

BY **MANNING GOLES**

**DEATH
OF
AN
AMBASSADOR**



A CRIME CLUB SELECTION

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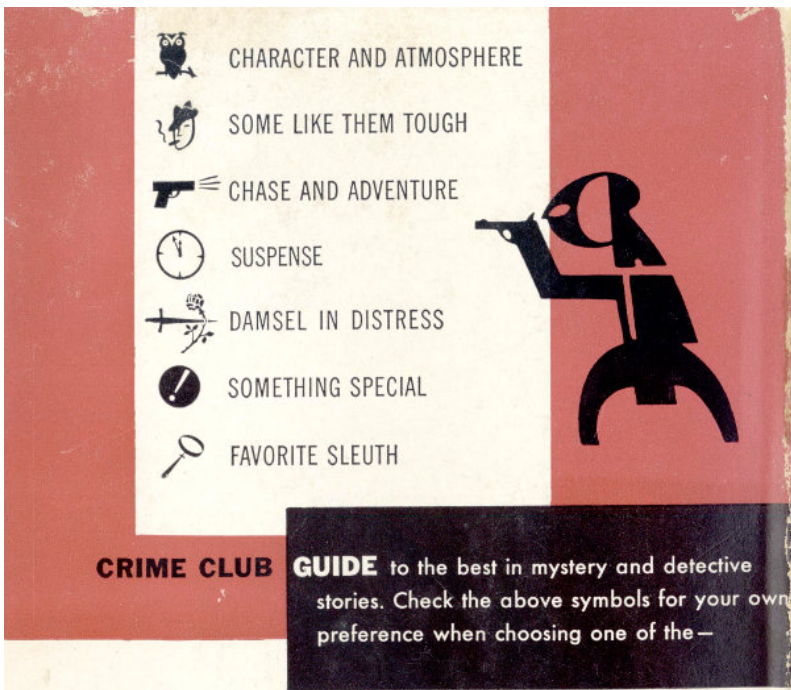
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Death of an Ambassador

MANNING COLES

A CRIME CLUB SELECTION

The fatal shooting of the much publicized Esmeraldan ambassador shocked London and gave Scotland Yard a dramatic puzzle to unravel. Immediately the Esmeraldan Embassy complicated the Yard's work by holding a suspected Frenchman beyond reach of the police.

This sent Tommy Hambleton of the Foreign Office's intelligence service to Paris and to his old friend Letord in the French Sûreté. Together they set themselves to tracking down the ambassador's dark past and a murderer's present whereabouts.

Just how the crisscrossing clues and numerous suspects tied into the ambassador's death was the big problem to untie before it could snare Hambleton and Letord in new deaths—that could be their own.

Scene: London and Paris.

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Favorite Sleuth



DEATH OF
AN AMBASSADOR

A
Tommy
Hambleton
Story

BY MANNING COLES



Published for THE CRIME CLUB by
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Garden City, New York, 1957

To
A. H. G. HOGGARTH M.A., F. R. HIST. S.

“Forty Years On.”

*All of the characters in this book are fictitious
and any resemblance to actual persons,
living or dead, is purely coincidental.*

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CONTENTS

- [ONE](#) *Murder in Mayfair*, 9
- [TWO](#) *Escape*, 17
- [THREE](#) *The Predikant of Alkdam*, 25
- [FOUR](#) *Southampton-Le Havre*, 32
- [FIVE](#) *By the Petit Pont*, 39
- [SIX](#) *Middleweight Undertaker*, 46
- [SEVEN](#) *Dossier of an Ambassador*, 53
- [EIGHT](#) *Darkness in Paris*, 61
- [NINE](#) *Scullions' Entrance*, 71
- [TEN](#) *The Policeman's Story*, 78
- [ELEVEN](#) *Bank Robbery*, 85
- [TWELVE](#) *The Cat with Four Eyes*, 93
- [THIRTEEN](#) *The Blind Men*, 101
- [FOURTEEN](#) *Eddi the Cabbage*, 110
- [FIFTEEN](#) *The Ladder Dodge*, 118
- [SIXTEEN](#) *Three Lumps of Sugar*, 125
- [SEVENTEEN](#) *Gogo the Dwarf*, 133
- [EIGHTEEN](#) *Métro to Abbesses*, 143
- [NINETEEN](#) *Speaking Tube*, 153
- [TWENTY](#) *Jean Télémaque*, 163
- [TWENTY-ONE](#) *Bravo* 173
- [TWENTY-TWO](#) *Lament*, 181

CAST

PEDRO MAXIMILIO TELUGA, *the Esmeraldan Ambassador to the Court of St. James, otherwise* ENRIGO LE CANIF

GASTON DUBOIS *of Paris*

THOMAS ELPHINSTONE HAMBLEDON

COMMANDER BAGSHOTT *of the C.I.D.*

ANTOINE LETORD, *Chief Superintendent of the Sûreté in Paris*

MADAME DUBOIS

THE REVEREND NICOLAAS VAN LEYST *of Alkdam, Holland*

INSPECTOR GEORGES GUERNAN *of the Sûreté*

FRANÇOIS DE MONTARGENT *de la Sainte Croix*

ROBERT ÉCRITET, *a criminal lawyer in Paris*

PAUL JOSEPH, *an art dealer in Paris*

GOGO, *a dwarf*

JEAN SAUCISSE, JACQUES LE DELICAT, FRÉCHANT, VERON, PEPI

L'AGNEAU, EDDI LE CHOU *and others, all crooks*

Police, café proprietors, etc.

SCENE, *Paris*

TIME, *the present day*

Murder in Mayfair

THE sun was going down upon a gloriously hot June day; level rays came over the roofs of the terraced houses upon the west side of Whatmore Street, Mayfair, to shine directly into the attic windows of the similar terrace of houses upon the east side. Whatmore Street runs from Curzon Street into Piccadilly and, like its neighbours upon either hand, Stratton Street and Bolton Street, is a road of the most impeccable dignity.

There were a number of people strolling slowly along the pavements, in twos and threes, in the cool of the evening; as they passed one of the tall houses in the middle of the west side the passers-by glanced interestedly at it, for this was the new Esmeraldan Embassy. The house had recently been repainted white from roof to pavement level and all the woodwork was a deep emerald green. There were three steps up to the front door, which had a pillared portico; over the portico was a flagstaff leaning forward, from which hung the emerald-green flag of Esmeralda, the small Central American state which, under an energetic and enlightened President, was making such strides in the world of progress.

The passers-by were hoping, vaguely, that something amusing would happen, for although the Esmeraldan Embassy in London had only been open a matter of weeks, the high spirits of the pleasure-loving Spanish American staff had already caused comment in the West End.

There was not much to interest the strollers on this June evening except the lights in the open, uncurtained windows of the Ambassador's drawing-room. Three magnificent glittering chandeliers hung from the ceiling of this room; they were all lit up and displayed plainly the large looking glasses upon the green walls and the expensive furniture recently installed by a well-known firm. Also displayed was the Ambassador.

He was a young man to hold such a post, not more than thirty or so, one would say, but already beginning to run to seed a little round the jaw and under the eyes. He wore a moustache and a small pointed beard and was in full evening dress; he was talking in the most animated manner with a small

man in a lounge suit. They were both, it seemed, arguing vehemently; their words were not audible in the street, but their gestures spoke for themselves.

The three adjoining houses opposite to the Esmeraldan Embassy were thrown together in 1883 by one Euphemia Morley on her retirement as housekeeper in the Bishop's Palace of a west-country diocese. She knew exactly what was wanted in the way of quiet respectable accommodation for country clergy and their ladies when visiting the metropolis; such accommodation was practically non-existent in 1883 and Euphemia supplied a real need. It is no longer quite so exclusive as it was in Euphemia's lifetime, nor is it so inexpensive, but its name is still the first to rise in the minds of provincial clergy when planning a visit to London.

The door of Morley's was standing wide open upon this fine evening. A Canon from one of the remoter dioceses, pleasantly replete and mildly excited on the first evening of one of his rare visits to London, came out of the door and stood upon the top step to look happily about him.

His attention was claimed by the lighted windows of the Embassy opposite, especially those of the room with the sumptuous chandeliers. There were two men arguing visibly. They danced about, gesticulating widely, and occasionally shook their fists at each other, and the Canon could not but be entertained. He watched for a few minutes and was then seized in conscience for window peeping.

"These foreigners," he murmured gently, "so excitable always. The Latin temperament."

He was on the point of going on his way when the smaller of the two men raised both arms in the air and shook his fists above his head as though appealing to heaven to remedy some injustice. At precisely the same moment the younger and taller of the two leaned suddenly forward and fell to the ground out of the Canon's sight.

"That man," said the Canon, half aloud, "has had some kind of seizure."

The smaller man uttered a loud cry which was audible in the street, and instantly the scene changed. People came running into the lighted room from both sides at once, some of them bent over the fallen man while others seized the smaller one by both arms and dragged him back. A man in green livery rushed to the windows, unhooked the curtains and drew them close. The scene was over.

A quarter of an hour later, every blind was drawn down in the Esmeraldan Embassy and next morning the emerald flag was hanging dismally at half-mast. His excellency, the Esmeraldan Ambassador to the Court of St. James, had been rudely hustled to the company of his ancestors.

The news came out too late for any edition of the evening papers but it was in time for the last news summary of the B.B.C. "We regret to announce," said the measured voice, "that His Excellency, Señor Pedro Maximilio Teluga, the Esmeraldan Ambassador, died suddenly this evening at the Esmeraldan Embassy in Whatmore Street." The announcement issued from the Embassy had stated bluntly that Teluga had been shot dead by a man whom he was interviewing, but the B.B.C. does not broadcast sensational stories until they have been officially confirmed. In any case the Canon was in bed and sound asleep long before that news was broadcast.

The editor of the *Daily Wire*, however, was not—far from it. This was the sort of thing he liked; good meaty stuff with plenty of thrills and not too much grief, well situated in the middle of London's West End and well timed in a period when as a rule there is precious little news to be had. He lifted an office telephone and said: "Send in Biggs, now."

Biggs was his star reporter, a thin sallow man with a nose for news like that of a bloodhound who has just been offered a murderer's boot.

"Biggs, the Esmeraldan Ambassador's been murdered. Shot dead by a man visiting him; at least, that's what they say."

"Man get away?"

"No, the staff collared him."

"I wonder what they'll do with him. I suppose they could hold on to him. Extra-territorial, embassies," said Biggs. "Bit awkward. British nationality?"

"No details. You know the place?"

"Oh yes. In Whatmore Street, opposite The Dog-Collar."

"The what?"

"Morley's. Where all the parsons go."

"Oh yes, of course. Biggs, if you can't do anything at the Embassy, you'd better take a front room at Morley's and keep an eye on the place. I'll send a photographer up to keep you company."

Biggs glanced at his watch. "There's half an hour. Morley's locks up at midnight." He left the room and borrowed a suitcase on his way out. One does not arrive at Morley's without luggage.

There was no crowd in Whatmore Street, since the news was not yet public; the street was, in fact, almost deserted except for two metropolitan policemen on duty at the front door of the Embassy. Biggs went up to the door, one of them stopped him and he said: "*Daily Wire*."

"No good," said the policeman. "No admission, no interviews, no statements, no callers."

“No hawkers,” said Biggs, “no circulars, no nothing.”

“That’s right.”

“Want to keep it all to themselves, do they? What happens if I walk up and ring the bell?”

“They don’t open. They ring up Scotland Yard and ask why the two muttonheaded dummies outside the door—that’s us—are letting tiresome people ring their bell.”

“How do you know they’d do that?”

“Because they’ve done it twice already.”

“Looks as though I’m wasting my time,” said Biggs, who knew finality when he met it.

“That’s right. Come back in the morning; they’ll open up sometime, I suppose.”

“I suppose so. Well, thanks very much. Good night.”

Biggs took his hat off, brushed it with his sleeve, straightened the brim and put it on again, after which he pulled his coat tidily into place, stowed his fountain pens away out of sight, straightened his tie and crossed the road to ring the front-door bell of Morley’s. After a short pause it was opened and he walked straight in.

“Good evening. I shall want a room here for a couple of days, I hope very much that you have a vacancy.”

“Well, sir,” said the night porter doubtfully, “we are very full up at the moment on account of this Conference on Parochial Duties and Privileges as is being held in London at the moment, sir.”

Biggs smiled.

“That is why I am here,” he explained. “I am the clerk to one of the principal Organizing Secretaries and my chief thinks it would be as well if I were here, at Morley’s, where so many of our delegates are staying.”

“I see, sir,” said the night porter, who was turning over the pages of the register. “Well, it looks as though you were going to be lucky, sir, if I may so put it. One of the delegates ’ad—had—to go back home on account of illness and he clocked out—that is, sir, he left the hotel late this evening and there is his room vacant, if that would suit you, sir. Number 17, first floor front.”

“Providential, indeed,” said Biggs, and meant it.

“I’ll take you up, sir,” said the porter, taking a key off the hook.

“I may have to make a number of telephone calls—”

“Bless you, sir, you can sit in your own room and talk on the telephone all day and all night if you so wish. There’s a telephone in every room besides the ’ouse—house telephones, sir.”

“Splendid. Admirable,” said Biggs, and did not repeat “Providential” only because he did not wish to overdo it.

The next morning the news broke with a roar like a collapsing dam and the only people who did not appreciate it were Scotland Yard, which is the headquarters of the Metropolitan Police, and, presumably, the Esmeraldans. A murder in an embassy and they were holding the accused as prisoner.

Scotland Yard, in the person of one of its highest officials, rang up the Esmeraldan Embassy to convey the respectful condolences of the Metropolitan Police upon this unparalleled outrage and to offer any assistance in their power in unravelling the crime.

The First Secretary was most grateful for the condolences but needed no help in unravelling the crime. They had the assassin in custody. With renewed thanks, good morning.

Commander Bagshott of Scotland Yard rang up Thomas Elphinstone Hambledon of Foreign Office Intelligence.

“I say, Hambledon, could you come round here? You’ve heard that somebody’s shot the Esmeraldan Ambassador——”

“I saw headlines in my morning paper,” said Hambledon. “Why? Does anybody mind?”

“Now don’t stall. This is right up your street, come on.”

Hambledon walked into Bagshott’s office ten minutes later, threw his hat into the IN tray and said: “What is all this and why worry me?”

“Because you know the Esmeraldans and they’ll remember you. After all, it was your lottery winnings that financed the revolution which chased out President Massimo and put this lot in——”

“I know. I am very pained that no statue of me has yet been erected in St. Martin. Never mind, they may do it someday. Well?”

“They’ve got a prisoner in the Embassy accused of the murder and they won’t give any information about him. The Commissioner himself, no less, rang them up this morning and they hung up on him. So I went round myself to interview somebody and was not admitted.”

“And there wasn’t a darn thing you could do about it,” said Hambledon. “Too disrating. Go on.”

“We don’t know who this fellow is they are holding; he may be a British subject. Teluga is said to have been shot, but all the windows were wide

open and nobody in the street outside heard a shot fired. The——”

“Perhaps the assassin used a catapult.”

Bagshott sighed and tried again.

“The Commissioner’s compliments and as you’re about the only man in London likely to be *persona grata* at the Esmeraldan Embassy, would you be so good as to pay a formal call of condolence and see what you can get out of them?”

“What? Claw-hammer coat, striped trousers and a top hat?”

“And a tie,” said Bagshott.

An hour later a glittering Daimler drew up at the Embassy door and Mr. Hambledon, in the garments of ceremony, alighted. The Embassy had been advised of the Señor Hambledon’s coming, and the green door, with long black ribbons tied to the knocker, opened to admit him.

Hambledon went in and was received by the First Secretary in a small room at the back of the hall. After the exchange of stately courtesy on both sides, Hambledon got down to business. He was empowered, he said, to offer all the facilities of the British Courts of Justice for the trial of the accused with the utmost rigour of the Law.

The First Secretary was overcome with gratitude for the noble offer but pointed out that the crime had been committed within Embassy precincts, which were, as his distinguished visitor was well aware, extra-territorial. “This,” said the First Secretary, tapping an exuberant Turkey carpet with the toe of a patent-leather shoe, “is the sacred soil of Esmeralda.”

Hambledon agreed enthusiastically, but asked if, for their records, the British Government might know who the accused man was. Was he, for instance, a member of the Embassy staff?

The First Secretary exhibited horror and said that no true-born Esmeraldan would ever etc, etc.

A long and juicy list of Esmeraldan assassinations within the past fifty years slid through Hambledon’s mind, but he only said that naturally that would be so. It was, in fact, on that account that he had come to ask a few particulars such as the name, address, and nationality of the accused.

“The point is this,” he added. “If the man was resident in Britain, the police here could obtain authority to search his dwelling and obtain, perhaps, evidence of the motive which inspired so dreadful a deed.”

The First Secretary was most grateful but said that it seemed that the prisoner had come to Britain merely in order to commit this crime. He did not appear to have resided here.

“And his name?”

“Alas! We have good reason to believe that the name he gave us is not really his. An alias, esteemed sir, a transparent alias.”

“And his nationality?”

“One of those unfortunate creatures who are known as Stateless Persons, to the best of our knowledge.”

“And he was staying in London?”

“If he is to be believed, he spent one night on a grassy bank in your most beautiful Hyde Park,” said the First Secretary with a bland smile. “Believe me, this, your visit, adds but one more item to the long list of benefactions which your immense kindness has showered upon Esmeralda. I cannot express our deep sense of the obligations we owe you. Come again, respected Señor Hambledon, upon a happier occasion.”

“So I came away,” said Tommy, reporting to Bagshott. “It is my considered opinion that they have made up their minds to erect a gallows in the Embassy back yard and hang him and I don’t know what you can do to stop them.”

Escape

THE rest of the afternoon passed slowly. Biggs suffered acutely from boredom, as did the photographer whose unhappy lot it was to share his vigil.

The houses in Whatmore Street, all alike, had flat-fronted façades of white-painted stucco, topped by a row of small dormer windows. Most of these attic windows had bars across them, including those of the Esmeraldan Embassy.

Biggs and the photographer were playing cards, smoking incessantly and drinking whisky to pass the time between meals. It was Biggs's deal and the photographer stood up to stretch his legs, strolled across to the window and looked out.

"Nice evening," he remarked. "Another fine day tomorrow, I shouldn't wonder, it's a nice clear sk——" His voice broke off.

"What's the matter?" asked Biggs, getting up hastily.

"That left-hand attic window. Blind's gone up and there's——"

"Someone's wrenching at the bars——"

"The prisoner——" they said in unison, and the photographer dashed for his camera.

"He's got two of the bars away——"

"And there goes the third," said Biggs.

"He's got out." The camera swung into position and the operator focussed carefully. Click.

The dormer windows were a foot or so back from the edge of the roof and the man's movements were not yet visible from the street below.

"He'll go along the roofs, I suppose."

"I don't think so," said Biggs. "The Esmeraldans had barbed-wire entanglements put up where their roof joins the next-door houses. Don't want bombs through skylights."

“Who would?” asked the photographer indignantly. “This is London. He’s crawling along the edge—ugh! Makes my spine creep——”

“He’s making for a down pipe from the gutter—he’s reached it.”

The man on the roof raised himself, and the camera clicked again and again.

“He’s climbing down over the edge,” said Biggs, and even his voice sounded breathless. “He’ll get a grip on the top of that down pipe if it doesn’t break away——”

A few of the crowd below saw the two faces at the window staring upwards and themselves looked up, their neighbours looked up also; seen from above, a forest of hats became a forest of faces, and even the faces grew paler. There came a low murmur from the crowd, instantly stilled as the man on the roof got a grip of the top of the pipe and very slowly let himself slide over the edge. That is, the movement started slowly and ended with a sudden slip and a jerk.

“I shall be sick in a minute,” said the photographer, but he did not cease operating.

“Keep at it,” said Biggs. “You may get one of him turning over in mid-air yet.”

Apparently the same thought occurred to the police also, for they began hurriedly to clear a space below the pipe.

The man must have shifted his grip, for he slid down the pipe until brought up by the first tie which held it to the wall. A short pause and another slide, another pause. There was a deathly silence in the street, broken by a gasping sob from somebody. Another slide and a stop.

“Nearly there,” said Biggs, “nearly there.”

Three of the police stepped forward; the man turned his head, looked down and slithered the last ten feet into their welcoming arms.

“A—ah,” said the crowd.

“You,” said the police, “are coming with us, please.”

“Messieurs,” said the man, clinging tightly to a sergeant’s coat sleeve, “it is precisely that which I most desire.”

A series of signals was passed from one policeman to another, which resulted in a taxi whirling up from Piccadilly. As it came to a stop, a loud and angry cry floated down from the top storey of the Embassy. Once more the crowd looked up to see an angry face leaning from the top window and a furious fist being shaken to the accompaniment of words in the Spanish tongue.

The prisoner paused with one foot on the step of the taxi, looked up and made one of those gestures which transcends the barriers of language. He then stepped in with an escort, the door slammed and with a ragged cheer from the crowd the taxi drove away.

Biggs threw himself upon the telephone.

A few moments later the door of the Embassy opened and a man stood on the threshold. He beckoned to the nearest policeman, who strode up and saluted smartly.

“The assassin,” said the Esmeraldan carefully, “has evacuated himself by window. Kindly arrest and restore to our judica—justica—judification. *Prestissimo.*”

“*Sforzando,*” said the policeman, who came of a musical family. He saluted again, about turned and marched away. The Esmeraldan front door slammed.

The prisoner was taken to Scotland Yard and Bagshott, warned in advance by telephone, awaited him eagerly. Tommy Hambledon, who could run when he wanted to, came cantering up Whitehall and turned the corner into Great Scotland Yard at the same moment as the taxi.

Hambledon came into Bagshott’s office and found the Commander alone. Tommy looked round the room.

“What?” he said. “Don’t tell me I’ve beaten the taxi on the last lap, or has the prisoner been abducted even from your august corridors?”

“He’s having a wash and brush up, free,” said Bagshott. “He not only needed it but even asked for it.”

“Did he crawl out of a drain?”

“No. He got out of an attic window and slid down a rain-water pipe into the custody of the police. He seemed delighted to be among them.”

“Slid three storeys down by a pipe? He must be an athlete.”

“Or a cat burglar,” said Bagshott.

“Same thing. Do the Esmeraldans know they’ve lost him?”

“Oh yes, indeed they do. They want him back, they have been ringing up the Commissioner about him. He is to be returned instantly, whole and alive, and the police who carried him off under their very eyes are to be arrested and dismissed the Force.”

Bagshott’s telephone rang. He lifted the receiver, said: “Right. Send him up,” and replaced the receiver. “Our visitor.”

The next moment the man was shewn in; a small, dark, sinewy man with long arms for his height and large, powerful hands. He was given a chair and

encouraged to explain himself.

“You speak English?”

“A little, but so slow and careful, you know? I speak French.”

“Then we will speak French,” said Bagshott. “What is your name, please?”

“Gaston Dubois.”

“Nationality?”

“French.” Dubois added an address in Paris, “for I am of Paris, monsieur, I was born there.” He grinned cheerfully and settled himself comfortably in his chair.

“How long ago?”

“In 1915, monsieur.”

“Thank you,” said Bagshott. “Now, would you like to explain to me why you were climbing down a rain-water pipe of the Esmeraldan Embassy half an hour ago?”

“But, with the greatest pleasure in the world, monsieur. You see, if I stay they are for hanging me in the yard at the back. Messieurs”—Dubois beamed upon Hambleton and Bagshott impartially—“messieurs, I am of those who have a conscientious objection to capital punishment when applied to me, so I came away. You applaud the decision, yes? Messieurs, they were erecting a gallows.”

“Oh, were they,” said Bagshott grimly.

“Did they hold a trial?” asked Hambleton. “I assume they did; who conduc——”

“Oh no, monsieur,” said Dubois. “They said there was no need. The Ambassador was shot while I, who speak to you, was so unlucky as to be alone in the room with him, so it stands to reason that it was I who shot him. I attempted to argue with them. I said, ‘But, messieurs, if I have shot him where is the gun?’ They say, ‘You throw it out of the window.’ I say ‘Very good, then. Ask of the concourse outside if any person saw a gun thrown from the window,’ for there were many in the street at that time. They say, ‘It is useless, for you threw it to an accomplice who caught it. You shall die.’ So they take me up to that high room and every time one brings me a meal he tells me how the gallows is getting on.”

“I see,” said Bagshott. “Tell me, what really happened, in your opinion? Was the Ambassador really shot or did he have a stroke or——”

“Oh yes, monsieur, he was shot, for there was a little hole in his head just here”—Dubois put his finger tip just above his left ear—“and a little

blood came out, but not much, monsieur, for you will understand the fellow was immediately dead.”

Hambledon noticed the contemptuous epithet, but before he could speak Bagshott went on:

“If that is so, where do you suggest the bullet could have come from?”

Dubois’s shoulders went up to his ears.

“The windows were wide open—no blinds—he had the lights on to show the English that Esmeralda could afford to buy those so expensive chandeliers; that is true, he said so himself when he switched them on. There are houses opposite with many windows all open that hot evening; how should I know where the bullet came from?”

“And what did you go to see him about?”

“Money. He had owed me money since five years when he left Paris to go back to Esmeralda, where he was born. Now that he is so rich and I am so poor, I think he can repay what he owes to an old comrade.”

“Did he agree to do so?”

“Him? Enrigo le Canif agree to pay what he owed?”

“You call him by a strange name,” said Hambledon. “I understood that his name was Pedro Maximilio Teluga.”

“That may well be, monsieur. Many small children have pretty names chosen for them by their mothers, but when they grow up and their characters are formed,” said Dubois, hissing his sibilants, “their associates give to them a name which is more appropriate. Pedro Maximilio—heaven help us!—Teluga was a bad smell and a dose of poison, but I did not kill him, messieurs.”

“You seem to know a good deal about him,” said Hambledon, and for some reason the remark stopped Dubois dead.

“I have heard stories,” he said sullenly, and would say no more about Teluga. He asked if he could go and was told that he could not, for the present. He had been seen breaking out of the Embassy and his story had not yet been confirmed.

“I want to go home.”

“Back to Paris?”

“Back to Paris, precisely.”

“I’m afraid we can’t let you leave the country just—”

“But I am innocent!”

“Look here,” said Bagshott, “I don’t know what experience you have had of the operation of the law——”

Dubois started nervously and Hambleton grinned.

“—but you must know that there is a charge of murder laid against you by the Esmeraldans and that your defence to that charge will require to be proved. What are you worrying about? We don’t hang people in back yards without trial, and you will be safe with us. The Esmeraldans are after you, you know. Are you——”

“Very well. I will stay a few hours, at least.”

Bagshott touched a bell and Dubois was removed to a safe place. The door opened again and a constable came in with a visiting card which Bagshott read.

“Bring him in, then. No, don’t go, Hambleton. This is a parson who is staying at Morley’s, opposite the Embassy, and he says he’s got something to tell us. Nice, for once, to hear a story one can believe, I assume that canons of the Church of England are usually truthful?”

“I imagine so,” said Hambleton, rather amused. “They vary, like other men, but normally their statements are reliable.”

The door opened and the Canon was shown in.

“So good of you to see me. You will please tell me at once if what I have to say is of no interest to you, as the last thing I would wish to do is to waste the time of a busy man like you. Gentlemen, it is impossible that that man could have shot the Ambassador. I saw it all.”

“This,” said Bagshott, “is the sort of evidence which policemen pray for. Please go on. Tell me, first, where exactly were you when it happened?”

The Canon explained that he was standing at the front door of Morley’s, “which, as no doubt you know, is raised three steps above pavement level; also I am, as you have seen, a tall man.” He had permitted himself to be amused by the pantomimic gestures of two men within the Embassy who were plainly at odds with each other. “Gentlemen, I rebuked myself for peeping, but if they desired to be private they would surely have drawn the curtains. Now this is the point; it was at the exact moment when the smaller man was shaking both fists in the air above his head, like this, that the taller man bent forward and fell to the floor where I could no longer see him. The smaller man uttered some kind of exclamation, a number of people rushed into the room and somebody drew the curtains. You see my point, gentlemen. If it had been said that the smaller man threw a knife, I might have believed it, but to shoot with a pistol, no, no. Impossible.”

“Tell me, sir,” said Bagshott. “Would it, in your opinion, be possible for this man to have been shot from the street?”

“From the street. Not without the assassin being observed; there were people about. You mean, perhaps, from a car or van, but there was no vehicle of any kind standing or passing at that moment.”

“Did you hear a shot fired, or any sound which might have been a shot fired?”

The Canon hesitated momentarily and then looked up.

“I did hear, not a shot in the ordinary sense, but a noise like ‘piff-ff!’ It reminded me of a pump-up air-gun I had when I was a boy, dear me, many years ago. But an air-gun pellet would not, I am sure, penetrate the skull of a grown man at that range. It might, I suppose, stun him—I am no expert on these matters——”

“And the sound came from—where?”

“I thought, from somewhere above my head, but I must have been mistaken. The sound must have come from somewhere else.”

“But,” began Bagshott——

“My dear sir,” said the Canon, a little testily, “we clergy are hardened, or at least accustomed, to being the cockshy for all sorts of wildly absurd accusations, but no one has hitherto alleged that we shoot ambassadors.”

Bagshott made deprecatory noises and explained that what he had in mind was that one, at least, of the hotel guests was not in Holy Orders. “In any case, do you in fact all know each other personally?”

