the fringes of the lake they dumped their tackle. Below them through the trees they could see the roofs of the Red House. Morgan took out the guns and handed one to his companion. Herbie turned it over in his huge fist.

"Fishin', huh? Looks like it. An' me leavin' all that beer. It's a crime, gu'ner, there's that to it."

"I wouldn't be surprised," Morgan's eyes were glinting, and Herbie knew what that meant.

"What's that farmer bloke gonna say when we turn up with no ruddy fish after a spendin' 'arf the ruddy night out here?"

"He'll assume that we're very bad fishermen and he'll continue to take our money." Peter Morgan gazed reflectively down over the darkening slopes. From where they were he could see the tiny bay where Joan March had left her car when she set out to shoot Bennie Ginnick. The coast curved in so far that the western boundaries of the Red House were but a few hundred yards from the shore, and this was the way the girl had come, driving over the downs and into the estate by a side road.

"Herbie, did you notice anything odd about the lad down there this morning?" Morgan pointed in the direction of the Red House.

"Yeah—lovin' ruddy pictures of blokes an' janes," Herbie spat into the lake disgustedly.

"You didn't notice a bunch of clothes hanging from a stand in the corner? Or two pairs of rubber sea-boots? Does that convey anything to your limited intelligence?"

"Only that some blokes don't like gettin' wet when it rains!" Herbie felt he'd scored. But Peter Morgan smiled softly and shook his head.

"Not clothes, pet, nor sea-boots—they aren't the normal precautions against bad weather. Except at sea. There must be some sailors at the Red House."

"So what?" Herbie was not impressed at this brilliant deduction.

"This is where the braincase comes in," Morgan told him indulgently. "I had a little chat with the huddle who runs the lurch at the Palace Court, and I gathered some interesting facts. There's a biggin sea-going boat moored in the bay down there, and it belongs to the Red House. But, and this is the curious part of it, neither of the March kids ever goes out in it—Rodney can't stand the sea. The only time the boat leaves its moorings is at night. I propose we find out why."

Herbie grinned. "I was expectin' that. Do it hafta be a ruddy mermaid or somethin'?"

"I've got a better idea," his boss went on. "I'll investigate the boat while you take a good little stroll round the Red House and see what you can pick up."

Herbie scratched his crazy law and cocked an eyebrow at the boss. "All right if I crack the joint!"

Morgan's smile was enigmatic. "What do you think, son?"

Herbie caught on, and his manner

became infinitely more cheerful. "Levin' gu, gu'ner," he intoned.

PETER MORGAN, STOWAWAY.

THE bay was dark. There were only a few craft moored there—a couple of smallish yachts riding at anchor with furling sails, a cabin cruiser with an awning. Further out, just under the lip of the bay, Morgan could make out a long dark shape swinging in the tide.

There were several dinghies drawn up on the beach. He picked the smallest, pushed it out into the shallows, and hopped aboard, rowing as quietly as he could he pulled across to the large motor-boat, approaching it in a wide half-circle.

There were no lights showing. It was a big boat, broad in the beam, with a long cabin, certainly a sea-going craft. Morgan came at it from the open side of the bay, drifting in on the tide, his oars shipped.

He came up under the stern and made fast to a brass bollard. The cabin door was locked. Working with illegal efficiency he had it open in a matter of seconds.

There were four long banks in the cabin and a table across to the floor-boards. The furnishings were expensive. There was nothing to help him there.

He came out into the well deck; the raked wheelhouse and looked along the curving length of the boat.

Just then, clear above the whisper of the tide on the sand, he heard men's voices. They were hawsering a dinghy. There were, as far as he could make out, three of them, and the dinghy was pulling straight out towards him.

It was a nasty moment. But as soon as he was sure that the newcomers were headed his way Peter Morgan jumped into action. He slipped his dinghy free and gave it a hefty shove. It shot away from the motor-boat, and bobbed on the tide.

Locking the door of the cabin he crept forward, keeping out of the sky-line, and peeped himself up on the sleeping deck of the foremast. There was a trap-door leading down a small hold right against the sharp bows.

He got the trap back. It squeaked on its brass runners and stuck half-way. Head first he slid into the dark hold-way and landed all anywhere on a jumble of cables and miscellaneous ironwork that played merry hell with the vulnerable parts of his anatomy. He pulled the trap back into position, as much as he could. He was still experimenting on the darkness, searching for a place to park, when he heard the bump and scrape of the others coming alongside.

A voice that he recognized as Bennie Ginnick's said: "O.K., Skipper, you pull back. Give us a couple of hours—and keep your dam' eyes open this time!"

A cheery voice replied: "Yeh, boss, I'll be waiting shore 'nuff!"

Presently the boat began to quiver as her engines were turned on. There was little noise, but to Peter Morgan, crouching in his last little hole with the water slapping against the timbers a few inches from him on both sides, it seemed the whole bay must have their departure.

It was not until they cleared the bay and got into the open sea that the lurch began to show what she could do. Morgan was tossed about from side to side like a shuttlecock—there appeared to be no counterbalancing number of splices and sharp protruberances amongst the damage in the hold, and after they had been that out for a few minutes he was certain that he'd braced against everything possible, only to discover his mistake the next moment.

They roared and pitched for half an hour or more, and then, to Morgan's great relief, the engines slowed down to half-speed, and were cut off. Fairly a voice sang out, and Bennie Glinkel answered. The sea had become miraculously calmer now, and Morgan guessed that they had pitched up under the lee of a luggan ship.

The luggan bumped and scraped. Peter tripped nobody over the foredeck, making dash. Peter Morgan waited three minutes, and then, with infinite caution, edged back the trap.

The sea was still in on him. Yearning across the launch were the rusty plates of a steamer, a rope ladder dangled a few feet above the launch's deck.

Morgan pulled himself out and stole along to the cabin. The lights were off, and it was empty. Bennie Glinkel hadn't been above. Morgan stood for a moment gazing up at the dark sides of the ship. She was showing no navigation lights, which only went to show that Bennie Glinkel's maritime rendezvous was the sort of back-biting job.

The rope ladder presented little difficulty to the red-headed investigator, and he dropped over the rail of the ship with the utmost unconcern. His brief sojourn in the "gray hole" of the launch had not improved his normally immaculate appearance. He cooked his hat, dug his hands into the pockets of his jacket, and scowled along amidships.

A life-belt fastened to the wheel-house bore in faded letters the inscription: "S. S. Santa Anna," and the Santa Anna was no Queen Mary. She was just another tramp, nondescript, dirty, battered by the storms of the seven seas.

Nobody was upon the bridge, and Peter Morgan was beginning to think he had the place to himself when a very tough-looking specimen in greasy overalls appeared round the deck house.

"Bennie gone below, pal?" asked Morgan casually.

The other jerked a large and dirty thumb over his shoulder. "Yeah."

"Thanks, pal."

Morgan stroked on, whistling softly. Out of the tail of his eye he saw the other man loam over the rail and light up the stem of a cigarette. Getting back wasn't going to be so easy, unless the greasy one could be shifted.

Under the bridge a companion-way led down and showed the only light in the whole ship. Morgan descended. There were two doors on each side of the corridor, with another at the far end.

He had his hand on his gun now. From behind the far door he could hear the murmur of voices. He lit a cigarette, stroked softly up, and loomed against the wall. He could hear quite plainly.

Bennie Glinkel was explaining something.

"But don't you understand, Leroy? We couldn't wait tonight—it wasn't safe, I tell you."

"I don't like it," rumbled a deep bass voice. "It's asking a helluva lot, Bennie. These steamer ticks are marauder. If they see me standing in to share again to-morrow like as not they'll nose in and come aboard."

"You'll have to risk that." Glinkel was determined. "I do, don't I? It's worked all right so far, and we'll have a big shipment this time, then you can lay off for a couple of weeks."

"But what about this bloke you were so scared of?" persisted the double bass.

"Oh, he's gone." Glinkel sounded impatient. "He left the Hotel this morning.

He won't trouble us—and if he does the cops can take care of him."

Peter Morgan smiled happily. Bennie Glinkel sounded very confident; it was a pity he couldn't see through the door.

Then Morgan froze: somebody was coming down the companion-way. Already he could see a pair of stock boots surmounted by blue trousers, which meant that it wasn't the crew in the overalls. Reaching out to the nearest door Morgan took a chance and slipped inside. The cabin was dark and stuffy. A mattress cracked and a sleepy voice said: "Deal it?"

Morgan held his breath as heavy footsteps thumped up and passed his door. Momentarily Bennie Glinkel's voice came louder and then abruptly died away. A door slammed. The man on the bunk made the tiny noise of a sound sleeper reluctant to be disturbed. "Gwan u' bell!" he mumbled, turning in to the wall.

Feeling that he'd played his luck just about as far as it would take him, Peter Morgan lost no time in getting up on deck. The sooner he was safely stowed in his hideout the better he'd feel.

The figure in overalls had gone. Morgan had just swung across to the rails when a sharp voice halted him: "Hey, you—come over here!"

A man in a reefed jacket was standing in the shadow of the deck house. He held his right hand waist high. As he moved out from the shadow the gun glinted.

"Keep 'em outa your pecker, bud," he warned as Morgan began to slip his hand in search of his automatic. "Oh, you up?"

Morgan stayed. His back was braced against the rail.

"What's the idea?" he demanded truculently. "Who sold a gun to me, pal? I just been down with the boss an' come up for some air. Gettin' treddy on this fancy hot sitcha?"

The sailor moved closer. He was a stocky little man with wide shoulders. He wore a peaked cap with tarnished braid beneath which his eyes were narrowed suspiciously.

"I didn't see you come aboard," he said. "They was only Glinkel an' Barigan that I saw. I'm gonna check on you, feller, so pick up 'r' dog." He waved his gun in the direction of the companion way up which Morgan had come.

Morgan hunched his shoulders and came slowly away from the rail. The sailor manned his gun against Morgan's back and dusted his hand over Morgan's right hand pocket. Morgan stiffened as his gun was patted out.

"Easy, feller. You walked into see-thin' here. Let's be gone." The sailor prodded him forward, none too gently.

Morgan descended the first two steps of the companion way. The sailor would have to bend to keep him covered so they descended.

As smoothly as the uncoiling of a steel spring Morgan swung round. His left arm flashed out and clamped down on the sailor's wrist, jerking the gun from his grasp. They swayed on the narrow steep steps. Morgan snugged his right upwards in a vicious arc. The sailor sprawled backwards on the deck.

He lifted his knees and looked out with heavily shielded feet as Morgan dropped on him, his with a little body that Morgan hit and pinned the paralyzing kick and pinned his opponent to the shoulder. The sailor's powerful body heaved convulsively. His coughing arm groped for the gun and found it.

Morgan caught his wrist with both

hands. They had scrambled to their knees now and wrestled chest to chest in the darkness. The sailor clawed with his left hand digging deep furrows in Morgan's cheek. He began to swing short stiff clips to the side of Morgan's head. But not for one split second did Morgan relax his grip on the other's gun arm.

They had rolled up against the rails. The sailor pulled himself to his feet, dragging Morgan with him. He tried to work his other opponent with his back to the rails, but Morgan ducked his head and tatted him hard under the chin.

Twice the gun cracked. It was new or never—releasing his right hand Morgan stooped, caught the sailor behind the knees and tossed him over the rail. There was a faint scream as the landing body struck the deck of the launch and then slipped into the dark water.

Morgan went down the dangling rope ladder so fast it scorched his palms. He scrambled forward, expecting every minute a rain of lead to pour down on him from the ship's towering sides. As he yanked back the trap he scanned the water below, but there was no sign of his late antagonist. He dragged into the dark hole and pulled the trap into position.

From the rails high above him he could hear the excited voices of the crew who had stood up at the sound of shooting. There was nothing on the deck to indicate what had happened; Morgan's own automatic had gone over the side in the sailor's pocket.

It was ten minutes later before Glinkel and Sam Barigan came down, and Peter Morgan waited expectantly until he heard the rattle of the launch's engines as they cut off. It would probably be some time before they discovered that one of the Santa Anna's crew was missing, and they'd have no reason for connecting the disappearance of the stocky sailor with the visit of the launch—men can fall overboard even in calm weather.

