

Dilemma  
of the  
Dead Lady

Cornell Woolrich

## \* A Distributed Proofreaders Canada eBook \*

This eBook is made available at no cost and with very few restrictions. These restrictions apply only if (1) you make a change in the eBook (other than alteration for different display devices), or (2) you are making commercial use of the eBook. If either of these conditions applies, please check with a <https://www.fadedpage.com> administrator before proceeding. Thousands more FREE eBooks are available at <https://www.fadedpage.com>.

This work is in the Canadian public domain, but may be under copyright in some countries. If you live outside Canada, check your country's copyright laws. **If the book is under copyright in your country, do not download or redistribute this file.**

*Title:* Dilemma of the Dead Lady

*Date of first publication:* 1936

*Author:* Cornell George Hopley-Woolrich (as Cornell Woolrich) (1903-1968)

*Date first posted:* Aug. 21, 2019

*Date last updated:* Aug. 21, 2019

Faded Page eBook #20190850

This eBook was produced by: Al Haines

[Transcriber's Note: A Contents has been added for reader convenience.]

[Source: Detective Fiction Weekly, July 4, 1936]

# Dilemma *of the* Dead Lady

A Complete Novelette by

Cornell Woolrich

## CONTENTS

- I. [The Kill](#)
- II. [All Aboard!](#)
- III. [Surprise](#)
- IV. [Jockeying for Peace](#)
- V. [Checkmate](#)
- VI. [Hare-and-Hounds](#)

## VII. [The Furies Laugh](#)

*The Instant Babe Sherman Became Desperate, He Began to Make Mistakes—Just Two Mistakes, but Either Could Cost His Life!*

### CHAPTER I

#### The Kill

It was already getting light out, but the peculiar milky-white Paris street-lights were still on outside Babe Sherman's hotel-window. He had the room-light on, too, such as it was, and was busy packing at a mile-a-minute rate. The boat-ticket was in an envelope on the bureau. All the bureau-drawers were hanging out, and his big wardrobe trunk was yawning wide open in the middle of the room. He kept moving back and forth between it and the bureau with a sort of catlike tread, transferring things.

He was a good-looking devil, if you cared for his type of good looks—and women usually did. Then later on, they always found out how wrong they'd been. They were only a sideline with him, anyway; they were apt to get tangled around a guy's feet, trip him up when he least expected it. Like this little—what was her name now? He actually couldn't

remember it for a minute, and didn't try to; he wouldn't be using it any more now, anyway. She'd come in handy, though—or rather her life's savings had—right after he'd been cleaned at the Longchamps track. And then holding down a good job like she did with one of the biggest jewelry firms on the Rue de la Paix had been damned convenient for his purposes. He smiled when he thought of the long, slow build-up it had taken—calling for her there twice a day, taking her out to meals, playing Sir Galahad. Boy, he'd had to work hard for his loot this time, but it was worth it! He unwrapped the little tissue paper package in his breast-pocket, held the string of pearls up to the light, and looked at them. Matched, every one of them—and with a diamond clasp. They'd bring plenty in New York! He knew just the right fence, too.

The guff he'd had to hand her, though, when she first got around to pointing out new articles in the display cases, each time one was added to the stock! "I'd rather look at you, honey." Not seeming to take any interest, not even glancing down. Until finally, when things were ripe enough to suit him: "Nice pearls, those. Hold 'em up to your neck a minute, let's see how they look on you."

"Oh, I'm not allow' to take them out! I am only suppose' to handle the briquets, gold cigarette cases—" But she would have done anything he asked her to by that time. With a quick glance at the back of M'sieu Proprietor, who was right in the room with them, she was holding them at her throat for a stolen moment.

"I'll fasten the catch for you—turn around, look at the glass."

"No, no, please—" They fell to the floor, somehow. He picked them up and handed them back to her; they were standing at the end of the long case, he on his side, she on her side. And when they went back onto the velvet tray inside the case, the switch had already been made. As easy as that!

He was all dressed, even had his hat on the back of his skull, but he'd left his shoes off, had been going around in his stocking-feet, hence the catlike tread. Nor was this because he intended beating this cheesy side-street hotel out of his bill, although that wouldn't have been anything new to his experience either. He could possibly have gotten away with it at that—there was only what they called a "concierge" on duty below until seven, and at that he was always asleep. But for once in his life he'd paid up. He wasn't taking any chances of getting stopped at the station. He wanted to get clear of this damn' burk and clear of this damn' country without a hitch. He had a good reason, \$75,000 worth of pearls. When they said it in francs it sounded like a telephone number. Besides, he didn't like the looks of their jails here; you could smell them blocks away. One more thing: you didn't just step on the boat like in New York. It took five hours on the boat-train getting to it, and a wire to Cherbourg to hold you and send you back could make it in twenty minutes. So it was better to part friends with everyone. Not that the management of a third-class joint like this would send a wire to Cherbourg, but they would go to the police, and if the switch of the pearls happened to come to light at about the same time....

He sat down on the edge of the bed and picked up his right shoe. He put the pearls down for a minute, draped across his thigh, fumbled under the mattress and took out a tiny

screwdriver. He went to work on the three little screws that fastened his heel. A minute later it was loose in his hand. It was hollow, had a steel rim on the end of it to keep it from wearing down. He coiled the pearls up, packed them in. There was no customs inspection at this end, and before he tackled the Feds at the other side, he'd think up something better. This would do for now.

It was just when he had the heel fitted in place again, but not screwed on, that the knock on the door came. He got white as a sheet for a minute, sat there without breathing. Then he remembered that he'd left word downstairs last night that he was making the boat-train; it was probably the porter for his wardrobe trunk. He got his windpipe going again, called out in his half-baked French "Too soon, gimme another ten minutes!"

The knocking hadn't quit from the time it began, without getting louder it kept getting faster and faster all the time. The answer froze him when it came through the door: "Let me in, let me in, Bébé, it's me!"

He knew who "me" was, all right! He began to swear viciously but soundlessly. He'd already answered like a fool, she knew he was there! If he'd only kept his trap shut, she might have gone away. But if he didn't let her in now, she'd probably rouse the whole hotel! He didn't want any publicity if he could help it. She could make it tough for him, even without knowing about the pearls. After all, she had turned over her savings to him. Her knocking was a frantic machine gun tattoo



by now, and getting louder all the time. Maybe he could stall her off for an hour or two, get rid of her long enough to make the station, feed her some taffy or other...

He hid the screwdriver again, stuck his feet into his shoes without lacing them, shuffled over to the door and unlocked it. Then he tried to stand in the opening so that she couldn't see past him into the room.

She seemed half-hysterical, there were tears standing in her eyes. "Bebé, I waited for you there last night, what happen'? Why you do these to me, what I have done?"

"What d'ya mean by coming here at this hour?" he hissed viciously at her. "Didn't I tell you never to come here!"

"Nobody see me, the concierge was asleep, I walk all the way up the stairs—" She broke off suddenly. "You are all dress', at these hour? You, who never get up until late! The hat even—"

"I just got in," he tried to bluff her, looking up and down the passageway. The motion was his undoing; in that instant she had peered inside across his shoulder, possibly on the lookout for some other girl. She saw the trunk standing there open in the middle of the room.

He clapped his hand to her mouth in the nick of time, stifling her scream. Then pulled her roughly in after him and locked the door.