“Apart from the Organizing Secretary, I do not suppose that any one of us knows every single one of the others, but each of us severally would be known to one or more. I hope I make myself clear.”

Bagshott said, abundantly so, and began to express his thanks, which the Canon cut short.

“Not at all,” he said. “Not good of me at all, it was my duty. That poor little man—I assume you will now be able to induce the Esmeraldan Embassy to release him?”

“He is no longer there, he escaped this evening.” Bagshott permitted himself an amused smile. “In fact, he slid down a rain-water pipe and landed safely in the street in full view of Morley’s. You did not see the performance?”

The Canon’s face fell. “No, did he? No, I did not see it. Slid down the pipe, did he? Dear me, I hope it is not wrong to wish I had seen it. What a

lot I shall have to tell when I reach home again. But I must not keep you from your work.”

“If you could spare a few moments while the statement is typed and then sign it——”

“Certainly, with pleasure. Shall I have to give evidence for the accused at a trial——?”

“There will be no trial, thanks to your evidence.”

“Dear me, how singularly fortunate I am——”

The Canon burred gently out and the door closed behind him.

The Predikant of Alkdam

BAGSHOTT said that he was going to Morley's himself. He deprecated, he said, a too prevalent idea that the more senior ranks at Scotland Yard merely sit in their offices awaiting and collating reports while the junior ranks go out on the job. For one thing, said Bagshott, it isn't true; for another, it ought not to be, and finally, why should mere superintendents and/or inspectors have all the fun?

They were ushered into the manager's office and Bagshott proceeded to extract information with the practised ease of an experienced housewife shelling beans. Yes, the manager had been at Morley's for many years; yes, it followed that his personal acquaintance with members and clergy of the Church of England was extensive indeed. Yes, it would be a simple matter to supply the names of all those who were occupying rooms in the front of the hotel. The register was at the porter's desk, just a moment——

The manager dived out to get it and returned immediately with a large flat book.

"Now, how far back do you wish me to go?"

"Yesterday," said Bagshott, "only yesterday."

"Oh. That is fortunately simple." The manager proceeded to read out a string of room numbers, attaching a name to each: "Archdeacon Grantly from the diocese of Barchester and Mrs. Grantly; the Reverend John Chisholm, Vicar of Billberry, a New Forest parish; the Reverend——"

The list went on and on until the manager came to "The Reverend Predikant Nicolaas van Leyst of the parish of Alkdam, Holland. Now there is someone who is new to me," said the manager, taking off his spectacles to look at his visitors. "He is a minister of the Lutheran Church and I understand that he is attending this Conference on Parochial Duties and Privileges merely as a spectator, in order to study what one might call the domestic organization of the Church of England. He wrote from Holland to book a room; here is his letter on his own paper. Yes, yes, he is the only one

who was not known to me previously and who had a room in the front of the hotel until late last night.”

“He is no longer here, then?”

“Oh no. No, he came to me in some distress because he had had a message to say that his wife was ill and he must get back at once. He was all in a rush; he paid his bill while my porter fetched him a taxi in an endeavor to catch the boat train from Liverpool Street for Harwich and the Hook. Poor man, I hope he caught it, he had none too much time.”

“So his room is now empty——”

“Oh no. No, it was let again late last night, at nearly midnight in fact, to a young Englishman, not in Holy Orders, who is a clerk to one of the Organizing Secretaries. His name is Hereward Biggs.”

“Room number 17,” said Bagshott.

“Number 17, exactly.”

“I wonder whether Mr. Biggs would mind our just having a look at his room.”

“I will ring up to him and ask,” said the manager, picking up the telephone. “You wish me to announce you by name?”

“No, don’t ring,” said Bagshott hastily. “We will just walk up and announce ourselves, if he is there. I think I know Mr. Biggs. Well, thank you very much, Mr. Er-er——”

“Snook.”

“Mr. Snook. You have been most helpful.”

“But,” said Snook, “you do not wish for any information about the other guests?”

“Are there any more in the front rooms?”

“Not in the front rooms, no——”

“Thank you, then we need not trouble you. Number 17 is on the first floor?”

“That is so, yes. Up the stairs and turn left and it is on your right.”

“He had not a glimmering,” said Hambledon as they walked up the stairs, “of what all this is about.”

“Not a spark, but I suppose that everyone still thinks that Dubois did the shooting. Tell me, Hambledon, is the clerical manner infectious?”

“Certainly it is. Highly. Here’s the room.”

Bagshott tapped at the door; a voice inside told them to come in and they did so. The two young men inside were sitting at a table, playing cards; the

room was blue with smoke; an overflowing ash tray was on the seat of a chair and the dressing-table carried two whisky bottles, one empty, and some used glasses.

The photographer glanced up but, not recognizing the visitors, he said nothing; Biggs did not even look up.

“Put it down somewhere,” he said, “there’s a good girl. On the bed will do.”

Bagshott laughed and Biggs whirled round.

“I thought it was probably you here,” said Bagshott, “when the manager told me the name was Biggs. Do you really do spare-time work for the Conference on Duties and Privileges? I knew the Wire had someone on the spot here somewhere; your despatches have the authentic eyewitness flavour.”

“Do sit down,” said Biggs, hurling things off chairs on to the bed. “And it’s Mr. Hambleton, isn’t it? Won’t you have a drink?—George, wash two tumblers for the gentlemen.”

“It’s very good of you, but we didn’t come here to drink your whisky. We came——”

“To ask a few questions,” said Biggs.

“You came here, when was it? Late last night?”

“Just scraped in before the place closed at midnight.”

“Yes. Has the room been turned out and cleaned today?”

“Now, does it look it? A young woman in a checked apron made the bed, but when she proposed to disturb us further we told her to scram.”

“And last night? Do you know if anything had been done to it before you came in?”

“Only clean sheets. There was a motherly old dear in a white apron tottering around the corridors when I came in. She said she’d remade the bed but she’d turn out the room in the morning, if that would do.”

“Do you mind if I have a look round now?”

“Not at all,” said Biggs in a puzzled voice. “Please help yourself. The only things here that are mine are the shaving things on the washstand; the luggage there in the corner is camouflage.”

Bagshott nodded and began by pulling out the drawers in the chest of drawers one after the other; there was nothing in any of them, although he pulled out the drawer paper and looked underneath it. Hambleton opened the wardrobe door and found nothing inside, nor in the drawer under the hanging space.

“Have I missed something?” asked Biggs.

“You didn’t find anything, did you, which the previous tenant had left behind? Any rubbish—a crumpled envelope, a train ticket——”

“No.” Biggs’s puzzled look was slowly giving place to a dawning idea and he looked across the road at the Embassy windows opposite. “No, nothing. But then, I didn’t look.”

Hambledon crossed to the dressing-table and pulled out both small drawers under the table top. He made a small grunting sound and Bagshott came to look. There was a card lying in the drawer, the sort of small card which hotels give their clients to remind them of their room number. It was face upwards, and gave the name and address of the hotel, the name of the proprietor and the room number written in ink. Bagshott picked up the card by its edges and turned it over, on the back was a note of an address: “127 Southgate Street, Lambeth,” and the upright stem of the figure seven had a stroke across it in the manner used by foreigners to distinguish a seven from a figure one.

Bagshott took an envelope from his pocket, slipped the card into it, put it in his wallet, and went on searching with Hambledon, but there seemed to be nothing else. Hambledon looked round the room; there was a piece of decorative carving along the top of the wardrobe. He took a chair across the room and stood on it to enable him to see over the top. There was a moment’s pause.

“Bagshott,” said Hambledon.

Bagshott snatched another chair, stood on it, peering, and said: “Dear me.” By this time Biggs and friend were dancing on the bed but they leapt off it again when the Commander very carefully and slowly lifted down a rifle of the folding variety, hinged to allow the barrel to lie back along the stock. The gun was fitted with a silencer. Bagshott stepped off the chair and laid the rifle on the table among the playing cards.

Biggs burst into speech. “Have I spent thirty-six hours in the same room as the murder weapon and not found it? Oh, Lord, I’ll never live it down.”

The Esmeraldan Embassy were informed by telephone from Scotland Yard that there was good reason to believe that their lamented Ambassador had been shot from a window on the opposite side of the street. In order to prove whether or not this was the case, would the Embassy be so good as to permit an autopsy to be held in order that the bullet might be recovered? A police surgeon, experienced in these cases, would be sent from Scotland Yard to perform the autopsy; a microscopic examination by ballistic experts

would then confirm or disprove certain evidence in the hands of Scotland Yard.

The Embassy said that they demanded as their right the immediate return of the assassin who had escaped from their custody.

Scotland Yard replied that that was impossible, since the man who had escaped from Embassy premises was not the Ambassador's assassin but completely innocent of that crime. If an autopsy were permitted, further steps could then be taken to discover and apprehend the guilty person.

The Embassy said that if the shot had indeed been fired from across the street, presumably the man responsible had been harboured by the management of the establishment called Morley's Hotel and strongly urged that the manager and all the staff should instantly be arrested. "Somebody must have seen the murderer."

Scotland Yard said that doubtless that would prove to be so, once the evidence only obtainable by an autopsy had been made available. Till then, an indispensable link was missing.

The Embassy sighed in an exasperated manner and said that no doubt extreme pertinacity was a principal ingredient in successful detection, and Scotland Yard agreed that that was so, indeed. The Embassy then said that provided that a surgeon of their own choosing was also present, a police surgeon would be permitted to make the autopsy. At what time——

Scotland Yard said: "At ten o'clock tonight? Thank you very much, that will be most helpful."

In the meantime, Hambledon having gone home, Bagshott was pursuing his enquiries at Morley's. There were plenty of descriptions available of the Reverend Nicolaas van Leyst of Alkdam from both staff and guests. He was a man above medium height, with brown hair retreating at the temples, grey eyes, a fresh complexion and a scar across his right cheek rather high up, across the cheekbone. He spoke English very well, though with a marked foreign accent. One of the clergy who had spoken to him said that he was mildly surprised to learn that the man was Dutch, his accent rather suggested that his mother tongue had been French. On the other hand, he did not seem to have said much to anybody; a civil greeting or a remark about the weather and he would pass on his way. He was, said another of the guests, a man who always seemed on the point of going somewhere else. He did not stop, he only paused, as it were. Age? Oh, a man in the forties, not more. Possibly less. No one seemed to be very sure of his age; it was of course on his passport, but the manager had not noticed it, why should he?

Someone suggested that Bagshott should ask a man who had sat at the same table with Van Leyst for one or two meals; they had been observed to be speaking together. "Where is Smith? Oh, sitting in that corner, the thin man with white hair. I'll take you over. I say, Smith, just a minute——"

After ten minutes of the Reverend Mr. Smith, Bagshott came to the conclusion that Van Leyst had chosen him as a companion because then it would not be necessary for him—Van Leyst—to say anything at all. Mr. Smith's conversation was of the kind which flows gently and irrevocably on.

"I do remember one thing I said to him one day when we were at lunch together. He said that he rather liked the C. of E. dress, it always looked so well cut and a good fit. I said that it was all a question of going to the right tailor and that did not necessarily mean the most expensive tailor. I am sure you agree with me, Mr.—er—Bagot, is it not? I gave him the address of my own man, down in Lambeth, not far from the Palace, you know, man named Jenkins in Southgate Street, and I remember that he wrote it down."

Bagshott slipped the room-number card out of its envelope and showed it to Mr. Smith.

"Yes, yes, that is it. I saw him write it down and I noticed that he crossed the seven in the continental manner, I was looking to see if he had it right, the spelling and all, you know."

Bagshott thanked him gratefully, came up for air and returned to Scotland Yard to put through an enquiry to the Dutch police about the Reverend Nicolaas van Leyst, Predikant of Alkdam. Was there such a man, was he in England or had he just returned therefrom?

The next day the answer came back from Holland. Certainly the Reverend Nicolaas van Leyst was Predikant of Alkdam, but he was equally certainly not in England nor had he recently returned therefrom. He was, in point of fact, in hospital with a broken leg and had been for the past three weeks. This enquiry sounded interesting and if there was any way in which the Dutch police could further assist their English *confrères* they would be most happy to do so.

Southampton-Le Havre

“WELL, we know a little more about him now, don’t we?” said Hambledon. “We know that he is probably a foreigner, though the accent and the crossed seven could both have been assumed for the purpose. We know that his name is not Leyst although it’s pretty certain that he has some connection with Alkdam. The Predikant’s own note paper, you know, you’ve got it there. He knew the name of the Predikant there and used it in case somebody looked him up in a book, he may even have known that the real Van Leyst could not possibly embarrass him by turning up in London. We have a very detailed description of him and I imagine you have his fingerprints—yes? Any luck?”

“Not in our records,” said Bagshott. “I’m sending them over to Holland on the chance that they may be known there.”

“Send them to the Sûreté in Paris, too. One of your parsons said that he thought the man’s accent was French, not Dutch, and I rather trust that sort of impression. What about the bullet?”

“It was a rifle bullet, a 6.7 mm. I am expecting a report from the ballistics people at any moment.”

“Did your people find anything else in the room?”

“No. Some fingerprints on the top of the wardrobe which matched those on the card. Hambledon, why did he leave his gun behind? He brought it in his luggage, presumably, so he could have taken it away again.”

“Because he didn’t want it any more and it would be an incriminating thing to carry about with him, wouldn’t it? Fancy trying to pass Customs with that in your luggage, that is, if one were trying to pass Customs. Were there any fingerprints on the gun? No, there wouldn’t be. I wonder where X got Van Leyst’s passport from, don’t you? That is, if Van Leyst has one, and if not——”

The telephone rang and Bagshott lifted the receiver, listened to what was said, thanked the speaker and rang off again.

“Ballistics department,” he said. “That bullet was fired from that rifle at Morley’s.”

“Well, that lets out Dubois, doesn’t it? What are you going to do with him?”

“Turn him loose,” said Bagshott. “In point of fact he’s never been in custody, only detained for questioning.”

“He knows more than he’s told us, doesn’t he?” said Hambledon. “If only a few funny stories about the late Ambassador and his possibly colourful past. I mean, there must have been a reason for the shooting unless the executioner is a man with a down on ambassadors as such and just happened to start off with Esmeralda’s. In that case, my poor friend, what an interesting time you’re going to have as the programme continues.”

“You have the most revolting ideas of any man I’ve ever known, though as a matter of fact we’d thought of that one. Precautions are being taken. Let’s have Dubois in and see if we can get anything out of him.”

Dubois was brought in and it was plain at once that he was not nearly so cheerful and happy as he had been the evening before. He looked anxious and fidgeted in his chair.

“We have good news for you, Monsieur Dubois,” began Bagshott. “You have been completely cleared of the charge of having shot Señor Teluga and even the Esmeraldan Embassy is convinced of your innocence.”

“Thank you,” said Dubois, and wound his fingers together. “Tell me, have you got the man who did it?”

“Not yet, but it is established that the shot was fired from a window on the other side of the road. I think you suggested that that was what had happened, did you not?”

“Yes. Yes, I did, but then I had not thought. Last night, you understand, I had just escaped from those brigands. But then when I go to bed I cannot sleep. I lie and think and the thought comes to me that it might so easily have been I who was shot in place of Enrigo le Canif. Or, even, as well as he.”

“I suppose so,” said Bagshott slowly, “but why should anybody shoot you?”

“They shot Teluga,” said Dubois.

“Why did they?”

Dubois’s shoulders went up. “Who knows?”

“Someone who had a grudge against him presumably.”

“Who knows?” repeated Dubois.

“We were hoping that you did, Dubois,” said Hambledon. “Tell me, do you know anyone who has a motive for shooting Teluga? And, possibly, you also?”

“No, no. I do not know anything about Teluga except that in the past I lent him money and yesterday he said that he would not repay. No one would want to shoot me, why should they?”

“You should know,” said Hambledon, and Dubois’s eyes went from side to side, but he did not speak.

“Dubois,” said Bagshott, “I think there is something you could tell us about the man who shot Teluga. If you know nothing, what are you afraid of?”

“It is enough to frighten anyone, to have a man shot dead within arm’s length. Some madman, how should I know? Can I go back to Paris?”

“Certainly you can, though it’s too late to catch the morning train today. You can go tomorrow perfectly well, why not? Stay in London tonight and cross tomorrow.”

“Can I stay here?”

“What? In this building? My dear Dubois, this is the headquarters of the Metropolitan Police, not a hostel. Where did you stay before the Esmeraldans collared you?”

“In an hotel. I am not going back there. I have some luggage—a suitcase—let it go.”

“Dubois, what is the matter with you? What are you afraid of?”

“Nothing. Nothing. It is my nerves which fail me. Can I get my ticket for Paris at the railway station? Do not stare at me like that, I beg you. I know nothing.”

Bagshott considered for a moment.

“About your ticket, it would be better to buy it today at a travel agency and reserve a seat at the same time. Listen. I will send you in a police car to Cook’s office in Pall Mall, that’s the nearest. You will buy your ticket and reserve your seat and then the police car will take you to the Speedwell Hotel at Charing Cross, where you can stay the night. You will be quite safe there. You can send a messenger with a note to collect your luggage from wherever it is and pay the bill if you haven’t done so. In the morning you can take a taxi to Victoria and get into the Paris train. All right?”

Dubois overflowed with thanks.

“This address in Paris which you gave us, we can get in touch with you there, can we?”

“Certainly, certainly. At all times, it is my home where I live.”

Bagshott gave orders for a police car to convey Dubois, who was then shown out, still babbling of unheard-of kindnesses and unexampled courtesy. The door closed behind him and Bagshott looked across at Hambleton.

“No use holding on to him even if we could,” said Bagshott. “He wasn’t going to talk.”

“He wasn’t, no. This is one of those cases where, one feels, the abolition of thumbscrews was a mistake. I think I’ll ring up Letord at the Sûreté; he may know something about Dubois or be better able to induce him to talk than we are. Tiresome man, Dubois. There’s no doubt that, tossing on his wakeful pillow, it suddenly dawned on him who had really shot Teluga and why and it scared him stiff. Poor Teluga, it really was a little hard having one man after his money and another after his life at the same moment.”

“Dubois thought the man with the rifle would be after him, too.”

“Yes, that was very plain.”

“Then why in the name of common sense,” said Bagshott irritably, “couldn’t the fool tell us all about the man and let us deal with him?”

“I simply hate having to point it out,” said Tommy sympathetically, “but the fact is that Dubois has more confidence in X’s capabilities than he has in ours. I may as well ring Letord from here; it is police business after all.”

Letord said that he knew the man called Dubois quite well. He was a high-class cat burglar and he considered murder to be vulgar and crude. However, he must be persuaded to be sensible. “I will send one of my fellows to meet him off that train and bring him here; perhaps he will talk to Papa Letord.”

The night passed and the next day; it was not until seven in the evening that Letord got into touch with Hambleton.

“The man Dubois,” said Letord’s incisive voice. “Where is he, then? Has he changed his mind about coming home? He was not on that train; do you know if he started on it?”

“No, I don’t,” said Hambleton, vaguely uneasy. “He certainly took a ticket and booked a seat on that train; I assume he caught it. We didn’t go and see him off. Why should we?”

“I merely thought that you might have done so, I do not wish to suggest that you should. As a man he is completely valueless, but as a source of information he may have his uses. Shall we continue to look for him here? He has not yet, by the way, arrived home.”

“I’ll see if we can find out anything here,” said Hambledon.

He got into touch with Bagshott, who blasted Dubois in a few appropriate phrases and said that he would send a man round to the Speedwell Hotel.

The Speedwell reception desk said that Mr. Dubois, the French gentleman, had certainly taken a room there in the early afternoon, but had gone out in a taxi at about four o’clock. He had returned before five, cancelled his booking and left in another taxi at about eight-fifteen. The hall porter remembered both occasions perfectly as the gentleman had asked for a taxi to be summoned and, when it came to the door, had rushed across the pavement and leapt into it like a rabbit down its hole. Yes, the taxis both came off a neighbouring rank, the porter always got taxis from there. Yes, he knew the drivers; with any luck they might be there now. They were, and the Scotland Yard man interviewed them. They remembered the agitated Frenchman perfectly well. Got the wind up proper about something, hadn’t he? The first had taken him to Cook’s office in Pall Mall, waited for him and driven him back again. The second had driven him to Waterloo Station and had heard him asking the porter where to find the boat train to Southampton for Le Havre. “So presumably,” said Bagshott, telephoning to Hambledon, “Dubois changed his mind about the Dover-Calais route and went to Paris via Le Havre instead. It got him out of the country twelve hours earlier.”

“It did, yes,” said Hambledon thoughtfully.

“I don’t see that we need to do anything about it. He wanted to go, so he went.”

“Yes,” said Hambledon.

“What’s the matter?”

“I don’t know. I seem to have got something nagging at me but I don’t know what.”

“Try flea powder,” said Bagshott helpfully.

Hambledon went to Cook’s office in Pall Mall on his way to the office in the morning and found the clerk who had attended to Dubois the day before. Yes, the French gentleman. He came in the early afternoon of the day before yesterday and took a ticket and a reservation on the Paris train Dover-Calais, not the Golden Arrow, the ordinary train. At about half-past four or so he came in again looking anxious and upset and asked if there was any other way of getting to Paris except via Dover. The clerk said certainly, there was the Folkstone-Boulogne route and the Newhaven-Dieppe. There was also the route via Southampton and Le Havre but that was a longer sea passage, a night crossing in fact.

“He seemed to like the idea of a night crossing,” said the clerk. “He said, ‘It go tonight, yes?’ and I agreed. He said, ‘Those others, to Boulogne and Dieppe, tonight also?’ I said no, they would be for tomorrow. So he said, ‘I go tonight please, thank you. You alter ticket, yes?’ So I changed the tickets for him and he buzzed off. Oh, he asked about going by air, but I couldn’t get him a reservation at such short notice.”

“Thank you so much,” said Hambleton, and went from there to the Speedwell Hotel at Charing Cross, where he talked to the desk clerk who had dealt with Dubois. She was a sensible and intelligent young woman and said that Dubois had seemed nervous when he first came.

“I can speak French,” she said, “so we got on quite well. He said he wanted a room with a window looking into a light well; he did not wish to look out on the street. I forgot to say he asked me to send a messenger for a suitcase he had left in an hotel in Bloomsbury. When it came I sent it up, and not long after that he came down and went to the bar for a glass of wine. While he was still there the telephone here rang and someone—a man’s voice—asked for Monsieur Dubois.”

“Asked in French?”

“Oh no, in English, but there was just that little trace of foreign accent. So I asked the caller to hold on and I went and fetched Mr. Dubois. I could not, of course, hear what was said from the other end, but after the first sentence I thought Mr. Dubois was going to faint. He gasped and turned a dreadful colour, so I dodged round the counter and gave him a stool to sit on. They were talking French then, at least Mr. Dubois was, and I didn’t get all of it because he talked so fast. He seemed to be denying something. ‘No, no, I did not,’ he kept saying. ‘I was not ever with that gang, indeed no. I do not like their—no, no excuse me, you are quite wrong. I do not know what you mean—please do not talk to me like that.’ I don’t generally listen like that,” added the girl, with an embarrassed laugh, “but he looked so ill that I was watching him. He didn’t say much, only ‘no, no,’ several times and, ‘believe me, you are quite mistaken. Whoever told you that, lies. I went there, yes, but it was nothing to do with them.’ Then he stopped in the middle of a sentence, so I suppose the caller had hung up on him. He leaned on the counter, looking so really ghastly that I asked if I could do anything. He asked for a double brandy, so I got the bartender to give him one. He kept on thanking me for being kind to him and I said I hoped he hadn’t had bad news.”

The girl stopped and looked away.

“What did he say to that?”

“Something rather funny. He said: ‘Mademoiselle is lucky. She has led an innocent life, her past will never overtake her.’ Then he asked Dick, the porter, to get him a taxi and went out for an hour or so. When he came back he said he would not want his room after all as he was going back to France that evening.”

Hambledon spoke to the porter, the waiter, and the bartender, but as none of them could speak French, it was not likely that Dubois, whose English was painfully limited, would have confided his sorrows to them. In any case, he had not.

Hambledon walked round to Scotland Yard in the June sunshine and went in to see Bagshott.

“Of course,” said the Commander. “I can ring up British Railways and get them to check on their tickets; that’ll tell us. You’re afraid something may have happened to him, are you?”

“Yes,” said Tommy Hambledon.

By the Petit Pont

A DAY or two later Hambledon rang up Letord in Paris.

“About Dubois,” he said. “He changed his mind about travelling Dover-Calais on account of a telephone call he received at his hotel; I don’t know, of course, what was said, but the conversation was in French and it frightened him into sixteen blue fits. He rushed off to Cook’s, changed his tickets and travelled that night via Le Havre. I suppose you haven’t seen him anywhere about?”

“He has not come back to his own place,” said Letord, “but one of my men believes that he saw him walking in the Boulevard Haussmann. You want me to look for him?”

“Odd though it may seem, yes. You see, he is my only link with the man who shot Teluga, for I am perfectly certain that Dubois knows more than he is telling. I don’t even know that he went to Paris, but he certainly reached Le Havre. What I should really like is for him to be, not arrested, but shadowed. I should like to know who are his contacts and I think I will come across myself, probably tomorrow.”

“Dubois is honoured,” said Letord, “and I shall be delighted.”

“So shall I be, to see you. As regards Dubois, the Esmeraldan Embassy are worrying the Home Office and one really can’t blame them, and the Home Office are worrying me, which, after all, is that for which I am paid. So I’ll see you tomorrow if nothing else crops up.”

Hambleton flew to Paris the following day and went straight to Letord’s office to learn that Dubois had not been seen again. “If, indeed, it was he whom my man saw. We went through his room very thoroughly and, my friend, I do not believe it.”

“What do you not believe?”

“Why, that that is his only place of residence. What, a man like that, always tidily dressed, clothes brushed, shoes polished and a sufficiency of clean shirts, to live only in one grubby little room on the second floor of a tenement in the Rue des Taillendiers? The room looks out upon a blank wall.

It is furnished with a bed, a table, a couple of chairs, an oilstove and a frying pan. Nonsense.”

“That is the address he gave us,” said Hambledon.

“I daresay. I should never be surprised to hear that he had a little villa out at Passy, that one, and a wife and two children, one boy and one girl, and that he takes round the collection bag at church on Sundays. He is not a _____”

There came a tap at the door and one of Letord’s plain-clothes detectives rushed in.

“Monsieur, I have found Dubois——”

“Where is he?”

“But almost beneath our windows. He is on the quay below us, here, a little further along, between the Petit Pont and the Pont au Double. He is waiting for someone, he walks up and down and looks at his watch, so I thought it safe to come away, messieurs.”

Before the man had finished speaking, Hambledon and Letord were out of the room and running down the stairs.

The Préfecture of the city of Paris is on the Île de la Cité; here also are the great church of Notre Dame, the Palais de Justice, the Sainte Chapelle and many other such places of historic and antiquarian interest as are listed in guidebooks.

One side of the Préfecture faces, across an open square, the west front of Notre Dame; the south side of the square is bordered by a garden with a statue of Charlemagne; below the garden is the river. At the bottom of the walls on both sides of the river there run narrow quays near water level. At either end of the square there are bridges across the river; the Pont au Double by the cathedral, and the Petit Pont by the Préfecture. The detective led Letord and Hambledon upon the Petit Pont and indicated the short stretch of shelflike quay between the two bridges.

“He is still there, messieurs.”

He was, indeed. He had on a felt hat tilted forward over his eyes, but there was no mistaking the simian slope of the shoulders, the unusually long arms which hung a little forward of his body and the big hands, half closed, like a sailor’s. High above his head the trees of Charlemagne’s garden moved gently against the cloudless sky, and long trails of creepers hung down like curtains from the parapet.

“That’s Dubois all right,” said Hambledon. “A peaceful scene, isn’t it? I wonder for whom he waits.”

Dubois took a turn up and down. There is a flight of wide steps at either end of this stretch of quay, leading up by the two bridges; Dubois looked up at one and then turned to look up at the other and Hambledon drew back.

“He cannot recognize us,” said Letord. “He has the sun straight in his eyes if he looks up here. Besides, there are always people on bridges looking over at rivers, why? I do, myself, if I am not in my usual hurry.” Dubois looked at his watch again. “His friend is late, I think.”

Hambledon glanced across at the parapet of the garden, there was someone leaning upon it, a man but barely visible in the shadow of the overhanging trees and between the massed clumps of greenery. The man raised his arm as though to throw something, people are always throwing rubbish into the river, screwed-up paper bags, empty cigarette packets——

Something fell through the air from the parapet; it landed just at Dubois’s feet and burst with a sharp crack and a puff of smoke. As for Dubois, he was a shapeless heap in a pool of blood.

The detective was first off the mark, but he had to run off the bridge before he could see who was behind the parapet; by the time he turned the corner there was no one there. When Hambledon and Letord overtook him he was staring about like a terrier who has unaccountably mislaid a rabbit, and no one else was betraying the slightest interest.

“They would notice nothing, up here, above the noise of traffic,” said Letord, and ran down the steps, followed by Hambledon and the detective.

Dubois was very obviously dead.

“I will ring for an ambulance,” said Letord, “and have this débris removed to the mortuary. My dear Hambledon, how annoying for you. Let us return to my office.”