On the return journey Morgan's agile brain was ticking over on all cylinders. There were several interesting problems: what was the "work" that Glinkel and Co. had suspended because of Morgan's presence at the Palace Court Hotel? What was the "shipment" that Glinkel intended to load on the steamer to-morrow night? And where did the Red House and the two Marsh youngsters come into all this?

The skipper of the Santa Anna had been scared of the revenue officers, which meant that he was taking on board some stuff that would get him into heavy trouble, and the kind of person who'd arrange a nocturnal meeting with Bennie Glinkel free of six miles off the Devon coast wouldn't scare easily.

All in all, Peter Morgan concluded that he was going to enjoy himself in the next twenty-four hours, in spite of the mercenary bumping he was being subjected to at the moment.

After gliding quietly into the bay they had to wait some ten minutes before the dinghy came out from the shore. Bennie Glinkel swore at Skinner Quinn, and then they pulled away.

There was nothing else for it. Morgan removed his shoes and slung them round his neck. He lowered himself over the stern, and struck out for the shore.

A SUBTERRANEAN EXPLOIT.

HENRIE watched his boss go down the winding path that would lead him to the dunes and the sea, and then turned to examine the high fence of close-mesh

wire that fringed the wood. It was a few inches, and an expensive one.

Herbie worked his teeth effectively and pulled out a tiny torch of the dimensions of a fat fountain pen. The narrow beam of light traveled slowly over the strands of wire. The top strand was different from the others—it was of unscratched copper, and where it ran through the slim concrete posts there was a rubber-insulated runner to give it free and easy movement.

Herbie fished in his back pocket and drew out a pair of slender rubber-handled pliers. The wire snapped softly and curled back as he snipped it through. He pulled himself up and dropped on the other side.

The wood was of pine with a thick carpet of needles underneath. Herbie was in no hurry. It looked simple enough: below him lay the Red House, and he was inside the guarded enclosure.

But there might be such things as trip-wires, so Herbie's progress was a foot at a time, while the shuddered beam of his torch searched the ground ahead of him.

For a big man to be moved with unsteady caution, and against the dark background of the trees his bulky figure was almost invisible.

As soon as he cleared the wood he halted to get his bearings. He could make out the shape of the Red House now. The main body of the building had a wing running back from each end, so that it was a good deal more conventional and extensive than it looked from the front. There was not a glimmer of light anywhere.

Herbie edged along the wood to approach the west wing. He passed for long minutes on end, invisible in the shadows—the big thing on a stand like this was to take it good and easy and not to rush anything. Since his association with the boss of Universal Investigations Herbie had vastly improved his technique acquired during his long career in early years. Cracking the Red House was going to be chicken feed.

There was a cluster of squat stone buildings behind the house. One of them had a double door flanked with a postlock—the sort of lock Herbie could pick with his teeth and a couple of hairpins. Inside there were two cars, one of them was the car Herbie had seen Benjie Chinski driving out from the Palace Court Hotel, the other he recognized from the governor's description as the car the dame had come in when she tried to bump-off Benjie.

The west wing itself appeared to be the oldest part of the building. It was of solid granite, with little arched windows set high up in the wall.

Herbie stole over the tuft grass and approached a tall door that looked as though it had been built to withstand the battering rams of besieging armies. Thick iron bars spanned it, the hinges were massive, the key-hole was protected by a thick plate of iron.

Tentatively Herbie touched the lock and his fingers came away black with grease. So much the better—it wouldn't squeak. He got busy, probing with his pet "wrench". The mechanism of the lock was sound and worked with a smoothness that was a tribute to some early craftsman.

As Herbie pushed the door he heard the sound of measured footsteps on the gravel at the front of the house. They were coming in his direction, round the corner. He snatched his gun out, closed the door all but a couple of inches, and waited.

Through the crack he saw a man in a belted raincoat pass slowly by. He were

a Jolt hat pulled down over his eyes, and under his arm he carried a short rifle.

Herbie scratched his chin in the darkness. Nocturnal visitors weren't encouraged at this joint, that much was plain.

Herbie shut the door gently, and turned to examine his new surroundings. He was in a stone-flagged passage. The air smelt chill and musty. At the end of the passage a flight of worn steps of solid stone spiraled upwards. They had been used recently, for the beam of the torch showed clear prints in the dust. At the foot of the stairs was a low archway, which ought, so far as Herbie could calculate, to lead to the main building.

He chose the stairs. They wound steeply and there was no handrail. As his head emerged to the level of the first landing Herbie paused. There was a terrace sloping tall in his face.

He snatched his torch on and the light shot along a polished passageway, similar to the one he had just left but wider. There were two doors in the rough hewn wall.

Herbie sniffed. Somebody hereabout was smoking a pretty good cigar. Herbie edged up the last couple of steps, flattered himself against the wall, and moved over to the nearer door.

It was low and squat and uncomplacingly solid, just like the rest of the building, and the key was in the lock. The odour of the cigar certainly came from inside.

Herbie's thick fingers operated with surprising super-sensitiveness to turn the iron ring of the door handle a fraction of an inch at a time. The door made only the faintest of cracks, and the fragrance of the cigar came out stronger than ever.

An unshaded bulb swung from the arched roof, illuminating what seemed at first sight to be a row of iron safes, each closed by a door at the height of a man's chest. There were six of them in all, and from the one at the far end came the sound of a man's voice.

It was just about the sweetest dangle Herbie had ever struck. He coaxed the door back and tipped to the nearest stall. The half-door had a rusty padlock fixed to a thick iron staple driven into the stone. Placing his palms on the top of the door, Herbie hoisted himself up and quietly dropped inside. Crouching in the corner, he listened.

A chair scraped and a man's voice said: "This is your last chance—why did you try it? I warn you. If you don't talk of your own accord we can make you, and that won't be nice for you. Going to be sensible?"

There was a brief silence, then a girl's voice, low and throaty with emotion, replied:

"I've told you all I intend to. I'm only sorry that I failed to kill him."

"Why?" the man snapped. But the girl remained quiet. Herbie had recognized both voices—the girl was the one who had married all this funny business, and the man was the bloke who had received him and the governor the morning when they paid their "social visit."

"You don't seem to understand your position, Miss March," the man went on steadily. "I can assure you, Benjie Chinski has few enemies, particularly when people, even a charming girl like yourself, try to shoot him in the back. I doubt my ability to persuade him to overlook the—incident. Then there is, of course, your brother—something will have to be done about him."

"What do you mean?" The girl's voice had risen and become shriller in tone.

"You wouldn't do anything to him? Why, he's as good as one of you—he's letting you use our house for whatever filthy game you're playing. That's why I wanted to—so kill Chinski—to stop all this—"

"But you will say you don't know what the game was?" the man persisted. "You expect us to believe you'd commit murder just to get rid of us? Really, Miss March, wasn't that rather drastic?"

"It was the only way. I was desperate. Why don't you leave me alone? I don't know what you're doing here—but all I know is that you've ruined my brother, made him as bad as yourselves—won't that enough for you?" There was a note of desperate pleading in the girl's voice, and Herbie, squinting in his corner, began to get steamed-up; somebody was due for a "poke into snoot."

"I wouldn't worry about that previous



The secret of the Red House! They had

brother. He knows what he's doing—and he likes your money. Not much like you, is he, Miss March?"

"Get out—now—you beast!"

The man laughed.

"Certainly. But I'll be back. Make yourself comfortable, my dear, and think of something nice to tell Benjie when he comes—I'm afraid he's going to be rather annoyed with you, and you can hardly blame him, can you?"

Herbie straightened. Cautiously he peeped over the door to watch the dark, black-haired man go by, still pulling at his cigar. The light was snuffed off, and the key turned with a click. In the darkness the girl's low sobs were the only sounds.

Herbie pulled himself out of his cell and padded along to where the girl was. She sat up in sudden terror, blinking at

the thin beam of light that streamed in her face.

"It's O.K., lady," whispered Herbie himself. "don't get scared." He swung the light back so as to light up his own face. "Remember me? Me an' the guv'ner. We came to see you 'sister'. Take it easy while I fix this door."

The girl lay on a low iron bedstead. She had swung her feet to the floor and stood up, leaning weakly against the wall, brushing the tangled hair out of her eyes. Her face was pallid where it was not leastreaked with grime; she wore shoes and stockings, and the tattered state of her frock showed that she had not been a willing prisoner. Her left hand was fastened in an iron handcuff that was fixed to the wall by a short length of chain. Motionless, she waited while Herbie undid the padlock.

the stairs. His moaning proved unequal to the steep climb, and faded out. As he passed Herbie saw that he was carrying a jug of water and a hunk of bread. He was an under-sized little rat of a man with a bald pate and a thin, lined face. He wore crumpled slacks and a dingy vest.

"Hiya, cutie," he said, unlocking the door. "here's y' share." The tin jug of water clanked on the floor, and he tossed the bread into the girl's lap. His mean little bulging eyes took in the shapely curve of her slim legs. He came over and stood looking down at her. She faced the wall and made no move.

"G'mon, sister, why act thain'way? You be nice to me and maybe I'll do some'n for yah. What say?"

"You can get out!" she said with measured clarity.

a slender knife whirped past his head and clattered against the stone wall.

He patted the man to his feet, shook him as though to settle his aim, and poked over his right. As a "poke line street," it was the top. The man's eyes rolled upwards, showing the whites, and his legs became limp.

Herbie dumped him on the floor. The girl's eyes were shining as they met his sheepish grin.

"Some o' these blinks is kinda fresh," he commented. "G'mon your hand, lady."

In less than a minute she was free, and stepping over the prostrate thug in the sweater, they slipped out into the corridor. Herbie went first, and they were at the top of the stairs when they heard quick footsteps coming along the passage below.

Hastily they retreated.

"Hey, Slim, g'mon down cuds that wily'n!" The voice echoed through the vault-like passage. The speaker got impatient. "Slim!" he barked. "What in hell you doin' up there?"

Herbie caught the girl round the waist and lifted her up over the door where he had hidden before. She dropped noiselessly on the ground. As he followed, the man below began to mount. He called the unconscious Slim a number of unpleasant names, and seemed to speak as one who had had plenty of experience of Slim's amorous habits.

But when he looked inside the cell and saw what had happened to Slim he let out a shrill yelp of amazement. Seizing the unconscious Slim by the shoulders, he shook him violently.

"Where's the dame?" he bellowed. "Where she got to? Hey, wake up, you little squirt—wake up, Slim!"

But Slim wasn't interested. He had a fractured jaw and a mouthful of broken teeth. He moaned loudly and tilted once more. His companion bolted out into the corridor and plunged down the spiral stairs at breakneck speed. They could hear his shouts as he reached the passage below.

"G'mon!" snapped Herbie. "Let's go." He swung the girl over the door.

"You follow me!" she whispered urgently.

"But I got the door open down there!" Herbie pointed out as he screamed after her.

"They'll have the grounds searched, and we couldn't get far."

He looked down at her white face, and nodded. She waited quickly down the stairs, turned as though to go back into the main building, and then slipped beneath a low stone arch. Rusty hinges creaked as she tugged at a door in the recess. The girl leaned on the elbow of her feet on the flag told them that the hall was on.

Herbie flung on his torch. They were in a tiny windowless apartment. The floor was thick with dust. Against one of the walls lay a heavy iron-bound chest.

"There's a trap below that, but it's frightfully difficult to move," whispered the girl. "We mustn't make too much noise—the stairs run right up that wall." They could hear angry shouts, the pounding of feet, and the clattering of doors.

Herbie took a grip on the inside edge of the chest and heaved. It moved a few inch or so. Anxiously the girl watched him. Herbie spat into the dust, braced his bulky shoulders, and got down to it.

His face was streaming with sweat, and he felt as though he'd gone through ten rounds with a brace of Jack Dempsey before he got the chest clear of the wall.



ated as it, and there was trouble coming. Herbie Adams thrust the girl back out to be prepared to deal with the armed guard.

"What brings you here?" she whispered. "They said you'd gone this morning!"

Herbie grinned.

"Kinda tired 'em, huh?" He surveyed the handcuff and chain with professional interest. "This joint is full o' surprises, ain't it?"

He took her slender hand in his huge fist and picked at the cuff. Then both of them froze. From below came the faint sound of a man's voice in a nasal version of "South of the Border."