He let go of her then. "Now, there's nothing to get excited about," he said soothingly. "I'm just going on a little business

trip to, er—" He snapped his fingers helplessly, couldn't think of any French names. "I'll be back day after tomorrow—"

But she wasn't listening, was at the bureau before he could stop her, pawing the boat-ticket. He snatched it from her, but the damage had already been done. "But you are going to New York! This ticket is for one! You said never a word—" Anyone but a heel like Babe Sherman would have been wrung by the misery in her voice. "I thought that you and I, we—"

He was getting sick of this. "What a crust!" he snarled. "Get hep to yourself! I should marry you! Why, we don't even talk the same lingo!"

She reeled as though an invisible blow had struck her, pulled herself together again. She had changed now. Her eyes were blazing. "My money!" she cried hoarsely. "Every sou I had in the world I turned over to you! My *dot*, my marriage dowry, that was suppose' to be! No, no, you are not going to do these to me! You do not leave here until you have give it back—" She darted at the locked door. "I tell my story to the gendarmes —"

He reared after her, stumbled over the rug but caught her in time, flung her backward away from the door. The key came out of the keyhole, dropped to the floor, he kicked it sideways out of her reach. "No, you don't!" he panted.

Something was holding her rigid, though his hands were no longer on her. He followed the direction of her dilated eyes, down toward the floor. His loosened heel had come off just now. She was staring, not at that, but at the lustrous string of

pearls that spilled out of it like a tiny snake, their diamond catch twinkling like an eye.

Again she pounced, and again he forestalled her, whipped them up out of her reach. But as he did so, they straightened out and she got a better look at them than she would have had they stayed coiled in a mass. "It is number twenty nine, from the store!" she gasped. "The one I showed you! Oh, *mon Dieu*, when they find out, they will blame me! They will send me to St. Lazare—"

He had never yet killed anyone, didn't intend to even now. But death was already in the room with the two of them. She could have still saved herself, probably, by using her head, subsiding, pretending to fall in with his plans for the time being. That way she might have gotten out of there alive. But it would have been super-human; no one in her position would have had the self-control to do it. She was only a very frightened French girl after all. They were both at a white-heat of fear and self-preservation; she lost her head completely, did the one thing that was calculated to doom her. She flung herself for the last time at the door, panic-stricken, with a hoarse cry for help. And he, equally panic-stricken, and more concerned about silencing her before she roused the house than even about keeping her in the room with him, took the shortest way of muffling her voice. The inaccurate way, the deadly way. He flung the long loop of pearls over her head from behind like a lasso, foreshortened them into a choking noose, dragged her stumblingly backward. They were strung on fine platinum wire, almost unbreakable. She turned and turned, three time over, like a dislodged ten-pin, whipping the thing inextricably around her throat, came up against him, coughing,

clawing at herself, eyes rolling. Too late he let go, there wasn't any slack left, the pearls were like gleaming white nail-heads driven into her flesh.

He clawed now, too, trying to free her as he saw her face begin to mottle. There wasn't room for a finger-hold; to pluck at one loop only tightened the other two under it. Suddenly she dropped vertically, like a plummet, between his tumbling hands, twitched spasmodically for an instant at his feet, then lay there still, face black now, eyes horrible protuberances. Dead. Strangled by a thing of beauty, a thing meant to give pleasure.

## CHAPTER II

### **All Aboard!**

Babe Sherman was a realist, also known as a heel. He saw from where he was that she was gone, without even bending over her. No face could turn that color and ever be alive again. No eyes could swell in their sockets like that and ever see again. He didn't even bend down over her, to feel for her heart; didn't say a word, didn't make a sound. The thought in his mind was: "Now I've done it. Added murder to all the rest. It was about the only thing missing!"

His first move was to the door. He stood there listening. Their scuffle hadn't taken long; these old Paris dumps had

thick-stone walls. Her last cry at the door, before he'd corralled her, had been a hoarse, low-pitched one, not a shrill woman's scream. There wasn't a sound outside. Then he went to the window, peered through the mangy curtains first from one side, then the other. He was low enough—third story—and the light had been on, but the shutters were all tightly closed on the third floor of the building across the way, every last one of them. He carefully fitted his own together; in France they come inside the vertical windows.

He went back to her, and he walked all around her. This time the thought was, appropriately enough: "How is it I've never done it before now? Lucky, I guess." He wasn't as cool as he looked, by any means, but he wasn't as frightened as a decent man would have been, either; there'd been too many things in his life before this, the edge had been taken off long ago. He had no conscience.

He stooped over her for the first time, but only to fumble some more with the necklace. He saw that it would have to stay; opening the catch was no good, only a wire clipper could have severed it and he had none. He spoke aloud for the first time since he'd been "alone" in the room. "Y'wanted 'em back," he said gruffly, "well, y'got 'em!" A defense-mechanism, to show himself how unfrightened he was. And then, supreme irony, her given name came back to him at last, for the first time since she'd put in an appearance, "Manon," he added grudgingly. The final insult!

He straightened up, flew at the door like an arrow almost before the second knocking had begun, to make sure that it was still locked. This time it *was* the porter, sealing him up in there,

trapping him! "M'sieu, the baggages."

"Wait! One little minute! Go downstairs again, then come back—"

But he wouldn't go away. "M'sieu hasn't much time. The boat-train leaves in fifteen minutes. They didn't tell me until just now. It takes nearly that long to the sta—"

"Go back, go back, I tell you!"

"Then m'sieu does not want to make his train—"

But he had to, it meant the guillotine if he stayed here even another twenty-four hours! He couldn't keep her in the damned place with him forever; he couldn't smuggle her out; he couldn't even blow and leave her behind! In ten minutes after he was gone they'd find her in the room, and a wire could get to Cherbourg four-and-a-half hours before his train!

He broke for just a minute. He groaned, went around in circles in there, like a trapped beast. Then he snapped right out of it again. The answer was so obvious! His only safety lay in taking her with him, dead or not! The concierge had been asleep, hadn't seen her come in. Let her employer or her landlord turn her name over to the Missing Persons Bureau—or whatever they called it here—a week or ten days from now. She'd be at the bottom of the deep Atlantic long before that. The phony pearls in the showcase would give them their explanation. And she had no close relatives here in Paris. She'd already told him that. The trunk, of course, had been staring him in the face the whole time.

He put his ear to the keyhole, could hear the guy breathing there on the other side of the door, waiting! He went at the trunk, pitched out all the things he'd been stuffing in it when she interrupted him. Like all wardrobes, one side was entirely open, for suits to be hung in; the other was a network of small compartments and drawers, for shoes, shirts, etc. It wasn't a particularly well-made trunk; he'd bought it second-hand. He cleared the drawers out, ripped the thin lathe partitions out of the way bodily. The hell with the noise, it was no crime partly to destroy your own trunk. Both sides were open now, four-square; just the metal shell remained.

He dragged her over, sat her up in the middle of it, folded her legs up against her out of the way, and pushed the two upright halves closed upon her. She vanished, there was no resistance; no impediment, plenty of room. Too much, maybe. He opened it again, packed all his shirts and suits tightly around her, and the splintered partitions and the flattened-out drawers. There wasn't a thing left out, not a thing left behind, not a nail even. Strangest of biers, for a little fool that hadn't known her men well enough!

Then, he closed it a second time, locked it, tilted it this way and that. You couldn't tell. He scanned his boat-ticket, copied the stateroom number onto the baggage label the steamship company had given him. 42-A. And the label read: NEEDED IN STATEROOM. It couldn't go into the hold, of course. Discovery would be inevitable in a day or two at most. He moistened it, slapped it against the side of the trunk.

He gave a last look around. There wasn't a drop of blood, nothing to give him away. The last thing he saw before he let the porter in was the hollow heel that had betrayed him to her lying there. He picked it up and slipped it in his pocket, flat.