A man came in with a tray on which were the various things taken from Dubois’s pockets. There were all the usual things one would expect to find in a man’s pockets; a handkerchief, a half-empty packet of cigarettes and some matches, a penknife, a bunch of keys, some loose coins, a wallet containing a little over two thousand francs in assorted notes, the remains of a book of Métro tickets, and a receipted bill for repairs to a chair, made out to Madame Dubois, Rue du Moulin 57c, Avenue Simon Bolivar.

“What did I tell you?” growled Letord. “The wife, here she is.”

“Where is the Avenue Simon Bolivar?”

“Just beyond the Gare de l’Est.”

There was also a folded paper which was not in very good condition since something appeared to have passed through it, tearing a jagged hole.

“The weapon,” said the detective who had brought the things in, “was a hand grenade. We found some of the pieces.”

Letord nodded. He laid the paper down upon his blotter and very carefully unfolded it, flattening out the jagged points with a paper knife. When he had finished the sheet was almost entire; it was a letter.

Dear Dubois,

It is many years since we met; you may have forgotten me. I have but just returned to Paris after a long absence and I should like to see you again. I have, in fact, something to suggest which may be to our mutual advantage.

I cannot give you my address as I am moving about, but if you would be on the lower quay between the Petit Pont and the Pont au Double, on the Île de la Cité side, at about seventeen hours on Thursday next, the fourteenth, the meeting would, I am sure, be profitable to us both.

The signature was not very legible and was also damaged, it looked like C or G Le Gris or Le Gros, and there was no address. The envelope was missing, so that there was no postmark to suggest a place of origin.

“Now we know what took him there,” said Hambleton.

“Perhaps Madame can tell us something about this Le Gros or Gris, let us go and ask her.”

“Very well,” said Hambleton without enthusiasm, and Letord glanced at him.

“I remember,” he said, “you do not like the weeping, do you? Never mind, you are not this time the cause of it. You can employ the time of our journey in composing the effective consolations, can you not? Besides, we do not know, she may be delighted.”

But Letord was wrong. Madame Dubois was a woman in the later thirties, with a pleasant face and a calm manner, and she received the news with a dignity and self-control which did not disguise the fact that her grief was deep.

“My poor Gaston,” she said, and her voice shook.

“Madame,” said Letord, looking down at his boots, “if it is any consolation to you, he was killed instantly and did not suffer even for a moment. I, who speak to you, saw it happen.”

“And yet you could not prevent it.”

Letord explained the circumstances.

“But,” she said, “who could have wished to do such a dreadful thing?”

Letord looked at Hambledon, who took up the story.

“Madame may have read in the papers the story of the assassination of the Esmeraldan Ambassador in London last week. Madame, I do not know whether your husband told you, but he was actually talking to the Ambassador when he was shot from a window across the road. This fact was not discovered until later and the Esmeraldans, in the excitement of the moment, concluded that your husband had shot him. They detained him in their custody at the Embassy, but Monsieur Dubois made his escape and took refuge with the London police, as he had a right to do, being perfectly innocent of the murder. He told you about this?”

She wiped her eyes and smiled faintly.

“He told me that he was going to London on a matter of business, to collect some money that was due. When he returned I asked him whether his journey had been successful. He said that it had not, since the man who had owed the money was now dead. He said no more, messieurs, and I did not ask, for he never spoke to me at all about his business affairs.”

“He came to the police, as I have said, madame,” went on Hambledon, “and I was there when he was interviewed, for it is our duty to find the man who shot the Ambassador if we can. We asked your husband many questions in case he might have seen or heard anything which would help us—you understand, madame. We knew that he was not guilty—we have proof of that—but he was there, an eyewitness. He could not tell us anything at all about the murder; he had seen nothing except the Ambassador fall dead before him, but I formed the opinion that he did know something which he was not telling. In plain fact, madame, I thought he was very seriously alarmed, but he kept his own counsel and left for Paris by the first available train. I came to Paris for the express purpose of seeing him again and imploring him to confide in me, but before I have a chance to speak to him he also is assassinated.”

She had sat perfectly still with her eyes fixed upon Hambledon while he was speaking; when he had ended she looked away out of the window for a few moments before she answered.

“You will understand, messieurs, that when one has received a shock like this, one does not, at first, think very clearly, but it is plain even to me, now, that you think that there is a connection between these two wicked deeds.”

“Yes, madame, that is what I think.”

“I told you, messieurs, that he never spoke to me about his business and that I knew nothing about it. That is perfectly true; what I did not add was that I was uneasy about it. He told me that he was a commercial traveller and he was, indeed, away from home most days and sometimes for a night or two as well. Men used to come here to see him on business; of course I absented myself from the room while they were talking, I am not of a curious disposition, messieurs, and I am happy in my kitchen. But there were little things. The men, they were not of the type to be serious businessmen, and yet I do not know. Businessmen are of all types. . . . Sometimes he was excited, or anxious, or despondent, but so are men in business. There is nothing to take hold of, you understand. An air of recklessness sometimes. . . . Once I begged him to give up whatever it was, but he only laughed. He was a good husband to me; we have been married for only three years, barely three years.” She pressed her handkerchief against her lips. “If there is anything in his papers that will help you——”

“We may search, madame?” asked Letord.

“Look where you please. That is his bureau, over there, and there are drawers under which are locked, I have not the keys——”

“We have them, madame.”

“Please look wherever you like. Excuse me, I should like to go to my room.”

“Madame, please——”

Both men sprang to their feet and Letord held the door open. She passed through with a word of thanks, crossed the passage and entered a room opposite. As the door closed they heard her break into sobbing.

Middleweight Undertaker

THE flat was small but well furnished, the sitting-room in which they were looked out over lower roofs to the trees of the Parc des Buttes Chaumont. There was a kitchen, a tiny, very modern bathroom and a second bedroom under dust sheets and plainly not used.

“I was wrong about the children, but that is all,” murmured Letord. He led the way back to the sitting-room and Tommy closed the door behind them. Letord started operations on the bureau and Hambledon searched the rest of the room.

“There is nothing here,” he said at last.

“There is nothing here either,” said Letord tartly, “not nearly enough, for there is no trace whatever of his business. What sort of a business is it, *mon vieux*, of which there is no trace among a man’s papers? He kept homing pigeons, and such papers as there are deal mainly with them; their records, their achievements, the events for which he entered them. It is all nonsense, this. He had some house property here and there, a house at Tours, another at Charenton and two more at Mézières; here are the prices he paid for them, the rents he received and what he had spent on repairs. Nothing, nothing. Wait a moment, this type of bureau usually has a so-called secret compartment; we will have this drawer right out. Yes, here it is, one pulls back a slide——”

Letord’s hand came out with a key in it, a long slender-barrelled key with a turreted head and complex wards.

“The key of a safe,” said Hambledon.

“Undoubtedly. Now where is the safe?”

It was not in that room nor in the kitchen, the bathroom or the spare bedroom. Madame Dubois heard them moving about the flat and came out from her bedroom. She was very pale and her eyes were red and swollen but she was perfectly composed.

“Madame,” said Letord, showing her the key, “do you know to what this belongs?”

“I do not, no. I never saw it before. It looks to me like the key of a safe, but there is no safe here.”

“To us, also, it looks like that. You do not know, madame, whether perhaps he kept a safe in the house of a friend? Such things are heavy and awkward to move, especially up several flights of stairs.” For the Dubois flat was upon the third floor and there was no lift.

“No, monsieur. He might have done so and I not know it. You will wish to look in my room; please do so.” She moved into the sitting-room and closed the door behind her while the two men hurriedly went round the bedroom.

“There is nothing here either,” said Letord.

“He was a cat burglar, you said?”

“That is right, he was. He served two terms in prison for it and after that we never caught him out again, the last was five—no, six years ago.”

“We have not asked her if she knows anything about Le Gros or Gris.”

“Quite right, we have not. We will go and ask her now.”

But Madame had never heard that name. If it were true, as the letter stated, that the writer and Dubois had not met for many years, it was not very likely that she would have heard it, since she had only been Dubois’s wife for about three years.

Hambledon, who had been looking out of the window into the street below, turned round and said: “I think that there is a man watching this house. Either that, or waiting for someone.”

Letord went across to stand beside Hambledon and said that it looked like that fellow who had been hanging about when they arrived. Madame Dubois also looked out and said: “It is too far, I cannot see at that range—just a moment.”

She hurried to her own room and came back with a pair of opera glasses, which she raised to her eyes, but there were thin net curtains over the windows and all that she could see through the glasses was curtain net greatly magnified. Before Hambledon or Letord could stop her she had taken hold of one of the curtains and thrown it back before going close to the window with the glasses at her eyes.

The man in the street looked up as though the movement had caught his eye and instantly turned his back and walked away. Letord was out of the room and running down the stairs before the man was out of sight; a minute later he came into view in the street below, running in the direction which the man had taken, though by that time he had disappeared.

“I did a stupid thing, I am vexed with myself,” said Madame Dubois. “It was when he saw me move the curtain that he went away, was it not?”

“That is true, madame,” said Hambleton, “but the mere fact that he did so shows us that he was watching the place and not merely waiting for a friend. Tell me, had you ever seen that man before, to your knowledge?”

“I did not see him very plainly, but he looked to me like one of the men who used to come here to see my husband.”

Letord came back into view, walking fast as always, but he was alone; a few minutes later he re-entered the room.

“He is gone, vanished. He knew some alley, some entry leading out elsewhere,” said Letord. “Never mind, we saw him when we came in, so we can look for him.”

“Madame thinks he may be one of the men who used to come here to see her husband.”

“Name?”

“I do not know, monsieur. Not of any of them.”

“I see.”

Letord retired into thought and there was silence, which Hambleton thought it kinder to break, since Letord’s trances had been known to go on indefinitely.

“Monsieur Dubois,” said Hambleton, “used to keep pigeons, or so we learned from papers in his bureau.”

“He still—they are still there, in the yard below. I must give them food and water soon, before they go to bed. The poor pretty things, I must think what to do about them.”

Hambleton and Letord took their leave and went downstairs in silence. At the door Letord said that he supposed they might as well look at those pigeons. There was a passage leading through the house to an open door at the back; outside, there was a paved yard with high walls round it, and against one of the walls a penthouse roof sheltering a row of cages. They stood upon planks laid upon large wooden cases which had been set up on their ends, and inside the cages the birds paced up and down on their delicate pink feet and regarded the strangers with first one bright eye and then the other.

“This will not help us,” said Letord. “Let us go. Can I drop you anywhere?”

In the morning Hambledon went to the Préfecture, but Letord was not there.

“He is gone, monsieur, all in a rush half an hour ago with a squad car and all advisable equipment. A telephone message came to say that there was trouble at the flat of Madame Dubois; Monsieur Letord took the message himself and immediately there was the whirlwind, you know?”

Hambledon did, for he had known Letord for many years. He took a taxi to the Rue du Moulin and found the house distinguished by the presence of the squad car exactly outside the front door. He ran up the stairs to the third floor, where he found the door of the flat standing open, a scene of devastation inside and detectives from Letord’s own branch dusting for fingerprints and searching closely for any indication of the identity of the intruders.

“Letord, what the devil’s been happening here?”

“Three men looking for a safe. Madame opened the door when they knocked, they pushed her back and came in. They asked her where the safe was and she told them that there was no safe in the place. So they locked her in the broom cupboard for the time being and hunted for it themselves.”

“They seem to have thought it was built into the wall somewhere,” said Hambledon, looking round him at the walls, which had apparently been attacked with something like a pick, for there were gaping holes in the plaster, which was scattered and trampled on the floors. Any piece of furniture large enough to contain a safe of any size had been broken open and Dubois’s bureau was a wreck. “What happened to Madame?”

“She is not much hurt,” said Letord, between his teeth. “Not much. She is lying down in her room with a nurse in attendance. The undertaker got here before that devil lighted the matches.”

“Matches——”

“Between her toes. So she is only bruised and suffering from shock. And terror, of course. It is my fault, I ought to have foreseen this and left a man here. We knew that there was a safe because we found the key of it; when we did not find the safe itself I ought to have known that someone else would come to look for it. We have got two of them, but they were not yet conscious when I had them removed to the cells. They will talk to me presently.”

The bedroom door opened and the nurse came out.

“Monsieur Letord, Madame Dubois would be grateful if you could spare her a moment.”

“But, of course,” said Letord. He tapped on the panel of the door and went in.

“Is Madame much hurt?” Hambleton asked the nurse.

“A very brutal attack, monsieur. It is shock, mainly, from which Madame suffers; she should lie still and keep quiet and not be left alone.”

From the bedroom came Madame Dubois’s voice, a little weary but still firm.

“There were three men, one the leader and two who merely did what they were told. It was the leader who questioned me, and when I said there was no safe here and I did not know that my husband had one, or where it was if he had, it was this leader who told them where to look. Then, when they had searched the place and found nothing, it was he who sent out the two men to stand in the passage while he told me that I had better answer him or I should regret it. He struck me and became very violent; monsieur, he kept on saying: ‘I must have them, I must have them.’ When I asked him what, he said I knew, but, Monsieur Letord, I have not the faintest idea. Then, when I was almost fainting, there was a noise outside in the passage, shouts and bumping noises and thuds, and my tormentor ran out of the room. Then Monsieur Pettitot came in and I was saved.”

“Can you hear one question before I leave you to rest?”

“Please continue, monsieur.”

“This leader, madame. Can you describe him?”

“He was—how shall I put it—a man not remarkable in any way, a small shopkeeper perhaps? He was a Frenchman, yes; he spoke quite well, but not the French of an educated man. He was of about my height, but running to fat a little. Dark hair and eyes and a pallid face; an indoor worker I would say. He had a round face and a short nose and a small moustache, his hands were well kept. His clothes were neat and tidy but not well cut; a blue suit, a striped shirt, a small bow tie. I cannot think of anything about him which was in any way noticeable; one sees men like him all day everywhere in Paris. I am getting tired.”

Letord rose to his feet at once. “I am inconsiderate. You will not be alone; the nurse will stay and I am leaving a man of mine sitting just inside the front door.”

He came out of the room and called to the nurse that Madame complained of being tired, and the nurse smiled and murmured that the sedative was taking effect. She then went into the room and shut the door behind her.

“Come into the sitting-room,” said Letord, and led the way.

“We have finished, monsieur,” said the fingerprint expert.

“You may go, then. Not the constable outside, I shall want him here. Send him in, will you? Did you get any prints? Good. We will compare them with those two men in custody and let us hope there is a third.”

The detectives went out and the constable came in.

“You are to remain here and you are not to leave your post until relieved.”

“Very good, monsieur.”

“Come on, Hambledon, we’ll get back to the office and see if those beauties are awake yet.”

“What happened to your two prisoners?” asked Hambledon as they got into the car.

“The undertaker. A Monsieur Pettitot. He came to ask Madame’s wishes about the obsequies of the late Dubois, you understand. Well, you know how those fellows creep about—do they wear felt on their boots? Anyway, no one hears him come up the stairs and he has his hand stretched out to the bell when he hears Madame cry out. So he takes the door handle instead, the door opens, and he is faced with that scene of wreckage, those two types in the passage and Madame moaning inside somewhere.” Letord lit a cigarette.

“‘Realizing that all is not well,’” prompted Hambledon, “go on——”

“Unfortunately for them, Monsieur Pettitot is a middleweight boxer. Very capable, I understand. I had never heard of him but I do not go in for sport. My men tell me he is a complete tiger. He knocked one of those types out cold with one blow, it seems, and while he was dealing with the other a third man slipped past him and ran for it. So he laid out the second man and ran in to see what was happening to Madame. She told him to ring my office. My dear Hambledon, when they were carried out half an hour later they were still completely at peace. They had better make the most of it,” said Letord grimly. “I do not, myself, feel particularly peaceful this morning.”

Dossier of an Ambassador

WHEN the car reached the Préfecture Letord leapt out and asked whether the prisoners were yet conscious.

“More or less, monsieur.”

“Bring them up to my room one at a time. Keep them apart.”

“Very good, monsieur.”

By the time Hambleton and Letord were settled into their chairs the door opened and one of the prisoners was brought in; a weaselly rat of a man in shabby clothes. He was holding his jaw with one hand and looked acutely unhappy.

“Jean Saucisse,” said Letord the moment the man came into sight. “The last time I saw you I told you to keep out of my way for the future. You are a fool. You will go inside for a long stretch this time and Paris will be the sweeter without you.”

“But, monsieur——”

“Don’t argue with me!” growled Letord. “Put your hands down and stand to attention, you—you gaolbird. What’s the matter with your jaw?”

“I think it is broken, monsieur.”

“Serve you right. What were you doing in that flat this morning? Speak the truth, if you know what that is.”

“I was asked by someone——”

“Who?”

“I do not know—a man——”

“Where was this? And when?”

“Last night, monsieur, in the Rue de Lappe. A man came up to me and said there was one who wanted someone to open a safe of which the key had been lost.”

“A likely tale! When honest men lose keys they call in a locksmith, not scum like you.”

“But that was what happened, indeed it was.”

“Go on. You fell for it and look where you are now. Go on.”

“So I said I would oblige and this man took me to another man who said he wanted me to do the job for him. He said it was simple, it was all in daylight and no risk. We were to meet him outside the École Diderot at eight and——”

“‘We’? Who was ‘we’?”

“I and Jacques le Delicat, he was there——”

“Two of you to open one safe?”

“Monsieur, you do not understand. There are——”

“I understand much more than you realize, unfortunately for you. Get on. You and Jacques met this man outside the École Diderot at eight.”

“He took us along to this flat and knocked and the lady let us in.”

“Liar. You pushed your way in and locked the lady in a broom cupboard.”

“Monsieur, I do not know where the lady went. I and Jacques were looking round for the safe we were to open, but we could not see one, so the man came and told us it was built into a wall or somehow hidden and we were to find it.”

“So you wrecked the place between you.”

“Monsieur, the man said it was his own place——”

“And he did not know where the safe was kept! If you lie to me again ——”

“Monsieur, for pity! He said that the building block belonged to him, not that he lived in that flat, and——”

“Saucisse. If you are not careful I will break the other side of your jaw, I myself. Now then.”

“We could not find the safe anywhere and the man told us to go out in the passage and he would ask the lady to tell him where the safe was.”

Letord showed his teeth and the man went on hurriedly.

“So we stood there waiting and I said to Jacques that I did not like to hear Madame weeping and then the front door opened and I do not remember anything more, not one thing, monsieur.”

“I believe that last phrase. Now tell me—listen, Jean Saucisse, you are going to answer this if I keep you here all day—who was the man who employed you?”

“I do not know, monsieur. Indeed, that is true, indeed it is.”

Letord persisted until the wretched man broke down and wept, but without result.

“Describe him, then,” said Letord, and the description tallied exactly with Madame Dubois’s.

Letord touched a bell and a detective came in.

“Take this man away and bring me the other.”

But Jacques the Delicate, who was more like a cart-horse than any man ought to be, could tell no more than Jean the Sausage had done. He added that their employer had a blackened nail on his left hand, “the ring finger, I think.” Letord stormed at him until the fellow suddenly put both hands to his head and fell down in a faint. He was removed and Letord looked at Hambleton.

“Can you suggest anything else?”

“The undertaker; Pettitot, is it? You said that the third man pushed past him, did he see him?”

“My dear Hambleton, Pettitot at that moment was dealing with that human gorilla who has just been carried out. Pettitot says that Jean Saucisse gave no trouble at all, one punch under the jaw and he was as one dead. Jacques is a fish of another kettle; even a middleweight boxer would have to give him the undivided attention, you understand? Someone slipped past, but who or what it was Pettitot has no idea. We know it was a man because he was there and then he was gone, but Pettitot says frankly he did not see him at all. You asked me about Enrigo le Canif, the late Ambassador of Esmeralda, God help his deluded country. I had him looked up.” Letord pulled out a drawer, took from it a sheet of paper and slammed the drawer shut again. “Not very interesting. Esmeraldan by birth. He came to Paris in 1948 and we had him through our hands two or three times. Nothing serious, you understand, only traffic offences of various kinds. He was fined, that is all. He was at first touting for coach tours and later he was a driver for one of them. In 1953 he went back to Esmeralda. We did not weep but neither did we rejoice; he did not matter, this Enrigo.”

“How did he get his nickname?”

“That I do not know. Perhaps I should find him more interesting if I did, eh? His real name, I see here, was Pedro Maximilio Teluga.”

“That is correct,” said Hambleton. “When Teluga arrived back in his native land, Letord, he was a rich man.”

“What? You mean he went home because he had inherited a fortune?”

“Oh no. His parents are still alive. They were small farmers in rather a poor way until Teluga came home with his pockets full of money. Teluga went away to make his fortune in 1948; in 1953, Letord, he came back rich. Esmeralda then was just beginning to crawl out of the doldrums, her present President is a very capable fellow indeed. Teluga subscribed to this and bought that and paid for the other and became notable. When Esmeralda came to wanting foreign representatives she was very short of men who knew the world at all; very few could speak any language but their own, which is approximately Spanish. Teluga had travelled; he could speak French very fluently and English very fairly. He was naturally appointed Ambassador at London. Local boy makes good, as they say.”

“Yes, yes, but from where did he get the money to start this meteoric career?”

“That,” said Hambleton, “was precisely what I had hoped you would be able to tell me.”

Letord shook his head and looked again at the sheet of paper which carried Teluga’s French dossier.

“It seems,” he said, “that there should be a great deal more upon this paper than, in fact, there is.”

“One does not, as a rule, obtain a great deal of money suddenly without annoying someone,” remarked Hambleton.

“That is axiomatic. I see now why you were interested. I am only sorry I cannot help you at the moment.”

Letord went to Dubois’s flat on the following morning and found that the nurse had gone and that Madame Dubois was up and about, though she still looked pale and moved slowly.

“I am recovered, monsieur, and this afternoon my widowed sister from Lille comes to stay with me while I make up my mind what it is best to do. There is a man downstairs who has come to take away the pigeons. He is a pigeon fancier and a friend of Gaston’s. He is buying them all, with their cages, and is taking them away at once.”

Someone came up the stairs, a little old man with white hair and a friendly look. Madame introduced him as “Monsieur Morand, who is buying my poor pigeons, Monsieur Letord of the Sûreté.”

Morand shook hands and said that he was glad someone was looking after Madame, she needed it. “As regards the pigeons, madame, they are safely in my van and the planks upon which the cages stood. Three out of the four boxes which carried the planks are also in my van but the fourth, madame, I cannot shift. I came, therefore, to ask you whether you knew of

any reason why it should be fastened to the ground, for that is what it seems to be.”

Madame looked startled. “Fastened to the ground? Surely not. It must have stuck in some way.”

“No, madame, for it moves a little, an inch and back again, but it will not lift at all. Do you know of anyone who would lend me a hand with it?”

“There is a constable still here, madame, is there? There should be.” Letord dived into the kitchen and returned with a large pink constable, very young and earnest; pink because he was blushing to the ears at coming to the notice of such as Letord. They went down the stairs together into the yard, where nothing was left of Gaston Dubois’s hobby but the penthouse roof which had sheltered it and one large, grubby, upended packing case standing alone.

“You,” said Letord, addressing the constable, “what’s your name? Vitry? Vitry, move that case.”

Vitry took hold of the case and pulled; it came forward an inch and stopped again. Vitry straightened up and looked at the thing and then put his large feet in exactly the right places, bent over the case and heaved. The case uttered one or two protesting squeaks but moved no more.

“There,” said Morand, “you see?”

“By permission,” said the constable, and began to remove his coat.

“Permission refused,” said Letord. “Go and get a case opener or, one moment, Monsieur Morand——”

“Has a tyre lever,” said the old man. “I get it,” and he skipped out to his van, which was outside in the street. Letord walked up to the case and tapped it with his knuckles.

“One would say,” he remarked, “empty in places and full in others, which is absurd. Madame, should you be standing out here? Let me beg you to go in and sit down.”

“Monsieur,” she said with a faint smile, “it will tire me much more not to know at once why an empty packing case cannot be lifted. I remember when Gaston brought these cases home; he bought them secondhand at Les Halles.”

Morand returned with a tyre lever. Vitry took it from him, found a narrow gap where one side joined the front, inserted the tyre lever and tugged. There was a loud crack, the front of the packing case swung open upon hinges and inside there was revealed the door of a large reliable-looking safe.

Morand uttered a loud exclamation, the constable said nothing at all, and Letord, who had moved in front of Madame Dubois in case the contents were of some unpresentable nature, turned to her and said in a low voice: "So that is where it was."

"Evidently, monsieur! I am amazed."

Letord turned to Morand and said: "This explains a mystery. It was known that Monsieur Dubois had a safe concealed somewhere and Madame was anxious to find it, as naturally there are private papers in it, title deeds and so forth."

Morand turned away. "I will leave you now, madame. That fourth case, it is not important, or if you wish to be rid of it I will come for it some other day. Au revoir, madame, take care of yourself. Au revoir, messieurs."

"What does Monsieur Morand do, or is he retired?" asked Letord, fishing in his pocket for the safe key. "Vitry, run up to the flat and bring down a chair for Madame. You ought to see me open this, madame, presumably the contents are your property."

"Presumably, monsieur. Monsieur Morand has some employment at Notre Dame, he has worked there all his life; I think he is a master carpenter, I know he attends to the woodwork. He lives in the Île St. Louis."

"He appears to be a person of the utmost respectability."

Vitry returned, at a gallop, with a chair. Madame Dubois sat down upon it and Letord put the key into the lock of the safe. He turned it and the door swung slowly open.

The safe had shelves in it. On the upper three were papers neatly tied up; at the bottom there was a tin box which had once contained capsules of lighter fuel. Letord took out one bundle after another, glanced at them and passed them to Madame.

"Title deeds of his properties, madame, and correspondence with his tenants."

She took them and Letord passed to the next shelf. A large sheet of paper, folded, with a plan upon it of what was plainly a street, but without any indication to tell where it was. It showed a considerable length of the street, apparently in order to display the various turnings off; at the top an arrow pointed upwards and there were written the words "*À la gare*"—To the station. The houses upon either side of the street were merely sketched in by rather casual dividing lines, except for one establishment halfway down, which had received more detailed treatment. It had a front door with one window on the left and two on the right; there was a floor plan of the rooms inside. The single window gave light to a small room with a connecting door

to the main room, which was large and had oblongs marked out which might represent counters or tables.

“Is that anything to concern me, monsieur?”

Letord spun round, for in the interest of the moment he had forgotten Madame Dubois. He folded the paper hastily.

“No, madame. Accept, please, my assurances that this paper”—he put it away in an inside coat pocket—“deals with matters with which I hope you need never be concerned.”

“Please,” she said, and rose to her feet. “I—he was very good to me, I would rather not know. I will go up, if you will excuse me.”

Letord looked after her for an instant and then turned back to the safe.

Dubois’s passbook from his bank. Letord glanced at it, dropped it in his pocket for future study and lifted out the tin box, which was heavy. He opened it, looked inside and caught his breath. The next moment he was hurrying out of the yard. He got into his car and put the tin box on the seat beside him, looked at it, picked it up again and put it on the floor behind his feet. He drove off to the Préfecture and rushed up to his room with the tin box held tightly in both hands; his first act was to lift the telephone and ring Hambleton’s hotel.

“Monsieur Hambleton, is he there? Good, yes, instantly, please . . . Hambleton, this is Letord at the Préfecture. Come here quickly, at once, I have something to show you. Take a taxi, run, fly——”

“You are excited, aren’t you? I come.”

Darkness in Paris

HAMBLEDON came into Letord's room and found him sitting at his desk. On the blotter before him, in a patch of sunshine, was a pool of glittering points of fire which changed as Hambledon moved; one spark went out and another took its place in all the colours of the spectrum. The jewels flashed and sparkled; in that strong light the reflections were so brilliant as to dazzle the eyes.

"Good gracious! Good morning, Letord. Have you found the robbers' cave?"

"Yes. That is, I have found Dubois's safe; it is the same thing. Pretty things, are they not? It is almost a pity that I know to whom they belong." Letord picked up a necklace of diamond rosettes linked together with fine gold chain. He held it by one end and swung it in the sunlight; the gems took fire and pulsated as though they were alive. "They are part of the proceeds of a jewel robbery from an hotel on the Riviera, they are the property of a princess from India. Maharanees, do you call them? The downtrodden and exploited victims of your so tyrannous and despotic British Indian Empire. My friend, when your colonial empire is abused as is the fashion these days, why do you not rise up and shout back that no other colonial empire since the world began has contained petty princelings with jewels like these? Never mind, it is no business of mine, perhaps the British enjoy being abused. I know whose these jewels are because I have a list of them here." Letord dropped the necklace and picked up a sheet of paper with a list printed upon it. "These, here, are about half and there may be some missing. I hazard a guess that Dubois was disposing of them a few at a time. Look, here are some empty settings; the stones have been prised out."

"So Dubois had not retired from business."

"Far from it. I told you, it was only that we were not quick enough to catch him."

"Then—has he already sold as much more as there is there?"