The girl's eyes were wide with fright. "They'll find you! Oh, what shall we do?"

"Oh back on the bed!" jerked Herbie. "an' stay quiet!"

He snatched the padlock on the door, reached his previous hiding-place in a couple of strides, and swung himself in just as the vocalist reached the foot

of the stairs. He sat on the bed and twisted her head round to face him.

"You got everything?" he told her, wet-mouthed. "I c'd go for a swell piece like you!"

She backed away against the wall. Her eyes flashed and her mouth curled with loathing.

"You—you beast!" she whispered.

"Get out and leave me alone!"

He started to reach out for her.

Using the wall as a leverage, she lashed out with one slim leg, caught him under the chin and sent him sprawling off the bed. He awoke obscenely.

"That'll be enough from you, cockle," said Herbie from the door. Like an owl, the man wriggled around, his hand straddling for his trouser-pocket. Herbie came down with bull-like relucy just as

"There was a sheet iron bar let into the wall a few inches from the floor.

"That was the trap," the girl explained. "I haven't been down there since we were kids. The tunnel goes up the hill and comes out near the lake. You have to crawl most of the way."

"Those Mikes know about it?"

"Sheeek her head, took hold of the bar and pulled. Slowly a slab of the stone wall revolved, creaking and groaning; dark, fustid air swept up at them.

Berlie forced his teeth on the spertire, disclosing a flight of stone steps disappearing down into the blackness. The girl wriggled through and shivered as the unpleasantly chill air struck through her thin clothes. Berlie stripped off his raincoat and wrapped it round her, then he squatted on the steps and took off his shoes. The girl pulled down a lever, and the wall closed again.

"Gonna be pretty tough gear' down there," said Berlie. "Mebbe if you wear my shoes—"

She wanted to refuse, but Berlie was adamant.

"The gear'me 'ud chew my ruddy ears off if I let you walk free that—look! them shoes."

The bottom of the tunnel was littered with rubbish, the low, curved sides were green with slime, rats' eyes blinked in the light of the torch. Berlie sniffed and was on the point of remarking that it was one helluva ruddy stink.

They had to duck their heads as they went upwards, groping at the stone sides to balance themselves; glumly Berlie picked his way over the stones, hopping from foot to foot and getting through considerable practice in the matter of vocal self-defence.

The girl explained that the west wing was the oldest part of the manor, and was, in fact, all that was left of the medieval Bunsford Priory. The tunnel they were in had probably been a private bolt-hole or exit for use when there was a local spot of better breeding.

"Yeah, I read about 'em in a book once," said Berlie lamely. "They was always takin' a poke at the Mikes next door. Musta been pretty fierce times."

"I wouldn't exactly term this a rest cure," murmured the girl, clamping along to Berlie's elbow.

Berlie chuckled cheerily.

"You just wait till we see the cur'ior—then things'll start poppin' from hell to breakfast—began' your pardon!"

"Granted, I'm sure," she told him. "And just who or what is the governor?"

Berlie told her enthusiastically, and at considerable length. And the way he put it convinced Miss Joan Marsh that the Red House wouldn't be troubled with Bonnie Glinkel & Co. much longer.

BONNIE GINKEL TAKES PRECAUTIONS.

THEY made an interesting trio when they met by the top end of the lake. Peter Morgan was directed to the skin from his quarter-mile swim back from the beach; Berlie had his trousers turned up to his hairy calves and had managed to collect a comprehensive coating of slime; while Joan Marsh was in a little better condition.

She tried to apologise for the reception she had given Morgan's offer of help the previous morning, but he cut her short and linked his arm in hers.

"Plenty of time to talk later on. Right now we'd better move. We're starting at the farm over the hill—Harrington's place. Think you can get that far, Miss Marsh?"

She nodded.

"Now Harrington was our name;

they're our tenants—almost the only ones we've got left now. It'll be all right."

With much hardly suppressed profanity Berlie followed them up over the downs. Looking back, Peter Morgan told him he looked like a spring lamb according to the clover. To which, Berlie's reply was unprintably blasphemous.

Joe Harrington and his wife were in bed. Morgan lost no time in reaching them. Sarah Harrington came down in a voluminous black dressing-gown and took charge of Miss Marsh, leading her off upstairs to a spare room. It was enough for her to know that Miss Joan was in need of help, and she asked no questions.

Joe Harrington, in his undershirt and trousers, surveyed the staff of Criminal Investigations with a mildly scornful eye.

"Don't reckon you got round to such fishin' secrets?"

"Absolutely right," agreed Peter Morgan heartily, revelling his chest. "It's a long, long story. We'll tell you about it in the morning. Pass over some of that beer, Berlie. We've got a heavy day ahead of us."

"Crums!" Tenderly Berlie caressed his feet. "I want to be on the pins again for a couple weeks, a swelp me!"

When they were up in their low-ceilinged bed-rooms Morgan listened with growing interest as Berlie gave a very sketchy of his part in the night's activities. He sat for long minutes, wrapped in a blanket, gazing out over the dark countryside and peering nervously at the hole of his left eye.

"We've been having quite an evening of it," he murmured. "Now I wonder just what it is that dear old Bonnie Glinkel is shipping us discreetly to that tramp—dope? Stains goods?"

"Weyman pop over an' ask him!" suggested Berlie sleepily. "An' sign! an'—"

"I hope we haven't scared them off," mused Peter Morgan as though to himself. "Right, now I can imagine the lads are doing some heavy thinking at the Red House."

They were. All available members of the gang were out combing the estate. Bonnie Glinkel and Ferdie Ambrosy sat waiting for the stricken Slim to tell them what had happened. But Slim, semi-conscious and coughing mouthfuls of blood, was uncommunicative.

"The girl couldn't have done that," said Ferdie. "Not unless she threw the bed at him. What if you make of it, Benner? Think we ought to get out?"

Glinkel's heavy face was damp with sweat.

"This had to happen now," he breathed. "Just when we were getting things nicely lined up. This door's heater probably made a play for the girl and she gave it to him—but how in hell did she get out of the handcuffs?"

Ferdie Ambrosy bemoaned on his real frog-mania.

"You tell me. She was all right when I saw her last. Maybe the place is haunted."

"That's not to funny!" snapped Benner, glaring at him.

Ferdie Ambrosy blinched up his creased trousers.

"Listen, Bonnie, the girl's got away somehow or other. All right, but I talked to her, and she doesn't know anything. All she knows is that we've got some sort of a haul on that kid brother of hers, but she hasn't any idea what we're doing. So where's the worry? She won't go to the cops, because that would drag dear Rodney in."

Bonnie Glinkel chewed nervously at the end of an unlit cigar.

"I wish I was as sure of that," he said thinly. "We don't want any damn cops nosing in here now. The girl couldn't have got far, the way she was chained up."

"How about Morgan? Suppose he had a hand in this? We haven't had word from Sam Harrington."

"They've probably gone back to Town. I told Sam to tell them wherever they were. Harrington knows what to expect if he falls down on this job." Bonnie Glinkel's tone was vicious.

Then, down in the hall, they heard the phone shrilling.

"That'll be Sam now," said Glinkel. "They'll have reached London by now."

Both of them went down to the lobby under the stairs. Glinkel took the call, and as he listened his face became tight and his voice rasped hoarsely.

"Hell! You'll have to stop him—wash, that's what I said. Tonight—do it yourself—and make it good!"

He replaced the receiver, and when he turned to Ambrosy his mouth was a thin, vicious line.

"That was Lopez. Rodney Marsh has been hitting 'em up and shooting his mouth off."

Ferdie whistled softly.

"Not so good, I was afraid of that young punk once he had a bit of cash in his pockets. What are you going to do about it?"

"What do you think?" snapped Glinkel. "Lopez is taking care of him. We'll pull out to-morrow night with Lopez. This location is all washed up, and it's time we were going. I'm going back to the hotel to clear things up that end, but I'll be back first thing in the morning. When the boys get back, have a couple of them patrol the place all night, and see that you've got the cellar ready to be flooded in case things break open."

"You just leave it to me," said Ferdie smoothly. "If the police come they won't find a thing."

"They'd better not!"

Ambrosy watched Bonnie Glinkel stride quickly across the hall to the back entrance. He was thinking it was a pity that the chief hadn't taken his advice about Rodney Marsh in the first place. Now it looked as if the whole set-up was finished, at least, as far as the Red House was concerned.

The entrance to the Cobstone Club in Green Street, in inconspicuous. You wouldn't notice it unless you knew it was there. There was just a plain door with a sliding pane through which prospective revellers were inspected.

At 2.30 a.m. the door opened and Rodney Marsh wrenched out into the street. His face was flushed, and his white tie had slipped under his left eye. On his arm hung a wilkewy old-bird, slithering drunkenly. By all the totems a good time was being had by all.

A black cabson did up to the kerb and stopped, and a cheerful voice hailed the pair.

"Hiya, Rod! Give you a lift?"

Rodney Marsh came across the pavement, stepping with tiny caution, and focused his bleared eyes.

"My pal," he announced gravely. "Good of Lopez." He placed one finger alongside his nose. "Storm word, of boy, of boy—govern our lady here."

"That's all right," said Lopez, flashing his white teeth and opening the rear door of the car. "I'll take you anywhere you want to go. No trouble at all."

"My pal," repeated Marsh. "Meet Poppy—first it's kid, Poppy—ganna take her Paris to-morrow and have a shake of a man."

The red-head stambled as she ducked into the car and sprawled on the seat, still uttering, Rodney Marsh followed.

Lopez got into low gear.

"You folks wants drinks," he said, "try the back pocket. Red, old man—it's pretty good brandy. Where is?"

Rodney Marsh found the flask, and offered it to the lady. She strook the tumbled hair out of her eyes. Her make-up had run streakily, and her eyes were half-closed.

"Just a bit drink," she mumbled, and sipped the flask. The car was moving faster now, and Lopez seemed to know where he was going. The streets were empty save for an occasional taxi.

Rodney Marsh's hand lolled against the swaying cushions. The flask dropped from his hand, spilling its pungent contents over his patterned trousers. The red-head was already out, her mouth agape; she was screaming. When the car swung the aid across Marsh's lap and lay there, face downwards.

The driver's smudged face was meaningless as he wound his way through the West End. He'd been on Rodney Marsh's tail all night, from one cove to another, watching, listening. Now he had his orders.

He drove through Richmond and Kingston, and turned off along the river by Walton Bridge. Switching off his lights, he bumped over the grass and pulled up by the edge of the water. It was very quiet and still. Not a light showed from the burgalows on the opposite side.

The doped brandy had done its work well, and Rodney Marsh was just a limp burden as Lopez jerked him out on to the grass and began stripping off his clothes. Poppy, the red-head, came next, and Lopez had little difficulty in ripping off her flimsy draperies. It was a pity, he reflected, as he bundled the clothes back into the car and covered them with a rug; she was a good-looking dame. Her sprawling body gleamed, slender and white against the dark grass. But she had heard too much of Marsh's drunken boasting of how much cash he could lay his hands on any time he pleased.

Muffling his gun in the folds of Marsh's jacket, Lopez shot the girl through the head. Her body twitched, and her white legs quivered spasmodically, and then went still. He shot Marsh through the heart.

The water swirled as the two bodies, suitably weighted, were dropped in Lopez watched the dark river for a moment, and then turned back to the car.

INTO THE TRAP.

JOAN MARSH came down next morning to breakfast dressed in an old frock of Sarah Harrington's that was much too bulky for her slender frame. She wore carpet slippers, and her face, though pale, brightened as Peter Morgan entered, followed inevitably by the grinning Herbie Adams.

"I didn't thank you last night," she began breathlessly, rising and holding out her hand. "I don't know what you must think of me, after the way I treated you at first—"

Peter Morgan smiled, his eyes crinkling as he looked down at her shiny black head.

"Let's have breakfast first," he suggested. "We've just taken a stroll up the hill, and as far as we can see the Red House is still inhabited. At least, there's

smoke coming from one of the chimneys. So we can conclude our dear friend Kenzie Glinski is still with us. There's no hurry."