He opened the door and jerked his thumb. The blue-bloused porter straightened up boredly. "*Allons!*" Babe said. "This goes right in the taxi with me, understand?"

The man tested it, spit on his hands, grabbed it. "He'll soak you—an extra half-fare."

"I'm paying," Babe answered. He sat down on the edge of the bed and finished lacing his shoes. The porter bounced the trunk on its edges out of the room and down the passageway. Babe caught up with him at the end of it. He wasn't going to stay very far away, from it from now on. He was sweating a little under his hat-band; otherwise, he was okay. She hadn't meant any thing to him any way, and he'd done so many lousy things before now...

He'd never trusted that birdcage French elevator from the beginning, and when he saw Jacques getting ready to tilt the trunk onto it, he had a bad half-minute. The stairs wouldn't be any too good for it, either; it was a case of six of one, half a dozen of the other. "Will it hold?" he asked.

"Sure, if we don't get on with it." It wobbled like jelly, though, under it. Babe wiped his forehead with one finger. "Never dropped yet," the porter added.

"It only has to once," thought Babe. He deliberately crossed his middle and index fingers and kept them that way, slowly



spiraling around the lethargic apparatus down the stair-well.

Jacques closed the nutty-looking little wicket gate, reached over it to punch the bottom button, and then came after him. They'd gone half a flight, before anything happened. Then there was a sort of groan, a shudder, and the thing belatedly started down after them.

It seemed to Babe like they'd already been waiting half an hour, when it finally showed up down below. He'd been in and out and had a taxi sputtering at the door. The concierge was hanging around, and by looking at him, Babe, could tell Manon had spoken the truth. He had been asleep until now, hadn't seen her go up.

The porter lurched the trunk ahead of him down the hall, out onto the Rue l'Ecluse, and then a big row started right in. One of those big French rows that had always amused Sherman until now. It wasn't funny this time.

The driver didn't mind taking it, but he wanted it tied on in back, on top, or even at the side, with ropes. The porter, speaking for Babe, insisted that it go inside the body of the cab. It couldn't go in front because it would have blocked his gears.

Sherman swore like a maniac. "Two fares!" he hollered. "Damn it, I'll never make the North Station—" A baker and a scissors-grinder had joined in, taking opposite sides, and a gendarme was slouching up from the corner to find out what it was about. Before they got through, they were liable to, at that...

He finally got it in for two and a half fares; it just about made the side door, taking the paint off it plentifully. The gendarme changed his mind and turned back to his post at the crossing. Sherman got in with it, squeezed around it onto the seat, and banged the door. He slipped the porter a five-franc note. "Bon voyage!" the concierge yelled after him.

"Right back at ya!" he gritted. He took a deep breath that seemed to come up from his shoes, almost. "Hurdle number one," he thought. "Another at the station, another at Cherbourg—and I'm in the clear!"

The one at the Gare du Nord was worse than the one before. This time it was a case of baggage car versus the compartment he was to occupy. It wasn't that he was afraid to trust it to the baggage car, so much—five hours wouldn't be very dangerous—it was that he was afraid if he let it go now, it would go right into the hold of the ship without his being able to stop it, and that was where the risk lay. He couldn't get rid of her at sea once they put her in the hold.

The time element made this second hurdle bad, too; it had narrowed down to within a minute or two of train time. He couldn't buy the whole compartment, like he had the extra taxi fare, because there was already somebody else in it, one of these bulldog-type Yanks who believed in standing up for his rights. The driver had made the Gare like only a Paris driver can make a destination, on two wheels, and "All aboard!" had already been shouted up and down the long platform. The station-master had one eye on his watch and one on his whistle. Once he tooted that the thing would be off like a shot—the boat-trains are the fastest things in Europe—and

Sherman would be left there stranded, without further funds to get him out and with a death penalty crime and a "hot" pearly necklace on his hands...

## CHAPTER III

### Surprise

He kept running back and forth between his compartment and the stalled baggage hand-truck up front, sweating like a mule, waving his arms—the conductor on one side of him, the baggage master on the other.

"Put it in the car aisle, outside my door," he pleaded. "Stand it up in the vestibule for me, can't you do that?"

"Against the regulations." And then ominously, "Why is this trunk any different from all the others? Why does m'sieu insist on keeping it with him?"

"Because I lost one once that way," was all Babe could think of.

The whistle piped shrilly, doors slammed, the thing started to move. The baggagemaster dropped out. "Too late! It will have to be sent after you now!" He turned and ran back to his post.

Sherman took out his wallet, almost emptied it of napkin-size banknotes—what was left of Manon's savings—about forty dollars in our money. His luck was he'd left that much unchanged yesterday, at the Express. "Don't do this to me, Jacques! Don't make it tough for me! It'll miss my boat if I don't get it on this train with me!" His voice was hoarse, cracked by now. The wheels were slowly gathering speed, his own car was coming up, toward them. They'd been up nearer the baggage car.

The conductor took a quick look up and down the platform. The money vanished. He jerked his head at the waiting truckman; the man came up alongside the track, started to run parallel to the train, loaded truck and all. Babe caught at the next vestibule hand-rail as it came abreast, swung himself in, the conductor after him. "Hold onto me!" the latter warned. Babe clasped him around the waist from behind. The conductor, leaning out, got a grip on the trunk from above. The truckman hoisted it from below, shoved it in on them. It went aboard as easily as a valise.

They got it up off the steps and parked it over in the farther corner of the vestibule. The conductor banged the car door shut. "I'll lose my job if they get wise to this!"

"You don't know anything about it," Babe assured him: "I'll get it off myself at Cherbourg. Just remember to look the other way."

He saw the fellow counting over the palm-oil, so he handed him the last remaining banknote left in his wallet—just kept some silver for the dockhand at Cherbourg. "You're a good

guy, Jacques," he told him wearily, slapped him on the back, and went down the car to his compartment. Hurdle number two! Only one more to go. But all this fuss and feathers wasn't any too good, he realized, somberly. It made him and his trunk too conspicuous, too easily remembered, later on. Well, the hell with it, as long as they couldn't prove anything!

His compartment mate looked up, not particularly friendly. Babe tried to figure him, and he tried to figure Babe. Or maybe he had already.

"Howja find it?" he said finally. Just that. Meaning, he knew Babe had been working Paris in one way or an other. Babe got it.

"I don't have to talk to you!" he snarled. "Whaddya think y'are, an income tax blank?"

"Tell you what I am, a clairvoyant; read the future. First night out you'll be drumming up a friendly little game with your own deck of cards. Nickels and dimes, just to make it interesting." He made a noise with his lips that was the height of vulgarity. "Lone wolf, I notice, though. Matter, Sûreté get your shill?"

Babe balled a fist, held it back by sheer will power. "Read your own future." He slapped himself on the shoulder with his other hand. "Find out about the roundhouse—waiting for you up in here."

The other guy went back to his Paris *Herald* contemptuously. He must have known he'd hit it right the first time, or Babe wouldn't have taken it from him. "You know

where to find me," he muttered. "Now or after we're aboard. I'll be in 42-A."

The label on that wardrobe trunk of his outside flashed before Babe's mind. He took a deep breath, that was almost a curse in itself, and closed his eyes. He shut up, didn't say another word. When he opened his eyes again a minute later, they were focused for a second down at the feet of the guy opposite him. Very flat, that pair of shoes looked, big—and very flat.

The motion of the train seemed to sicken him for a moment. But this guy was going back alone. A muffed assignment? Or just a vacation? They didn't take 3,000-mile jaunts for vacations. They didn't take vacations at all! Maybe the assignment hadn't had a human quarry—just data or evidence from one of the European police files?