“*Ciel*, no. The robbery only took place three months ago. No, the loot was divided, they would not let Dubois have it all at once. He would have sold these by degrees and then they would have given him the rest to deal with. Look at his bankbook over the last five years. Here are the regular payments for rent of his houses and interest on his investments; but here, and here”—Letord’s thin brown finger stabbed the page—“lump sums come in by deposits in cash. Cash! Then, every so often, when he has a few million francs to spare, there is the purchase of another investment and some more dividends naturally follow. I am retiring,” said Letord rapidly, “I am sending in my resignation. Then, when it has gone through, I, too, am going in for crime and in ten years or less I shall have enough in the bank to buy a little place in the country and live happily on the interest of my investments.”

“Unless someone disembowels you with a hand grenade.”

“All trades have their risks,” said Letord, but he sobered up suddenly, put the jewels back in the tin box and shut down the lid. The room turned suddenly darker and Letord said that at his first attempt he would probably be captured by a newly joined village constable still unaccustomed to his regulation boots.

“Then the other half of this haul is in someone else’s care, I suppose.”

Letord nodded. “Madame Dubois probably saw the man at some time. I shall see her again and ask her if she can describe any of them. It is now obvious, is it not, why this gang was so eager to find Dubois’s safe that they were looking for it with pickaxes? You notice, they sent a man to interrogate her whom she had not seen before, just in case her husband might have let slip a name at some time.”

“Gang,” said Hambleton.

“Gang, yes. We have known of this gang of thieves for many years; the individuals change, no doubt, but the gang goes on. But we have never identified a single one of them. We thought that Dubois was in it; the work was like his, you understand, but we could never prove it. They were very painstaking. Look at this.” Letord tossed across the detailed plan which had also been in the safe. “Complete even to the number of windows. It would be still more helpful if we knew what it was.”

Hambleton looked at the plans with interest and laid them down.

“Very nice, and I wish you success, but I don’t quite see how it will lead me to Teluga’s murderer. I think I had better go to Holland and nose round at Alkdam, as it seems clear that our murderer knew the place fairly well. At

least he knew the name of the Predikant there and that he would not be in England at that time.”

“My poor friend,” said Letord sympathetically, “these charming little Dutch villages all take in summer visitors. Alkdam. What did I hear about Alkdam quite recently? Ah yes, I have it. I sent a man up there to look for an absconding financier of Paris who was reported to be there. He was, too, but no longer by the time my man reached it. He had left the day before. He was eventually traced to Brussels and Guernan caught up with him there. He is now in prison awaiting trial.”

“Your man had a look round Alkdam, did he? I wonder if I might have a word with him.”

“Unfortunately he is on leave at the moment. He went to England when he left Holland; there was some indication that the financier had gone there, but apparently the indication lied. When Guernan came back to Paris from Brussels he went on sick leave.”

“It does not matter,” said Hambledon. “It is not likely that he would be able to help me if he only went to Alkdam to look for a man who had already left. I do not know what I want myself; it is to poke about and see if anything pops out.”

“Yes, only too well do I know. But Guernan knows Alkdam well, he told me, he stayed there once some time ago. He is a useful man, Guernan. Already he is Inspector. One of these days he will sit in this chair unless one of his customers rubs him out. He has a natural flair for the work and a good brain, but what makes him outstanding is that he is an excellent linguist. English, Dutch, German, Spanish; so I send him on errands.”

“I shall look forward to meeting Inspector Guernan, but this errand I think I must do myself. If nothing interesting happens within the next day or two I will go up to Alkdam.”

Much later that night, between ten and eleven o'clock, when the last lingering twilight was dropping out of the sky and lights were going up in all the windows of Paris; when the cafés were busy with chatter and music and the clashing of plates; when the cinemas were well into the last showing of the big film and the dance halls were full; when quiet stay-at-home people were cooking a little supper in flats and bed-sitting-rooms and the great restaurants were serving the meals which had made their names, all the lights went out in one sector of the city and these activities came to an abrupt stop. Fortunately the sector was not a large one, only two or three streets, but within its limits darkness covered the earth, as it is written, and

gross darkness the people. Even the streets were only illuminated by the lights of passing vehicles.

The sufferers, numbering several hundred, waited a few minutes more or less, according to their store of patience, and then rang up the Electricity Company. The night clerk on duty in the office noted the area of trouble and informed the foreman in charge, who called out the breakdown gang.

“Sounds to me as though it’s that box on the Quai St. Bernard that’s packed up. Better start there, anyway.”

Every visitor to Paris must have noticed the intriguing little iron kiosks which are frequently to be seen in the streets of Paris. They are severely plain in design but usually brilliant with colour, since Paris uses them as bill-posting stations and the posters of Paris have been famous for a hundred years and more. There is a competition among poster artists to produce the most conspicuous, and their efforts are not without success.

The only odd thing about these kiosks is that they appear to have no door. They have, but it is very inconspicuous; it is curved to fit the contour of the round kiosk; it fits flush and has no door handle but only a small keyhole. The doors are kept locked, because within them is contained the impetuous voltage of Paris. These kiosks are, in fact, part of the electrical installation of Paris and they contain switchboards, control panels, fuse boxes, even transformers, who knows?

When the breakdown gang drove down the Quai St. Bernard they were surprised to see a small crowd gathered interestedly round the kiosk. The van pulled up, the men leapt out and said: “What is all this?”

“There is someone in there——”

“There are knocking sounds——”

“Someone has broken in——”

“There are cries——”

“I heard cries and kicking——”

“Nonsense,” said the foreman. “That is an electrical installation, no one in his senses would attempt to get in.”

“Then it is someone mad,” said the crowd, and recoiled a few inches. “Listen.”

The foreman approached the door, key in hand, and offered it to the lock, which refused to receive it.

“Pierre. Show a light here.”

One of the men shone a powerful torch on the keyhole.

“There is a key broken off in the lock. Just a minute. Stand back a little, please, the company.”

The company gave the men room to move, and while the foreman was considering the problem there came from within the sound of thumps, muffled but distinct, and a voice crying something inaudible.

“It is true,” said the foreman incredulously, “there is someone in there.” He approached his mouth to the keyhole and shouted through it.

“Keep perfectly still! On your life, do not touch anything! We will open as soon as possible.”

A car drew out of the traffic and came to a stop by the kiosk; it was a police patrol car on its normal round. One of the police got out and was immediately informed by the chorus of what was happening.

“Some practical joke, I suppose,” he said. “Those students will be up to anything.” For this is the Quartier Latin, where, indeed, anything may happen. “What can you do? Must you drill the lock out?”

“With luck,” said the foreman, juggling with a pair of pliers, “if I can get a grip on the broken end and the lock is not damaged—keep that light steady, Pierre. Ah!”

There was a click, the heavy door swung open and a man fell out. The policeman fielded him and supported him into the lights of the patrol car.

“Are you hurt?”

“I am burnt behind,” said the man feebly, and felt cautiously behind him. The policemen turned him round and it could be seen that his trousers were badly scorched so that the cloth was breaking away.

“You’d best get into the car,” said the policeman. “We’ll look after you.” The driver and another officer helped him in. “We’ll take him along to the Préfecture, that’s the nearest, and get a doctor to him. We’ll get all particulars and let you know.”

“Don’t worry me,” said the foreman, “just take him out of my way. You can tell the company. Now what’s happened in here?”

The police car drove off with the sufferer kneeling in the back. When they reached the Préfecture the doctor’s car was there already, for he was making a report to Letord on a post-mortem. The doctor was called down and Letord, who thought it an odd story, went down with him.

The victim was largely undressed and the doctor applied remedies to a blistered area in the lumbar region while Letord asked questions.

“Locked in one of the Electricity Company’s boxes? How the hell did you manage that? Trying to break in?”

“Certainly not,” said the sufferer, with as much dignity as was consistent with bending double over the back of a chair for the doctor’s convenience. “I was the victim of a dastardly and treacherous attack. Ouch! You hurt me.”

“Stand still, then,” said the doctor.

“Describe the outrage,” said Letord.

“I went to a café near the Gare d’Austerlitz to meet a man. I had an appointment with him, he was not there. I waited for him, drinking a glass of wine at the bar. In turning round to look towards the door, I had the misfortune to upset the glass of a man standing next me. I apologized, naturally, and bought him a replacement and we fell into conversation. He gave me a drink in his turn and it was after consuming this that I began to feel unwell; not sick but dizzy and unsteady. I said as much to this man. I thought it was due to the heat of the day and the oppression of the atmosphere. He said that I should recover outside, in the air, and that he would stroll along with me. We went out and walked slowly along by the Jardin des Plantes, but instead of getting better I became worse. I remember leaning heavily on his arm and saying that I would take a taxi home, I could not keep my eyes open. He said he would look out for one. I can just remember our stopping, I did not know why, and he turned me round, saying: ‘In here.’ He gave me a push, I staggered forward, a door slammed and I was in darkness.”

“Disconcerting,” said Letord.

“I leant back against something, there was a bright flash and I was burnt as you see. Ah, monsieur, the terror—the agony of that moment! It sobered me completely.”

“I must try that,” said the doctor, “on the next drunk-and-incapable with whom I have to deal. Branding irons, forward!”

“I kicked the door,” continued his patient, “I shouted, and at last I was released.”

“Were you robbed?” asked Letord.

“I don’t know. Where is my coat? I expect the miscreant has stripped me bare.”

“In a sense,” said Letord, with a glance at the partially draped form before him, “I should agree that he had. Here is your coat.” He picked it up and began to lay out the contents of the pockets where the man could see them. “Here is your wallet, it does not feel empty. Handkerchief. Keys. One ball-point pen. Gauloise cigarettes. Petrol lighter. Loose coins. Packet of Week-End cigarettes”—Letord shook it—“empty. Two lengths of string rolled up and the stub of a pencil. A bus ticket——”

“Week-End cigarettes?” said the man in a surprised voice. “That is not mine. I do not smoke those things, they are for the tourists.”

Letord picked up the empty cardboard packet, glanced at it again, strolled across the room to a place where the man could not conveniently see him and, still with his back turned, looked closely at the packet. When he turned to come back, there was a change in his manner which his men noticed if the victim of outrage did not.

“Well now,” said Letord briskly, “we must do something about finding your assailant. First of all, your name and address, please.” He nodded at one of the constables present who prepared to take notes.

“I am Jules Aristide Fréchant, café proprietor, of the Café of the Four Winds in the Rue du Jardin, just off the Boulevard St. Michel. I have been there many years.”

“There,” said the doctor, “you’ll do. You will sleep on your face for a few nights and eat your meals from the top of the piano if you have one, and after that all will be as before. I cannot say the same for your trousers.”

Fréchant thanked him effusively and Letord cut him short.

“May we take your fingerprints, Monsieur Fréchant?”

Fréchant turned an odd colour and his brows drew together.

“Certainly not. I should never permit such a thing. Most unseemly.”

“Oh no,” said Letord smoothly, “why? We shall be fingerprinting the kiosk of your imprisonment and we shall also obtain the prints of the men working on it. Come, Monsieur Fréchant, in the interests of justice you will not wish to refuse. It is merely, you understand, for purposes of elimination.”

“I have an unconquerable aversion——” began Fréchant.

“My dear Monsieur Fréchant,” purred Letord, and the doctor turned from packing his bag to look at him, “you cannot be so unhelpful as to refuse, surely? The innocent, you know, have nothing to fear.”

Fréchant shook his head.

“I ask myself,” said Letord, and he was no longer purring, “why any good citizen should refuse so simple a request from the police.”

The two men stared at each other and Fréchant’s eyes were the first to fall.

“Oh, if you put it like that——”

“A mere formality,” said Letord. “Sergeant, take Monsieur’s prints with his kind permission.”

When this was done, the operation revealed plainly a blackened fingernail on the left hand. While Fréchant was wiping the ink off his fingers Letord drew one of his men aside and spoke in a whisper.

“Take those dabs along to the fingerprint department and ask them to compare them with the unidentified print we got from the Dubois flat yesterday. Ask them to check at once, please, and ring me here.”

The doctor closed his bag and said: “I shall go now, Monsieur Letord, if you have no further use for me this evening?”

“Thank you, Doctor,” said Letord absently. “I think not.”

“As for you, Monsieur Fréchant,” added the doctor, “if that dressing becomes uncomfortable or the pain increases, apply to your own medical attendant. Good night.”

He went out and the door closed behind him.

“I can go home now,” said Fréchant, “can I not? If one would have the infinite goodness to call me a taxi——”

“But you have not yet described your assailant,” said Letord, sitting down at a table and reaching for a sheet of paper. “I will not ask you to sit down, but perhaps you would like a chair to lean on? No? Well now, what was he like?”

The assailant was a tall dark man of some age in the thirties. He had what one might describe as a very ordinary face. He wore a dark grey suit with a darker stripe in it, a bluish-grey shirt and a dark tie. Letord laid down his pen.

“If I were a little taller, that description would do for me. Still better for the sergeant over there by the door. Anything else?”

“He had a scar across his left—no, his right cheek, high up, across the cheekbone. Very noticeable.”

“Scar on right cheekbone——”

“A horizontal scar,” prompted Fréchant.

“Horizontal scar, that’s better. Anything else?”

“And he stammered. Not badly, but one noticed it.”

“I hope that we shall soon have the pleasure of noticing it here at the Préfecture,” said Letord with such joviality that the sergeant by the door looked round in surprise. “There was nothing noticeable about this man’s hands?”

“No—no, I did not notice anything.”

“Hands, you know,” said Letord, laying down his pen in order to display his own, “are as readily recognizable as faces, if carefully observed, and

much less easily altered. One cannot, for example, grow moustaches upon them.”

“No doubt,” said Fréchant. “I should like to go home now, if you please. I do not feel well.”

“But your trousers!” said Letord in a concerned voice. “A man cannot go about Paris without trousers. We, in our official capacity, could not permit it.”

Fréchant threw up his head as though coming to the end of his patience.

“But if I had a taxi—my door is right upon the street——”

The telephone rang and Letord snatched up the receiver.

“It is, is it? No possible doubt? Thank you.”

He put the receiver down again and looked attentively, and with growing distaste, at Fréchant, who became increasingly uneasy.

“If you please, a taxi. I want to go home.”

“Jules Aristide Fréchant, I arrest you on a charge of obtaining entry to a flat, namely, number 57c Rue du Moulin, and there assaulting a woman, the tenant, Madame Gaston Dubois, widow. Put him in a cell for the night; I will see him again in the morning.”

“But——” began Fréchant, clinging to the edge of the table——

“We will, for the moment, excuse your trousers.”

Scullions' Entrance

"HERE is the empty Week-End packet which was in Fréchant's pocket," said Letord, tossing it across the desk to Hambledon. The packet had a white label, such as are used for readdressing envelopes, pasted across it; upon the label were half a dozen typewritten lines.

Look behind the fireplace in small
bedroom second floor this man's
house and you will be happy.
Compare his dabs with that from
Dubois's flat.

"Interesting," said Hambledon coolly. "And did you?"

"*Dieu-de-Dieu*," said Letord, "what do you take me for? A section of frozen cod on a fishmonger's slab? I began with the fingerprints; the one from the flat was his. I arrested him then and there and Madame Dubois identified him this morning. So much for that. Last night, as soon as he was in the cells, I took a couple of men to his house and we removed the fireplace in the bedroom referred to in the note——"

"The rest of the Maharanee's jewels?"

"Precisely. All the rest of them."

"Magnificent," said Hambledon. "There are two of your gang disposed of for you."

"I ask myself," said Letord, a little hesitantly, "to whom I am indebted for this assistance."

"In your place," said Hambledon crisply, "I should acknowledge my indebtedness by not asking myself anything of the sort. What? He is doing for you work which you have been trying in vain for years to do yourself. What would you do if you found him?"

"I should like to enrol him in the police," said Letord frankly, "but he did, after all, murder a citizen of Paris with a bomb and that I cannot have. It is true that Dubois was not a very good citizen, but he has done nothing to

deserve death. That is, so far as I know. I cannot condone assassination, Hambledon; you know that as well as I.”

“Well, yes. I suppose you are right, but it’s a pity.” Hambledon looked again at the typewritten message. “This was done on an old and much-used typewriter; it would be identifiable if you could find it, but I don’t suppose _____”

“Nor do I. I ask myself,” added Letord gloomily, “how the writer of that note knew that we had an unidentified print from Dubois’s flat.”

“I am glad I am not a policeman,” said Hambledon. “My dear Letord, I congratulate you from the bottom of my heart on regaining those jewels, but even I am beginning to ask myself whether all this is anything to do with me. I am here to try to find out who killed Teluga. I came here to see Dubois because I was sure he knew something, but it may have had nothing whatever to do with jewel robberies. I think I——”

Letord uttered an exclamation, pulled open a drawer and took something from it. “I meant to have shown this to you before, but it escaped my memory. Dubois was wearing this on his finger. It was taken from his body.”

He gave Hambledon a signet ring of a heavy old-fashioned design with a coat of arms out in a carnelian bezel. The shield bore a device of three roses across the top—“in chief”—with a Maltese cross below. Hambledon looked at it attentively.

“Proceeds of a robbery?” he asked. “Odd that he should wear this openly, if it were. One should be able to discover to what family this ring belonged. It is an old ring.”

“If it amuses you to take it up,” said Letord graciously, “do so. I have no note of it that I can find among lists of stolen property. Madame Dubois should have it if other ownership cannot be proved.”

“It might help, though I doubt it; it is just worth while making a few enquiries.”

Hambledon, with the ring on one of his fingers, left the Préfecture. His second enquiry sent him to a vast library smelling of cold stone floors, antique dust and calfbound volumes gently decaying. The respectful quiet of ages hung in the air and so awed Hambledon that when at last he found the right section he applied for information in a sort of hushed whisper which well-brought-up people use in church.

The arms on the ring proved to be those of Montargent de la Sainte Croix, an ancient family of Brittany.

Hambledon took the Métro to Buttes Chaumont to call upon Madame Dubois. She was at home, and with her was another and older woman, also

in the undiluted black in which Frenchwomen mourn their husbands, who was introduced as the widowed sister from Lille. She gathered up her knitting and prepared to rise.

“Monsieur,” she said, “no doubt has business to discuss with you, Annette.”

“I beg Madame not to disturb herself,” said Hambleton. “It is only a small matter and should not take a moment. I have here, Madame Dubois, a ring which your husband was wearing. Could you be so infinitely obliging as to tell me about it?”

“But certainly, monsieur, it was a wedding present to Gaston from one of his friends, I never heard his name. This was a man who came to the wedding reception all in a rush; he was going abroad that day, he had had no time to buy a present. He pulled that ring from his finger and put it upon Gaston’s. ‘Wear it, *mon vieux*, and think of me sometimes,’ he said. I remember now, he said that he must not delay or the ship would sail without him.”

“The ship,” said Hambleton. “And this, madame, was in 1953?”

“That is so, monsieur, on the seventeenth of August.”

Hambleton thought of one man who had sailed from France in 1953; it was the longest of long shots but just worth trying. He took a photograph from his wallet and showed it to her.

“Was it, by chance, this man, madame?”

She took the photograph from him and looked at it.

“No, the man at my wedding was clean-shaven and looked younger than this. He was very good-looking, a handsome man, but so indeed is this one.” She picked up an envelope from the table and used it to cover the mouth and chin of the photograph. “But yes, I think it is the same. I cannot be certain, but it looks like him. Monsieur, I only saw him that once, and on one’s wedding day one’s mind is not at its calmest, Monsieur will understand. I would say that it could be the same, that is all.”

“Thank you, madame. You cannot remember how your husband addressed him?”

“Not by any name, for I asked him afterwards who was the man who rushed in and out again and he said it was no matter as he had gone away for good. May I ask—or perhaps I should not.”

“I had better not say,” said Hambleton cautiously, “until I am perfectly sure.” He put the photograph back in his wallet.

“And the ring——” said Madame Dubois hesitantly.

“May I borrow it for a few days, madame? I will tell you frankly that I am interested in the man who gave it to your husband—if I might keep it for a little——”

“Please,” she said, “please do so. If it is right for me to have it back, I am sure that you will see that I do.”

“Depend upon it, madame,” said Hambledon and bowed himself out. He ran down the stairs humming tunelessly to himself, for the photograph he had shown her was a portrait of Pedro Maximilio Teluga, the late Ambassador of Esmeralda.

Hambledon went back to the Préfecture and told Letord his story. “But she is not certain,” he added. “Do you know whether Teluga was clean-shaven in those days?”

Letord said that he did not. He added energetically that the wretched overworked underpaid police of Paris had not hitherto made a practice of noting down in detail the personal appearance of people who committed minor traffic offences such as parking in the wrong place or crossing against the lights, and that was all that they had had against Teluga. It was not, he added in the tone used by governesses in explaining minor points of table manners to children, as though Teluga had been a well-known criminal.

“Not ‘well known’ certainly,” agreed Hambledon, and Letord looked at him.

“You are right, though even now we do not know that he was a criminal, we only guess it. In your place, I should go and look at the illustrious family of Montargent de la Sainte Croix. They might have some story to tell. You will find full particulars in the usual reference books; you may consult them in our library.”

The next afternoon found Hambledon jogging happily along in a slow local train into the remoter parts of the country of Brittany which, although it contains the ports of Brest and Lorient, is still a place apart.

Eventually the train stopped at Montargent and Hambledon descended while the guard and the one porter engaged in conversation in a French so peculiar that Tommy only gathered vaguely that the subject was milk. After a little, the guard climbed back, the engine gave a deep sigh, and the train slowly rumbled away.

Hambledon asked the way to Montargent, since there was no village in sight, and the porter pointed out a footpath which apparently led straight to a rock face and there vanished.

The path led up to the rock face, twisted sharply and entered a cleft in the hills. Ultimately Hambledon emerged, as through a doorway, to find

himself looking down upon the village of Montargent at his feet in the valley; grey walls and roofs and a grey church tower, all veiled in trees.

“There is something about this place which is not quite real,” said Hambledon, and walked on. A few yards further on, a steep path led up and back to his right. He glanced over his shoulder and was startled to find a castle close above him, so close that a stone dropped from the curtain wall would have rolled to his feet.

“I seem to have arrived,” he said and turned up the path, remembering as he went that the present Seigneur de Montargent de la Sainte Croix was Clovis Raimond, b. 1868 and therefore eighty-eight years of age. Hambledon sighed and plodded on.

The path ran by the foot of the curtain wall till it took him to a door in the wall. Over the arch there was carved a coat of arms with the three roses above the Maltese cross. The door stood open; there was no one to be seen and Hambledon crossed a cobbled yard between high walls to a low and deep doorway in the house itself. This door also stood open to a stone passage and still there was no one in sight. He looked about him and saw an iron bellpull so he pulled it; far away within the house a deep-toned bell answered.

Almost at once a man in livery came along the passage to the door and waited for Hambledon to address him.

“The Sieur de Montargent de la Sainte Croix?”

The man bowed.

“Will you ask him,” said Hambledon, taking a card from his wallet, “whether he will do me the honour to receive me for a few minutes? I will not detain the Sieur for long.”

“May I ask,” said the man, receiving the card on a salver, “the nature of Monsieur’s business with the Sieur?”

Hambledon had prepared a sentence about an official enquiry into the ownership of a certain article of value, but decided against it.

“It is this,” he said, and showed the ring on his left hand.

He was led along passages and round corners and left in a small room while the servant went away with his card. Hambledon looked out of a barred window upon a forecourt with a tall gatehouse admitting a carriage road.

“You,” he said, addressing himself sternly, “presented yourself at the scullions’ private entrance. Oh well.”

Presently the servant came back and took Hambledon to another room, where a man sat at a table and rose to his feet as Hambledon came in. This was a man in the thirties with a sombre expression and the bearing of a soldier. He had dark eyes, very deep-set, and beneath one of them the scar of an old wound.

“I am François de Montargent,” he said in a slow even voice. “My grandfather, for whom you asked, is no longer able to receive visitors. Would you care to say to me whatever it is that you wish to say?”

“It is good of you to receive me,” said Hambledon.

“Please sit down,” said De Montargent, as though Hambledon’s voice had reassured him.

“Thank you. It is a question about this ring, which appears to bear the arms of your family.”

Hambledon laid it upon the table and De Montargent picked it up to look at it, holding it close under his eyes.

“You are right, it does,” he said, and looked across the table at Hambledon.

“I am an Englishman, monsieur, and a member of the British security organization. I have been sent to France to trace the antecedents of a man who was assassinated in London last week. This ring was found on the hand of a man who also was murdered, but in Paris, four days ago. His name was Dubois and he was by profession a cat burglar.”

De Montargent looked faintly amused. “It does not sound as though France had lost one of her more irreplaceable citizens. This ring was stolen from me some years ago”—he slipped it on his finger—“but not in a house robbery. It was taken in Paris and entirely owing to my own carelessness. I laid it down while I was washing my hands and it was whisked away.”

“Dubois did not steal it; it was given to him by the other victim of assassination of whom I spoke. It may be, of course, that he bought it innocently.”

“Are you referring to the Esmeraldan Ambassador in London? I do not wish to ask an indiscreet question, but a man of your stamp would not travel round Europe looking for the murderer of a nonentity.”

“Thank you,” said Hambledon. “Yes, that is the man, his name was Teluga.”

De Montargent looked away out of the window, but not as one who saw what his eyes rested upon, and Hambledon wondered what mental picture was before his eyes.

“Teluga,” said the Frenchman slowly, and his face darkened. “He was a scoundrel, monsieur, and the man who killed him deserves a medal.”

“You knew him personally, monsieur?”

De Montargent returned abruptly to the present day.

“I encountered him at one time, monsieur, to my sorrow. I repeat, he was a scoundrel and is much better dead.”

“May I know——” began Hambleton, but De Montargent cut him short.

“No. If you did, it would not help you and I do not care to have the subject reopened.” He touched a bell push on his desk and went on: “I am greatly obliged to you, monsieur, for returning my ring to me, I always valued it and am delighted to have it again.” The door opened, the servant came in and De Montargent rose to his feet. “I thank you indeed for your visit and wish you a very good day. Étienne, perhaps monsieur will take a little refreshment.”

Hambleton bowed, refused the refreshment and was conducted to the main gate with the greatest politeness. He tipped the servant and walked away down the hill, so wrapped in thought that he forgot to look back.

The Policeman's Story

HAMBLEDON entered the village and walked into the market square, where there was the inn of the Three Roses, ancient and picturesque, if not dazzlingly spotless. However the landlord was welcoming and friendly. Certainly Monsieur could be accommodated for the night, certainly Monsieur could have a little something now and dinner later, with pleasure. When one had had the sense and the good fortune to marry the cook from the castle, it was understandable that one's meals were above all things edible.

Hambledon ate an excellent omelette, drank a passable wine and did his best to make the landlord talk. Here he succeeded, if what he wanted was the colourful past history of the Montargent family from the time of the Crusades, but when it came to the present generation the landlord dried up. The old Sieur Clovis Raimond enjoyed the respect of all who knew him, the young Monsieur François enjoyed the respect of all who knew him. Yes, the grandson, his father died in 1935. All the family, to the remotest cousin, enjoyed the respect of all who knew them.

Hambledon said that he was sure that that would be so. He had himself had the honour of being received by Monsieur François on a matter of business.

"He is back, then," said the landlord. "He has been away in England for the past three weeks, at London, or so we were told."

"Indeed," said Hambledon without apparent interest. "It is pleasant in London at this time of the year." He then turned the conversation to the village. The church, yes, most ancient. He asked if there was a constable in the village and was told that there was, but that he was out on his rounds. Hambledon said that it was not urgent, a small matter of asking advice about something, and was assured that Constable Bargeau always dropped in to the Three Roses in the evening; Monsieur should be informed.

In due course Bargeau came in with his uniform jacket unbuttoned to show that he was off duty. He was a pleasant-faced man who came

originally from Lorient and was not, therefore, so completely overawed by the dignity of the Great Family as the aboriginal inhabitants. Hambledon sized him up, took him into a quiet corner and showed him Letord's authorization. Bargeau looked at it, nodded, and said: "Monsieur desires?"

"A little information."

"Without conceit, if it is to do with this immediate district, I know it. Some of the people," added Bargeau thoughtfully, "would be surprised."

Hambledon said that he was upon the track of a gang of jewel thieves and already a certain degree of success had been attained. The jewels of the Maharanee had been found, at least, nearly all of them. Bargeau's face lit up. Was it possible that he, Bargeau, was in a position to help to round up a gang like that?

"Certainly you are. One of the gang was murdered in Paris last Monday, and, one thing leading to another as they do in police work, it was when Monsieur Letord of the Sûreté was looking into that affair that he came upon the Maharanee's jewels. Yes, well, that is one of the gang out of the way, but there are others and they also must be caught. This man who died had a ring on his finger bearing the arms of the Montargent family, so I brought it here today to show it to Monsieur—"

"Monsieur François, we call him."

"I wanted to know whether he could tell me anything about it, but he was not very forthcoming." Hambledon repeated what had been said, and added: "So I come to you to ask you whether you know anything about this Teluga, since he seems to have done some sort of wrong to Monsieur François. I did not wish to press Monsieur if I could get the information some other way, as he said frankly that he did not wish to talk about it and indeed it may not help at all in the end. But one must know all; you are a policeman yourself and you understand."

"Certainly, monsieur. Seven tenths of what we so patiently learn is of no use at all, that is so in every case, but one must have it all to pick out the three tenths which do matter. I do remember something about this man——"

Hambledon took the photograph of Teluga from his wallet and showed it to Bargeau who, like Madame Dubois before him, covered up the mouth and chin, looked again, and nodded.