She couldn't wait until the end of the meal to tell them what she knew, and as soon as Sarah Harrington had discreetly discovered urgent duties elsewhere, Peter Morgan pushed aside a man-size cup of excellent coffee and said:

"All right, now you can talk, Miss Marsh. What's Kenzie Glinski doing at your place?"

She gave him a level, steady glance.

"I don't know," she said simply. "That's the honest truth, Mr. Morgan. Red brought him down about six weeks ago and said he was going to stay with us. A few days afterwards the rest of them appeared and settled on us. Then Glinski moved to the hotel, but he was at the Red House most evenings with Red until pretty late."

She paused and fingered the rough tablecloth.

"What's Glinski got on your brother?" said Morgan softly.

The colour had flooded back into her smooth cheeks.

"Red—he's—he's awfully weak, Mr. Morgan. He was always short of money. The money doesn't say now; and he started gambling. I didn't know anything about it until I saw a letter from the bank about the overdraft—he'd spent every penny he had and had started borrowing. I asked him, and he said he was going to make it all right. It was hopeless—we're in debt right and left; even the house isn't ours any longer. This Glinski man really owns it. When I told him I refused to have his things about the place any more he just laughed at me and said if I didn't behave myself he'd see Rodney went to prison!"

Morgan's eyes had narrowed.

"And as you want out and tried to convince Glinski in your own way?"

She nodded. Her lips twitched, but she got a grip on herself, and went on:

"It was madness, but then I—I hardly knew what I was doing. I tried to reason with Rodney, to get him to go to the police, but he threatened to kill himself rather than do that. You see, he'd given Glinski a cheque for a gambling debt—over eight thousand pounds. It was—and the cheque wasn't any good. We haven't eight thousand pounds. And that wasn't all. Oh, it's a horrible mess! And now Red has run away and left me to face it on my own!"

Peter Morgan smiled.

"Not alone," he reminded her softly.

"We've taken a hand in the game. But what did Glinski's mob do at the house?"

"I simply don't know," she repeated wearily. "They've looked up the west wing and kept it to themselves. One night, just after they had arrived, a luge was come, and they unloaded some heavy packing-cases out of it; and as far as I could make out they took them down into the vaults. We only had three amounts left, and they had to go. I've been doing the housework myself—it was something to keep me busy, at any rate. And I wasn't anxious to have the village gossiping about our affairs. What do you think it all means, Mr. Morgan? I've worried myself sick about it."

Peter Morgan passed his lips reflectively.

"I followed Glinski last night and over-

heard him talking to the skipper of a tramp steamer some miles out beyond the bar." He mentioned a statement he intended to hand tonight. "Whatever it is, it's paying pretty high dividends, if they can afford to use a ship; and yet it can't

be bulky, or they couldn't get it out to the ship. I've some across Glinski before, and I know he's a crook, but what his particular line is at the moment, I don't know. Perhaps the answer lies in the vaults under the west wing."

He stood up.

"I don't think a day's rest will do you any harm, Miss Marsh. I want you to stay here and take it easy."

"I can hardly go out like this, can I?" Restfully she indicated the shapless frock. "But what are you going to do?"

He measured her slender figure with a judicious eye.

"What else should I make?"

She told him. He turned to Herbie with an impish grin.

"Dear that—in mind, Kenzie; you shall come and help me choose something pretty for the lady. Won't that be nice?"

"Wouldn't be the first time," said Herbie darkly. "Beggin' your pardon, lady."

They looked the Legends out of the shed and bumped slowly down the cart-track road.

"Where we go?" demanded Herbie.

"Kester, to start with," Morgan told him, "to buy some frocks and dresses. She's a nice girl."

"Pity she didn't bump that Herbie bloke—woulda saved us plenty trouble. Now look what we got on our hands!" Herbie raved indignantly. "Never seen such a cork-upped business—the don't know—no! you don't know. In the ruddy way! under the ruddy west wing!"

Peter Morgan whistled thoughtfully and offered no comment on this diatribe. He was busy with plans for the evening, and there was a wicked gleam of pleasurable anticipation in his eyes that portended some unwholesome for Kenzie Glinski & Co.

When they set out up the hill just after dark Joan Marsh wanted to come with them. She was wearing the frock and shoes that Peter Morgan had got for her in Kester.

"After all," she pointed out, "this is really my affair, Mr. Morgan. I guess—won't you let me come? I'm sure I could be useful. I know the place inside out."

He took her hands and patted them, smiling into her dark pleading eyes.

"I know just how you're feeling," he told her gently. "But, believe me, this is going to be no job for a girl. We're only going to make a sort of survey."

"Yeah, there's right," chimed in Herbie. "We ain't gonna do anything—much!"

"I—I don't know why you're both doing it," she began haltingly.

Morgan chuckled and gave her a mock salute.

"Try and keep us out of it! Secret wants and undercurrent passions are the very breath of life in our nostrils. Isn't that so, my darlings?"

"Yeah, so then 'em tough, lady," Herbie declared. "C'mon, go 'em."

When they reached the lake it was dark, and they could see nothing of the Red House down there through the belt of trees.

"How do you mean that?" demanded Herbie. "There's nobody is liable to be sitting up for us, after last night. We only got one chance!"

"We're going in the way you came out last night," Peter Morgan told him pleasantly. "What could be better? We

get under their defence and pop up in the midst of them. It ought to be fun.

"Who first? Curious, I gotta feel!" Morgan laughed softly.

"I hope you're right. We like 'em tough," he remarked.

Herbie snore. The top entrance to the tunnel was in a heap of mossy rubble by the edge of the lake. It was overgrown with brambles and ferns, and even though Herbie had used it only the previous night, it took them some ten minutes to locate it again.

Morgan pushed the bushes aside and leaved back the slab of rock. The powerful beam of his torch lit up the narrow aperture. He squeezed in. Herbie, ruminating something about his preference for a nice clean sewer, bent his head and lanky shoulders and followed him.

They were coated in slime and fish by the time they reached the foot of the steep stone stairs.

Morgan snapped off his torch and pulled out their one and only gun. He found the lever that opened the trap and cautiously eased the square of stone out into the room. It croaked noisily, and they waited long minutes.

Then Morgan went through into the windowless chamber.

"Lever B open," he whispered. "Remember—there are fourteen steps, and they're left-handed, just in case we lose in a hurry."

"We will," grunted Herbie. He carried a large gasmask and among it in anticipation.

Morgan pained the latch of the low, arched door and pulled it back, an inch at a time. Through the archedway the corridor was dark and silent as the tomb.

They crept along in the shadow of the south-beam wall and came abreast of the arch.

Without warning the corridor and the archway were flooded in a sudden harsh light.

"Don't move!" barked a metallic voice. "Get y'r hands up—and keep 'em up!"

Blinking against the hard glare of a powerful unshaded bulb just over his head, Peter Morgan slowly raised his hands. Then he began to grin. They'd walked into it good and proper this time.

Herbie was breathing heavily through his sprayed nostrils. He still had the gasmask in his upraised right hand.

Three men hovered about, two with fat automatics, and one cradling a tommy-gun.

"You boys are full of surprises," said Peter Morgan cheerfully.

"Yeah!" snarled the man with the tommy-gun. "An' we ain't even started yet!"

"Shut it, Shiner!" snapped Ferdie Ambrose. "Get round behind them. Drop that gasmask, you, and kick it over."

The gasmask clanked on the stone steps and clattered across. Herbie blanched under his breath and thrust out his chin.

"Easy," jerked Morgan out of the side of his mouth. "Perry of base."

Ambrose jammed his automatic into Morgan's stomach while searching him. He found the gun and stopped back, holding the two guns. "Take the gas down first," he ordered. "I'll watch this one."

Herbie was marched off, with a tommy-gun propped into the small of his back. Peter Morgan listened to the echo of their feet as they went down the corridor. A door clanged. He shifted his position over as slightly.

"No," Ferdie Ambrose wagged his two

guns warningly. "don't do that again, Jim Peterson."

Morgan chuckled sympathetically.

"You had, Really, old boy, you shouldn't wear that tie with chevron tweed. It simply isn't done."

"Shut up!" said Ambrose thinly.

Peter Morgan sighed.

"Rather limited in conversation, aren't you? Are you the head man here or only the office boy?"

"You'll find out pretty damn soon! Why you didn't give us credit for a little more intelligence," Ambrose sneered.

"Oh, but I expected this," Morgan assured him earnestly. "Really, I would have been most disappointed if you hadn't been here to welcome us."

A momentary flicker of doubt glowed in the other's eyes as he searched Peter Morgan's cheerful face. Then:

"That's a lie," he said. "We got you with your pants down. Don't tell me—you can't bluff yourself out of this one, Morgan."

The port with the tommy-gun returned and clag it into Morgan's side.

"Turn round, pal, an' walk nice an' careful," he intoned. "The chief's all ready to say hello."

Peter Morgan leaped away from the wall.

"Such hospitality overwhelms me," he murmured. "Bernie and I have so much to chat about."

"Shore right there, pal," said Shiner Quinn, prodding him on. "Only you ain't gotta do so much of it y'self. The Big Pella is all turned up about you, and he shore is liable to cut your ears off, pal."

"You stress the beyond words," said the boss of Universal Investigations, "you shore do, partner."

A NAVAL ENGAGEMENT.

IT was a long, low chamber supported by two squat pillars of masonry. They had reached it by another of those steep, spiral staircases in which the older parts of the Red House seemed to abound. Morgan's quick eye took in the two steel presses mounted on solid rubber blocks; on the far wall there was a complete rack of tools, engraver's tools, he noticed, and the whole of the room was bathed in a sharp white radiance from a number of arc-lights set up in the curved ceiling. There was a distinct tang of printer's ink and steel machinery.

Bernie Glinski was watching one of his men bending over the complicated levers of the press. He took no notice at all as Morgan was brought over.

Herbie Adams snarled against one of the pillars to which he was anchored by a stout rope. He was kicking his knuckles and near him stood a fat man in overalls carrying a pressening nose and assuring nobody. Peter Morgan's grin became broader. Herbie had evidently announced himself in no hesitant fashion.

"Well, well, well," said Morgan, leaning around with the utmost composure. "So this is the cozy little home from home! Very, very nice indeed!"

Bernie Glinski turned and faced him, removing his cigar. His eyes glittered.

"You stuck your neck out for me this time, Morgan. This is where I beat down on you."

"That'll be nice. What are you printing—Swear?"

Glinski scraped a match along the pillar and kept his eyes on Morgan as he lit his cigar. He exhaled a cloud of smoke into his prisoner's face.

"It ain't going to do you any good now," he said softly. "We're pulling out,

Morgan, and we're leaving you and this gag of yours right here. You won't do any talking. It's certain for you this time."

Peter Morgan waved the smoke away from his face with a grimace of distaste.

"The black who told you that weed gipped you, Bernie—it's terrible. You were saying something about me?"

Glinski laughed shortly and turned away.

"To him to the other pillar."

They had two long, jagged bits of wood, and into one of them, under Bernie Glinski's supervision, one of the men was sticking what looked like thick bundles of banknotes.

Peter Morgan squatted against the pillar and watched, with considerable interest, the minute Max March had spoken about the heavy packing-case that had been taken down into the vaults, to be used only at night. Peter Morgan had begun to get ideas. And what he was witnessing now confirmed them.

This explained the mysterious shipment Bernie Glinski had talked about. This was the reason why they had been so anxious to find out if Juan March knew what was going on in the vaults beneath the Red House.

Bernie Glinski strode over to him and smiled.

"I always heard you were smart, Morgan. I admit, quite frankly I got a nasty job when I heard you were staying in these parts. But I wouldn't have worried, you're just a pinhead like the rest of the chicks in this country. You didn't fool me for one minute—I know you'd come back through that tunnel tonight. This is the last piece of snatching you'll ever do."

"You're depressing me," complained Morgan. "Don't talk like that, Bernie. It isn't nice."

"Maybe you've got all the nerve they got, or maybe you've just a plain dumb fool," Glinski gazed down at him nastily, pulling at his cigar. "You got that snip out of here last night, didn't you?"

"My partner did," said Morgan placidly.

"He's very good at that sort of thing, isn't he?"

"He's very good at that sort of thing, isn't he?" said Morgan placidly.