The irises of the other man's eyes weren't on him at all, were boring into the paper between his fists—which probably meant he could have read the laundry mark on the inside of Babe's collar at the moment, if he'd been called on to do so. Federal or city? Babe couldn't figure. Didn't look government, though. The dick showed too plainly all over him—the gentleman with the whiskers didn't use types that gave themselves away to their quarry that easy.

"So I not only ride the waves with a corpse in my cabin with me, but with a dick in the next bunk! Oh, lovely tie-up!" He

got up and went outside to take a look at his trunk. Looked back through the glass after he'd shut the door; the guy's eyes hadn't budged from his paper. There's such a thing as underdoing a thing; there's also such a thing as overdoing it, Babe told himself knowingly. The average human glances up when someone leaves the room he's in. "You're good," he cursed him, "but so am I!"

The trunk was okay. He hung around it for awhile, smoking a cigarette. The train rushed northwestward through France, with dead Manon and her killer not a foot away from one another, and the ashes of a cigarette were the only obsequies she was getting. They were probably missing her by now at the jewelry shop on the Paix, phoning to her place to find out why she hadn't showed. Maybe a customer would come in today and want to be shown that pearly necklace, number twenty-nine; maybe no one would ask to see it for a week or a month.

He went back in again, cleaned his nails with a pocket-knife. Got up and went out to look in another half hour. Came back in again. Gee, Cherbourg was far away! At the third inspection, after another half hour, he got a bad jolt. A fresh little flapper was sitting perched up on top of it, legs crossed, munching a sandwich! The train motion gave him a little qualm again. He slouched up to her. She gave him a smile, but he didn't give her one back. She was just a kid, harmless, but he couldn't bear the sight.

"Get off it, Susie," he said in a muffled voice, and swept his hand at her vaguely. "Get crumbs all over it, it ain't a counter."

She landed on her heels. "Oh, purrdon me!" she said freshly.

"We've got the President with us!" Then she took a second look at his face. He could tell she was going mushy on him in another minute, so he went back in again. The flatfoot—if he was one—was preferable to that, the way he felt right now.

Cherbourg showed about one, and he'd already been out there in the vestibule with it ten minutes before they started slowing up. The train ran right out onto the new double-decker pier the French had put up, broadside to the boat; all you had to do was step up the companionway.

His friend the conductor brushed by, gave him the office, accomplished the stupendous feat of not seeing the huge trunk there, and went ahead to the next vestibule. The thing stopped. Babe stuck his head out. Then he found out he wouldn't even need a French middleman, the ship's stewards were lined up in a row on the platform to take on the hand-luggage for the passengers. One of them came jumping over. "Stand by," Babe said. The passengers had right of way first, of course. They all cleared out—but *not* the wise guy. Maybe he'd taken the door at the other end of the coach, though.

Then the third hurdle reared—sky-high. "In the stateroom?" the steward gasped, respectfully. "That's out of the question, sir—a thing that size! That has to go in the hold!"

About seven minutes of this, two more stewards and one of the ship's officers—and he wasn't getting anywhere. "Tell you what," he said finally, groggy with what he was going through, "just lemme have it with me the first day, till I can get it emptied a little and sorted out. Then you can take it down the hold." He was lighting one cigarette after another and throwing



them away half-smoked, his eyebrows were beaded with sweat, the quay was just a blur in front of him...

"We can't do that, man!" the officer snapped. "The hold's loaded through the lower hatches. We can't transfer things from above down there once we're out at sea!"

Behind Babe, a voice said gruffly: "Lissen, I'm in there with him and I got something to say—or haven't I? Your objection is that it'll take up too much room in there, cramp the party sharing the cabin with him, right? Well, cut out this bellyaching, the lot of you, and put it where the guy wants it to go! It's all right with me, I waive my rights—"

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **Jockeying for Peace**

Babe didn't turn around. He knew what had just happened behind him though, knew by the way their opposition flattened out. Not another word was said. He knew as well as if he'd seen it with his own eyes: the guy had palmed his badge at them behind his back!

He would have given anything to have it go into the hold now, instead, but it was too late! He swallowed chokedly, still didn't turn, didn't say thanks. He felt like someone who has just had a rattlesnake dropped down the back of his neck while he's

tied hand and foot.

He got down from the car, and they hopped in to get it. He didn't give it another look. He headed slowly toward the companionway he'd been directed to, to show his ticket, and was aware of the other man strolling along at his elbow. "What's your game?" he said, out of the corner of his mouth, eyes straight ahead.

There was mockery in the slurring answer. "Just big-hearted. Might even help you make out your customs' declaration on what y'got in it—"

Babe stumbled over something on ground before him that wasn't there at all, stiff-armed himself against a post, went trudging on. He didn't have anything in his shoulder for this guy before. He had something in his heart for him now—death.

He looked up at the triple row of decks above him while an officer was checking his ticket and passport at the foot of the companionway. It was called the *American Statesman*.

"You're going to be one short when you make the Narrows seven days from now!" he told it silently. "This copper's never going to leave you alive."

They maneuvered the trunk down the narrow ship's corridor and into the stateroom by the skin of its teeth. It was a tight squeeze. It couldn't, of course, go under either one of the bunks. One remaining wall was taken up by the door, the other by the folding washstand, which opened like a desk. The middle of the room was the only answer, and that promptly turned the cabin into nothing more than a narrow perimeter

around the massive object. That his fellow-passenger, who wasn't any sylph, should put up with this was the dearest giveaway ever, to Babe's way of thinking, that he was on to something. Some of these punks had a sixth sense, almost, when it came to scenting crime in the air around them. He wouldn't need more than one, though, in about a day more, if Babe didn't do something in a hurry! It was July, and there were going to be two of them in there with it.

He tried half-heartedly to have it shunted down to the hold after all—although that would have been just jumping from a very quick frying pan to a slower but just as deadly fire—but they balked. It would have to be taken out again onto the quay and then shipped aboard from there, they pointed out. There was no longer time enough. And he'd cooked up a steam of unpopularity for himself as it was that wouldn't clear away for days.

The dick didn't show right up, but a pair of his valises came in, and Sherman lamped the tags. "E. M. Fowler, New York." He looked out, and he saw where he'd made still another mistake. He'd bought a cabin on the A-deck, the middle of the three, just under the promenade deck; a C-cabin would have been the right one, below deck-level. This one had no porthole opening directly above the water, but a window flush with the deck outside. But then he hadn't known he was going to travel with a corpse, and her money had made it easy to buy the best. Now he'd have to smuggle her outside with him, all the way along the passageway, down the stairs, and out across the lowest deck—when the time came.

He beat it out in a hurry, grinding his hands together. Should

have thought of it sooner, before he'd let them haul it in there! He'd ask to be changed, that was all. Get the kind he wanted, away from that bloodhound and by himself. Sure they could switch him, they must have some last-minute cancellations! Always did.

The purser spread out a chart for him when he put it to him in his office, seemed about to do what he wanted; Sherman felt better than he had at any time since five that morning. Then suddenly he looked up at him as though he'd just remembered something. "You Mr. Sherman, 42-A?" Babe nodded. "Sorry, we're booked solid; you'll have to stay in there." He put the chart away.

Arguing was no use. He knew what had happened; Fowler and his badge again. He'd foreseen this move, beat him to it, blocked it! "You weren't bragging, brother, when you called yourself, a clairvoyant!" he thought bitterly. But the guy couldn't actually *know* what was in the trunk, what was making him act like this? Just a hunch? Just the fact that he'd sized Babe up as off-color, and noticed the frantic way Babe had tried to keep the trunk with him when he boarded the train? Just the way any dick baited anyone on the other side of the fence, not sure but always hoping for the worst? Well, he was asking for it and he was going to get it—and not the way he expected, either. He'd foreclosed his own life by nailing Babe down in the cabin with him!