"That is he. I only saw him once but I had occasion to mark him closely. It was on a day in August three years ago. I had not so long been here then and I was"—Bargeau smiled apologetically—"courting the second housemaid at the castle. We used to meet in the evening in what they called the Italian garden, a small square divided off from the rest and only

overlooked by the window of Monsieur François's study where he did all the estate business. But as that room was never used in the evening after dinner, the garden was private enough. I went there as usual one night when it was getting dusk under the castle walls and I waited for Colette in the little garden and presently I heard voices from a window above my head, for it was a hot night and the windows were all open. The voices were those of Monsieur François and another man. The other man said something to the effect that it was cheap at the price and he would advise Monsieur to pay, and at that I turned to go softly away, because I do not care to eavesdrop when I am not on duty. Then Monsieur François said something which decided me to stop where I was because it seemed possible that I was on duty after all. He said: 'This is blackmail and you are a damned scoundrel.'

"Dear me," said Hambleton thoughtfully.

"So the other man laughed and said that he would not advise Monsieur to complain to the police because then he—this man—would certainly talk and that would not be at all nice for Monsieur. For a gentleman in Monsieur's exalted position, how painful, and so easily to be avoided for a paltry sum of a million francs.

"'Until you come back again demanding more,' said Monsieur François, and the man laughed again and said that there was no fear of that as he was leaving France in two days' time. 'I am going back to my own land,' he said. '*La Patrie*, eh? No place like it.' He had an odd accent, this man. I thought him a Spaniard perhaps. So Monsieur François said that he would give him the money this time on two conditions; one, that he left France within three days and, two, that he never came back. 'For if you do not go,' he said, 'I will set the police on you and damn the consequences, and if you ever come back, I will kill you at once.' Monsieur may wonder," added Bargeau, "how I remember all this so well, but the fact is that I wrote a verbatim report that night in case it were ever wanted and only last week I read it again."

"Please go on," said Hambleton.

"Then the man said that Monsieur François was wise and, as for himself, if ever he was mad enough to come back to France Monsieur was welcome to try to shoot him if he could. Then there was silence for a space and before they began to talk again Colette came to me in the garden, so I led her away quickly lest Monsieur François should hear us, in his turn. Colette said that she was late because there was an unexpected visitor and Monsieur François was not pleased, one could see that, and all the household were on edge and Monsieur had ordered two of the gamekeepers to be sent for to come to the castle in case they were wanted. We strolled round to the kitchen door

together and I soon saw that if anything exciting were to happen, she did not wish to miss it, Monsieur understands.”

“Perfectly. And did it?”

“The two gamekeepers were there, sitting in the kitchen waiting for orders, and presently word was brought that they were to go through the house and escort the visitor to the station as it was now dark and he wished to catch the last train to Paris. So, at that, I made my excuses and went down to the station in case there might be any trouble there, but there was not. The two gamekeepers came in with a man between them and it was the same man as the photograph which Monsieur showed me just now. The train came in, he got into it, and the train left again. That is all.”

“Thank you very much,” said Hambledon. “How wise I was to ask you, for I cannot imagine Monsieur François telling me that story himself. And the date was August——”

“August the fifteenth, monsieur, three years ago. Nineteen fifty-three.”

“You have not, I suppose, the least idea of what grounds there could have been for blackmailing Monsieur François?”

Bargeau lifted his shoulders. “None, monsieur. Monsieur François goes to Paris frequently; he has had a flat there these several years. He is not married and he is still young—who knows?”

“Oh, quite,” said Hambledon.

On the following morning Hambledon went back to Paris and put through a long telephone call to Bagshott at Scotland Yard.

Two days later he received the answers to his enquiries and went to see Letord at the Sûreté.

“Well, I think I’ve found Teluga’s murderer,” he said. “Listen to a story.

“Once upon a time, there was a man of good family who lived in a castle and another man came to see him and demanded a large sum of money in blackmail. So the gentleman paid up on condition that the blackmailer left France within three days and never came back, as, if he did, the gentleman would shoot him on sight or words to that effect. Shooting was mentioned.

“Two days later, that was on August 17, 1953, the blackmailer, whose name you have already guessed to be Teluga, left Europe and did not return until he was appointed Esmeraldan Ambassador in London.

“A little over three weeks ago the gentleman went to London and stayed at Claridge’s until Wednesday last, when he returned home. I saw him on Thursday and showed him the ring. He told me that the ring had been stolen from him years before and admitted that he had known Teluga, to his

sorrow. He added that Teluga was a scoundrel and that the man who killed him had performed a public service. He refused to say any more.

“On the evening when Teluga was killed, the gentleman was driving in a taxi along Piccadilly when the taxi was involved in a minor collision with a private car. The taxi was not to blame, but the police took the gentleman’s name and London address in case he should be required as a witness. This was a few minutes after nine, about an hour before Teluga was shot and within ten minutes’ walk of the Embassy.

“The taxi was sufficiently damaged to be put out of action, so the gentleman got out of it, accompanied by a manservant who was carrying a long narrow case. The gentleman seemed a little shaken by the crash, because the manservant helped him to get out. When the police enquiries were complete the gentleman and his servant walked away together.

“The gentleman has a scar on his face and so had the sham clergyman who stayed at Morley’s. What was in the long narrow case the servant carried?”

“Finally, Letord, the constable at the village where the castle stands recognized Teluga’s photograph as that of the scoundrel who had blackmailed this gentleman. I am told, also, that when this gentleman served in the Resistance he was known as a crack shot.

“Taking one thing with another, Letord, don’t you think there is a case to investigate?”

Letord, who had been making notes, looked them over and nodded.

“It would seem so. What is the gentleman’s name and address?”

Hambledon told him, and Letord sprang to his feet.

“Montargent de la Sainte Croix himself? But they are a great family, they are of the *ancien régime*. I shall ask for an interview to discuss this,” said Letord, and lifted the receiver.

“I’ll go,” said Hambledon, picking up his hat. “Let me know——”

“I’ll ring you,” said Letord, and addressed himself to the telephone. Hambledon returned to his hotel and lunched there; he had but just finished when Letord rang him up.

“I am going down at once to interview your suspect,” he said. “Tact is to be exercised and I am not to put my large foot in anything, if it can be avoided.”

“Certainly not,” said Hambledon amiably. “Most undesirable.”

Letord returned late that night and came into Hambledon’s hotel to find him sitting in a corner of the lounge reading the German version of *Picture*

Post.

“Well?” said Tommy.

“I went there,” said Letord, letting himself fall into a basket chair, which complained creakily. “I was graciously received and allowed to ask any question I liked; I was also permitted to question the manservant. All your facts are as you stated and everything fits in beautifully. There is only one thing the matter with it; Montargent did not shoot Teluga.”

“Who provides the alibi? The French Ambassador?”

“No need. Montargent was a good shot once, but that war wound in the head damaged the optic nerve and he can see nothing which is more than a metre or so distant. You say in your country that some man ‘could not hit a haystack.’ My friend, the unfortunate Monsieur François cannot see the haystack until he is near enough to touch it, and then he would not see the whole of it.”

“Who told you——”

“I have interviewed, among others, his oculist. Besides, at the castle everyone knows. He is sensitive about it, the poor monsieur, he does his best to conceal it. You did not notice anything, no?”

“Only that he held the ring close under his eyes when he looked at it.”

“Oh, and the long case carried by the servant. Since Monsieur has had to give up shooting he has taken to fishing instead. The case contained all that is possible of perfection in a new fishing rod.”

There was a short silence.

“I am sorry for your disappointment, my poor friend,” went on Letord. “Such a beautiful story, so accurate in every detail, so well fitting, and all the time as empty as one of those air balloons on strings the children run about with in the Tuileries Gardens. If De Montargent had indeed shot Teluga, I should have said that he was justified. I dislike blackmailers.”

“I agree,” said Hambledon. “When you show me that De Montargent is cleared, I rejoice, but when I consider that I am now back at the beginning where I started——”

Letord snapped his fingers and an attendant looked round.

“Monsieur desires?”

“Two Grand Marniers. For the amelioration of undeserved distress.”

Bank Robbery

HAMBLEDON packed his suitcase and caught the Étoile du Nord express from Paris to Amsterdam the following morning. From Amsterdam he travelled by that cross between a train and a string of tramcars with which Holland serves its remoter villages. It passed steadily across mile after mile of a patchwork of small fields, each cultivated to the last available square inch and for the most part divided from each other by deep and narrow drainage ditches, some as dark as night and some a vivid green with weed, and everywhere were windmills; for this is the Holland of the picture postcards, where people wear wooden clogs and even, occasionally, broad-seated trousers with patches in appropriate places.

Hambledon arrived at Alkdam in the early afternoon to find it a pleasant and unpretentious Dutch village of one wide street with a few minor lanes leading from it. There was a fair-sized inn which called itself an hotel; he had a belated lunch there and then set out for a stroll.

A needle-pointed spire showed him where was the church and close beside it the small neat house of the Predikant, dark red brick with white-painted door and window-frames and snow-white muslin curtains at the windows. Hambledon walked up a short brick path to the door, pulled a brilliantly polished brass bell handle and heard a bell ring somewhere at the back of the house.

Presently a rather halting step could be heard inside and the door opened to disclose the Predikant himself in clerical dress, a solidly built man of medium height with grey eyes and a fresh healthy complexion and grey hair retreating at the temples. He had a pleasant face, though his features were undistinguished and even commonplace, and he leaned heavily upon a thick stick with a rubber ferrule. He smiled and apologized for keeping his visitor waiting at the door. "My good Kaatje is out upon some errand and I am regrettably slow on my feet at the moment."

"Please do not apologize," said Hambledon. "I am sorry indeed to have given you the trouble of coming to the door. I wonder whether I might have a word with you, you are the Reverend Nicolaas van Leyst?"

“I am indeed. Do come in.” The Predikant led the way to a small room looking out upon his garden at the back of the house. “I had the misfortune to break my leg in a fall about five weeks ago and am not long home from hospital. I am happy to say that my unfortunate leg is mending well but it is regrettably disinclined to do any work as yet. Will you take that chair?” He lowered himself into a comfortable armchair, leaned back and beamed upon Hambledon. “Ah, that is better. What slaves we are to our wretched carcasses, are we not?”

“They are good servants to us for the most part,” said Hambledon, “and if a faithful servant has an accident, it is only right to pamper him a little, is it not? Well, now, I do not wish to take up too much of your time.” He introduced himself and added that he was a member of a British security organization, deliberately using a loose phrase which might be taken to include the police. “A crime was committed in London a fortnight ago and, though we know that you cannot possibly have had anything whatever to do with it, I have been instructed to come and see you because the man who did it had the impudence to call himself by your name and to say that he was the Predikant of Alkdam.”

Mr. van Leyst’s colourless eyebrows went up and his face broke into a broad smile.

“Really? Indeed, how very surprising. Do you know, although my profession has brought me into touch with various evildoers at various times, this is the very first occasion upon which I have ever been mixed up with the crime itself. Quite a new experience. Yes, I suppose it was impudent of him, as you say, but it was also considerate of him to choose a time when I had so impeccable an alibi. I wonder whether that was intentional, I hope so. Well, that explains, probably, two little mysteries which have been puzzling me, perhaps I might tell you——”

“Please do.”

“I broke my leg—what—a day or two over five weeks ago; I fell down the ladder from the loft in this house. The doctor came and I was put to bed until the ambulance came to take me to hospital. While I was away I gave instructions for my good Kaatije to take her annual holiday, so that this house was closed up for rather more than a week. Well, now, when I was well enough to be properly dressed I sent for my clothes and Kaatije reported that though she had put them away herself after I left, she could not find them; they were gone. She had to send me my old suit, which is very threadbare indeed, I am sorry to say. However, it served. I came home a little over a week ago and the suit was still missing, most baffling. Who could

have wanted it? Then, among a pile of correspondence, I found a stout envelope containing, of all things, my passport.”

“Ah,” said Hambleton.

“You expected that? Really! Here it is, you may care to look at it. It was posted in Paris as you will see by the postmark upon the envelope.”

“Has it any fresh stamps upon it?”

“No, it has not—look for yourself. It has only the stamps of my two visits to Germany, two years ago and last year. I have a married sister living near Dusseldorf.”

Hambleton looked through the leaves of the passport. The man who carried it had had a passport of his own for presentation at frontiers. He glanced at the photograph of the kindly but shapeless features and reflected that they would serve for almost anyone, provided that he also looked ordinary enough. Besides, it had not been presented to eagle-eyed frontier officials but only to a desk clerk in an English hotel who would not look at the photograph at all. Why should he, when all he wanted was the nationality and the number? There was, of course, no scar upon the photographed face.

Hambleton handed it back and said: “I am most grateful. Well, now _____”

“Oh, but I have not done. No, indeed. You see this suit which I am wearing?”

“Certainly,” said Hambleton, not seeing anything remarkable about it.

“It is much more travelled than I am, for it has been to England.”

“Good gracious! Has it?”

“It arrived the day before yesterday, by post from London. It is, of course, the one which was missing. I have never been so surprised in my life.”

“No doubt you must have been.”

“I must point out one thing,” said Mr. van Leyst in a tone of appeal. “This man, whoever he is, may be a criminal but he is both kind and honest. We of the Dutch Reformed Church are not wealthy men and he has gone to considerable trouble to ensure that I shall not be the loser by his actions. He need not have returned me my suit, need he? Are you so certain that he is a criminal? Is there no possibility of mistake?”

“I will tell you this,” said Hambleton, “that, if there is, I shall be very happy to find it.”

“And you will search for it?”

“I will indeed. I should, in any case, but this time I shall do so with a will.”

“Thank you. And the crime, was it anything so very bad?”

“I am sorry,” said Hambledon quietly. “It was murder.”

The Predikant threw up his hands and there was a short silence.

Hambledon looked about the room and affected to notice something which he had in fact seen when he first entered.

“You have a typewriter?”

Mr. van Leyst returned with a start from wherever his thoughts had led him and said that indeed he had and there it was, old but still serviceable. “Pray examine it, if you are interested.”

“Do you mind if I type something with it?”

“By all means! Here is a sheet of paper.”

It bore a printed heading which Hambledon had seen before and he took a similar sheet from his wallet; the pseudo Nicolaas van Leyst’s letter to Morley’s hotel booking “a room in the front, please, as I wish to look out upon the life of London. Do not trouble to reply as I shall be travelling about before I come to England.” Hambledon sat at the typewriter and made a copy of the original letter. The machine was much worn and several of the letters out of alignment; it needed no expert to tell that the same machine had produced both.

“There is no doubt,” he said. “The man came here during your absence, took your passport and your suit and used your typewriter to book his room.” He showed the letters to the Predikant.

“He is better educated than I,” said Van Leyst, handing them back, “for I cannot write or read English. I seem to have been away at the wrong time, do I not?”

“He would have used some other scheme,” said Hambledon cheerfully, “if you had prevented his doing what he did.”

Hambledon returned to Paris and telephoned to Letord, who was out, but was expected back in half an hour if Monsieur Hambledon would be so obliging as to come to the Sûreté? Monsieur Letord had some news for him. Hambledon said that he would be there. He arrived at the gates as Letord came up from the other way and they walked across the graveled courtyard together.

“Did you, then, benefit by your journey?”

“The man we are looking for knows London well. At least, I assume he does, he knows Morley’s Hotel is directly opposite to the Esmeraldan

Embassy and that it—Morley’s—is frequented by parsons. He could, of course, happen to know that one fact about London and nothing else, but it does not seem to me very probable. On the other hand, London, unlike Lhasa, Kamchatka or Tristan da Cunha, is not a place which confers distinction upon anyone visiting it by the mere fact of having done so. One does not say, ‘Remarkable man, that. Do you know, he has actually been to London.’ Teluga’s killer went to Alkdam and wrote on the Predikant’s note paper with the Predikant’s typewriter to book a room at Morley’s, thereby practically ensuring that he would get one. He then borrowed the Predikant’s clothes and passport, went to Morley’s, did what he meant to do and left again. The clothes were returned by post from London and the passport by post from Paris, from which we may deduce that the borrower was an honest man. If you know an honest man who knows London or possibly has merely had Whatmore Street minutely described to him, that’s our man.”

“My poor friend! I assume that you have not benefited from your journey. No matter, I have a little something here. Come up to my room. You remember the plan which we found in Dubois’s safe? I showed it to all our experts and when I told them that it had been found in the safe of a robber, with one accord they said that it probably represented the environs of a bank. I said that, dunderhead as I have always been, that thought had even occurred to me but what I wanted to know was which bank? Then they all said ah, but the data was insufficient for identification and I said that I also had noticed that. Come in and sit down. We know now which bank it was, for it was attacked yesterday afternoon. It is a branch of the Banque Nationale in the Rue Gustave-Hamel.”

“Did you get the men?”

“To be accurate, we have got them but we did not get them, some kind friend did that for us. Shortly before the bank was due to close, two men walked into this branch, which was otherwise empty of customers. One of them took from a rack one of the little forms you fill up when you wish to open an account, took it to a table and was seen to be writing upon it. He then handed it over the counter to the cashier. What his unbelieving eyes beheld was a demand for all the cash within reach or they would shoot to kill, and when he looks up there are, indeed, two guns pointed at him. He steps forward and puts his foot upon a knob in the floor under the counter and starts all the alarm bells ringing—gongs, they are, gongs of brass and not to hear them one must have been deaf from birth. So one of the robbers shot the cashier in the arm. He fell down, both men rushed outside and leapt into a car which was waiting with the engine running; it started away. They had not gone ten yards, *mon vieux*, when suddenly the car’s windscreen

shattered into tiny fragments, the driver fell across the wheel, the car slewed across the road and collided with a heavy lorry coming the other way.”

“Magnificent,” said Hambledon. “Were they all killed?”

“By no means. Only the driver, and that saved the guillotine the trouble of being erected, for he was wanted for a murder in Marseilles. It also saved the time, the trouble, the hard work and the expense of a trial. I approve heartily; would that all murderers would collide themselves with lorries. The other two men, they were not much hurt, but when my police picked them out of the wreckage there was no fight in them. My friend, they were so busy holding, the one his head and the other his stomach, that they had forgotten that they had guns until the cashier, himself holding his arm, pointed them out to my police. One would say, a battlefield.”

“But what made the windscreen——”

“A bullet. It was in the driver’s chest and that, no doubt, was why he swerved, but he would have died anyway for his neck was broken. Most satisfactory. You are about to ask me who fired the bullet and where from; I cannot answer that. One or two people heard a crack or said they did, but they had no idea whence it came. The excitement, you understand, and when people are listening to alarm bells and seeing a bank robbery being enacted, they do not notice a sound like a stick breaking.”

“As for who fired the gun——” began Hambledon.

“I assume, our benefactor again; for I believe these two men to be also of the gang, though I have as yet no proof. I shall have it,” said Letord confidently.

“Are they well enough to talk?”

“Quite well enough to refuse to talk. They demand their lawyer and, *mon vieux*, this is where the case ceases to [be] a mere bungled bank robbery and becomes interesting. They ask for Robert Écritez.”

“Who is he?”

“A criminal lawyer, and by that I mean a lawyer who defends criminals, though he may be a lawyer and also a criminal, but if so he has not been found out. He is a man of great ability; I, Letord, say so. I tell you that if Écritez had been retained to defend the Devil on the charge of inciting Eve to steal an apple from *le bon Dieu* he would have secured an acquittal.”

“He sounds to me to be an excellent choice.”

“So he is, but his charges are colossal. But, colossal. We are told that all that a man has he will give for his life; my friend, if a man engages Écritez, that is precisely what he will be paying.”

“Is he, then,” asked Hambledon, “engaged upon murder cases only?”

“Principally, but not entirely. Look now, these three men, the driver now happily dead and Barran and Bichot in custody, are all men who should have been lying low, not making themselves headlines with robbing a bank. Why did they do it? Because they are out of money, for they are all of the type which, when it has money, must spend and spend. If they are out of money—I anticipate your question—how can they afford to engage Écritet? The answer is——”

“That someone is backing them, naturally. Who?”

“The organizer of the gang?” said Letord.

“I see,” said Hambledon. “And presumably the only person who knows who that is, is lawyer Écritet.”

“Even he may not, but even his guess would be better worth having than any other man’s.”

“Just so. What kind of a man is Écritet?”

“Not the kind to talk. Why should he, since he earns a fabulous income by knowing how to keep secrets?”

The Cat with Four Eyes

HAMBLEDON went into the Bastille area and entered a café in the Rue de Lappe, where he sat reading a paper, exchanging desultory conversation with any chance comer and drinking coffee until a small and shabby man came in to sit at a table on the far side of the room for a glass of wine. If he knew Hambledon he showed no sign of doing so, but when the shabby man had finished his wine, paid and gone out into the night, Hambledon threw down his paper, paid his bill and strolled out after him. One man went left and the other right but a few minutes later both were crossing the Place de la Bastille towards the lines of trees at the head of the Gare de L' Arsenal, which is not a station at all, but a long and narrow stretch of water with quays and barges tied thereto.

The shabby man paused to light a cigarette and Hambledon caught up with him.

“Good evening, Jules.”

“Good evening, monsieur. I thought, when I saw you sitting there, that perhaps you wished to speak to me.”

“You were right. Give me a light for my cigarette, will you, and then we might stroll together.”

“Willingly, monsieur. What did Monsieur want to say?”

“Can you give me anything on Barran and Bichot?”

The man checked his step momentarily.

“Monsieur, let that business alone. I do not know anything and, to be frank with Monsieur, if I did I should not tell it. Monsieur, hell is but just below the surface in that business and at any moment it may break through; when it does I hope that I shall not be there.”

“Why?”

Jules dropped his voice to a murmur.

“That gang—Monsieur knows? Yes. There is someone after them and it is not the police, they do not know who it is but one by one they are falling.

Dubois is dead, Saucisse and Le Delicat in prison, Fréchant in prison, Pepi l'Agneau—he drove the car yesterday—dead, the two of whom you ask, in prison. Monsieur, the rest are frightened and when men like that are frightened they kill. I beg Monsieur to keep out of it.”

“There was yet another who died,” said Hambledon in a tone to match Jules’s, “but not here in Paris. Enrig le Canif, did you know him?”

“That garbage,” said Jules, and spat ceremonially. “Is he dead? I did not know.”

“Why was he called Le Canif?”

“It was his weapon, that is all. I have heard nothing of him for some years.”

“And you will not tell me——”

“Monsieur, about that gang one does not talk, one does not even think. One averts the eyes and the mind and thus, with luck, one continues to live.”

“I see. Well, can you give me anything on Robert Écritet?”

“The lawyer. If Monsieur ever commits a murder, I would recommend to him Robert Écritet.”

“I do require his help but not on my own account. Suppose that he were to refuse, is there nothing——”

“We have talked long enough,” said Jules suddenly. “I feel it in the hair at the back of my neck. As for Écritet, if he turns nasty, mention the affair of Rosalie. Au ’voir, monsieur. Take care.”

Jules stepped aside into a patch of shadow and was not to be seen.

“All done with wires,” said Hambledon, and dived into the Métro station.

On the following morning he went to call upon Robert Écritet. His offices had been built in about 1890 and were consequently neither respectably old nor cleanly modern; they were airless, required redecoration and smelt of dusty papers and stale cigarette smoke. The front room was occupied by a clerk who looked less like a clerk than any whom Tommy Hambledon had ever met; he looked like a retired boxer and, considering Écritet’s usual clients, perhaps that is what he was. Hambledon asked for a few minutes’ conversation with Monsieur Écritet.

“Any appointment?”

“No.”

“He is very busy. He does not see visitors without an appointment.”

Hambledon grinned at him.

“He’ll see me. Tell him I come from Beppi le Prince.”

The man nodded and went out of the room to return a few minutes later.

“He can give you five minutes.”

Hambledon was shown into an inner room; Robert Écritet, who was busy writing, barely glanced up.

“Sit down. I’ll talk to you in a moment.”

Hambledon remained standing and looked the man over, a weaselly little man with close-cropped red hair and the prominent Adam’s-apple of the habitual speaker. Écritet went on writing, Hambledon lit a cigarette and strolled across to look out of a dusty window into a back yard with dustbins. Écritet blotted his page, looked up and said sharply: “Who is Beppi le Prince?”

“Do you mean to tell me,” said Hambledon, turning round, “that you don’t know?”

“Not by that nickname; what is his real name?”

“No idea,” said Tommy casually. He lounged across the room and sat down.

“Well, what do you want?”

“Some information, if you please.”

“I don’t give information,” said Écritet, “I receive it.”

“That is precisely why I have come to you. It is plainly no use asking for information from a man who has not received it in the first place.”

Écritet looked at him with plain distaste, but Hambledon went on before the lawyer could speak.

“The case is that of Barran and Bichot, under arrest on a charge of attempted bank robbery. I understand that you are defending them, is that so?”

“I am.”

“Thank you. Please tell me who is paying your justifiably high fees in this case as the defendants cannot possibly do so themselves?”

“Certainly not. The question is an impertinence and in any case it would be confidential.”

“Écritet. You know something of the background of this case——”

“Are you police?”

“No,” said Hambledon.

“You look like an Englishman.”

Hambledon let that pass unanswered.

“Écritet, the background of this case is murder, repeated murder, and you cannot refuse information which may——”

“Oh, can I not? I do refuse. Now get out.”

“If you won’t talk I suppose I must. To the police. About Rosalie.”

The lawyer drew in his breath sharply and his colour faded. Hambledon pursued his advantage.

“You do understand, don’t you? Either you talk to me or——”

The colour flooded back into the man’s face and his eyes sparkled with anger.

“I have only one thing to say to you. Get out! Go at once or I will have you thrown out.” Écritet pressed a bell push on his desk and Hambledon heard the answering ring in the outer office. No doubt it was for occasions like this that the ex-prize-fighter clerk was kept on the premises. Hambledon lounged to his feet.

“I was told that I should get a reaction if I mentioned Rosalie,” he remarked easily. “I am obliged to you for acting precisely as I was led to expect. *Au ’voir, monsieur l’avocat.*”

He turned to the door and opened it smartly, to be confronted with the square figure of the ex-pugilist.

“Come in, Tarzan,” added Hambledon amiably, “master wants you.” He gave the man an encouraging pat on the shoulder and walked straight past him through the outer office into the street. When he was quite sure he had shaken off any possible shadower he went to a telephone and rang up Letord.

“You were quite right,” began Hambledon——

“I make a habit of it,” said Letord. “What is it this time?”

“There is something very fishy about lawyer Robert Écritet. Do you know anything about a lady called Rosalie?”

“It is a reasonably common name among women. It is also the name by which French soldiers are or were accustomed to call the bayonet. Why?”

“Écritet doesn’t like it.”

“Oh? Oh, doesn’t he. In that case I will have it looked up. I assume that you do not know her surname or you would have mentioned it. Will you lunch with me tomorrow at midday?”

But Hambledon did not keep the appointment.

Late that evening he was sitting at an outside table of a café in the Boulevard des Italiens, drinking a glass of wine and watching the world go by, when an Algerian pedlar, with folded rugs slung across his shoulder,

came up to the tables and began to pass from one to another, offering his wares. When he came to Hambledon he went through the pantomime of displaying his goods, but instead of the usual patter he had something else to say.

“Monsieur,” he said confidentially, “a message. If Monsieur will go to the Café du Chat aux Quatre Yeux, he will find a friend urgently desiring speech with him.”

Hambledon remembered the striking sign of the Cat with Four Eyes, a disreputable-looking moggy wearing a pair of horn-rimmed spectacles. It was in the Rue du Faubourg Montmartre.

“When?”

“As soon as convenient,” said the Algerian. “Monsieur will walk straight through the café, taking no notice of any, and out through a door at the back where his friend waits.”

“What is his name?”

“I do not know, monsieur. I was told, if Monsieur hesitated, to say that it was concerning *l'affaire Rosalie*. I thank Monsieur.” The Algerian bowed, slipped away and was lost to sight among the strolling passers-by.

“Jules, I suppose,” said Hambledon to himself. This was probably some news about the jewel gang, but Jules was so terrified of them that he would not be seen speaking to Hambledon anywhere in public. He was probably standing back in a doorway somewhere nearby and had tipped the Algerian to take the message. However, this was not the first time that Hambledon had kept dubious assignations and he returned to his hotel for his Luger automatic before taking a taxi to the Church of Our Lady of Loretto. Le Chat aux Quatre Yeux was less than a hundred yards from there.

Twenty minutes later he entered the café of the Chat aux Quatre Yeux and found it a rather grubby place, distinguished only by a certain studied raffishness probably intended to attract tourists. If so, the attempt was unsuccessful; the place was only sparsely filled and the customers all French, to judge by their appearance. Tommy threaded his way between small tables towards the back of the café. The proprietor, selecting a bottle from the shelves behind the bar, glanced at him with plain interest and at once looked away again.

“He knows,” said Hambledon to himself. He drew aside a curtain and passed behind it; when it fell again into place the space behind it was very dimly lit. There was a room door upon either hand and an outer door straight in front of him, this would be the one. He took the Luger from his pocket,

opened the outer door with his left hand and stepped out, closing the door behind him.

Outside, it was very dark. Hambledon stood still for a moment to accustom his eyes to the gloom and made out that he was in a small yard with high walls all round it; he could see the line of them in silhouette, but within those high walls the yard was a pit of darkness.