"You talk too much," said Glinski evenly. "That was March's trouble, so I had to liquidate him—just the way I'm going to do you, too. For good. Harry up and get all that stuff out of here!" he barked at his subordinates.

Apart from the two presses, they had stripped the place, taking away the stuff in trays in loaded cases. Ferdie Ambrose had the jagged boxes, one under each arm. He passed on the way out.

"All set, Bernie. Any time you like now. I'll get the boys on board."

Bernie Glinski nodded curtly and chewed at his cigar. He walked over to the wall. A length of rusty chain hung from a staple set far up in the side. He pulled at it. The block of stone just above the staple moved slowly back, and a dirty trickle of water came splashing down the wall. Presently it increased in volume until a steady stream splashed down and began creeping over the slicked floor.

Being careful to keep his feet shoes dry, Bernie Glinski came back. He was smiling.

"Cutting it, Morgan? They had some cute ideas in the Middle Ages. You're in the punishment vault. There's enough water in a stone covey up there to flood this vault to the height of a man's chin—that's the way they made you talk in the

good old days. Unfortunately you've both falling down!"

Already the water had lapped up to the bases of the pillars, and Morgan and Herbie were sitting in it. Bernice Glinski had retreated to the steps.

"I'll have the light on!" He had to shout above the roar of the falling water. "I wouldn't want you to miss any of the thrill. Sorry I can't wait to see your heads go under, but it won't be long now!" He tossed his glowing cigar into the water, made them a soothing bow, and ran quickly up the steps.

Twisting his head, Peter Morgan could see Herbie's shoulders heave as he tugged at the rope that bound him. The water was icy-cold and filled with dust from the floor.

"Steady now, ain't it?" bawled Herbie. "I don't think that looks like us much. How's it comin', guv'nor?"

Peter Morgan grunted. His head was bowed on his chest. He had bent his knees and was trying to thrust his body into an upright position against the pillar. But the rope round his middle was too tight. He felt as if his stomach was being cut in two. And steadily, inexorably, the water was rising. He managed to wrench himself round so as to face Herbie, but they were some fifteen feet apart.

In between them, his head cocked to keep his whiskers dry, and with his tail trailing, a rat swam over to the steps and scurried up to safety.

White-high now—and still rising, rising. Green foam and dead wills circled about them. The air was misty with the spray from the cascade tumbling out of the wall. Morgan met Herbie's eye and grinned.

"I see you a week's pay, beautiful. Hecken I'm going to save that this time." "Like hell you are!" Herbie bent his bullet head and tugged till the purple veins stood out in his thick neck. But the rope was stout, and the water had lightened the knots. He sat up, wet-faced, and shook his head.

"No good, guv'nor. We're in for a dunnin'."

Peter Morgan stiffened and his mouth fell open. He could see a slender pair of legs crossed in silk stockings, and they were coming down the steps, slowly and hesitantly. The launch glittered on the vain mirrors of a shot-gun, and Joan Marsh's white face peered uncertainly down at them.

Peter Morgan whooped gladly. The girl dropped the gun and came down the last few steps in a frantic rush. She could see nothing now but their heads and shoulders. Perhaps she screamed. At least she opened her mouth, but the surging water drowned all other sounds.

"A knife! Get a knife!" Morgan bellowed. "Hurry!"

She seemed to understand, for she turned and fled up the steps again.

Herbie grinned delightedly at his chief. "Gonna collect that pay after all, guv'nor. How about a little beer, lady?"

Morgan ducked his head, took in a mouthful of water and squirted it at Herbie. The girl appeared with a large breadknife in her hand. She dropped thigh-deep into the water and waded over to them. Frantically she waved at Peter Morgan's boat, and he rose, dripping, to his feet and took the knife.

"You're an angel," he told her, "straight from Paradise."

"My feet are wet," she replied. "What are those things over there?"

"Presents, for printing stink," said Morgan, smiling Herbie free.

"Blast!"

"Counterfeit. Bad banknote."

They splashed over to the steps. Peter Morgan helped her up, and picked up the shotgun.

"That's Jed Harrington's," she explained. "I borrowed it. I couldn't stay behind—I just had to come."

"You're killing me!" Peter Morgan put a wet arm round her shoulders and squeaked. "What's the time?"

She looked at her watch.

"Eleven-fifteen. Why? You aren't going to go on with this—not after what you—"

"Lady," he told her crisply, "we're just getting under way. We've got a little account to settle."

"You ruddy-well betcha life!" chirped in Herbie emphatically, squeaking along in their wake.

The only car left in the garage was Rodney Marsh's Vauxhall.

"I'm coming with you," declared the girl with determination, "just in case you get yourselves into trouble."

Morgan chuckled as he backed fiercely and sent the car scurrying round the back of the house and down the drive.

At the gate he turned right-handed and gave the Vauxhall all she'd take. They banged and swayed over the road, the headlights picking out the twisting hedges that seemed to leap and beckon towards them.

Two miles along Morgan did a beautifully controlled skid into a side road towards the sea. He kept his feet down while the springs squeaked protestingly.

After a while the road petered out and became a mere footpath over the downs to the sea. The Vauxhall sizzled on, right up to the cliff's edge, where Morgan braked viciously and flung himself out before the wheel had stopped sizzling.

A narrow path led down to the tiny cove below. A hoarse voice shouted:

"That you, Ratty?"

"Coming!" bawled Peter Morgan, and plunged down the slope. Her skirt fluttering, Joan Marsh followed.

Half a dozen hunky figures in raincoats were sitting down on the beach.

"Good for you, chaps. Let's go!" Morgan caught the girl by the arm and dragged her over the sand to where a rowing-boat lay drawn up.

With much cheerful protest the boat was thrust out into the shallows, and the six men clambered aboard. The way they handled the heavy oars as though they were feather-light sent the boat scurrying out in excellent style.

"Thought you were going to let us down, you blighter," said straws, bending to it with a will.

"We were detained," said Morgan simply. "Everything O.K.?"

"You bet!" Straws chuckled deep in his chest. "What d'you think—we wanted a Bren gun, old boy! Shorty snaked it out of us."

"Short fiddle—I hope he won't get court-martialled," Morgan turned to the girl.

"Allow me to present Captain 'Groggy' Williams, Miss Marsh. He and the other toughs have been living in camp on the taxpayers' money for the past week. So I thought I'd make use of them. Excuse their language—you know what rowing men are."

Especially the rowing-boat came alongside a long slender grey-hull, and the rowers piled aboard, leaving one disconsolate corporal to take the boat back.

Engines throated, and the speedboat shot away, leaving a wide wake of creamy foam.

Joan Marsh stood beside Morgan by the stranded cabin.

One of the Territorials had clambered forward and lay spread-eagled on the cabin. A bright beam of light suddenly streamed from the prow of the racing craft and swept over the sea, sweeping in wide, steady arcs. The Bren gun was assembled and hoisted into position alongside the searchlight.

"Better get into the cabin," said Morgan to the girl. "They'll make a bit of a fuss at first, and there'll be snags flying."

They had cleared for action, and were coming up that stern of Glinski's skow launch, overhauling it yard by yard. Glinski was giving his craft all it would take. His face glistered pallidly in the glare of the searchlight.

The Bren gun put in a sharp burst, splintering the woodwork of the cabin, and began tracing pretty patterns along the launch's upper works. Only a sporadic fire was returned. Most of the mob lay now lay flat under cover.

Peter Ambrose popped up to take a pot at the searchlight, and Herbie, who had been sentenced for too long, flung up the double-barrelled shotgun and let Herbie have both barrels. The rain of pellets rattled against the side of the launch. Freddie Ambrose threw up his hands and begged back. They could hear his shrill scream of agony.

Captain "Groggy" Williams was carefully sweeping the launch's tiny port-holes, while the rank and file called out the score and begged him to let them finish it off, just as a personal favour.

Morgan edged the speedboat closer in. "Cover the man at the wheel, Groggy!" he bawled. "We'll leave 'em to us."

Bernice Glinski's face appeared round from the wheelhouse, and his hands were above his head. He had switched his engine off, and in the sudden quiet his voice was heard hoarsely calling:

"I quit—don't shoot!"

The Territorials cheered ironically. The two boats drilled together. As the landing party landed aboard the launch Glinski's men came out of the cabin with arms raised.

"It 'em up, boys!" jerked Peter Morgan, and ducked into the cabin. He came back with two black tin boxes.

"Counterfeit notes—couple of hundred thousand of 'em. Fivers and tenners—you've read about the fake Bank of England notes that have been flooding the Continent during the last few months. Friend Bernice was the source. Don't that so, Bernice?"

Glinski swore volubly.

Joan Marsh was very quiet on the return journey, and Peter Morgan knew why. She was wondering what was going to happen to Rodney, her brother.

"I'm sorry," he said gently. "You'll have to know it sooner or later—Rodney is dead. Glinski had it done last night."

She lifted her hands and covered her face, weeping. His arm was steady and reassuring about her shoulders. He could feel the sob that convulsed her slender frame. But presently, when she looked up again, her eyes were dry, though her lips trembled.

"Thank you," she whispered. "I—I suppose it's better that way. I was afraid that would happen. I'd be all right now."

THE END.

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HERCULES, Esq.:

Because Two Rich Men were Bored
he was Offered a Gamble with
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START NOW THIS BRIL-
LIANT AND UNUSUAL
STORY OF MYSTERY AND
MILLIONS

By **GWYN
EVANS**

Chapter 1.

FIGHT THAT MAN!

"SAY, doc, I reckon you've plumb
cray?"

Phineas T. Lee paused in the act of
lighting a Cigars Lopez cigar and
regarded his guest with a half-irresolute
smile, then turned for confirmation to the
other occupant of the Royal Suite of the
Hotel Splendide.

"What do you say, Jarvis?" he de-
manded. "It sounds all punk to me."

Sir John Jarvis, whose pink, benevolent
face was known to a million homes
throughout the country, sipped his port
delicately, then speculated the single
word:

"Fragorosa!"

"You said it, Jarvis!" exclaimed
Phineas T. Lee, the American Canning
King, agreeing for once with his godson
ring, the millionaire manufacturer of
Jarvis's jams and jellies.

Dr. Armand Leroir shrugged his
shoulders and laughed softly.

"On the contrary, my dear fellow," he
drawled, "my suggestion is not only sen-
sible and practical, but it offers you the
only chance of relief from the intolerable
burden with which you are both afflicted
since Mr. Maxwell brought about the
amalgamation."

"Damn Maxwell!" snarled the Ameri-
can. "If I hadn't listened to that guy
I'd have smashed Jarvis when he tried to
corner—"

"You'd have what?" snapped Sir John,
staring to his feet.

He was a rotund little man, whose
benevolent features, while an excellent
advertising adjunct on posters and bottle
labels, were merely a mask for a ruthless,

jealous nature that swept aside all
obstacles in his lust for commercial power.
Phineas T. Lee, president of the Calypso
Canning Corporation, Inc., and a chain
of subsidiary companies, had for twenty
years been the bitterest enemy of John
Jarvis. Both were self-made men, and
were immoderately proud of the fact.

In Europe, Jarvis's name had become
synonymous with jam. His rubicund,
smiling face and silver hair ornamented
every spot of preserves turned out from
the great factory. Every time Phineas T.
Lee saw it, however, he wanted to smash
it. It was the exact antithesis of his own
gaunt, ruthless, and rather haggard
features.

When John Jarvis opened his first fac-
tory in America, Phineas T. Lee, who was
a specialist, bought a two-pound jar of
Jarvis's raspberry jam and solemnly
smashed it with his mallet. He then
bought up half a dozen of Jarvis's casks
and started operations in England.

The conflict developed on Homeric lines.
Not only raw hides, and pineapple
cranks alone was the war waged. As the
business grew it embraced shipping, rail-
roads, and real estate.

Jarvis received his knighthood for war-
time services with the commissioner on
the same day that Phineas pulled off a
ten-million dollar deal by buying up the
Crystal Citing Company.

Long ago the simple amassing of money
had become a secondary matter in the



The penniless man little
guessed that out of that
imposing house would
come a million pounds!

lines of the rival millionaires. Each was
obsessed with the idea of smashing the
other. Neither Lee nor Jarvis wanted nor
expected quarter, nor cared how many
smaller men were engaged in the struggle.