Just the same, he felt the need of a good stiff pick-up. They were already under way when he found his way into the bar, the jurisdiction of the French Republic was slipping behind them, it was just that pot-bellied old gent now with the brass

buttons, the captain. The straight brandy put him in shape; the hell with both sides of the pond! Once he got rid of her there wouldn't be any evidence left, he could beat any extradition rap they tried to slap on him. Water scotches a trail in more ways than one.

He spent the afternoon between the bar and 42, to make sure Fowler didn't try to tackle the trunk with a chisel or pick the lock while his back was turned. But the dick didn't go near the cabin, stayed out of sight the whole time. The sun, even going down, was still plenty hot; Sherman opened the window as wide as it would go and turned on the electric fan above the door. It would have to be tonight, for plenty of good reasons! One of the least was that he couldn't keep checking on the thing like this every five minutes without going bughouse.

A steward went all over the ship pounding a portable dinner-gong, and Sherman went back to the cabin, more to keep his eye on Fowler than to freshen up. He wouldn't have put on one of his other suits now even if he could have gotten at it.

Fowler came in, went around on his side of the trunk, and stripped to his undershirt. Sherman heard a rustle and a click, and he'd turned off the fan and pulled down the shade. Almost instantaneously the place got stuffy.

Babe said, "What's the idea? You ain't that chilly in July!"

Fowler gave him a long, searching look across the top of the trunk. "You seem to want ventilation pretty badly," he said,

very low.

It hit Sherman, like everything the guy seemed to say, and he forgot what he was doing for a minute, splashed water on his hair from force of habit. When it was all ganged up in front of his eyes, he remembered his comb was in there, too, he didn't have a thing out. He tried combing it with his fingers and it wouldn't work. He stalled around while the dick slicked his own, waiting for him to get out and leave it behind.

The dick did some stalling of his own. It started to turn itself into an endurance contest, the second dinner gong went banging by outside the window. Sherman, nerves tight as elastic-bands, thought: "What the hell is he up to?" His own shirt was hanging on a hook by the door, he saw Fowler glance at it just once, but didn't get the idea in time. Fowler parked a little bottle of liquid shoe-blackening on the extreme edge of the trunk, stopper out, right opposite the shirt. Then he brushed past between the two, elbows slightly out. He had no right to come around on that side; it was Sherman's side of the place. The shirt slipped off the hook and the shoe-polish toppled and dumped itself on top of it on the floor. The shirt came up black and white, mostly black, in his hand.

"Oops, sorry!" he apologized smoothly. "Now I've done it—have it laundered for you—"

Sherman got the idea too late, he'd maneuvered him into opening the trunk in his presence and getting a clean one out, or else giving up his evening meal; he couldn't go in there wearing that piebald thing!

He jerked the thing away from the detective, gave him a push that sent him staggering backwards, and went after him arm poised to sock him. "I saw you! Y'did that purposely!" he snarled. He realized that he was giving himself away, lowered his arm. "Hand over one of yours," he ordered grimly.

Fowler shook his head, couldn't keep the upward tilt from showing at the corners of his mouth though. "One thing I never do, let anybody else wear my things." He fished out a couple of singles. "I'll pay you for it, or I'll have it laundered for you—" Then very smoothly, "Matter, mean to say you haven't got another one in that young bungalow of yours?"

Sherman got a grip on himself; this wasn't the time nor the place. After all, he still held the trump in his own hands—and that was whether the trunk was to be opened or to stay closed. He punched the bell for the steward and sat down on the edge of his berth, pale but leering.

"Bring me my meal in here, I can't make the dining-saloon."

Fowler shrugged on his coat and went out, not looking quite so pleased with himself as he had a minute ago. Sherman knew, just the same, that his own actions had only cinched the suspicions lurking in the other's mind about the trunk. The first round had been the detective's after all.

That thought, and having to eat with his dinner tray parked on top the trunk—there was no other place for it—squelched the little appetite he'd had to begin with. He couldn't swallow, had to beat it around the other side and stick his head out the window, breathing in fresh air, to get rid of the mental images

that had begun popping into his dome.

"Going soft, am I?" he gritted. After awhile he pulled his head in again. There were a few minor things he could do right now, while the dick was in the dining room, even if the main job had to wait for tonight. Tonight Fowler would be right in here on top of him, it would have to be done with lightning-like rapidity. He'd better get started now, paving the way.

## CHAPTER V

### Checkmate

He closed the window and fastened it, so the shade wouldn't blow in on him. He set the untouched tray of food down outside the door, then locked it. The boat was a pre-war model reconditioned, one of the indications of this was the foot-wide grilled vent that pierced the three inside partitions just below the ceiling line—a continuous slitted band that encircled the place except on the deck-side. It was the best they could do in 1914 to get a little circulation into the air. He couldn't do anything about that, but it was well over anyone's head.

He got out his keys and he turned the trunk so that it opened *away* from the door. He squatted down, took a deep breath, touched the key to the lock, swung back the bolts, and parted the trunk. He didn't look up, picked up a handkerchief, unfolded it, and spread it over her face. He got out a couple of



the shirts that had been furthest away, protected by other things, and his comb, and then he took a file that was in there and went to work on the pearls.

It was hard even to force any two of them far enough apart to get at the platinum wire underneath, without damaging them in the filing, but he managed to force a split in their ranks right alongside the clasp, which stood out a little because of its setting. The wire itself was no great obstacle, it was just getting the file in at it. In five minutes the place he had tackled wore out under the friction, and it shattered to invisibility. Three pearls dropped off before he could catch them and rolled some place on the floor. He let them go for a minute, poised the file to change hands with it and unwind the gnarled necklace—and heard Fowler saying quietly: "What's the idea of the lock-out? Do I get in, or what?"

His face was peering in and down at Sherman through that damnable slotted ventilator, high up but on a line with the middle of the door, smiling—but not a smile of friendliness or good omen.

Sherman died a little then inside himself, like he would never die again, not even if a day came when he would be kneeling under the high knife at Vincennes or sitting in the electric chair at Ossining. Something inside him curled up, but because there was no blade or voltage to follow the shock, he went ahead breathing and thinking. His eyes traveled downward from Fowler's outlined face to the top of the trunk in a straight line. Her handkerchief-masked head was well below it on his side, her legs stayed flat up against her like he'd first folded them, from long confinement and now rigor. He

thought: "He doesn't see her from where he is. He can't, or he wouldn't be smiling like that!"

But the opening ran all around, on the side of him and in back of him. He must be up on a stool out there; all he'd have to do would be jump down, shift it further around to where he could see, and spring up on it again. If he did that in time, he could do it much quicker than Babe could get the trunk closed. "He hasn't thought of it yet!" Babe told himself frantically. "Oh, Joseph and Mary, keep it from occurring to him! If I can hold him up there just a split minute, keep talking to him, not give him time to think of it—"

His eyes bored into Fowler's, trying to hold him by that slight ocular magnetism any two people looking at each other have. He said very slowly: "I'll tell you why I locked the door like that; just a minute before you showed up—"

*Whang!* The two halves of the trunk came together between his outstretched arms. The rest of it was just reflex action, snapping the bolts home, twisting the key in the lock. He went down lower on his haunches and panted like a fish out of water.

He went over to the door and opened it, still weak on his pins. Fowler got down off the folding stool he'd dragged up. If he was disappointed, he didn't show it.

"I didn't hear you knock," Sherman said. There was no use throwing himself at him right now, absolutely none, it would be a fatal mistake. "I'll get him tonight—late," he said to himself.