“Is anyone there?” he asked in a low voice, but there was no answer. He took a pencil torch from his pocket and the narrow beam showed him what looked like another door opposite. Through there, presumably, and then he would find himself in another yard with another house backing on to it.

The door had an iron latch for a fastening and Hambledon dropped his Luger in his pocket to have a free hand to open it. He raised the latch and the door began to come towards him——

The next instant it slammed shut again because he had been thrust forward against it, there was a knee in his back and his arms were seized and forced behind him. The torch fell to the ground and went out. The cold rim of a gun was laid against his right ear and a low voice told him to be silent. Completely silent. There was a momentary pause before the same voice said in the same tone: “I have his gun. Take him back a pace while I open the door.”

The immensely strong hands which had pinioned him dragged him back. Hambledon responded by going too willingly and flinging his head back in the hope of banging his captor painfully upon the nose and then, possibly, tripping him. But the idea did not work and Tommy realized that the man who held him was very short, so short that his head barely reached Hambledon’s shoulder. He merely tightened his grip, the door opened and the gun was pressed against his ribs this time.

“March on, monsieur, through the door,” said the low voice. Hambledon went forward, stumbled over the doorsill and found himself being thrust into a car outside. More hands received him, he was pushed face downwards on a hard floor and the car moved off while someone tied his hands together behind him. Some sort of van, presumably, there seemed to be plenty of room.

Hambledon removed his face from a projecting bolthead in the floor and waited patiently while the vehicle turned this way and that. It was no use trying to see where they were going and the moment was not propitious for giving trouble. Patience, fleas, the night is long.

Presently the van stopped again; someone opened the doors at the back and got out, took hold of Hambledon’s feet and hauled him along the floor.

He was pulled out and stood upon his feet; they were within a narrow side entrance to some house and there was an open door close at hand. He was pushed in at the door and taken through a kitchen to a narrow shabby hall where they stopped and he looked about him. There were only two men in sight, although Hambleton could hear that there were others in the house, keeping out of the way. A chair scraped along the floor in one room; somebody coughed upstairs.

One of the two men with him was of a regrettably common type in Paris; he was a man in the twenties, thin and round-shouldered, unshaven, shabbily dressed and with shifty eyes continually glancing to left and right and never quite looking at anyone. Tommy turned to look at the second man, who had kept behind him all the time, and found as he expected that he was very short, almost a dwarf, but solidly built, with broad shoulders and a look of great strength. No one moved; it seemed that they were waiting for something, while outside the house a motor started and drew slowly away, turned and went off at a fast pace. The van, of course, being backed out and driven off. Probably stolen and now being returned.

A man's voice called down from upstairs. "Veron? Bring him up now."

The taller man answered and then told Hambleton to follow him, a matter of no risk as Hambleton's hands were still tied behind him, and the procession tramped solemnly up the stairs, with the dwarf following closely behind. They crossed a landing and up a second flight, narrower and steeper than the first, with the treads in bad repair. At the top of the stairs there was an open door leading to an attic with sloping ceilings and an uncarpeted floor and here they stopped.

"Your lodging, monsieur," said Veron. "No doubt, not such as Monsieur is accustomed to, but for a short time it must serve. Gogo, here, is your footman-valet, to whom all complaints should be addressed if Monsieur thinks it worth while. It is not, but Monsieur is at liberty to try." Veron untied Hambleton's wrists and backed away to the door. "I wish Monsieur a good night. Come, Gogo."

The two men went out, shutting the door behind them, Hambleton heard a key turn in the lock and the sound of a bolt being shot. He looked round the room, which contained, by way of furniture, only a grubby mattress on the floor. There seemed to be no window or fireplace; there was what looked like a pair of cupboard doors on one wall. The door seemed to be new and strong——

At that moment the light went out and he was left in the dark.

The Blind Men

HAMBLEDON put his hands in his pockets and discovered with some surprise that they had left him all his possessions except the automatic and his knife; even his wallet was still with him.

“Probably an oversight,” he remarked aloud, fishing out matches and cigarettes. “They must have been excited.” He struck a match to light his cigarette and sat down upon the mattress before the flame went out. When his eyes became used to the dark he saw to his surprise two pale hearts glowing high up to his right, and got up to investigate.

“Love nests,” he said to himself, “have never come much in my way, but this place is less like—oh, I see.”

The hearts were ventilation holes cut in what he had taken to be cupboard doors and the glow they displayed was that of the night sky of Paris. Not cupboard doors; shutters over a window. He expended one more match examining them, only to find that they had been firmly screwed up. Recently, too; the screwheads were still bright. No doubt that was why they had waited in the hall. The carpenter of the party had not quite finished, and when he had done so he had hidden in one of the rooms while the prisoner and escort went by.

Hambledon considered this and thought it a good sign. “If they were going to bump me off out of hand, it wouldn’t matter how many of them I saw, so I am to remain alive for the present. In that case I think I shall go to bed.”

He finished his cigarette, rolled up his coat for a pillow and lay down upon the mattress; it was a degree less hard than lying on the floor.

He woke up when a bolt rattled; a key turned in the door and it opened to admit Gogo with a battered tin tray. Twin rays of sunshine were streaming through the ventilation holes in the shutters and printing two large golden hearts upon the opposite wall. Hambledon sat up.

“Good morning, Gogo. Is that my breakfast? Thank you. I’ll have it here, I think.”

The dwarf set it down on the foot of the mattress.

“Monsieur will excuse the tray,” he said in an oddly soft voice. “It is the only one.”

He rearranged the tray with neat fingers and Hambledon noticed that the man had beautiful hands with long fine fingers. The skin was roughened and stained and the nails neglected, but the hands were those of a musician or a surgeon.

“Hot coffee,” said Hambledon cheerfully.

“Very hot, monsieur. There is butter in this little pot. I return for the tray later.”

Gogo went out, locking the door behind him; Tommy had practised for years the art of dealing with things one at a time. The day probably held unpleasantness in store, but, in the meantime, here was breakfast. Excellent.

An hour later Gogo returned, bringing an enamelled iron basin, a jug of hot water, a piece of soap in a cracked saucer and a small towel. He left the door open while he brought these things in and he did not speak; outside the door there was a shuffling sound as someone shifted his feet on the wooden stair; though no one came into view it was plain that Gogo had an escort, probably armed. The dwarf repacked the breakfast tray, picked it up and turned to go.

“Er—thank you,” said Hambledon casually.

“I come back for the basin presently,” said Gogo in an expressionless voice, and went out of the door; there followed the usual security noises outside and two sets of footsteps went downstairs. Half an hour later Gogo returned, removed basin, jug and saucer without a word and went out again. Hambledon admired the organization, they left him with nothing which by the wildest exercise of ingenuity could be used as a weapon.

Time passed slowly, the room was airless and hot and Hambledon suffered from boredom. He could look out of the ventilation holes by standing on tiptoe, but there was nothing to be seen but a huddle of roofs and a deployment of chimneys, nothing recognizable, such as the Eiffel Tower, by which he could estimate where he was lodged.

He took his coat off, rolled up his shirt sleeves for coolness, and went to sleep.

Gogo came up with lunch; a reasonably well-cooked stew, roll and cheese and even a half bottle of wine. The dwarf set out the meal with as much refinement as was consistent with a “place” laid on a bare wooden floor, and Hambledon thanked him.

“Tell me, Gogo,” he added, “why am I imprisoned here?”

“I do not know, monsieur. Monsieur will understand that I am only a servant.”

“Not a very good situation, Gogo.”

“Perhaps not, monsieur, but one must live.” The dwarf seemed about to say something else, but there came a sound from somewhere down the stair and he changed his mind with a quick glance at Hambledon. “I come later,” he said, and went away at once.

“Intelligent face, that fellow,” said Hambledon thoughtfully, and picked up his spoon for the stew. Knives were, very sensibly, not provided.

The day passed at last. Gogo switched on the light when he brought supper and there was even a Paris newspaper on the tray. Later that evening there came to Hambledon’s ears the sound of a violin being played with considerable skill and great delicacy.

The music ceased and a few minutes later the dwarf came in to take away the tray.

“Someone is a real violinist, Gogo. I wish that he would play again.”

The man’s face lit up. “It is I, monsieur. A violinist is what I have always wished to be, but I cannot study, there is no time, and they do not like it if I play too much.”

“But, surely, with a gift like that——”

“One must still eat, monsieur. I have tried starvation and I do not like it.”

“Gogo. There is no future for you here. One by one this gang is being rounded up, and you——”

Gogo clattered the crockery. “I am so unimportant, monsieur. I am only the strong slave who does the heavy work.”

“That will not help you when the reckoning comes. Get away, man, while there is yet time.”

The dwarf’s sensitive face twisted. “It is not easy to find work, for such as I. One must eat, monsieur.”

There was a shout from below and Gogo lifted up the tray and scurried out of the room. The next moment the light went out.

“Tomorrow I talk to that fellow,” said Hambledon. “That is, unless something else happens.”

But the next day passed like the first. Hambledon asked for cigarettes and matches and got them, then for shaving kit, but that was refused. Every time Gogo came up he was a little more friendly; towards evening he even

seemed a little less nervous and hurried and there was no shout from below when he lingered.

“Listen, Gogo. I’m sick of this, I want to get out.”

“But, naturally, monsieur.”

“Why am I kept here?”

“I have heard. They think you are the one who is getting rid of them, one by one.”

“Oh, do they? Then it’s high time I left.” Hambledon took out his wallet and counted out ten thousand francs. “That’s nearly all I have, I must keep a little to get away. Gogo, will you—”

“It is of no use my leaving the door unlocked, there is always someone about at all hours. Monsieur must go some other way.”

“But there is no other way, the shutters are screwed up.”

Gogo went to the door, listened, and then closed it.

“It is simple, monsieur. The window-frames are old.”

He crossed to the shutters, took a firm hold of one by the bottom edge and the ventilation hole, braced himself and pulled. There was a succession of cracking noises as the screws drew out and the shutter was lifted down, the other followed. Tommy went to look out.

“There are also bars,” he said doubtfully.

“Those also,” said Gogo. He grasped one near the bottom and pushed, and the great muscles of his shoulders rose under his thin shirt. Another effort and the bar came loose at the bottom, to be easily wrenched away at the top.

“You are immensely strong,” said Hambledon. “I could not have done that.”

“Not many men could,” said Gogo with simple pride. “One more, and Monsieur can pass easily.”

A second bar came out and Hambledon put forth his head, for there was no glass in the window frames. Ten feet below there was the roof of the next house, slated and sloping from a ridge tile.

“If I drop on that,” said Tommy, “I shall slide off or go through with a crash that will rouse the street.”

“I will bring up a sheet for the bed,” said Gogo. “If I am seen I shall say you asked for it. It is not very clean but it is strong, Monsieur understands?”

“Perfectly.” Gogo turned to leave the room and Hambledon stopped him. “One moment. You have not had your money.”

The dwarf took the notes and stowed them away. "I thank Monsieur most profoundly. This may be, perhaps, my chance. I go for the sheet."

He was back in a moment with a rough bundle under his arm, which he threw down. "I must go, I have been here too long. This bar"—he gave Hambleton one which he had torn from the window—"it may serve for a weapon if anyone should come up tonight."

Hambleton took it with a smile. "Evidently you trust me, Gogo."

"Oh yes," said the dwarf in his soft voice, "yes, I trust Monsieur." He went out of the room and could be heard noisily turning the key and shooting the bolt into place. He did not switch on the light, presumably because the lighted window might attract attention, and Hambleton occupied the time until complete darkness should come by tearing the tough sheet into strips and knotting them together.

At last the night seemed to have grown as dark as it ever does in Paris in early summer. The attic window was at the side of the house, it could only be by a piece of extremely bad luck if he were seen from the street. Hambleton attached one end of his rope to the remaining window bar, since there was nothing else to which to tie it. He regarded it doubtfully, but he had no choice.

"Well, I hope you hold," he said to the bar. "The question is, am I heavier than Gogo is strong?"

He dropped the loose end out of the window and it lay upon the roof below; at least it was long enough. He climbed out of the window and let himself slip down the wall; as his feet touched the roof below there was a cracking noise above; the strips of sheet yielded in his hands and the whole length fell down and coiled lovingly round his shoulders as he sat down upon the ridge with a bump which jarred him to the teeth. The bar above had come away at one end and the loop had slipped off it.

The rope began to slide off the roof and at that moment a door somewhere below him opened and shut. He snatched at the retreating coils and hauled them back. One might just as well call down: "Hullo, there! I'm off," as drop escape equipment at people's feet. He turned round upon the ridge and crawled away, taking his rope with him; he was looking for a skylight which could be opened from the outside. There were three houses of the same height and then a taller one which would stop him effectively.

"A Commando course would have been a help," he said thoughtfully, and crawled on, the further away the better. The last house had a skylight which looked possible; at the expense of a damaged thumbnail he managed to claw it up and found himself looking down into darkness. Most

uninviting, dropping down into darkness. There might be iron bedsteads with knobs. Or even a bedstead with someone asleep in it. At the thought of dropping ten feet upon the person of some sleeping female, Hambledon nearly turned round to go back.

However, at that moment someone in the house opposite switched on a bedroom light whose kindly rays shone through the window of the room below him and showed him that it was quite empty. Taking this as a signal from Providence to carry on, he dropped his encumbering rope into the room and himself dropped in after it, landing with a thud which, he felt, shook the house. No cries followed nor any sign of alarm.

The place was plainly a loft and had no door; there was, however, a trap door in the middle of the room and a water tank in one corner.

“There can be no one in the room below,” he told himself, “or there would have been some reaction when I landed. Up, therefore, with this flap.”

There was a ring by which to lift it. Hambledon took hold of it and pulled; first gently, then firmly and finally with all his strength.

“Bolted underneath,” he said, and sat down on the floor to light a cigarette and think things over. The light of the match revealed to him the incredibly filthy condition of his hands and knees and he did a little tidying with the remains of Gogo’s sheet. He looked about him. A chimney breast went up against one wall and beside this was a tall and narrow cupboard door; he got up to open it and was faced with a narrow perpendicular ladder fastened to the wall.

“I see. If you merely want to inspect the ball cock, you come up the ladder. To introduce large objects, such as a new tank, you open the trap door. Sensible.”

He looked down but it was completely dark, no light showed from below, and at that moment the light in the bedroom window opposite went out and the loft was in darkness also. The tank in the corner produced a sardonic gurgle.

“What you want,” said Hambledon, “is a pinch of bicarbonate of soda,” and he went down the ladder.

It went down a long way, certainly more than one storey, before he saw chinks of light and heard one voice going on and on, though the actual words were indistinguishable. A few steps more and his feet touched ground; enough light filtered in to show eyes accustomed to darkness that he was in a similar cupboard to that in the loft and that the narrow door was behind him. Plainly, it led into a lighted room and there was the sound of

knives and forks upon plates. The voice of the speaker was now much plainer; not a speaker, no, a reader, for what he heard was an extract from Anatole France's *L'Île des Pingouins*. Hambledon stood still and wondered. What sort of gathering would it be who accompanied a meal with reading aloud? Refectory meals in monasteries were, he thought, sometimes soothed in this manner, but not, surely, with *Penguin Island*. The *Lives of the Saints*, now——

He made to turn round with great care, but he was a broad-shouldered man and the cupboard was shallow; as soon as his arm touched the door it swung quietly open and he stepped out into the lighted room. It was a dining-room; at least there was a long table down the middle at which eighteen or twenty men were sitting. The table ran to left and right of Hambledon so that he was behind the backs of those sitting on the near side of the table; the reader was at the end of the table towards his left.

Hambledon took a step forward, pushed the door to behind him and waited to be challenged, but no challenge came. The reader went on reading, the diners went on eating and no one took the slightest notice of him; even those facing him from the opposite side of the table showed not the faintest interest in him; if they looked towards him at all their eyes merely passed him by without pausing or any flicker of interest. The room was not brilliantly lit, there was only a subdued light from shaded sconces on the wall, but these men were plainly visible to him, surely—a small chill ran up Hambledon's spine. What sort of a gathering could this be?

He took a couple of paces to one side, his rubber soles making no sound on the carpeted floor, but still no eyes followed his movement. It had, however, given him for the first time a clear view of the reader at the head of the table; the book before him was a large one and he was not looking at it. He was running his fingers along the lines. Of course, Braille, and the diners could not see him because they were all blind.

There was a vacant chair against the wall, near him, and he sank down upon it, excusing himself for a momentary weakness by telling himself briskly that, as it was the first chair he had seen for two days, to sit upon it was a natural human instinct. The fact was that he shrank irrationally from betraying his presence among them; they might resent it and one could hardly defend oneself against the blind, if they started pawing him——

A door opened and a waiter came in, a perfectly normal-sighted waiter with a tray bearing bottles of wine. He came round the table, filling glasses; when he came within reach Hambledon laid a hand on his arm and murmured: "I want to go out."

“Just a moment,” answered the man. “I’ll take you down.”

He finished his round, returned to Hambledon and took him by the arm, evidently assuming that he also was one of the afflicted, and Tommy did not argue. He allowed himself to be led out of the room and guided downstairs to a café on the street level.

“Thank you so much,” he said to the waiter. “I think I’ll sit down here instead.”

“As you wish,” said the waiter. “New to these meetings, aren’t you? Here’s a table, sit here. I always think they’re a bit creepy myself, so many all together—no offence meant, please! I beg a thousand pardons!”

“It is nothing, thank you. I am not completely blind and I shall not go again. A glass of red wine, if you please. How often do they meet?”

“Quarterly, monsieur, quarterly.” The waiter brought a glass of wine and Hambledon paid him. “It is very sad and one is sorry, but I find them a little frightening. I hope Monsieur may be cured.”

“Oh, I shall,” said Tommy confidently. “Completely, and quite soon. I am grateful for your kindness.”

So long as that waiter was in sight Hambledon sat quietly drinking his wine. A good fellow, the waiter, but a full-sized mug; whoever saw an even partially blind man without a stick? Hambledon had heard of associations of the various types of Paris beggars; now he had seen one and it was enough. He waited until the man went upstairs, got up quietly and walked out through the back of the café.

Eddi the Cabbage

HAMBLEDON found himself in a short alley leading to a narrow street, one of a maze of narrow streets. He turned one way and another and then got the idea that someone was following him. He lengthened his stride, turned another corner and saw in front of him a cheerfully lighted square. Splendid. He did not recognize it and the blue-enamelled name plate on the corner conveyed nothing to him, but at least the place was lighted and open and from any café one could telephone to Letord.

He entered the first café he came to, an unassuming place which called itself simply Au Bon Gré, and sat down near the back of the room. When the proprietor came to him he ordered a coffee and asked if he could telephone.

“But, certainly, monsieur. At the end of the bar, here. No *jetons* are necessary, as monsieur sees, if he will pay me, I will get his number.”

Hambledon hesitated, he had expected the usual telephone cabinet and seclusion for his remarks, whereas this was out in the open and whatever he said would be perfectly audible to anyone within earshot. However, probably customers and proprietor alike were persons of innocent and upright lives. He got up and went to the bar and a man sitting at a table close to the telephone moved his knees out of the way to let him pass.

“It is a local call,” said Hambledon, and gave Letord’s number; a moment later he was connected.

“Is Monsieur Letord there? Not? This is Hambledon speaking, Monsieur was expecting me.” Excited interest was manifested on the other end; Hambledon told them where he was and added: “Would you please send a car here for me? Yes, at once if possible. A thousand thanks, I will wait for it here. Au ’voir.”

Hambledon returned to his table, where the coffee was awaiting him. He sipped it and looked round him. A pleasant, clean place with a friendly *patron*; the other customers were respectable couples or quiet family groups talking among themselves. Somewhere at the back of the bar there was a

radio turned low; outside in the square there were bright lights, passing traffic and cheerful chattering people. He had been in a tight corner and got out of it unharmed and presently the police car would come and drive him to the inviolable precincts of the Sûreté, where he could tell Letord quite a lot of news. The house where he had been held captive could easily be traced, it was three doors from the café where the blind mendicants of Paris held their quarterly meetings. Gogo must be protected from the wrath to come, if his known record were not too black. A musician like that should be encouraged. He had acted at some risk to himself and——

A man came into the café from the street and looked about him; he was dressed in a dark uniform and a peaked hat and looked like a chauffeur. He saw Hambledon and came straight to him.

“The car is here, monsieur.” There was, indeed, a black saloon car standing directly outside the door.

Hambledon got up, paid for his coffee and went out with the man. The car outside was similar to those used by the Paris police; Hambledon thought that he recognized the number. The chauffeur opened the rear door. There was a man already sitting in the back seat, he wore a raincoat and a soft hat as did most of the plain-clothes detectives. He made room with a sort of welcoming gesture as Hambledon sat down beside him; the chauffeur shut the door and went round to his own seat and the car moved off.

“Thank you for coming so quickly,” said Hambledon.

“It is nothing, monsieur.”

The words were entirely commonplace, but the hair at the back of Hambledon’s neck stiffened. The tone was wrong; it was not commonplace enough. It sounded as though the man were amused. Hambledon turned sharply to look into his face, but the car took a sharp corner into a dark street and Tommy could see nothing but a pale blur. Letord’s men were not likely to be impertinent to any friend of his, but perhaps it was merely some private joke. Hambledon sat back and said no more. The run was not a long one; five minutes later the car stopped again before a house in a row of houses and the driver came round to open the door.

“What is this?” said Hambledon sharply.

“Home again, Monsieur Hambledon,” said the man beside him. “Monsieur has had a little outing and we hope he has enjoyed himself. Get out, please, I have a gun here and it has a silencer on it; can Monsieur not feel it at his back?” Monsieur could. “Out, please, and no trouble will be caused.”

Hambledon hesitated, but the driver seized him by the right wrist and the gun was against his spine.

“Monsieur will be sensible,” said the cold voice in his ear and Hambledon was shepherded across the pavement and in at the front door of the same house he had left an hour earlier.

“Take the car back, quickly,” said the same voice, and the chauffeur went out, shutting the door behind him. Hambledon turned to look at his captor and saw a tall fair man with a pale hairless face and high cheekbones.

“Since Monsieur has spoiled his previously comfortable room for security purposes,” said the man, “we must bestow him somewhere else. Veron!”

Veron came from the back of the hall, the shifty-eyed fellow who, with Gogo, had brought Hambledon into that house in the first place. There was no sign of Gogo.

“Tie his hands.”

Veron obeyed.

“Now open that door—not that one, fool. That larder, pantry, whatever you call it.”

The door was opened; Hambledon was pushed into a large cupboard and immediately bumped his head against a shelf.

“If Monsieur is not so comfortable, it is his own fault,” said the tall man. The door was shut and locked and Hambledon was left in the dark. He was not, however, the victim of boredom upon this occasion, for there were voices in an adjoining room and they came to his ears so plainly as to suggest a wooden partition rather than a wall. Since the voices were discussing Hambledon himself, he leaned his head against the partition and gave them his absorbed attention.

“I believe that he is police,” said the cold voice of the tall man. He spoke fluent and colloquial French, but there was something in his careful enunciation which suggested that French was not his first language and Hambledon guessed him to be some kind of Slav. “He had a good look at the police car when he came out and I think he recognized it. It was fortunate, that.”

“I do not believe that he is police,” said another voice which was familiar to Hambledon, though for the moment he could not place it. “He has not the walk or the mannerisms, he is not that stamp. No, he is one whom the police have brought in from somewhere to bring us down one by one, since they cannot do it themselves. I think myself that he is English.”

“Does it matter?” asked Veron’s voice.

“No. There is no doubt in my mind that he is the man who has done it all so far. Well, he will do no more.”

There came a knock at the front door, a recognizable pattern of taps. Someone in the next room said: “It is Louis,” and the sound of footsteps was followed by the sound of a door opening and shutting. More footsteps returned to the next room.

“All right, Louis?”

“Perfectly. The car had not been missed. Well?”

“We were saying,” said the voice which Hambledon had still not identified, “that he is undoubtedly the man whom we seek. He was at the Widow Dubois’s house twice, he was near by when Dubois was killed, he is in and out of the Sûreté, he rang the Sûreté from the café just now, asking for Letord. Finally, and the most convincing of all, when he came to my office he spoke of Rosalie.”

“Of course,” said Hambledon to himself, “this is the lawyer Robert Écritet.”

“He must have been in touch with Rosalie,” went on Écritet.

“I wish I were,” said the Slav viciously. “I would teach him to talk. First that journalist and now this man.”

Hambledon’s eyebrows went up. “Him”? A grammatical mistake on the part of a foreigner—

“We shall find him someday,” said Écritet smoothly. “I think myself he has joined the Foreign Legion.”

So Rosalie was a man.

“But the journalist died before he could talk, and now this one will die also,” went on Écritet.

“Now we talk sense,” said the deeper voice of Louis, the driver. “Good. I will go and cut his throat; we will drop his body in the Seine with weights, and that will be the end.”

“No murders in this house, please,” said Écritet. “I bought it, and though it stands now in another name, it could be traced to me. That”—he applied an epithet—“Letord is no fool and he distrusts me already. I must be always clear of suspicion or who will speak for you in the courts if I am taken? Not only you, remember that. I am the best criminal lawyer in Paris and I have a duty to my clients.”

Hambledon expected either silence or a sardonic laugh in reply to this gasconade, but he was wrong. There was a respectful chorus of, “It is true.

You are necessary.”

“Very well, then. I suggest the ladder trick. I expect you have heard of it?”

There was a general laugh.

“The neatest type of weight,” went on Écritet, “is sheet lead out into strips and wrapped round the rungs. It does not swing or rattle or become detached.”

“Monsieur,”—that was Veron’s voice—“monsieur, if you please, there is some sheet lead in the yard; we had it for those bullion boxes, to weight them, but there was too much, monsieur.”

“Good. Someone else ought to wheel it through the streets, I think. Then, if by any accident he is discovered, it is a joke or done for a bet. On the other hand, if everything goes well, the rubbish can all be tipped into the Seine together. Ladders decorated with sheet lead do not float.”

There was a short pause and then the Slav spoke.

“Eddi le Chou has a barrow for the stuff he sells in the Flea Market. I think that Eddi will oblige us.”

“He can also wheel the barrow through the streets,” said Louis the chauffeur.

“If anything should go wrong, Eddi can take the blame,” said Veron cheerfully.

Hambledon felt that Fate was bearing a little hardly upon Eddi the Cabbage, but no doubt he deserved it.

“Monsieur,” added Veron, “shall I go and bring in the ladder?”

“You can go and bring in Eddi le Chou,” said Écritet, “and his barrow with him. And a pile of his rubbish to load on the top.”

“Willingly, monsieur,” said Veron. Hurried footsteps passed Hambledon’s door towards the back of the house, and an outer door closed.

“You will need something to cover the victim on the ladder,” said Écritet. “An old tarpaulin or——”

“There is,” said the Slav, “that old British Army ground sheet in the cupboard. If he is English it may be a comfort to him.”

“Since we have no Union Jack?” laughed Écritet. “Excellent, excellent. On the top of that——”

“Eddi’s pots and pans artistically scattered,” said the Slav.

“It is you who are the artist,” said Écritet gracefully. “I must go now, I have still to establish that I have spent the evening elsewhere.”

Eddi le Chou was wheeling his barrow through the streets of Paris in the general direction of the Seine; a zigzag route, partly to avoid places where he would be likely to encounter police, and partly because it simply was not in him to go straight, literally or morally. The load was heavy and the night was warm; fatigue compelled him to stop and rest occasionally until terror in its turn compelled him to lift the handles and struggle on again. He had a horrid feeling that he was being followed, though he heard and saw no one.

“One of them hulking great slackers,” he said bitterly, “might at least have come and helped push. Got no human feelings, that lot.”

The barrow looked innocent enough. Upon the top of an ancient and dirty army ground sheet, neatly tied down at its eyelet holes, there was a collection of such rubbish as is pawed over on the Flea Market stalls by those hopeful of finding an uncracked piece of Meissen or a good miniature or a valuable first edition. On Eddi’s barrow were battered oil lamps lacking globe or chimney, kitchen pots with holes in them, three or four candlesticks, some odd china badly chipped or without handles and some worthless books without covers and incomplete as to pages.

He was nearly there; one more rest and one more effort. He heaved the barrow up a slight incline and stopped, panting, at the top under some trees. He was just about to resume his journey when, without a sound or any warning, a man stepped out from under the trees within a yard of him.

Eddi started so violently that his gasp was perfectly audible, but on a second glance he took heart again, for this was not a policeman but an ordinary gentleman in nice clothes and with a square black beard.

“Good evening,” said the gentleman.

Eddi muttered something in reply and took up the barrow handles to go on his way, but the gentleman stopped him.

“Just a minute,” he said. “Let me look at what you have there. I am interested in antiques.”

“Only rubbish. Only a lot of old rubbish,” whined Eddi. “Not such as would interest Monsieur.” He lifted the barrow, but the gentleman leaned heavily upon the side and the legs went down again.

Eddi was panic-stricken. If the gentleman were to lean on the ground sheet he might be led to wonder what was beneath it.

“No, no. These things are not for sale——”

“I will give you two hundred francs for the candlestick——”

“I don’t want to sell anything——”

“—which is much more than you would get for it anywhere else,” said the gentleman, and leaned both elbows on the barrow with his hands hovering over the candlestick. Eddi lost his head.