Neither side triumphed for long; their
forces and their fortunes were evenly
matched, and but for the intervention of
that conciliatory genius, Mr. Elmer Max-
well, the Lee v. Jarvis struggle on the
world's markets would have become as
chaotic a deadlock as Dickens's *Juridical v.*
Juridical in Chancery.

How he managed it is one of the most
romantic stories in the tangled history of
international finance. That America did
not suggest Elmer Maxwell as a solution
of post-war problems, instead of the
League of Nations, is one of Europe's
tragedies.

In financial circles the news of the
amalgamation came as a bombshell, but
the executives of England and America
continued to buy Jarvis's jams and
Calypso jams, entirely unaware that a
historic struggle had ended and that the
manufacturers of these popular comestibles
had become of one fell swoop the
richest and most venerable merchants
in the world.

Six months had elapsed since the
merger—six months during which both
Phineas and Jarvis had met each other
for the first time in the flesh. The en-
counter merely increased their mutual
hatred, but both were compelled to bottle

up their emotions in view of the smallness.

One thing alone they shared in common—an almost homoidal build of Maxwell.

His was the face of most peace-makers, and his unhappy lot was one that the stunted psychologist, Dr. Arnold Lenoir, took pains to avoid.

It was the post-prandial hour of the Hotel Vendôme. Both Sir John Jarvis and Dr. Lenoir were the guests of the American, but of the three who sat down to the capriciously cooked meal Lenoir was the only one who was thoroughly enjoying himself.

He was a dapper little man, slightly theatrical in appearance, with his feet imperial heeled and moustache. He sat back in his chair, stretched out a slim, blue-veined hand to the fire, and covertly studied his host.

Tall and graying, with a shock of iron-gray hair, Phineas T. Lee lit his pipe and fixed with his hawk to the mantelpiece.

"I tell you it's a crazy idea, doc," he repeated. "There ain't no one else big enough to fight. If that say Maxwell hadn't landed in when he did I'd have got Jarvis here where I wanted him."

Sir John Jarvis raised a little. His face reddened with rage.

"See here, you big Yankee boaster!" he began. "This Californian fruit deal of mine would have put you and your precious syndicate in Queen Street. I tell you, Lee, that Maxwell stepping in when he did saved you from bankruptcy."

"Why, you damned little fat four-farther—" broke in Phineas Lee wrathfully.

"Gentlemen—please!" interrupted Lenoir soothingly. "I implore you not to descend to personalities. I came here to tender my advice, not to invent to a vulgar brawl."

"But see here, doc—"

"He's ahead of you don't understand, Lenoir."

The two millionaires spoke simultaneously; but Dr. Lenoir merely shrugged his shoulders and smiled.

"Sit down, both of you, while I digress your malady and suggest a remedy," he remarked blandly.

Sir John Jarvis bounced back into his chair and glowered at the American. Inadvertently, Lenoir smoothed the silk lapels of his dinner-jacket and addressed them both.

"You are both suffering from a disease that attacks either the very poor or the very rich, my dear sirs," he drawled. "It is a disease that makes one man put his hand in a pocket and another elope with a barmaid. It is known as 'herdian rias.'"

Phineas T. Lee coughed uneasily.

"Say, Tim as scored on a bill, doc. You know that. I don't know about Jarvis here, but—"

"The disease is not physical, but mental," continued Lenoir. "You are both bored to the point of extinction. You are suffering from the tedium of life. You are—and pardon my frankness—both too old and set in your ways to take up a hobby, or I should have recommended golf or yachting."

"Golf!" roared the American. "A fool game. I tried it for three months once. He did not finish the summer as he finished the last and most satisfactory use to which he had put his machine."

"I'm not keen on games," echoed Jarvis stiffly.

"Exactly," said Lenoir. "You both asked me for advice, and I am giving it to you. You want to fight. Both of you spent half your lives fighting the world

and the rest of the time fighting each other. You are essentially combative—and the present situation doesn't agree with you."

"It ain't an amiable," growled Phineas. "It's a damned peace treaty. Maxwell saw to that."

"H'm!" said Lenoir thoughtfully. "And you really think that you are so immensely powerful financially that it is not worth your while entering the arena again?"

"You said it, doc," replied the American. "Between us, Jarvis and I are unbeatable."

Lenoir helped himself to a cigar.

"The old story—Alexander fighting for fresh worlds to conquer," he murmured. "You have money, power, position, and are admired, my friends. Psychologically, your case is a simple one to diagnose, yet a difficult and expensive one to cure."

"Oh, cut out the psychology, Lenoir," said Sir John testily. "The point is that neither Lee here nor myself, by the terms of the merger, can sever connection. Between us we control nearly a hundred million sterling—and there's no one big enough to fight."

"No one big enough to fight, eh?" echoed Lenoir, with a peculiar little smile.

"Tell me, my friends, how much you would pay if I pointed out an easy way strong that it would need all your wit, all your operative instincts, perhaps all your raw fortune, to overthrow?"

"Oh, punt!" repeated Phineas T. Lee contemptuously. "There ain't a guy big enough. I know. The only thing I can trust Jarvis here is that he's a sturdy bloke and a good scrapper. I like him a heap better as an enemy than a damned partner."

"The sentiments are reciprocated, I assure you," said Sir John stiffly. "Who is this unknown Coloman, Lenoir?" he asked. Dr. Arnold Lenoir rose to his feet, a queer smile gleam in his dark eyes.

"You fellows have spent your lives amassing wealth and knowing Romance," he said quietly. "This is not a homely, my dear sirs. Both Money and Romance, though ephemeral and unsatisfying, are desirable. It is obvious that you will both die of boredom unless you have an opportunity of using the combative instincts with which you are endowed; but, for a triling sum, I can prescribe a remedy."

"A remedy?" echoed Phineas. "What's the big idea?"

"For answer Lenoir crossed over to the window and drew back the curtains.

Down below, through the balcony, shone the yellow lights of the Thames Embankment.

The two millionaires followed Lenoir's contracted finger with their eyes.

"See! There is the enemy!" he said quietly, and pointed out the figure of a man huddled on an Embankment seat beneath the shadow of the obelisk.

"What on earth are you talking about?" demanded Sir John irritably.

"That homeless bloke," echoed Phineas Lee with a snarl of contempt.

"Exactly!" said Lenoir. "Fight that man!"

"Say, what are you handing us, doc?" demanded the American. "Is this Socialist or phunk fool-drover?"

"Neither, my friends," said Lenoir with a satiric little smile. "He also is suffering from the same disease as you, and may possibly supply the antidote."

"I'm dashed if I can understand you, Lenoir," said Sir John testily. "Is it some

sort of stupid class warfare you are handing us?"

Lenoir held up his hand protestingly.

"You quite misunderstood me," he asserted. "There is nothing political in the matter at all. I may quite frankly and simply fight that man—or another in the same position. You will find, probably, that you have both entered on the hardest battle of your careers."

"Tell me, my friends," he said, "have you ever heard of Hercules?"

"Of course," snapped Sir John. "That is the trade mark of one of our late—Hercules Marks."

Lenoir chuckled.

"Doubtless," he said. "I was referring, however, to the mythical Greek hero."

"Say, what in Hades has this Hercules guy gotta do with the conversation, anyway?" broke in Phineas T. Lee angrily.

"Simply that the gentleman on the seat is Hercules—the man you've got to fight," drawled Lenoir. "It will cost you a million pounds if you lose. I fancy your manhood will be saved."

"What the devil are you talking about, Lenoir?" snapped Sir John. "Heads, I hate to suggest it, but you sound quite drunk to me."

"On the contrary, my friends, I was never more serious and sober in my life. You are not the only wealthy patients of mine who are suffering from boredom, and now that I have the millionaires to diagnose for, I think the time is ripe to inaugurate a long-cherished project of mine."

"And that is?" demanded Sir John.

"Oh, doc, and I will tell you about Hercules, doc, and that remarkable organization, the Secret Six," said Dr. Lenoir.

AT CLARIPATHA'S HEADQUARTERS.

BILL KELLAWAY emerged from the editorial office of the "Early Bulletin," and the janitor with which he had entered dropped from him like a cloak.

Dust had fallen, and a chill wind blew up from the river.

Bill Kellaway shivered. Staffiff's parting words, with their stony-eyed candour, still echoed: "Sorry, old man. Absolutely no vacancy at the moment. Leave your address." Staffiff was the new editor of the "Bulletin"—a good fellow but—

He turned down Villiers Street towards the Embankment. The lights glowed in the gloom like a necklace of amber beads. A tap-booted dimly as it clung up the darkening river. The stark obelisk of Cleopatra's Needle loomed inconspicuously through the mist.

He sat down on a seat and frantically hid his shoulders.

The Sphinx gazed with its haughty, meaningless smile at the turpiter, and Kellaway amused himself by transferring the more readily recognizable hieroglyphs of the obelisk in the light of a convenient lamp.

An overwhelming yearning for Egypt came over him. His heart ached with

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memories of a cloistered room, whispering prayers, and the queer, breath-soothing glow of the cool banners and glowing colours of the Orient.

For ten years Bill Kellaway had lived in Cairo—ever since the time when, a youngster of eighteen, he had been de-robbed from the R.A.P. after a bad crash at Helwan.

After that an enterprising Mitros had started an English newspaper, the "Cairo Mail," and Kellaway bought a share in the rag with his granuity.

Under Kellaway's editorship the paper had tripled its circulation, and then came the gradual departure of the British troops, followed by the withdrawal of English officials from Egypt when the country was granted her independence. The "Cairo Mail" dwindled and died, and Bill found himself—with dozens of other Englishmen who had spent half their lives in Egypt—politely re-considered by the newly created Sovereign State.

There was nothing for it but to return to England, and Kellaway, full of optimism, determined to tackle Fleet Street as a free-lance. He had a bright, satiric pen and a gift of pungent epigrams; but he found that there were scores of other journalists, older and more experienced with the same gifts.

He had been some six months here, and beyond a few guesses for stray articles in the newspapers and a solitary short story in the "Unique Magazine," Kellaway had earned nothing.

That morning he had given up his room—a shabby back bedroom in Bloomsbury—and now the reluctantly inadequate coils of suspense stood between him and starvation.

He poised it between finger and thumb

and contemplated: "Needs a dosehouse and no supper, tail, St. Martin's Crypt and a message-roll."

With a flick he sent it spinning; but the coin slipped from his fingers and rolled under the seat. He stared softly under his breath and groped for it.

Red of face he straightened—then started sobbing.

A figure, garbed in a dingy white shawl draped with a red mark, stood in the shadow of the chair.

In the light of an adjacent lamp, Kellaway glimpsed a swarthy face and dark eyes regarding him gravely from beneath a scarlet turban.

It was odd, yet appropriate, Kellaway thought, to meet an Egyptian fellow against such a background.

The man's robe was none too clean, and his turban looked as if it needed ironing. Kellaway felt a queer sympathy for the forlorn, shabby-looking man, and greeted him civilly in Arabic:

"Gimme me, sir," replied the other, and Kellaway noticed he carried a small wooden tray to which was pinned a printed card: "You'd like to buy a mascot? Very lucky charms—thousands of years old. The crocodile god Sobek!"

He spoke in a curiously singsong voice with a pronounced Cockney accent.

Kellaway stared and glanced sharply at the man's face.

"Why, you're English!" he said with a chuckle as he noticed the brown smears of grease-paint on the neckband of the man's shawl.

The other grinned sheepishly. "Yes, sir. This 'ere's just a kind of advertisement, sir. But we a look at this mascot. Ques, it's supposed to bring luck. 'Ere's the 'ole 'istory of it on the envelope. A tanner the lot, sir."

Kellaway chuckled.

The humor of the situation appealed to him.

"Let's have a look at the holly thing," he answered, and took the envelope.

Within was a small metal charm about two inches long. It was wrought in the shape of the crocodile-headed god Sobek, with a small clip attached—a crude, Italian piece of work.

"This is about as Egyptian as you are, my friend," said Kellaway. "What's the idea?"

He turned over the badly printed card, and read a brief statement in Teutonic English to the effect that the original leader of the statue of the great God Sobek was a British officer in the Sudan. The mascot was a small reproduction of the statue, which had, according to the venerable character, "to the English officer great good luck, and riches brought."