Fowler answered insolently. "Why knock, when you know ahead of time the door's going to be locked? You never get to see things that way."

"More of that mind-reading stuff." Sherman tried to keep the thing as matter-of-fact as possible between them, for his own sake, not let it get out of bounds and go haywire before he was ready. "I don't mind telling you you're getting on my nerves, buddy."

He spotted one of the pearls, picked it up before Fowler saw what it was, put it in his pocket. "First you gum up a good shirt on me. Then you pull a Peeping Tom act—" He kept walking aimlessly around, eyes on the floor. He saw the second one and pocketed that, too, with a swift snake of the arm. His voice rose to a querulous protest. "What are you, some kind of a stool pigeon? Am I marked lousy, or what?" Trying to make it sound like no more than the natural beef of an unjustly persecuted person.

Fowler said from his side of the trunk: "Couple little things like that shouldn't get on your nerves—" pause—"unless you've got something else on them already."

Sherman didn't answer that one, there didn't seem to be a satisfactory one for it. He couldn't locate the third pearl either—if there had been one. He wasn't sure any more whether two or three had rolled off her neck.

He flung himself down on his bunk, lay there on his back sending up rings of cigarette-smoke at the ceiling. Fowler, hidden on his side of the trunk, belched once or twice, moved

around a little, finally began rattling the pages of a magazine. The ship steamed westward, out into the open Atlantic. They both lay there, waiting, waiting...

The human noises around them grew less after an hour or so; suddenly the deck lights outside the window went out without warning. It was midnight. A minute later, Sherman heard the door open and close, and Fowler had gone out of the cabin. He sat up and looked across the trunk. He'd left his coat and vest and tie on his berth—gone to the washroom. He listened, heard his footsteps die away down the oilcloth-covered passageway outside. That was exactly what Babe Sherman was waiting for.

He swung his legs down and made a bee-line across the cabin, didn't bother locking the door this time, it was quiet enough now to hear him coming back anyway. He went through that coat and vest with a series of deft scoops, one to a pocket, that showed how good he must have once been at the dip racket. The badge was almost the first thing he hit, settling his doubts on that score once and for all—if he'd still had any left. New York badge, city dick. Sherman had no gun with him, didn't work that way as a rule. He thought, "He almost certainly has. If I could only locate it before he comes back—" He didn't intend to use it in any case—too much noise—but unless he got his hands on it ahead of time, it was going to be very risky business!

The fool had left one of his two valises open under the bunk,

ready to haul out his pajamas! Sherman went all through it in no time flat, without messing it too much either. Not in it. It was either in the second one, or he carried it in a hip-holster, but probably the former was the case. Then one of those hunches that at times visit the deserving and the undeserving alike, smote him from nowhere; he tipped the upper end of the mattress back and put his hand on it! A minute later it was broken and the cartridges were spilling out into his palm. He jammed it closed, put it back, and heaved himself back onto his own bunk just as the slap-slap of Fowler's footsteps started back along the passageway. "Now, buddy!" he thought grimly.

Fowler finished undressing and got under the covers. "Gosh, the air's stale in here!" he muttered, more to himself than Sherman. "Seems to get ranker by the minute!"

"Whaddy want me to do, hand yuh a bunch of violets?" Babe snarled viciously. He got up and went out, for appearance's sake, then stayed just outside the door, head bent, listening. Fowler didn't make a move, at least not to or at the trunk. Sherman took good aim out through the open window that gave onto the little cubicle between their cabin and the next, let fly with the handful of bullets. They cleared the deck beautifully, every last one of them.

He went back in again, saw that Fowler already had his eyes closed, faking it probably. He took off his coat and shoes, put out the light, lay down like he was. The motion of the boat, and the black and orange frieze of the ventilator high up near the ceiling—the corridor lights stayed on all night—were all that remained. And the breathing of two mortal enemies, the stalker and the stalked....

Sherman, who had cursed the ventilator to hell and back after it had nearly betrayed him that time, now suddenly found that it was going to come in handy after all. It let in just enough light, once your eyes got used to the change, so that it wouldn't be necessary to turn on the cabin light again when the time came to get her out. He couldn't have risked that under any circumstances, even if it took him half the night to find the keyhole of the trunk with the key. This way it wouldn't.

The guy was right at that, though, it was getting noticeable in here.

He planned it step by step first, without moving his shoulders from the berth. Get rid of her first and then attend to the dick later was the best way. She couldn't wait, the dick could. They had six days to go yet, and the dick couldn't just drop from sight without it backfiring in some way. Down here wasn't the right spot either. They might run into heavy weather in a day or two, and if he watched his opportunity he might be able to catch the dick alone on the upper deck after the lights went out. Even raise a "Man overboard!" after he went in, if it seemed advisable. Or if not, be the first to report his disappearance the day after.

So now for her. He knew the set-up on these boats. There was always a steward on night duty at the far end of the corridor, to answer any possible calls. He'd have to be gotten out of the way to begin with, sent all the way down to the pantry for something if possible. Yet he mustn't rap on the door here in answer to the call and wake the flatfoot. And he mustn't come back too quickly and catch Babe out of the cabin—although that was the lesser danger of the two and could

always be explained away by the wash-room. Now for it; nothing like knowing every step in advance, couldn't be caught off-base that way.

## CHAPTER VI

### Hare-and-Hounds

There is an art in being able to tell by a person's breathing if he is asleep or just pretending to be; it was one of Sherman's many little accomplishments. But there is another art, too, that goes with it—that of being able to breathe so you fool the person doing the listening. This, possibly, may have been the other man's accomplishment. His breathing deepened, got scratchier—but very slowly. It got into its stride, and little occasional burblings welled up in it, very artistically. Not snores by any means, just catches in the larynx. Sherman, up on his elbow, thought: "He's off. He couldn't breathe that way for very long if he wasn't—be too much of a strain."

He got up off the bunk and put on his coat, so the white of his undershirt wouldn't show. He picked up the shirt that Fowler had ruined and balled it up tightly into fist-size, or not much bigger. He got out the trunk-key and put it down on the floor right in front of the trunk, between his bent legs. He spit muffledly into his free hand, soaked the hollow of it. Then he gave that a half-turn up against the lock and each of the clamps. The lock opened quietly enough, but the clamps had a

snap to them that the saliva alone wouldn't take care of. He smothered them under the ganged-up shirt as he pressed each one back. He got it down to a tiny click. Then he took a long, hard look over at Fowler through the gloom. That suction was still working in his throat.

The trunk split apart fairly noiselessly, with just one or two minor squeaks, and he had to turn his head for a minute—for a different reason this time. The way it had opened, though, was all to the good, one side of it shielded him from Fowler's bunk.

He had to go carefully on the next step, couldn't just remove her. There were too many loose things in there, all the busted partitions and drawers would clack together and racket. He got them out first, piece by piece. She came last, and wasn't very heavy.

Now here was where the steward came into it. He had a choice of risks: not to bother with the steward at all, to try sneaking down the passageway in the opposite direction with her. That was out entirely. All the steward would have to do was stick his head out of the little room where the call-board was and spot him. *Or*, to leave her out, but in here, in the dark, and tackle the steward outside. He didn't like that one either. Fowler might open his eyes from one moment to the next and let out a yell. So he had to get her out of here, and yet keep the steward from coming near her outside. The inset between the cabins, outside the door, was the answer—but the steward must *not* turn the corner and come all the way! It was all a question of accurate timing.