“Get away!” he snarled, and rushed at the stranger. The next second something cold closed round his wrist; there was a click, a rattle and another click practically simultaneously, and the gentleman was gone in the shadows without a sound except a low and what Eddi considered a thoroughly nasty laugh.

“Some joke, I suppose,” said Eddi sourly and lifted his hand to see what was the cool thing about his wrist. At precisely that point a merely unpleasant job turned into a complete nightmare.

The thing round his wrist was a handcuff. He could not lift his hand very far because the other end of the handcuff was entangled in something and would not come away. Eddi had to stoop to disentangle it and found that impossible. The other end was not merely entangled, it was locked round the rim of one of his wheels. They were nice wheels. They had once been the smaller pair on a pony chaise and still showed traces of layers of paint and smart striping down the spokes; they had been beautifully made and, though the spokes were slender and the rims narrow, they were astonishingly strong. Eddi pulled and nothing happened except that he hurt his wrist.

This was completely ridiculous. Of all the senseless practical jokes, to fetter a man to his barrow so that he could not get away from it—not get away from it and there was a body on it. He tried hammering the handcuff round his wrist on the edge of the barrow and accomplishing nothing. Very well, then. He would wheel the barrow on, get rid of the load as arranged—it was not far now—and get the handcuff sawn off at his leisure.

He managed to get round between the handles, lift them and push the barrow a few inches. The wheel revolved and naturally took the handcuff with it and his arm went too. Before the wheel had done a quarter turn, he was spread-eagled along the side of the barrow and could only just reach the handles with one hand, which was no use at all.

Eddi stared, gasped and burst into tears. He danced with fury and the handcuff jingled musically. Sobbing and cursing, he tried to kick the wheel to pieces but the stout workmanship was still better than his boots, and when he had bruised his toes enough he stopped doing that.

“One must be calm,” he snuffled, wiping his eyes with his sleeve. “There must be a way out of this.” He looked wildly about him for inspiration and saw the sky growing light in the east. Soon it would be day and people would come and find him, and the barrow, and the body.

“If I take the wheel off,” he said slowly, “I can carry that up to old Raoul’s and he will cut it off me. It is not far. As for the barrow, let those who loaded it deal with it. I have had enough.”

He managed with a frightful struggle to unscrew the hub cap singlehanded; it was daylight before he managed to push the pin out, and at last he could use both hands to pull off the wheel. The barrow went over on its port beam and the pots and pans clattered into the road, but Eddi scarcely noticed them; he was free of the barrow at last. Now for old Raoul’s.

A wheel is an awkward thing to carry and he could not roll it along because he had to go with the rim, but he staggered up one street and along another towards the alley where Raoul lived. Nearly there.

He was within a few yards of the corner when a heavy hand fell upon his shoulder.

The Ladder Dodge

EDDI uttered a yelp of terror and would have run for it but that his burden impeded him. He looked round and saw the pale face and cold eyes of the Slav.

“You!”

“Myself. What the hell are you doing here?”

“I got to get rid of this.” Eddi indicated the wheel. “Somebody played a trick on me. If you was following, why couldn’t you stop him?”

“I was not following. I went down there”—the Slav jerked his head towards the river—“in case you could not manage alone. I waited too long; I come back and see you like this. Have you done the job?”

“Not yet, I tell you I was——”

“Fool. Idiot. Incompetent bungler, where is the barrow?”

“Go and find it,” squealed Eddi, baited beyond endurance. “I’ve had enough of the lot of you; go and do your own dirty work and I hope you go in too!”

There was a step just within the entrance to the alley, and round the corner came the substantial form of a police constable going home off duty. The Slav went off like a quarter miler and Eddi, unable to follow, turned at bay.

“Here,” said the policeman, who knew him personally and had no confidence in him, “what is all this?”

“Nothing,” said Eddi stubbornly. “Only a bit of trouble with my wheel and I’m taking it to be mended.” He held the wheel awkwardly clutched to him. It would never do to let the constable see the handcuff, it would only start him asking questions and Eddi passionately wanted no questions.

“Sure it is your own wheel?” asked the constable, and bent to look at it.

“Course it’s mine. It come off my barrow.” It was going to slip in a minute; the hub was digging into his ribs and his fingers were aching.

“Doesn’t seem to be much the matter with it,” said the constable.

“Nothing to see. It’s in the hub somewhere. It come off,” said Eddi, and began to sidle round the constable who was obstructing the end of the alley. The movement was fatal, the wheel slipped from his cramped fingers and the handcuff jingled tactlessly into view.

“Here, stop,” said the constable, and laid bare this phenomenon. “What did you want to chain it to your arm for? Afraid somebody’d run off with it?”

“That—that was a little accident,” babbled Eddi. “Nothing to worry about. I’m getting that seen to, too.”

“Funny accident,” said the sceptical constable. “Where did you get that outdated handcuff from? They’re all in store, haven’t been used for years, that type hasn’t.”

“No type didn’t ought to be neither,” retorted Eddi. “Picked it up with a lot more worthless old junk if you must know. *Will* you go on home if you’ve got one, and let me pass?”

“Where’s your barrow?”

“Miles away, that’s where.”

“That’s a lie anyway,” said the constable in a tone of relief, for he had smelt a rat on first sight of Eddi with his wheel and yet his story might just conceivably have been true. “You wouldn’t carry that wheel far, not you. If it come off your barrow as you say, that barrow’s near by. You come along to the station.”

“I won’t,” howled Eddi, shedding tears of rage and frustration. “I can’t carry it no further and I won’t try and you can’t make me.”

The policeman looked round. That there was something very fishy about this story, he had no doubt at all, and his common sense urged him to start by looking for the barrow. But though Eddi might protest that he could carry his burden no further, it was certain that the moment he was left alone he would be off like a startled cat, wheel or no wheel. At the corner where they stood, there was a tree growing through the pavement, after the pleasant manner of Paris, and round the tree was a ring of protective railings.

“Come here,” said the constable and suddenly jerked Eddi towards the tree with one hand while the other drew something shining from the uniform pocket. Eddi, spitting with fury, found himself handcuffed to the railings with one hand and still attached to his incubus with the other.

“Dirty little beast,” said the constable, without heat, and strode away to look for Eddi’s barrow. Back the way the man had come and not far away.

Nor was it. After one false cast the policeman turned a corner to see, twenty yards off, a barrow standing on its nose like a digging terrier and, brooding over it, one of his colleagues.

“I’ve got the man this belongs to,” said the first policeman. “I wasn’t satisfied, somehow, so I——”

“Nor am I,” said the second. “I’ve just got here and I thought—look at that.”

The ground sheet heaved slightly in the middle, and one remaining vase rolled off and broke in the gutter.

“Something alive,” said both simultaneously and attacked the cords. The ground sheet was dragged off and disclosed a gentleman in a grey suit, lashed to a ladder and efficiently gagged. What could be seen of his face, for gag and dirt, was scarlet with effort and near suffocation, but his eyes were furiously alive.

They cut the lashings, took the gag off and helped the gentleman to sit up.

“Who did this to you, monsieur?”

“Letord——” began the gentleman, but the act of speaking, brought on a fit of coughing which nearly choked him, and the police waited, exchanging glances.

“If you mean Monsieur Letord of the Sûreté,” said one of them eventually, “it is inconceivable that he should have——”

“Idiot,” said Hambledon so energetically that his nose started bleeding. “Tell Letord, you fool, I am Hambledon—oh hell, I’ve lost my handkerchief—catch that man who was pushing this barrow——”

“He is already secured, monsieur,” said the first constable, handing him a clean handkerchief with a polite bow. “Monsieur can himself charge the man when Monsieur is sufficiently recovered. In the meantime I will call a taxi to take Monsieur to his hotel and will at once inform Monsieur Letord who has been most anxious about Monsieur.”

Hambledon stood up rather shakily and the other constable deferentially supported his elbow.

“I will myself speak to Monsieur Letord,” said Hambledon obstinately. “That is of more immediate urgency than finding me a taxi. Where is the nearest telephone?”

“At the police station, less than a hundred metres this way, if Monsieur can walk so far, or shall I——”

“There are strips of lead wound round the rungs of that ladder,” interrupted the other constable. “Most unusual.”

“I hope so,” said Hambledon tartly. “It is there to ensure that a body dropped in the Seine does not float. I was the body. That is called ‘the ladder dodge,’ I have it on the best authority.” He straightened, with an effort, knees which showed a tendency to buckle and took one constable’s arm. “*Allons! March.*”

They reached the police station in good order, although to Hambledon the hundred metres seemed to be rather long ones. He asked at once to be allowed to ring Letord’s private number and was immediately connected.

“Letord, this is Hambledon——”

Letord ejaculated something and added: “Where are you?”

Hambledon looked over his shoulder. “Where am I?”

Letord said: “Hambledon! Are you all right?”

“At the police station of the twelfth arrondissement, monsieur.”

Letord said sharply: “What is that muttering in the background? Hambledon!”

“Letord, be quiet and listen. The gang’s headquarters are in a house three doors away from the café where the blind mendicants of Paris have their quarterly meetings, I don’t know its name or the street or where it is——”

“I shall know in five minutes. Where are you?”

“At the police station of the twelfth arrondissement. Send for me, will you? We have one prisoner already, I understand, but I don’t think he’s very important. An odd-job man only.” Hambledon laughed abruptly and Letord did not like the sound of it.

“Very good,” he said. “Don’t hang up, Hambledon. I will be with you shortly. Give me the Inspector or whoever is in charge there, will you?”

Hambledon handed over the receiver and Letord issued orders which resulted in immediate cognac followed shortly by strong coffee, rolls and butter. Before these were all eaten, there were sounds of arrival, with bumps, in the outer office and Hambledon set down his cup. Presently the station sergeant came in.

“Monsieur has everything he desires?”

“Everything, thank you. Was that, by chance, Eddi le Chou who has just been brought in?”

“It was, monsieur. Does Monsieur wish to interview him?”

“I don’t think so, thank you. That is, there are a number of things which I should dearly love to say to him, but they will keep. What, precisely,

happened to him? I could not, of course, see anything, and though he said quite a lot at the time his remarks were more lurid than illuminating.”

“He was handcuffed to the wheel of his barrow, monsieur. He says a stranger leapt upon him and did it.”

Hambledon thought this over.

“So that was why he could not proceed.”

“Precisely, monsieur. So he detached the wheel and went away by himself.”

“Sensible man. I wonder who the stranger was.”

“Yes, indeed, monsieur.”

“Because, you understand, he undoubtedly saved my life. Eddi’s instructions were to wheel me down to the Seine and tip me in.”

“Abominable,” said the sergeant indignantly.

“Just so. In fact, at the moment when the barrow tipped over I thought we had arrived.”

“Monsieur undoubtedly has an alert and energetic Guardian Angel.”

“No doubt. Did Eddi give any description of the stranger?”

“Well dressed, spoke like a gentleman, square-cut black beard.”

“No wings?”

The Sergeant laughed. “Eddi did not mention them, monsieur.”

“Then the stranger must have been someone else and, in any case, I cannot picture an angel with a square-cut black beard.”

“No, indeed, monsieur. The description applies better to one of the Patriarchs.”

A car whirled to a stop outside, the door burst open and Letord came in.

“Hambledon! Are you all right? Where the devil have you been? We have been combing Paris——”

Hambledon swallowed the last drops of coffee.

“Got a car here? Come on, then. Where do the blind men meet, have you found out?” He got up and came round the table, in a fever to be gone; to his horror, Letord took him by the shoulders and embraced him after the French manner. A kiss on both cheeks, in fact. “Good God, Letord, don’t waste time. If those fellows get away now——”

“They cannot. The street of which you speak is already held by my men. And the yards behind. They do but wait,” said Letord, being vigorously impelled through the outer office and into his car, “for you to tell them

which is the house.” The car rocketed off and the two men sat back abruptly in the rear seat. “Now tell me.”

Hambledon gave a short précis of his experiences and added: “When they hauled me out of that cupboard I was all set to give as much trouble as possible, but they got in first.” He fingered the top of his head. “They dotted me one and I didn’t wake up until I heard someone talking about candlesticks. I thought I was dead and somebody was arranging a *chapelle ardente*.”

Letord patted his arm. “You shall burn candles for them instead, one day soon, if you are in a generous mood. For me, in such a case, I buy a packet of cigarettes for myself; they at least are not wasted. This is the street and there is the café of which you spoke.”

“That’s the house, then. I got out of that window.”

“Very good. Stay here in the car.” Letord alighted and went away.

Hambledon was very willing to sit still; he felt bruised from head to foot, his mouth was sore and his head ached. Let the police do their own job. What he wanted was a bath and a good sleep. It was very tiring, being practically murdered, and the moment when the barrow tilted over was one which he would prefer to forget.

Twenty minutes later Letord returned, and one look at his face told Hambledon his news.

“They are gone, the place is empty. Someone warned them. The woman opposite, shaking out rugs, she saw a man come running and go in there; five minutes later four men came out and scattered, going different ways.”

When Letord’s comments finally ran down and stopped, Hambledon said: “It’s quite obvious. They sent someone to trail Eddi. When he got stuck they cleared off, that’s all. Simple.” He leaned back and closed his eyes.

Letord took Hambledon back to his hotel, and had the satisfaction of seeing him drop into sleep the moment his head was on the pillow. Letord returned to the Sûreté and sent for Eddi the Cabbage.

Three Lumps of Sugar

AT about this time a rumour began to run round the underworld of Paris that Rosalie was back, Rosalie the incomparable safebreaker, the gunman who had a dozen times outfaced the police and got away with it. He was back; he had been seen sitting in this café or that, alone, morose, silent and juggling with lumps of sugar as of old. He looked older, his hair was grey at the temples and his skin burnt brown and shrivelled by the African sun; one might pass him in the street and not recognize him, but it was certainly Rosalie with the ivory beads still about his left wrist. The brother of Bichot, that Bichot now in gaol for the attempted bank robbery, had seen and spoken to Rosalie, who had asked after old friends and rivals, particularly Pepi l'Agneau who was nearly as good a safebreaker as Rosalie himself. So Pepi the Lamb was dead, eh? Killed in the Rue Gustave-Hamel just after the bank-robbery fiasco, fancy that. No doubt he would be much missed. Rosalie had looked at the brother of Bichot with such cold, contemplative eyes that he, who was normally a garrulous person, had dried up completely and taken his leave, not looking behind him.

In due course the rumour came to the ears of Robert Écritet, who repeated the news at their next meeting to the Slav, to Veron and to Louis who drove cars so well and looked so very respectable. "I hear," said Écritet, "that Rosalie is back. So I have no doubt that that Englishman, Hambledon, has indeed been talking to him, as I said."

"Point him out to me," said the Slav magnificently, "and in an hour—two hours—he talks no more for ever."

"You do not know him?" asked Écritet.

"No. He had left Paris before I came."

"And you, Louis?"

"I may have seen him without knowing who he was. He was not one of us, though he worked for us two—no, three times. That was before you joined us, Monsieur Écritet. But I did not meet him."

“Veron?”

Veron nodded. “I saw him the other day.”

“And you did not tell me?”

“Rosalie,” said Veron, “is one of whom it is safer not to speak. I had him pointed out to me and I came away.”

“You are a coward,” said the Slav. “You shall point him out to me and then there will be an end to all this talking.”

“You will do nothing of the sort,” said Écritet, “for I have orders from our Principal to recruit him. Since Pepi l’Agneau died, we have no one who can open a tin of sardines, let alone a safe. Those are not my words, they are those of my Principal, by telephone.”

“Recruit him?” repeated the Slav. “Does the Principal know what he says? This Rosalie will shop us to the police without hesitation.”

“Oh no,” said Écritet. “You forget, he has done three murders and the police greatly desire his company. Were it anything less, he might buy remission of sentence by betraying us, but murder—and one of them an Inspector of Police, I believe—is outside the range of bargaining. No, we have him in our power. Veron, you will find out where he habitually goes and point him out to me.”

Late that evening Rosalie was sitting alone at a small table in a café in a turning off the Rue de Lappe; alone, because he was not the type of man with whom the most undiscerning would make a chance acquaintance. He was drinking coffee and playing with three little cubes of sugar, tossing them up so that there were always two in the air at once; he wore a hat pulled down over his eyes; he had not shaved for a day or two, but the dark stubble did not hide the deep lines from his nose to the corners of his thin bitter mouth.

Écritet walked up to his table, drew out a chair, sat down and said: “Good evening. Monsieur Rosalie, I believe.”

Rosalie looked at him with distaste. “Good evening, monsieur. What do you want with me?”

“It is not what I want with you, it is what you may want with me that matters. I am the lawyer Robert Écritet.”

“Touting for custom?”

“No. I am here to ask you if you are still in business, or have you retired?”

Rosalie looked him up and down for a long minute and dropped his sugar lumps into his saucer.

“If the business were sufficiently profitable,” he said slowly, “I might possibly consider it. But it would have to be very profitable.”

“Yes,” said Écritet, “yes. It would be profitable. A client of mine has”—he paused and chose his words carefully—“has had for a number of years an extremely good business which is now running into difficulties owing to an increasing shortage of staff. I think——”

Rosalie looked grimly amused. “You mean the gang who came unstuck over the bank robbery the other day.”

“Yes. I think you worked for them at one time.”

“I did one or two little jobs which that ham-handed bungler Pepi l’Agneau could not tackle.”

“He is dead,” said Écritet repressively.

“That does not make him less of a ham-handed bungler while he was alive, though perhaps you think he is now much improved, eh? If he wishes to open the gates of Hell, for example.”

Écritet did not pursue the subject of the Hereafter; perhaps it was one upon which he preferred not to dwell.

“I will tell my Principal, then, that you are prepared to work for him.”

“You can tell your boss that he can come and see me about it and that then I will make up my mind whether to join his gang or not.”

“You will not see my Principal; even I have never seen him. He will see you without your knowing it and then he will decide whether——”

“Never seen him? How do you do business, then?”

“He rings me up on the telephone.”

“What is his name?”

“I do not know,” said Écritet.

“Nor where he lives?”

“Nor where he lives.”

“Sounds like a phoney setup to me,” said Rosalie contemptuously. “I don’t think I’ll join your club.”

“Wait until you hear what he has to offer,” said the lawyer, rising to his feet. “I will let you know what he says. Will you be here tomorrow night?”

“Here or hereabouts,” said Rosalie indifferently, and began tossing his sugar cubes again.

By the following morning Hambledon was completely restored. Bathed, shaven and dressed in refreshingly clean linen, he came down to breakfast at eight. Soon after nine Hambledon walked into Letord's office and the detective looked up from his desk.

"Practically indestructible, the Monsieur Hambledon," he said. "*Mon vieux*, you are without doubt made of rubber, pure rubber. Well, I talked to Eddi le Chou."

Hambledon threw his hat upon one chair, sat down on another and said: "I do not doubt it. What is more to the point, did he talk to you?"

"Not in our sense. He told a long and circumstantially detailed story. He said that having stolen half a sheep from a butcher, he put it on his barrow to take home and covered it up so that my nosey police should not ask questions. On the way home he became fatigued and went into a café for refreshment, leaving the barrow outside. When he came out again he just wheeled the barrow straight on the way he was going. Asked why the body of a distinguished foreign visitor was found in place of the mutton, he said, of course, that he had no idea. Someone had planted Monsieur. Paris was full of wicked people and the police ought to do something about it. As for the handcuff, he sticks to the same story he told to start with, that a man with a square black beard stepped out of the shadows, engaged him in conversation, took him unawares, handcuffed him to the wheel and, with a low but fiendish laugh, walked rapidly away. For me," said Letord, "I believe that bit."

"So do I," said Hambledon thoughtfully, "except, perhaps, the square black beard. I suppose the stranger had no scar across his cheek? If he had, the beard would mask it."

"Presumably. I also think it sounds like disguise; these square-cut black beards, they are not so common, and it was night. If it was not a jest, how did this man know that there was a body on that barrow? Even if he did not know whose body? Or did he know that it was you?"

"Gogo might have talked. I don't know. I am getting worried about this case, Letord. I am trying to catch the murderer of Teluga. If he is the man who has just saved my life——"

"Precisely. I also am worried. Hambledon, you and I think that the man who is cleaning up this gang for me also murdered Teluga——"

"Began with Teluga, who was a member of this gang until three years ago."

"Yes. Well, now, I believe that I can trust my own men implicitly. I am sure of it. Should I keep a man I could not trust? Yet"—Letord leaned his

elbows on his desk, dropped his voice and prepared to count upon his fingers—"yet there are two things. First; how did this man know that there was an unidentified fingerprint found in Dubois's flat? Only the police knew that. Second; Eddi's handcuff. An old pattern now discontinued; they were adjustable for size and it was too easy to fasten them much too tight. They were called in and replaced, every one, but they were not thrown out, they were put away in the store here. Two pointers to the Sûreté."

Hambledon could not think of any effective consolation and changed the subject.

"Fréchant, who assaulted Madame Dubois. Did he talk?"

"No. Not to any purpose. He said that Dubois was blackmailing him about a letter and he wanted to break open Dubois's safe to get the letter. It wasn't true; Dubois was not a blackmailer and there were no such letters in his safe."

"But the rest of those jewels which you found in his house?"

"Planted there to incriminate him. Probably by the police. He comes up for trial next week and I hope he gets fifteen years," said Letord viciously. "To return to what I was saying. I have been sitting here late into the night, Hambledon, going through my records, comparing the times and places of this fellow's—Monsieur X's—actions against the gang, with the turns of duty of my fellows here, and there is not one who could have done them all. If a man of mine could have pushed Fréchant into that electrical kiosk, he could not have shot the driver after that bank robbery, and so on. And I refuse to credit," said Letord, thumping his desk, "that my men have formed themselves into a Jewel Gang Abolition Association and be taking it in turns to knock them off. It's ridiculous, it's impossible, it's——"

"Then why think about it?" said Hambledon reasonably. "It's not your men, so it is someone else, as we always thought."

"I wish Guernan were back. He was looking into this case for me and he said that he thought he was on to something, but not definitely enough to take action."

"You mentioned Guernan before, is he not the man who is such a good linguist? I think you said that he was on sick leave."

Letord's face saddened. "He still is, I saw him yesterday. You remember I told you he went to Alkdam after that financier Morand? Yes. From there he went to London on a false trail and then back to Brussels where he caught his man. But there was a fight and someone hit Guernan across the back, here, with an iron bar. When he came back to Paris with the prisoner, he complained of pain and stiffness in the legs and I told him to see the doctor.

He is in bed all the time now; they say he has lost the use of his legs. They hope that some treatment will cure him; I hope so, I—when I saw him I did not like what I saw. His eyes are too bright, I thought. I don't know anything of medicine, how should I?"

"What a shocking thing. How old is he? Thirty-five? But it is wonderful what they can do in these days."

"One can always hope," said Letord gloomily.

"In the matter of this case we are on," said Hambleton. "We are both uneasy about the outcome, but in the meantime we can enjoy ourselves embarrassing the ungodly. That rogue Écritet, for one."

Letord cheered up. "At least we know something now, though we still cannot prove that he had anything to do with your abduction. No legal proof, that is, since you only heard his voice through the wall and did not see him. Defending counsel would tear the case to rags."

"Of course, but at least we know that we are on the right track. I was wondering whether his bank account would tell us anything. Would it be possible for you to get a look at it?"

"I could obtain the necessary authority. At least we can try it," said Letord, "for frankly I have no better suggestion to offer. I will put through a request for it and if it is granted, we will go together, eh?"

"Certainly we will. Oh, by the way, there was one other thing I overheard from that foul cupboard. Rosalie is a man. He talked to a journalist who was consequently killed before he could talk in his turn. Écritet thinks I have been talking to Rosalie, too, because I threw out that name in Écritet's office. If only they knew that I thought I was referring to an embarrassing lady! They would like to knock off Rosalie, only they don't know where he is. Écritet suggested that he'd joined the Foreign Legion."

"Oh. That is interesting. When you asked me about Rosalie before, I thought we were looking for a woman. Now I know it is a man I can tell you something. Rosalie was an expert at opening safes. He did not blow them as a rule; he considered that a coarse and vulgar method. He would pick the locks until they opened for him. It is said that he used a doctor's stethoscope to hear when the tumblers fell. He worked with the jewel gang on two or three jobs; he was not a regular member, but they employed him sometimes."

"Calling in the expert," said Hambleton.

"Precisely. But normally he worked alone. He was very successful as a rule, but if he were discovered and cornered he would shoot his way out. When he had three murders to his account he disappeared from Paris and

was reported as having been seen in Algiers, in the Kasbah. That was three years ago. Our police could not wrinkle him out from there, as I imagine you know; if he has not got himself knifed, I expect he is still there and I hope he will stay there. He was a master of disguise, but he had one habit which was liable to give him away; he could not keep his hands still. If he were sitting at a café table, he would juggle with three little packets of wrapped sugar such as are always supplied, or he would play with a string of ivory beads which he wore round his left wrist. The beads were said to have some connection with his nickname, Rosalie, and to have belonged to a woman; I do not know. I do not think that Écritet is right in saying that Rosalie had joined the Foreign Legion. We have some tough characters in that body but we do not, if we know it, harbour murderers.”

“Very interesting,” said Hambledon. “I assume that he had some quarrel with the jewel gang, since he seems to have talked about them to the journalist they mentioned.”

“That is right,” said Letord. “Some of the gang informed the police when Rosalie was to open a safe in a house in the Avenue Kléber, so we made our preparations and dropped on him and he got three years for it. That was a long time ago, eight or nine years. I remember the journalist case, he was knifed. I cannot recall his real name—it was not one of my cases—but he called himself Le Boueur, the man who scrapes up the mud, you know? He was a brilliant man but something of a nuisance; he nosed out Paris scandals and wrote articles about them with full details and usually names. Deputies who made too much money, you understand? Very awkward. Fraudulent company promoters. What you English so picturesquely call White Slave Traders. Rapacious—is not that the word always used?—rapacious moneylenders who acquired property by foreclosure. All that sort of thing for a start——”

“But why a nuisance?” asked Hambledon. “Surely——”

“Because he acted upon evidence which would have been insufficient for police action, and then demanded in capital letters: What Are The Police Doing?”

“Oh dear.”

“Then he started a series about some murders which worried us a great deal at one time, and even then I wondered how much longer he had to live. Finally he attacked this gang of thieves and at that point he died suddenly of a knife in the back. The murderer was not apprehended.”

“I see,” said Hambledon. “Well, I am hindering you unless you can suggest anything useful I can do?”

“You can go and buy the biggest candle procurable and burn it in Notre Dame for the benefit of those who walk in darkness. I refer,” said Letord sourly, “to the police.”

“I will buy two,” said Hambledon, picking up his hat. “The other one is for me.”

Gogo the Dwarf

THE bank manager protested his distaste at being asked to reveal his clients' financial secrets.

"For I am under an obligation to secrecy," he said. "This little office"—it was twenty feet square and had a marble floor—"is, in a very real sense, a confessional. Here come the inexperienced, the embarrassed, the unhappy, the——"

"The police," said Letord. "They are not inexperienced, they are seldom embarrassed, but they are frequently unhappy, especially when information is withheld from them. I have shewn you my authority for inspecting this account——"

"But I bow to it," said the manager. "I bow deeply. At the same time I owe it to my——"

"Grandmother. The account, please."

"I have made my protest," said the manager with dignity and pressed a bell upon his desk; the clerk who came in was sent for the account of Monsieur Robert Écritet, l'avocat. When it was laid upon the desk the manager took his time in opening it and arranging it before him while Letord's fingers tapped out an inaudible tattoo upon his knee.

"Well, now," said the manager, "the messieurs desire——"

Letord shot a string of questions and received a great deal of not very helpful information. Monsieur Écritet did not pay cheques in as a rule, usually cash. Large sums in cash, usually in thousand-franc notes. Monsieur Écritet would come in with an attaché case full of notes, put it down on the counter and say: "A little more stuffing to keep the wind out."

"That was always his little joke, you understand," said the manager, looking over the tops of his spectacles. "Then my clerks would gather round and one would count and a couple more would check."

"I am more interested in the cheques he received."

"They were not large. Not many, and not large. He——"

“No large cheques at all?” snapped Letord.

“There was one large one, I remember, sometime last year. Let me turn back, yes, here we are. In April last year, fourteen months ago. It was for seven million francs.”

“From whom?”

“An art dealer named Paul Joseph, in the Boulevard Haussmann.”

“Oh, indeed. And that is the only large cheque?”

“That is so, monsieur. The others, they are for ten thousand francs, twenty-five thousand—no more.”

“I think,” said Letord when they were once more in his office, “that Monsieur Robert Écritet should be asked about this cheque.”

Hambleton agreed. “There is something fishy about it. What, a man of that stamp to take an interest in art? I don’t believe it.”

“Why not? Appreciation of fine pictures is not confined to the innocent and pure in heart. In Paris, the most unexpected people are often genuine art lovers.”

“Even if it is the only genuine thing about them? I bow to your superior knowledge.”

“All the same, I will send a man to ask Écritet a few questions about Paul Joseph’s cheque.”

Two hours later the man, one of Letord’s inspectors, came back and reported.