"So much did he prosper," continued the narrative, "that he determined to share in the same way himself. For thousands of years in Egypt the mighty god Sobek good luck to the unfortunate has brought."

"Right. It's a sporting offer, Abd!," laughed Kellaway. "I hope jolly old Sobek does his stuff soon. This a my last tanner."

The other smiled tolerantly. He was evidently sceptical.

"Thank you, sir. I 'ope it brings yer luck. Can't say as it's brought me much," he added, then glanced anxiously at the hovering sky.

There was a sudden rattle of thunder, and a keen wind whipped the leaden Thames.

"Looks like a storm brewing, sir. I'll 'ave to be getting back and take this mascot off my face," he added.

"Half a minute!" began Kellaway. "Don't think me inquisitive, but where'd you get these things? Do you sell many of these?"

"Fraid, I works the pale mostly. I've had a rotten day, though—tramped all over the City and only sold four of the blessed things."

He glanced half-expectantly at Kellaway, who had his hands in his empty pockets. Bill smiled.

"Sorry. No cash do, Abd! It's the honest truth. That was my last sixpence in the world."

The hawk's manner altered subtly, and the "sir" vanished from his mode of address.

"Is that straight, mate?" he inquired. "Down on yer luck?"

Kellaway nodded, and the other's voice dropped confidentially.

"You looks the right sort, gov'ness," he remarked. "There ain't much in this lot—but it's better'n nothing. I'm starting a job at Covent Garden to-morrow—and I'll be 'anding in three tops to Ben Odd-bery to-night."

"It's raining this night—threepence in the shilling for every bloomer's land sold, and I lets you 'ave the costume free. If you'd like to take it on, nobody'd know you with yer d'ar blanket. Tell an Oinger Mullins over yere. You'll find it place in Southall Street, Shoeditch."

"That's a damned sporting of you, Oinger," broke in Bill. "Thanks for the tip, old man."

"Aw, that's awright, mate. We all strikes bad patches," said Oinger Mullins. He coughed awkwardly.

"About this 'ere tanner, sir," he began. "You won't be offended if—"

"Keep it, Oinger. It's no good to me," laughed Bill. "Besides, I want to give Sobek a chance."

He glanced abstractedly at the hideous little metal charm as it lay in the palm of his hand.

"I'll be aching, kiddie. Good-night and good luck!" said Mullins.

"Cheers!" Kellaway replied; then laughed, a queer little discomfit laugh, as he stared after the inconspicuously suited figure.

"Decent little chap!" murmured Kellaway. "And who what?"

He glanced ruefully at the hideous mascot peeping in his palm, then thrust it into his pocket. "Poof!" he apostrophized himself bitterly. "Might 'ave bought a packet of gaspers at least with the money."

Bill gazed in the linings of his coat, in the last hope that he had overlooked a cigarette, and he gave a sigh of satisfaction as he ascertained a stub.

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26
LASH GAME
LASH GAME

Spelling Bee is a fast and exciting game for boys and girls of all ages. It is a card game which involves spelling and strategy. It is a great way to improve spelling skills and have fun at the same time. The game is suitable for 2-4 players and takes about 15-20 minutes to play.

A sudden jagged lightning flash split the milky clouds, followed by a deafening thunderclap.

He shivered and rubbed his numbed fingers. What had the man Madira said? Ben Goldberg, Shovelitch. Some Jew trader, perhaps, exploiting down-and-outs with his tawdry wares.

Kellaway was a horn settler, with a firm belief in "what's around the corner," and, though he accused the powers of the hideous-headed deity, he was grateful for the chance encounter with Madira. To-morrow—who knew?—a stick of grease-paint and a trayful of tin gods might lead to some queer episode in the greater adventure of living.

"Goah!" said he, as he tightened his belt and started in the last pungent whiff of his dogged fight to ease the hunger pang that was almost a physical pain. "I'd sell my soul for—"

He broke off suddenly as he felt the light touch of a hand on his sleeve.

"Would you like a million pounds, my friend?" asked a soft, urbane voice at his side.

Bill Kellaway swung round with an exclamation of surprise. Facing him was a tall man in evening dress. His appearance was slightly theatrical, due perhaps to his silk-lined open cloak and neatly trimmed beard. His face was pale, but extraordinarily alert and sensitive, and his dark eyes, beneath slanting jet-black eyebrows, held a queer, satanic gleam.

"What the devil—" began Kellaway in astonishment.

A vivid sheet of lightning for an instant bathed the Embarrasment in its blue, unearthly glare. The stranger's face shone grey and paled in its all-revealing radiance. His slanting eyebrows and dark beard were horribly suggestive, somehow.

"Exactly!" said the stranger. "I've been told I look like him."

Then the thunder boomed and large drops of rain began to fall.

"What did you say?" demanded Kellaway in a high-pitched voice.

"I asked you whether you would like a million pounds," said the stranger calmly. "Needless to say, there are conditions."

Kellaway laughed unashamedly.

"Of course, your identity," he answered. "The market price of souls seems to have gone up. I must say it's a handsome offer for a rather shag-bellied specimen."

The stranger laughed.

"You'll do, my friend." And then, more seriously: "This is scarcely the place to discuss an important transaction."

He took Kellaway's arm gently, and for the first time Kellaway noticed that a luminous luminous had drawn up unconsciously by the curb, in the shadow of the Sphinx.

"Come, my friend. A good dinner and a bottle of wine are an excellent prelude to a million-pound transaction. I seem to have arrived in time."

The ground seemed to give slightly under Bill's feet. This fantastic stranger—the warring Kola-Scope—a million pounds!

He felt he would wake up presently. In the meantime—

"Lead on, Monsieur Mystère," said Kellaway.

THE BARGAIN.

"Do you smoke, my friend?"

"Thanks—no—Mr—"

Bill stammered helplessly.

"My name is Lenoir—Dr. Armand Lenoir," copied the other. "Virginia this side—Turkish that," he added. Kellaway helped himself to a Virginia, and the doctor courteously switched on the silver electric lighter.

"Ah, that's better," he remarked, as Kellaway relaxed his long legs and blew out a wreath of smoke. "Apart from a natural surprise and mystification, you have reacted extraordinarily well, my friend. Your name is—"

Lenoir's slanting eyebrows lifted interrogatively.

"Kellaway—Bill Kellaway. Is this a joke, or a bet, or what, doctor? You must admit it's a bit out of the ordinary to be offered a million pounds by a complete stranger who looks like—"

Kellaway broke off in embarrassment. The other chuckled softly.

"The devil himself. Go on, say it. The demoniac played up extraordinarily well, I assure."

Kellaway felt uncomfortable beneath the keen scrutiny of those dark, gleaming eyes.

"Well you certainly startled me, doctor. You see, I—I happen to be dead broke, and in the circumstances—"

"Exactly!" broke in Lenoir. "That is precisely why I approached you, my dear fellow. You would be astonished at the curious reactions I have encountered to a perfectly simple question like this one I put to you. It's an anomalous and a spiritual one, I'm afraid." Lenoir shook his head solemnly. "You have heard of a man who, for a wager, offered to sell genuine sovereignty—in the days of

sovereignty—at midnight a time on London Bridge, and not a soul would buy there."

"Yes," said Kellaway. "But you don't surely mean that—that your offer is on a par with that?"

Dr. Lenoir nodded.

"My question is perfectly genuine," he answered. "Would you like a million pounds—and if so, are you prepared to fulfil the necessary conditions?"

Kellaway glanced sharply at his companion's pale, insipid face. It was as expressionless as the bronze Sphinx itself.

"Of course I could do with a million quid—who couldn't?" he said. "The point is, who's going to give it me, and what have I got to do to get it?"

"Ah!" said Lenoir. "You will be enlightened later on that point. Meanwhile, if you contemplate pulling yourself up to a provisional candidate, I must beg of you to answer to one or two simple questions. You will notice that the kinds of this car are specially made to shut out the view. That is because I wish our destination to remain unknown."

"Will you give me your word of honour not to attempt to find out where we are going, nor in any way try to discover the identity of the people you are about to meet?"

Kellaway hesitated.

The doctor's calm, matter-of-fact tone was in singular contrast to his fantastic proposal. Who on earth was this queer, satanic-looking stranger who had appeared with a two-thousand guinea car and an invitation to dinner?

Was Lenoir a crack or a fanatic, or both?

Bill thrust his hand into his trouser's pocket. His fingers encountered a little metal object. In a flash he remembered Zerk—'the crocodile god'!

The little streak of superstition, relic of primitive man's slavish, woe in life as Bill Kellaway. For a moment or two a nameless fear of the occult gripped him. It was queer—shaded queer!

"Think carefully, my friend," broke in Dr. Lenoir quietly. "Take your time. It is not often a man is offered a million pounds."

"Look here," began Kellaway suddenly.

"In this case of those Caliph Hassan al-Rasheed matters? I'm a journalist by profession—Hassan held me!—but that story's worn a little thin and threadbare since the days of the Arabian Nights and O. Henry."

Dr. Lenoir smiled, revealing gleaming

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white teeth against the dark luxuriance of his beard and moustache.

"You like O. Henry, eh, my friend?" queried Lenoir. "That man knew life. He had suffered. You, too, have not found it easy to live by writing?"

Bill Kellaway shrugged.

"Have I to criticize Tommy Tucker and sing for my supper? By the way, what conceivable chance that single has," he added with a grin. "I'm afraid you won't find my reactions very interesting, doctor. In the best class of the Baghdad story, the millionaire invites the beggar to dinner to tell him a story. I'm afraid I haven't one to tell—otherwise I'd have sold it to a magazine months ago."

"You have a sense of humour, my friend," said Lenoir. "A priceless asset; but, to be frank with you, this is not one of those caliph stunts, as you express it. On the contrary, it is a strictly business-like proposition. I offer you a million pounds on certain conditions. If you accept I will enlighten you further, later."

Dr. Lenoir laughed softly.

"If you refuse, my dear fellow, then the episode is closed. You might slight here, and I wish you a very pleasant evening."

"Right-to, doc?" said Kellaway, suddenly leaning forward. "I accept unreservedly. I'm a candidate for that million pounds from now on."

"Excellent!"

Dr. Lenoir patted his knee approvingly. "I don't think you'll regret your decision. I'm afraid you'll consider it absurdly melodramatic, Mr. Kellaway, but you'll have to be blindsided very shortly. We are tearing our destination."

(Don't miss the amazing developments in next week's instalment of this new story.)

MEET Mr. BUDD

To My Readers

MR. BUDD knows his colors. There is no possible doubt about that. It fully explains his position as the most successful detective-inspector at Scotland Yard.

When Mr. Budd is given a job to do, he is also given a free hand to tackle it his own way. If he were refused a free hand it wouldn't make any difference. He would still go his own way and come back with the mystery solved and the crook in the can.

He is fat, cheery, shrewd, with a worldly wisdom that has never let him down. He is known and feared throughout crookdom, but no one has ever said that Mr. Budd ever played a dirty trick on anyone.

It is his brain, quick, keen and far-seeing, that gives crooks the willies. When they know that Mr. Budd is on the trail, they make tracks for some other place while they have the chance.

That is Mr. Budd who tackled the strange case of the bald man murdered in Park Lane—the strangest case Mr. Budd ever had to tackle. For one thing, the victim's bowler hat was missing, and completely bald men do not, as a rule, wander around hatless. In any case, the policeman on the beat was able to testify that the man did have a hat, but it vanished.

It was some time afterwards that Mr. Budd found it—in the House of the Goat—that weird, tumble-down house on an island out in the wilds of the Norfolk Broads, where the dust of ages lay on the floor, disturbed only by footmarks—cloven footmarks!

Not that Mr. Budd believed in ghosts or fairies. But he knew crime when he ran up against it, and in that house were killers and crooks, thieves, a young fellow who acted like a crook and wasn't, a girl who acted innocent and might have been. And Mr. Budd took his life in his hand and, with the renowned Sergeant Hawk by his side, plunged into a host of weird adventures to solve the mystery of the bald man of Park Lane.

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The Editor

Letters to The Editor should be addressed to: "The Thriller" Office, The Publishing House, Farringham Street, London, E.C.4.