He was as far as the cabin door now, but that was a problem



in itself. He was holding her up against him like a ventriloquist's dummy, legs still folded up flat while she hung down straight. He got the door open without any creaking, but a sunburst of orange seemed to explode around him and his burden. It didn't reach all the way to Fowler's berth, but it could very well tickle his eyelids open if it was, left on too long.

He stepped across the raised threshold with her, holding onto the door so it wouldn't swing with the ship's motion. Then without letting go of it he managed to let her down to the floor out there. He turned and went in again alone, to ring for the steward; as he did so an optical illusion nearly floored him for a second. It was that Fowler had suddenly stiffened to immobility in the midst of movement. But he was in the same position that he had been before—or seemed to be—and his lids were down and the clucking was still going on in his throat. There was no time to worry about it, either he was awake or he wasn't—and he wasn't, must have just stirred in his sleep.

The steward's bell, Sherman knew, didn't make any sound in the cabin itself, only way out at the call-board. He punched it, got back to the door before it had time to swing too far shut or open, and then eased it closed. She was right beside him on the floor out there, but he didn't look at her, listened carefully. In a minute he heard the put-put of shoeleather coming down from the other end of the passageway. Now!

He drifted negligently around the corner, started up toward the steward to head him off; the man was still two of those lateral insets away. They came together between his, Babe's

and the next.

"Did you ring, sir?"

Sherman put his hand on the steward's arm appealingly. "I feel rotten," he said in a low voice. "Get me some black coffee, will you? Too many brandies all afternoon and evening." He looked the part, from what he'd just gone through—if nothing else.

"Yes, sir, right away," the steward said briskly. And then instead of turning back, he took a step to get around Sherman and continue on down the passageway, toward where the body was!

"What're you going that way for?" Sherman managed to say, gray now.

"The main pantry's closed, sir, at this hour. We have a little one for sandwiches and things in back of the smoking room, I'll heat you some up in there—"

"Here I go!" was all Sherman had time to think. The whole boat went spinning around him dizzily for a minute, but his reflexes kept working for him. Without even knowing what he was doing, he got abreast of the steward—on the side where she was—and accompanied him back, partly turned toward him. The steward was a shorter man, only Sherman's outthrust shoulder kept him from seeing what lay sprawled there as the inset opened out to one side of them. He pulled the same stunt

he had on Fowler when he was getting the trunk closed under his nose, kept jabbering away with his eyes glued on the steward's, holding them steady on his own face.

The steward stepped past, and the opening closed behind him again. Sherman dropped back, but still guarding it with his body. His jaws were yammering automatically: "—never could stand the coffee in Paris, like drinking mud. All right, you know where to find me—"

The steward went on and disappeared at the upper end. Sherman, in the inset, crumpled to his hands and knees for a minute, like an animal, stomach heaving in and out. This last tension had been too much for him, coming on top of everything else. "All to keep from dying twenty years too soon!" he thought miserably, fighting his wretchedness.

He got himself in shape again in a hurry, had to, and a minute later was groping up the corridor in the opposite direction, lopsidedly, borne down by her dimensions if not her weight on one side, his other arm out to steady himself against the wall.

There was no one out at the stair-landing now that the steward was out of the way, and only a single overhead light was burning. He decided to chuck the stairs and do it right from this A-deck. One deck higher or lower couldn't make any difference if he went far enough back to the stern. And there might be other stewards on night duty on the other deck levels.

He put her down for a minute on a wicker settee out there, unhooked the double doors to the deck, and looked out.

Deserted and pitch-dark. A minute later she was out there with him, and the end of his long, harrowing purgatory was in sight. Babe couldn't keep his hands from trembling.

He didn't go right to the rail with her. There was still the necklace, for one thing, and then the nearer the stern the better to make a clean-cut job of it. You couldn't see your hand in front of your face beyond the rail, but the deck wall on the other side of him showed up faintly white in the gloom, broken by black squares that were the cabin windows.

Near the end of the superstructure there was a sharp indentation, an angle where it jugged further out, and in this were stacked sheaves of deck-chairs, folded up flat and held in place by a rope. There were, however, three that had been left unfolded side by side, perhaps made use of by some late strollers and that the deck-steward had missed putting away, and one of them even had a steamer-rug left bunched across it.

He let her down on one of them and bent over her to finish freeing the necklace. The handkerchief had remained in place all this time, for some reason. But it was one of his own and huge, touched her shoulders. He had to discard it to be able to see what he was doing. Loosened, the breeze promptly snatched it down the deck and it vanished. His hands reached for the loose end of the necklace, where he had already filed it through close to the clasp—and then stayed that way, poised, fingers pointing inward in a gesture that was like a symbol of avarice defeated.

The platinum strand was there, but invisible now in the dark, naked of pearls! Not two or three but the whole top row had

dropped off, one by one, somehow, somewhere along the way! The motion of carrying her, of picking her up and setting her down so repeatedly, must have loosened them one at a time, jogged them off through that break in the wire he himself had caused. And since it obviously hadn't happened while she was still in the trunk, what it amounted to was: he had left a trail of pearls behind him, every step of the way he had come with her from the cabin out here—like that game kids play with chalk-marks called "Hare-and-hounds"—but with death for its quarry. An overwhelming sense of futility and disaster assailed him.

They wouldn't stay in one place, they'd roll around, but they were there behind him just the same, pointing the way. It was only the top row that had been stripped clean, the other two had been tourniqueted in too tight for any to fall off..

He had no more than made the discovery, with his fingertips and not his eyes, than a figure loomed toward him out of the deck-gloom, slowly, very slowly, and Fowler's voice drawled suavely:

"I'll take the rest of 'em now, that go with the ones I been pickin' up on the way."

Sherman automatically gave the blanket beside him a fillip that partly covered her, then stood up and went out toward him, knees already crouched for the spring that was to come. The gloom made Fowler seem taller than he was: Sherman could sense the gun he was holding leveled at him by the rigid foreshortening of his one arm. The thing was, was it still empty or had he reloaded it since?

## CHAPTER VII

### The Furies Laugh

He started circling, with Fowler for an axis, trying to maneuver him closer to the rail. That brought the chair more clearly into Fowler's line of vision, but the position of his head never changed, slowly turned in line with Sherman. Suddenly it dawned on Sherman that the dick didn't know the whole story even yet; hadn't tumbled yet to what was on that chair! Must have taken it for just a bunched-up steamer rug in the dark. Sure! Otherwise he'd be hollering blue murder by this time, but all he'd spoken about was the pearls. Hadn't seen Sherman carry her out after all, then; thought he was just on the trail of a jewel-smuggler.

"But in a minute more he'll see her; he's bound to!" he told himself. "Dark or not, his eyes'll be deflected over that way. And that's when—"

While his feet kept carrying him slowly sidewise across the rail, from the chair toward the rail, he muttered: "*You* will? Who says so?"

Fowler palmed his badge at him with his left hand. "This says so. Now come on, why make it tough for yourself? I've got you dead to rights and you know it! They're so hot they're smoking. Fork 'em over and don't keep me waiting out here all

night, or I'll—"

Sherman came up against the rail. Had he reloaded that persuader or hadn't he? "I can only be wrong once about it," he figured grimly. He jerked his head at the chair. "The tin always wins. Help yourself!" His knees buckled a notch lower.

He saw the pupils of Fowler's eyes follow the direction his head had taken, start back again, then stop dead—completely off him. "Oh, so you *are* working with a shill after all! What's she showing her teeth, grinning so about? D'ye think I'm kid —?"