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WHAT HAPPENED LAST WEEK

AUTHORITY Pointer Trane, investigating Jerome A. Trebble, the millionaire of the yacht, Harmsen, listened to the spot, where the Quark he was desired to follow. The ship, Harmsen, owned by his sailing was to have left, but the Shadow's men were aboard. They staged a mutiny which, with the spirit of great endeavor, forced the crew to flee. Pointer Trane consulted with them. (See next page.)

CRIME'S EVIDENCE.

IT was three o'clock in the afternoon of the same day. In a cabin aboard the yacht Harmsen, a mustachioed man sat talking to a naval commander. The man with the mustache wasn't highly pleased, but he tried to suppress his feelings.

He was Vic Marguette of the Secret Service, and he had been called in to handle a case that should have produced results long hours ago. Instead, everyone had awaited his arrival, although they held evidence in hand.

"These papers"—Marguette gestured toward the drawer on the left—"belong to Jerome Trebble. They have his signature, and it looks genuine."

"There's a man on board," resigned the naval commander, "who isn't so sure that it was Trebble who got away last night."

"You mean that stevedore Hartley," returned Marguette. "I've talked to him, but we can't take his testimony. The fellow's half blind! As for the others, they won't admit that the man wasn't Trebble."

Turning to the drawer on the right, Marguette methodically lifted out a stack of papers and spread them on the desk.

"These were here before that light began," he declared. "That point is certain. There's no way in which they could have been brought aboard afterwards. You agree with me?"

"Absolutely! The shooting was all over when we arrived, but we can't have searched this yacht."

"These show us," Vic said, "that Hugh Barvale was behind all these works at sea. He's collected his insurance money, which makes it bad enough. But from all this evidence, the thing may go a lot deeper. However, there's something else we must consider. That is how these papers got here."

"It's obvious that they were in the possession of Jerome Trebble. He had money, nothing much to do, and he spent his time at sea. There's every reason why Trebble should have put some in-

vestigator on the job, just to find out what lay behind all these works."

"Suppose that Barvale found out about Trebble. His only course would have been to put men aboard this yacht and start some trouble. That's exactly what happened. And what would Trebble have done? He'd have cleared out. Which is what he did."

Vic Marguette ended his summary decisively. It carried weight, and convinced the man who listened. Like Vic, the commander agreed that Hartley's testimony, honest though it might be, had been disproved by the facts.

Vic Marguette spent the next half hour in transmitting wireless messages ashore. He was hoping that they wouldn't be too late; that there would still be time to prevent Barvale's flight from London.

The odds, Marguette believed, were very much in the law's favor. From all appearances, Barvale would try to bluff matters through.

In fact, Barvale would very probably believe that all the documents aboard the Harmsen had been destroyed. The longer that he remained untraced and unobserved, the more confidence would be become. That probability pleased Marguette. It explained the care with which he sent his messages.

Hugh Barvale was to be closely watched by C.I.D. men, but under no circumstances was he to gain the slightest inkling that he was under observation. All that, Vic decided, would lead to a complete surprise for Barvale, particularly if something else turned out the way that Marguette wanted it.

Collecting all the papers from the desk, he packed them in a folder. Going on deck, Marguette boarded a small boat that took him to the salvage ship Harbuck, which was less than a quarter of a mile away.

The salvage crew had sent divers down to the Quark, but there had been difficulties resulting the wakened freighter's leak. The explosion had wrecked the ship badly, blocking the hatchways. That was something that Pointer Trane had not foreseen, and which would have made trouble for his own outfit had they taken charge of operations.

Vic Marguette, however, was not thinking about Pointer Trane. He hadn't even connected the big shot's name with the chain of crime. The one person who occupied Vic's mind was Hugh Barvale. He was the owner of the strong-box that soon would be reclaimed.

There were signals from the divers; then more delay, until finally the word was given that all was clear. Big winches worked. Huge cranes labored with the massive weight, tightening as the burden reached the water's surface.

Slowly, a bulky object was slung over the side. Settling with a resounding thump upon the deck, the reclaimed strong-box stood in view. Straight from the drop, that object had an electric effect upon the men who saw it.

They remembered the strike that the strong-box had caused; the lives that had been lost in efforts both to lose and reclaim it. There were plenty of gasps as they—men brought from the naval vessel—all fell were ready with their guns, as if expecting orders to spring from anywhere and make another foray.

Sensitive eyes looked upward to an autogyro that was circling overhead. To all appearances, that plane was merely bringing curious observers; but there was a remote chance that it might contain cannon, ready to drop a bomb upon the salvagers.

What to one guessed was that the lone pilot of that gyro was the personage whose work had actually led to the reclaiming of the strong-box.

The Shadow was on hand should his efforts again be needed at this crucial time.

Eager hands grabbed for the chain that dived the strong-box. They were anxious to smash the padlocks, to blast the box open and actually bring to light the gold and silver. No one expected interference, for with Government men aboard it seemed the proper time for such work.

Intervention came, however, from the very man whose should have been most anxious at viewing the wealth.

Vic Marguette gave an order so sharp that it literally brushed at hands away. Turning about, Vic picked out a man close by. The fellow was Rufus Pell, once the third officer of the ill-fated Quark. Pell had been assigned to duty with the salvage crew.

"Can you identify that strong-box?" questioned Vic. "Would you swear that it was the same one that was shipped aboard the Quark?"

Pell studied the faded letters that spelled the name of Barvale & Co. He examined the chain with meticulous care, clanked the big padlocks. After a look at the combination dial, he turned to Marguette and said:

"It is the same strong-box."

There were others who suggested Pell's identification of the box, but most of them were none counted than the junior third officer of the Quark. Something had occurred to Pell; it was linked with the recollection of the time when the strong-box had been brought aboard—something he had forgotten because of other worries.

The next question asked by Marguette was one that Pell evaded.

"How much would you say that box weighed?" asked Vic. "It seems to me those crates swing it on the deck very easily. Too bad we haven't got scales on board, but we'll attend to the weighing later. I'll make a bet, though, that the thing weighs less than four tons."

"Less than three!"

Marguette was startled by Pell's statement, because of the assurance it carried. Vic's eyes sped sudden suspicion a moment later. Then Pell began to explain the reason for the statement. He told Vic of the weakened chain back at the pier in Southampton; how he would have changed it if the men who had brought it had not objected.

Vic realized that Peff's story could be corroborated by many witnesses, and reasoned, therefore, that the man was telling the exact truth. Peff's valet, Elmer, showed him the clock. At the time of the murder, said Elmer, the clock was at the time shown and stood him in good stead. Vic Marquette was pleased, knowing that he had found the very man he needed to clinch the case.

He ordered the strong-box to be put aboard the naval sloop exactly as it stood. The latter drove alongside the sloop, stop and the transfer was completed. Vic went aboard the cutter and took Peff with him.

All the while the wireless advogator was hovering above the scene. A blotted light beam showed it was practically stationary in the air. It had settled less than a hundred feet above the Hercules, and the sharp eyes of the pilot had been busy watching all that happened around the sloop-boat.

As the naval sloop headed northward, the advogator followed. Soon it passed the ship and was lost far ahead in the dim distance. It would be dark when the sloop reached Southampton; long after the advogator had arrived there.

Soaring above the ocean, Lamont Cranston set the great controls and considered matters which intruded Vic Marquette.

He could analyze all Vic's purpose. He knew exactly what they would produce. Vic was gaining for Hugh Barvale, trying to assure the man's conscience, only to damn him.

That same was aiding Cranston; but his plans went farther. All that Marquette was sure would apply to Barvale would also influence Pointer. Trance, Crane's evidence was coming home. It was to prove a greater bossman than either Barvale or Pointer could realize.

STOLEN PROFITS.

EVENING had settled in London when a large car pulled up in front of the house where Hugh Barvale lived. The driver of this car, who appeared like a chauffeur, but his attire didn't offer his class. He had all the marks of a tough.

However, the driver didn't close enough to any light for his face to be noticed by certain watchers who were on the ground. Alighting, the man hastened most close to the car as he opened the rear door.

The man who stepped out was very precariously dressed. He had an important air as he conferred with his case to dismiss the car. He adjusted his borrowed spectacles as he turned to look at Barvale's mansion.

When the car pulled away, watchers opposite could see the man quite plainly.

He answered the description that they had of Jerome Treble. In fact, he was playing the part of Treble very well, for he had practiced it a long while.

The man from the big car was Pointer Traffic.

Traffic rang the bell at Barvale's door, was admitted to the mansion, immediately, seen across the way went into motion. They were Yard boys, posted here to see who called on Barvale. One of them answered a nearby bell and put in a phone call to a certain telephone. He learned that a scavenger had just arrived there. It didn't take him very long to report to Vic Marquette.

Within fifteen minutes a taxi came screeching up to Barvale's door. Marquette spring from it, motioned across the street. A pair of detectives came up to him when he was for entry at Barvale's.

The servant who admitted Vic began to say that Mr. Barvale couldn't be disturbed. Marquette brushed the fellow aside and headed for a door at the rear of the first floor. From the light beneath that door, Vic had a hunch that it was the entrance to Barvale's study.

It was very black near that door, and for a moment Vic hesitated, showing his hand to his gun-pocket, just the place for a hunch, thought Vic; and the possibility seemed necessary to mind.

Vic Marquette remembered a certain passage who had often worked with the law. That man was the Shadow; his hand had certainly been evident in recent thrives against men of crime.

Could it be that the Shadow was here ahead of Vic Marquette?

That darkness near the door was made to order for the strange fighter who guffed himself in black. Marquette spoke in a low, tense voice, as though addressing some friend in the gloom. There was no response.

Someone, the blackness didn't look as thick as it had. In a sense, it had receded along the passage. Marquette drew closer, still staring, but he saw nothing more. Then his attention was captured by voices that came from within Barvale's study.

"I tell you all this means nothing!" The hoarsest tone belonged to Hugh Barvale. "You are saying that the law can hold me responsible for crime. Bah! All that has been thrashed over long ago!"

"You have collected a few thousands in insurance money," returned a whining voice that Marquette identified with Jerome Treble. "That is sufficient to incriminate you."

"If so," rumbled Barvale, "why have you come here to tell me?"

"Because, Mr. Barvale," began Trance,

persistent with his tone of Treble, "this is something that I have to settle."

"The whole broke off," Marquette didn't give the words, although he had supplied it himself. Pressing closer to the door Marquette had joggled in. Hearing the sound Trance stepped the presence of a listener.

"Something that I have to settle!" repeated Trance more emphatically. His voice tremed a note of accusation. "Last night there was a fight aboard my yacht, Marquette. Obviously, someone jangled with my crew, tried to kill the loyal men who served me."

"I occupied with his life. Since there was every reason why you should suppose me dead, I decided that it would be better to show here, to confront you with the proof of crime that you engineered."

"What crime?" demanded Barvale. "And where is the proof?"

"I have certain documents—"

"Let me see them!"

"I have left them elsewhere"—Trance's faded voice was a rattling one—"far the law to find."

There was a door from Barvale, the things of concerning furniture. Vic Marquette pushed at the knob, found the door unlocked. He shouldered into the study, to find the two men in a furious tangle.

Marquette ended that with a commanding challenge that he lacked with a drawn gun. Barvale's fingers slipped loosely from Trance's neck. Robbing his throat, Pointer resumed the manner of Jerome Treble.

"Thank you," he said politely to Marquette. "Your arrival was most opportune!"

Hugh Barvale seemed to think the same when Marquette showed his warrant. "Arrest this impostor!" he roared, motioning towards Pointer. "He claims to be Jerome Treble, but he is nothing but a cheap crook trying to blackmail me!"

"A most ridiculous charge!" declared Pointer, his tone caustic. "Mr. Barvale might just as well claim that I belonged to his criminal organization!"

There was a lightning of Barvale's face, then the speaker calmed himself. Pointing his arms he faced Marquette and the other detectives who had come into the study.

"Put your questions," said Barvale. "I can answer them."

"It'd be better than that," snapped Vic. "Head tilted, he could hear the rattle of a motor in front of the house. "Come out into the hall. I think your front door will be wide enough for what I want."

(Don't miss the astounding climax of this story in next week's pulpoff installment.)

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