He never finished it. Sherman's stunning blow—the one he'd promised him in the train—his whole body following it, landed in an arc up from where he'd been standing. His fist caught Fowler on the side of the neck, nearly paralyzing his nerve-centers for a minute, and the impact of Sherman's body coming right after it sent him down to the deck with Sherman on top of him. The gun clicked four times into the pit of Sherman's stomach before they'd even landed, and the impact, with which the back of the dick's head hit the deck told why it didn't click the two remaining times. He was stunned for a minute, lay there unresisting. Less than a minute—much less—but far too long!

Sherman got up off him, pulled him up after him, bent him like a jack-knife over the rail, then caught at his legs with a vicious dip. The gun, which was still in the dick's hand, fell overboard as he opened it to claw at the empty night. His legs cleared the rail at Sherman's heave like those of a pole-vaulter topping a bar, but his faculties had cleared just in time for his

finish. His left hand closed despairingly around a slim, vertical deck-support as the rest of his body went over. The wrench nearly pulled it out of its socket, turned him completely around in mid-air so that he was facing Sherman's way for a brief instant. His face was a piteous blur against the night that would have wrung tears from the Evil One himself.

But a human being was sending him to his death, and they can be more remorseless than the very devils of hell. "I don't want to die!" the blurred face shrieked out. The flat of Sherman's foot, shooting out between the lower deck-rails like a battering-ram, obliterated it for a minute. The gripping hand flew off the upright support into nothingness. When Sherman's foot came back through the rails again; the face was gone. The badge was all that was left lying there on the deck.

The last thing Sherman did was pick that up and shie it out after him. "Take that with you, Cop, you'll need it for your next pinch!"

Carrying out his original purpose, after what had just happened, was almost like an anticlimax; he was hardly aware of doing so at all, just a round-trip to the rail and back. He leaned up against the deck-wall for a minute, panting with exertion. The partly-denuded necklace, freed at last from its human ballast, in the palm of his hand. "You've cost me plenty!" he muttered to it. He dumped it into his pocket.

Suddenly the deck-lights had flashed on all around him, as if lightning had struck the ship. He cringed and turned this way and that. They were standing out there, bunched by the exit through which he himself had come a little while ago, stewards



and ship's officers, all staring ominously down toward him. He knew enough not to try to turn and slink away; he was in full sight of them, and a second group had showed up behind him, meanwhile, at the lower end of the deck, cutting him off in that direction. That last scream Fowler ripped out from the other side of the rail, probably; the wind must have carried it like an amplifier all over the ship at once.

"But they didn't see me do it!" he kept repeating to himself vengefully, as they came down the deck toward him from both directions, treading warily, spread out fanwise to block his escape. "They didn't see me do it! They gave it the lights out here just a minute too late!"

The chief officer had a gun out in his hand, and a look on his face to match it. They meant business. One by one the cabin-windows facing the deck lighted up; the whole ship was rousing. This wasn't just another hurdle any more; this was a dead end—the last stop, and he knew it.

Suddenly he came to a decision. The net was closing in on him and in a minute more his freedom of action would be gone, forever. He didn't waste it, but used it while he still had it to cut himself free from the first crime even while the second was tangling around him tighter every instant. He found the rail with the backs of his elbows, leaned there negligently, waiting for them. Right as they came up, his elbows slipped off the rail again, his hands found his trouser-pockets in a gesture that looked simply like cocky bravado. Then he withdrew them

again, gave one a slight unnoticeable backhand-flip, through the rails. The motion, screened by his body, remained unobserved; their eyes were on his face. The necklace had gone back to Manon, the job had blown up—but it couldn't be helped, he had his own skin to think of now.

The chief officer's eyes were as hard as the metal that pointed out of his fist at Sherman's middle. "What'd you do with that man Fowler?" he clipped.

Sherman grinned savagely back around his ear. "What'd I do with him? I left him pounding his ear in 42-A. We're not Siamese twins. Is there a regulation against coming out here to stretch my legs—?"

The night-steward cut in with: "I didn't like how he acted when he ordered the cawfee a while ago, sir. That's why I reported to you. When I took it in to him they were both gone, and the insides of this man's trunk were all busted up and lying around, like they had a fierce fight—"

A woman leaning out of one of the cabin-windows shrilled almost hysterically: "Officer! Officer! I heard somebody fall to the deck right outside my window here, the sound woke me up, and then somebody screamed: 'I don't want to die!' And when I jumped up to look out—" Her voice broke uncontrollably for a minute.

The officer was listening intently, but without turning his head away from Sherman or deflecting the gun.

"—he was kicking at a *face* through the rails! I saw it go down—! I—I fainted away for a minute, after that!" She

vanished from the window, someone's arm around her, sobbing loudly in a state of collapse.

The net was closing around him, tighter, every minute: "We all heard the scream," the officer said grimly, "but that tells us what it meant—"

The bulky captain showed up, one of his shirt-tails hanging out under his hurriedly-donned uniform-jacket: He conferred briefly with the chief officer, who retreated a pace or two without taking his gun off Sherman. The latter stood there, at bay against the rail, a husky deck-hand gripping him by each shoulder now.

The gun was lowered, only to be replaced by a pair of handcuffs. The captain stepped forward. "I arrest you for murder! Hold out your hands! Mr. Moulton, put those on him!"

The deck-hands jerked his forearms out into position, his cuffs shot back. The red welt across his knuckles where he'd bruised them against Fowler's jawbone revealed itself to every eye there.

He flinched as the cold steel locked around him. "I didn't do it—he fell overboard!" he tried to say. "It's her word against mine—!" But the net was too tight around him, there was no room left to struggle, even verbally.

The captain's voice was like a roll of drums ushering in an execution—the first of the hundreds, the thousands of questions that were going to torment him like gadflies, drive him out of his mind, until the execution that was even now rushing toward him remorselessly from the far side of the

ocean would seem like a relief in comparison. "What was your motive in doing away with this man, sending him to his death?"

He didn't answer. The malevolent gods of his warped destiny did it for him, sending another of the stewards hurrying up from the deck below, the answer in both his outstretched hands, a thin flat badge, a gnarled string of pearls, half-gone.

"I found this and this, sir, on the B-deck just now! I thought I heard a scream out there awhile back and I went out to look. Just as I turned to come in again this, this shield landed at my feet, came sailing in from nowhere on the wind like a boomerang. I put on the lights thinking someone had had an accident down on that deck, and a little while afterwards I caught sight of this necklace down at the very end. The wind had whipped it around one of the deck-supports like a paper streamer—"

Sherman just looked at the two objects, white and still. The night had thrown back the evidence he had tried to get rid of, right into his very teeth! There were two executions waiting for him now, the tall knife at Vincennes, the electric chair at one of the Federal penitentiaries—and though he could only die once, what consolation was it that only by one death could he cheat the other?

The captain said: "He's as good as dead already! Take him down below and keep him under double guard until we can turn him over to the Federal authorities when we reach Quarantine."

Sherman stumbled off in the middle of all of them, unresisting. But he did crack up completely when the captain—just as they were taking him inside—unfolded a yellow wireless-message and showed it to the chief officer. "Funny part of it is," he heard him say, "this came in not fifteen minutes ago, from the New York City police authorities, asking us to hold this man Fowler for them, for blackmail, for preying on people on ships and trains, impersonating a detective abroad. The badge is phony, of course. If our friend here had kept his hands off him for just quarter-of-an-hour more—"

Sherman didn't hear the rest of it. There was a rush of blood to his ears that drowned it out, and the laughter of the Furies seemed to shriek around him while they prodded him with white-hot irons. All he knew was that he was going to die for a murder that could have been avoided, in order to cover up one that otherwise would quite probably never have been revealed!

[The end of *Dilemma of the Dead Lady* by Cornell George Hopley-Woolrich (as Cornell Woolrich)]