“Monsieur Écritet permitted himself a few acid comments about police interest in his accounts, but he answered me quite openly. The cheque was for a picture which he had sold to Paul Joseph, and the picture was one which he had accepted as payment from a client named Duplessis who lives out at Saint-Ouen. This Duplessis bought a small property there and then found himself involved in a boundary dispute. There was a court case and Écritet acted for him and won the case. Duplessis gave him the picture, alleged to be a Guido Reni, and Écritet sold it because, he said, it was too large for his rooms and not of a cheerful nature. It is, he said, a portrayal of the martyrdom of Saint Sebastian, and the sight of the poor young man all stuck with arrows put him off his breakfast.”

“I sympathise,” said Hambleton. “It would me also.”

“And me,” said Letord. “So he sold it; how sensible, especially at that price. At that price. Hambleton, would you expect a Guido to fetch a sum like that?”

“What? Nearly eight thousand pounds in British currency? No, I wouldn’t, there are a lot of Guidos about, are there not? I seem to remember a gallery full of them at the Louvre, but it’s no use asking me, I’m not an art dealer. One thing which does occur to me is that seven million francs seems rather a lot to pay a solicitor for appearing in a boundary-dispute case. Why didn’t Duplessis sell the picture himself, pay Écritet in cash and pocket the difference? I think——”

“I think we go and see this Duplessis,” said Letord. “Now, at once.”

Monsieur Duplessis proved to be a pleasant little old man who lived in a pleasant little house with a garden round it at Saint-Ouen, which is one of the northern suburbs of Paris. He said he was a retired draper, who had, with the onset of declining years, sold his business and bought the house with the proceeds. Yes, yes, there was trouble over the boundary line. He did not know any lawyers, having passed a life happily free of litigation until then, and someone said that Monsieur Robert Écritet was clever and usually won his cases. So he engaged him and all turned out well. Monsieur Écritet came out to see his client and admired this picture; when it was all over and Monsieur Duplessis asked what he owed, Monsieur Écritet hinted fairly plainly that he would like that picture instead. “So I gave it to him at once.”

“It was his idea, was it, to have the picture? You did not suggest it?” asked Hambleton.

“Oh no, it would not have occurred to me.” The old man laughed gently. “In point of fact I was delighted, though I did not say so. I am something of an amateur of pictures in a very small way; I cannot keep away from auction sales if there are pictures there and I have had my successes—that is a Manet over the fireplace. This Saint Sebastian, it hardly got a bid, and it was in a very large room, I did not realize how big it was—in short, I was a fool and when I brought it home my good wife very rightly told me so. So I said, let us hang it up for the time being, it is a very fine frame and one day I shall get my five thousand francs back on that——”

“How much?” said Letord blankly.

“Five thousand two hundred to be exact, and as Monsieur Écritet’s bill was for twenty-five thousand francs, you can imagine that I was well pleased.”

Hambleton and Letord looked at each other and burst out laughing.

“It is indeed amusing, is it not?” said Monsieur Duplessis.

“It is,” said Hambleton, “but what is even funnier is that Monsieur Écritet sold the picture again to Paul Joseph in the Boulevard Haussmann——”

“I know the shop,” nodded the old man. “I always look in the window if I am passing.”

“For a very much larger sum.”

“May I ask how much? I am interested in prices.”

“Hold on to your chair,” said Letord. “For seven million francs.”

“For seven—for seven million—oh no. Not possible. There must be some mistake.”

“There is not,” said Letord.

“Then,” said Duplessis severely, “Paul Joseph must have taken leave of his senses and his relations should take some advice in the matter before he ruins an extremely good business.”

“But it was a Guido Reni, was it not?” said Hambledon.

“Oh no, my dear monsieur, no. It was a Spanish copy probably made in the early nineteenth century. About 1840. I told him so myself.”

“Then Paul Joseph must be mad.”

“Either that,” said Duplessis, “or Écritez sold him some other pictures at the same time. That might account for it, you know. Perhaps Monsieur Écritez is also an amateur of pictures, and when he sees one—Monsieur Letord, what is the matter?” For Letord was staring at him as though he had announced a revelation.

“Nothing. That is, you have given me an idea—I am very deeply in your debt—excuse us, please. My colleague and I have an urgent appointment——” Letord was upon his feet and urging Hambledon towards the door.

“I am delighted,” said the old man, in a puzzled voice, “if I have said anything helpful. I cannot think what it could have been.”

“‘Monsieur Écritez is an amateur of pictures,’ ” quoted Letord. He fairly pushed Hambledon into the police car, leapt into the driver’s seat himself and drove back to the Sûreté at a pace which, Hambledon felt, demanded a respectful silence. Do Not Speak To The Man At The Wheel.

They reached the Préfecture unscathed, and Letord led the way upstairs at his customary gallop, threw himself upon the telephone and asked for the file concerning the robbery, in February of last year, of five pictures from a private gallery at Biarritz.

Hambledon said, “Ah,” and lit a cigarette.

“It is indeed ‘ah.’ It is time I retired and kept chickens,” said Letord violently, “for when I picture in my mind the face and general demeanour of a hen, that is an exact representation of what the mechanism I used to call my brain most resembles at the moment. *Dieu-de-Dieu*, to think it should

take a fat little retired draper with a bald head and fallen arches to indicate to me, Letord, a point which is as plain as the Dent du Midi on a clear day! Of course Écritet has to take a cheque for a really large sum. One does not walk into a bank with seven million francs in notes in a paper bag. No. It would occasion more comment than a cheque, even from that stuffed dummy of a bank manager whom we interviewed this morning. No, he presents a cheque and produces a perfectly genuine picture to account for it. He——”

“It was not even genuine,” said Hambledon, “it was a Spanish copy. 1840 or thereabouts.”

Letord said, “Bah!” with such energy that three letters and a memorandum blew off his desk and fluttered to the floor. Before Hambledon had finished picking them up, the door opened and a clerk came in with a file of papers.

Letord opened the file and looked through it.

“Here we are. A Hobbema, 1 metre 16 centimetres long by 71 centim—oh, to the devil with these measurements!—of a village with a water mill bathed in a warm golden light. A Jan Davidsz de Heem, measurements so-and-so, a still life of a table with a blue cloth loaded with fruit and a tortoise-shell butterfly. A Caravaggio of a Cheating Gamester, a tavern scene by Teniers, who, I understand,” interpolated Letord, “spent most of his time in taverns and probably died young as a result of it, and a Frans van Mieris of a shop scene, a young lady, accompanied by her duenna, buying ribbons, 41 centimetres by 28.”

“That’s very small,” commented Hambledon.

“He started a fashion for tiny pictures, a reaction from Rubens’ highly coloured acres,” said Letord absently, and provided a proof of the truth of his own remark that in Paris the most unexpected people are art lovers. “No, that was all. I was thinking of some stolen miniatures, but that was a different case altogether. Now, I think, we go and call upon Paul Joseph, do we not?”

Paul Joseph’s shop was narrow-fronted, having only one window and a door beside it, but once inside, it could be seen that the showroom stretched back a long way. The walls were covered with paintings, and down the middle of the room were long screens with more pictures hung upon them. The severity of this arrangement was tempered by having a few more set about upon easels—presumably these were especially choice—and some small statuettes and bronzes upon pedestals. Paul Joseph himself was a tall thin old man with a wispy grey beard. He came wandering slowly forward as Letord and Hambledon went in, and greeted them with a vague smile.

Letord showed his credentials and engaged Paul Joseph in conversation while Hambledon strolled quietly about looking at the exhibits.

“In order to check a small point in connection with one of my cases,” said Letord, “would you be so good as to answer one or two questions?”

“Certainly, certainly. I spend my days answering questions—or trying to—in what way can I help you? A little matter of art, I suppose?” Paul Joseph’s voice was as soft and vague as his manner and he smiled upon Letord like a kindly grandfather instructing the children.

“It is to do with a picture which you bought from Monsieur Robert Écritet——”

Instantly the old man’s face fell and he bent his head as though in shame.

“Alas, that picture! Monsieur, if I may I should prefer to be allowed to forget it.”

“It is said that you paid him the sum of——”

Paul Joseph’s long white hands fluttered up to cover his ears, but Letord merely raised his voice.

“——the sum of seven million francs for a picture of Saint Sebastian pierced by arrows and alleged to be the work of Guido Reni.”

“It is true,” said the old man, shaking his head mournfully, “it is quite true. I can hardly believe it myself.”

“For one picture only?”

“Yes. Oh dear, oh dear, yes.”

“And that not even a genuine Guido but a nineteenth-century Spanish copy?”

The old man turned his head away and sighed deeply.

“But what possessed you to do such a thing?” persisted Letord.

“Monsieur, it was said by the ancients that even Homer nods sometimes. It is also said that not even Apollo can keep his bow always at stretch. Even so, art dealers sometimes have their lapses. Monsieur, it was in this way that I was misled. I was reading in an old journal an article by a man who said that it was possible for many famous pictures in galleries, long accepted as originals, to be in fact copies by a skilled hand, possibly contemporaneous, possibly by a student in the artist’s own studio, and one of the several pictures he mentioned was Guido’s Saint Sebastian in the Louvre. Now, upon the evening in question——”

Hambledon lost the argument at this point because he had found something which interested him more; a dark but vivid picture of a man, head and shoulders only. The man wore a broad hat with a twisted feather

and his clothes were shabby and shapeless; in his hands—notably beautiful hands—he held a violin. At the bottom of the frame was the usual gilt label: “The Street Musician, attributed to Rembrandt.” Hambledon regarded it with intense interest, for the dark eyes and well-shaped features alive with intelligence were those of Gogo the dwarf. There could be no mistake, for it was a living likeness. One would say that the parted lips were about to speak.

Hambledon became aware that Paul Joseph was turning in his direction and hastened to transfer his attention to something else.

“So there it was,” said the old man’s delicate *trainante* voice. “I had this article in mind, I had for once exceeded a little my usual temperate allowance and I made a bad deal. Happily, none but me will lose by it; I have no partner to reproach me and perhaps, who knows, I may make it up by a stroke of luck next week. Who knows? For picture dealing is not an exact science, Monsieur Letord. No, indeed. One backs one’s fancy, as racing men say, and sometimes one is left at the post—I have it right?”

“And the picture?” said Letord.

“Is at the back of my storeroom. I shall keep it, monsieur, to mortify my pride whenever I find myself thinking myself too clever.” Paul Joseph smiled sadly and made a gesture of throwing something away. “*Humanum est errare*, it is said, but I shall not forgive myself.”

Letord took his leave and Hambledon, murmuring uninstructed appreciations, followed him out.

“The old humbug,” said Letord, when they were out of earshot, “the soapy old liar!”

“Listen, Letord. When I was wandering round I saw something.” Hambledon described The Street Musician, attributed to Rembrandt. “It is a portrait of Gogo and a damned good one, too. I told you about Gogo, you remember, the dwarf. Paul Joseph has a painter—at least one painter—working for him and Gogo knows who he is. I think——”

“We will have Gogo brought in.”

“Without fuss or publicity, if possible,” urged Hambledon. “I owe him a lot; he saved my life at considerable risk to himself.”

“He shall be inconspicuously wafted away,” said Letord.

Écritet faced Rosalie again over the café table where they had talked two days earlier. This time Rosalie was drinking wine instead of coffee, so that there were no little cubes of sugar for him to toss up and unerringly catch

again; on this occasion he was playing with a string of ivory beads about his left wrist, moving them round one at a time as though he were counting them.

“Good evening, Monsieur Rosalie.”

“Good evening, lawyer Écritet.”

Écritet’s reddish eyebrows drew together, for Rosalie’s tone had been contemptuous and the lawyer was more accustomed to adulation than to contempt. However, he had received orders which he dared not disobey.

“My Principal has seen you and approves of you.”

“Very good of him. When was this?”

“When we met here on Monday night he was also here.”

“You surprise me,” said Rosalie slowly. “There were a number of petty crooks here on Monday night and even a few reasonably honest citizens, but no one who looked like a gang leader, not even of a gang of pickpockets.”

“I do not suppose that my Principal looks at all like the leader of a gang of pickpockets,” said Écritet coldly. “What I am to tell you is that he is not yet ready to avail himself of your services. In a few days’ time—a week, perhaps—you will hear from me again.”

“I am in no particular hurry,” said Rosalie indifferently.

Two days later Letord telephoned to Hambledon and said that Gogo was at the Sûreté.

“I come,” said Hambledon. “Be nice to him.”

“I have just given him one of my own cigars,” said Letord indignantly.

“Heaven help him,” said Hambledon.

He came into Letord’s room to find Letord busy at his desk and Gogo sitting on the edge of a chair looking apprehensive.

“Good morning, Gogo,” said Hambledon, and shook hands with him. “I am glad to see you again to thank you for all you did to release me from that horrible attic. Letord, this is the man to whom I owe so much.”

Letord smiled and nodded and Gogo said it was nothing, it was a pleasure to be able to help Monsieur and, besides, Monsieur had paid him handsomely.

“I am glad that you got clear away from that place,” said Hambledon. “I was a little anxious about you.”

“Monsieur, I took up my violin and fled.”

“Very wise.”

“Gogo,” said Letord, “how long had you worked for those people?”

“Not long, monsieur. Four—nearly five months.”

“Had you any idea of what they were doing?”

Gogo turned pale and looked at Hambledon for support, and Letord said that there was nothing to fear if he spoke the truth. Gogo’s pallor turned greenish and he half rose from his chair.

“It is all right, Gogo,” said Hambledon. “Carry on.”

“I—I knew, that is, I guessed that they were not honest——”

Letord laughed.

“Letord, you are terrifying him. Go on, Gogo.”

“They did not talk in my hearing of what they had done or meant to do; it was their manner. Also, I carried in the bullion boxes and presently carried them out again. When I went through the kitchen to carry them in, there were rolls of sheet lead on the floor; when I took them out again there were piles of something on the floor covered with sacking. Afterwards, I read about it in the paper.”

Hambledon looked at Letord and said: “Orly Airport?”

“Exactly,” snapped Letord. “Continue, Gogo.”

“But when I found that Monsieur was not a thieving servant as they had said, but someone whom they feared——” Gogo stopped in midsentence.

“You thought that a little beyond the mark and you were quite right,” said Hambledon. “Not just clean boyish fun, eh?”

“No,” said Gogo, and shivered.

Métro to Abbesses

“LET that go for the present,” said Hambleton. “What I really wanted to ask you about was quite another matter. Do you know Paul Joseph’s shop in the Boulevard Haussmann? The art dealer.”

“But yes, monsieur. I know it.”

“When I was having a look round there the other day, I saw a portrait of you.”

Gogo’s face lit up and he smiled.

“Did you indeed, monsieur? With my violin? So that is where it is now. It was painted by a friend of mine who is an artist. I think him a great artist, but you may say that I am no judge, I know nothing about painting; he thinks me a good violinist and there he is certainly wrong. I have known him ever since we were boys together and sometimes when I am in great need I go to him and he lets me eat with him and sleep on the couch in his studio. He is always a good friend. Then I do what I can for him and sometimes he uses me for a model, sometimes my head, but more often my hands. I have been a circus clown—in a picture, I mean—and a watchman sitting by a brazier; Monsieur knows? But the one with my violin is the best.”

“I thought it excellent,” said Hambleton. “Who is your friend?”

“Raimond Berger, monsieur.”

“Berger. Does he do much work for Paul Joseph?”

“I do not know, monsieur. Raimond has sold pictures to Monsieur Joseph from time to time and to other art dealers in Paris also, but I do not know how many.”

“No, I see. Sometimes art dealers engage artists to repaint parts of an old picture where the paint has been damaged in some way. I wondered whether your friend did work like that.”

“Restoring, monsieur, that is a part of picture restoring. Raimond says that ninety-nine picture restorers out of every hundred should be sent to the

guillotine, monsieur, but whether he ever did any such work himself I cannot tell.”

“I wondered——” began Hambledon and at the same moment Gogo said: “I do remember—I beg Monsieur’s pardon.”

“No, you go on. You remember what?”

“About a year ago, it was in May last year, I was staying with him and he had five pictures brought in.” Letord’s ears pricked up almost visibly. “I thought that they were very nice, but he said that they were valueless but good frames and he was going to use the canvases again because good canvas is expensive and he is always poor. He lives, monsieur, but not well, you understand.”

“Perfectly. I have heard of canvases being used again, but I should have thought that the underneath picture would show through,” said Hambledon.

“No, monsieur, for one paints the first picture over with thick paint—ordinary paint, something special—and when it is dry it is quite smooth and opaque, monsieur.”

“I understand. What were the pictures like which he was painting over?”

“Two I did not see, for they were already covered. There was one I liked of a village with a water mill, and the sun must have been setting because the light was all golden, monsieur, and there was a boy and a dog with a long tail by the water. There was another of men drinking in a tavern, sprawling on benches, but the one I liked best was a very small one, monsieur, of a shop with some ladies buying ribbons, beautiful ribbons, blue and cerise and all colours. I begged him not to paint it over, but he said he had an order for a picture that size so it had to go.”

“What a pity. What did he paint over them, do you know?”

“Street scenes in Paris, monsieur. There is always a sale, Raimond says, for Paris street scenes, especially if one can see also the Basilica du Sacré Coeur. But on the little one he painted a scene in the Luxembourg Gardens, with a statue of a lady in a little glade, very fine and delicate, monsieur. But I still liked best the picture of the ribbon shop which was underneath, but then I know nothing about art, monsieur.”

“Perhaps not, one cannot know everything. He did not tell you from whom he got his old canvases, then?”

“From Paul Joseph, monsieur, but I do not know what became of them when he had finished.”

There was a short pause. Hambledon glanced at Letord, but he, having got what he wanted, merely smiled amiably and said nothing.

“What are you doing now, Gogo?” asked Hambledon.

“Monsieur, I wanted to get away to another part of Paris and not to be seen about the streets, so I went to the *chiffonniers*, monsieur knows? They live all together in one place like a camp, and in the middle of the night we all go out, each group having its own area, and sort the contents of the dustbins for rags and bones and other useful things. These we put into bags and the cart follows round and collects them and after that they are sold and the money fairly divided, and so we live, monsieur. In the daytime we do not go out, so I can practise my violin, ah, by the hour, monsieur, and they do not mind at all. Monsieur, there is even one who studied the violin at the Conservatoire and was one of the second violins at the Opéra till he had an accident and lost the fingers of his left hand, so now he is one of us and he is teaching me a great deal, monsieur, though of course he cannot show me but only tell me how to do this or that. Monsieur, I beg forgiveness, I talk too much, only Monsieur was kind to me and now I am so happy.”

Gogo was congratulated, rewarded, and despatched on his way in a closed car which would put him down where no one was looking, so that none could tell that he had been in touch with the police.

“I wonder whether he is really any good,” said Hambledon, when the dwarf had gone. “When this is all over I should like to take him to someone who knows about violin playing and see if anything can be done for him.”

“Excellent,” said Letord. “And if your expert says this Gogo is no good and never will be, how will you tell him? For men live upon hope, *mon vieux*, as well as upon food and drink. Now, if you care to turn your mind to a less deserving object, I am going to see if I can do anything for Paul Joseph, for,” said Letord between his teeth, “I think that we now have him upon the dish, *hein?* and I will carve him up.”

They arrived at the shop in the Boulevard Haussmann in an official police car with a uniformed driver and two detective sergeants to add dignity and importance to the occasion. These two men were left on the pavement outside, with instructions to be observable from within, and Letord and Hambledon entered. Paul Joseph was serving another customer at the time; Letord nodded to the dealer and took Hambledon for a stroll round the gallery. They noticed with interest four paintings of Parisian street scenes and one small one of a glade among trees; they all bore small labels printed with the word Sold.

A few minutes later the customer said that he would consult his wife and call again. For himself, he liked the picture under discussion; “But the

ladies, you know, have the last word. After all, she also will have to live with it.”

“Undoubtedly,” said Paul Joseph amiably, “undoubtedly. It is only right that Madame should first be consulted.” He bowed the customer out and came wandering vaguely across to where Hambledon and Letord were waiting for him.

“Good morning, Monsieur Letord. Good morning, monsieur. I am happy to see the messieurs here again.”

“I doubt if you will be so delighted when you hear the purpose of our visit,” said Letord abruptly. “We are making enquiries about five valuable pictures which were stolen from a private collection at Biarritz in April last year.”

“I remember,” said Paul Joseph gently, “reading about the robbery in the papers at the time, though I cannot now recollect the precise details.”

“I will refresh your memory. There were five paintings stolen.” Letord took a paper from his wallet and read out the list in full. “Paul Joseph, you will tell me where they are now, all of them.”

“Monsieur Letord, I should be overjoyed to be instrumental in returning those valuable and beautiful pictures to their bereaved owner if it were within my power, but I have not the remotest——”

“Come off it. You handled them, they were in your hands last May——”

“Monsieur, monsieur!” The high old voice rose to a wail. “You cannot be well, you are in a fever, you are distraught! I beg of you to consult a ——”

“Paul Joseph. Those pictures were stolen on the twentieth of April last year. On the twenty-seventh Robert Écritet sold them to you for the quite inadequate sum of seven million francs and threw in the Saint Sebastian as a cover for the deal. Sometime at the end of April or in early May you passed them to a painter named Raimond Berger——”

There was a shuddering sigh from the old man, but he did not speak. Letord waited a moment and went on: “—Raimond Berger, with instructions to paint them over with the sort of coating one uses for these purposes and to paint pictures of his own on the top. The Hobbema, the De Heem, the Caravaggio and the Teniers were covered with paintings of Paris street scenes, with or without the Sacré Coeur in the background, but the little Van Mieris had a scene in the Luxembourg Gardens, a glade with a female statue. I believe that I see them here.” Letord pointed them out one by one, and the old man tottered. “I am taking you into custody on a charge of being concerned in the disposal of stolen goods and I am also taking those five

pictures for expert examination.” Letord signalled to the two men outside to come in, but Paul Joseph seized him by the arm.

“Monsieur, monsieur! One moment——”

“What is it?”

“I am an old man, monsieur, I know I have done wrong but I was intimidated into it——”

“If you had reported it to the police, the criminals would have been arrested and you would have had nothing to fear.”

“Monsieur, you do not know what you are saying! Do you imagine you could have caught them all? Monsieur, if I tell you all I know, shall I get a lighter sentence?”

“If you are willing to assist the police by giving full information, that will be taken into consideration when you are sentenced.”

Paul Joseph’s hand fell to his side. “Thank you. I cannot expect mercy, but I can beg for it.”

Letord’s sergeants waited for orders and he told one of them to take the old man out to the car. “He is under arrest, look after him. You”——to the other——“you have the metre rule I told you to bring? Take those five pictures down and measure the canvases, they should correspond with the sizes on this list. No, you lift them down and I will measure them. Be careful, they are immensely valuable.”

Hambledon, not particularly interested in this piece of routine, strolled outside the shop and looked about him. A few minutes later Letord came out and joined him.

“Those are the ones; at least, the sizes are right. I told my fellow to pack them carefully and we will send a van for them. This car is too full of large feet to be safe for——what are you looking at?”

“Tell your man,” said Hambledon, “to lock all the doors and not to open till he sees through the window that it is the police van outside.”

“What——”

“That customer. He has been hanging round and when I came out he strolled away. Now he thinks himself out of sight he is running; look.”

“Sergeant Vaugiraud!”

“Monsieur,” said Paul Joseph’s escort.

“Stay with Bontout, lock all the doors and look for trouble. If you two let yourselves be murdered I will personally kick your dishonoured carcasses into the Seine.”

“Very good, monsieur,” said the man, grinning. He went back into the shop and could be seen turning keys and shooting bolts on the door. Letord sat in the back of the car beside Paul Joseph, Hambledon rode beside the driver; they reached the Sûreté entirely without incident.

“You won’t want me,” said Hambledon when they got out, “and I want my lunch.”

“Go, and good appetite. I shall have a little something myself and then interrogate this—this venerable personage. If I can get anything definite about Écritet, I shall go straight out and arrest him. You will be with me?”

“Certainly. I will come back in less than an hour.”

Letord nodded and went in. The prisoner was already out of sight.

Hambledon returned later to find a squad car ready and waiting for Letord; there were several of the police already there, including one man whom he knew to be Letord’s champion searcher. If there was anything to be found in a house, said Letord, Vignon would find it, though sometimes the house had subsequently to be rebuilt.

Letord came out and said that he had enough to go upon and Écritet would be hard put to it to talk himself out of trouble now. They entered the squad car and drove away.

As they drew near to Écritet’s office they saw little groups of people standing about, talking; at the end of the street the crowd was across the road and there was in the air the acrid smell of burning and a drift of smoke.

“A fire somewhere,” said Letord to the driver. “If the road is blocked, go round. I am in a hurry.”

But when they reached the end of the road the crowd parted to let the police go through; once round the corner, they could see an array of fire engines, escapes, motor pumps and all the paraphernalia of *les pompiers* outside a house which was alight from floor to roof, for flames were already shooting long tongues out of the attic windows. The house was one in a row and the neighbours were sensibly removing themselves, their wives and children and such of their goods as were readily portable.

“Which house——” began Letord——

“Monsieur,” said one of Letord’s men, the same Inspector who had interviewed Écritet about the cheque, “monsieur, it is Écritet’s house which is burning.”

“Did he live above the office?” asked Letord.

“I do not know, monsieur, I will ask.” The man slipped out of the car and could be seen making enquiries.

“Now we know,” said Hambledon calmly, “what Paul Joseph’s customer was running for. And where to. Save yourself, brother Écritet, for Paul Joseph is captured and he will, naturally, talk.”

“I was so much looking forward,” growled Letord, “to going through the papers in that office, I was sure they would prove illuminating.”

“So was Écritet, and since papers take a long time to burn, he took a quicker way and burned the house.”

The Inspector returned.

“Écritet lived alone above the office, and a woman went in daily to do the work. Écritet and his clerk rushed out of the house when it was well alight, the woman was rescued from an upper window.”

“And where have they gone—the men?”

“No one knows, monsieur. They danced about, exhibiting agitation, and after that no one saw them.”

“If he were to reappear now,” said Letord, “it would give me immense pleasure to pick him up and throw him back.” The roof fell in with a crash and a shower of sparks and the startled crowd recoiled. “Now would be a good moment.”

“Come,” said Hambledon, in a soothing voice, “come away. We are doing no good here and, besides, we are impeding the noble and gallant *pompier*s.”

They returned in mournful silence to the Sûreté. It was a measure of Letord’s depression that he merely walked up to his office instead of charging up the stairs three steps at a time.

“I blame myself,” said Letord, sitting down heavily in his desk chair. “I should have gone straight from that art shop to the lawyer’s office and arrested him out of hand and got the evidence afterwards. It is my fault; you pointed out the running messenger——”

“And drew the wrong conclusion about what he was running for,” agreed Hambledon. “I thought only that they would want to rescue the pictures and destroy the evidence. Cheer up, Letord, you are getting them on the run.”

“But where are they running to? They must have a base somewhere, Hambledon. That house in which you were held was a mere camping-out place, it was most barely furnished.”

“You are hard on their trail,” said Hambledon. “You are doing much better than I. It is your aim to abolish this gang of thieves and one by one you are gathering them in. It is like peeling an onion, with every coat you pull off you are one layer nearer the middle. Cheer up, encourage yourself

by looking at me. I was sent out here to trace the murderer of Pedro Maximilio Teluga—Enrigo le Canif—and I tell you frankly that I am no nearer my goal than I was that day when we looked over the parapet of the Petit Pont to watch Dubois strolling up and down waiting for his death.”

Letord said nothing.

“That is bad enough, but what makes it worse is that my task is completely distasteful,” went on Hambledon. “You and I are sure in our own minds that the man whom I seek is the man who is breaking up your gang for you. He is doing good work and should be rewarded, not hunted down to appease a piebald crowd of crooked Central American politicians. I refer,” said Hambledon furiously, “to the Esmeraldan Embassy staff, blast them. And if, in addition, he was the man who stopped Eddi from tipping me alive into the Seine——”

He stopped and there was a short silence.

“I said something just now,” continued Hambledon, “what was it? Oh yes, Enrigo le Canif. I asked a man I know why Teluga was called that and I was told that it was because the knife was his weapon. And the journalist was killed with a knife by the gang and Teluga was one of the gang. So possibly Teluga stabbed the journalist. If he did, does that take us anywhere? Since they are both dead, no.”

Hambledon sighed impatiently and hurled his cigarette end into the fireplace with such energy that it bounced back again to lie smoldering upon Letord’s rug. Hambledon got up slowly from his chair, picked up the cigarette end with finicking neatness and put it carefully at the very back of the grate. He then sat down again with a bump which made his chair creak.

“It serves no useful purpose at all,” said Letord briskly, “for you and me to sit here making each other miserable. It is partly the weather today; it is humid and heavy, it is getting overcast, soon it will grow dark and there will be a storm. The storm may go on for hours, but when it is over the air will be fresh and we shall all feel better. Go, my old friend, go out somewhere where the air is fresher than it knows how to be on the Île de la Cité. You English are all mad about fresh air; if even I feel oppressed, what must it be for you? Go and divert yourself. For me, I will divert myself with some of my prisoners and I will start with Paul Joseph. Perhaps he will remember something he has not yet thought to tell me. *À demain, mon vieux*, you will feel better tomorrow.”

“I expect you are right,” said Hambledon.

He went out into the streets. Letord was quite right; the atmosphere was of an almost tangible weight, hot puffs of air smelling of exhaust gases blew

into his face at every corner and sharp-edged black clouds shouldered each other upon the horizon.

Hambledon took the Métro to Abbesses and walked up to the Place du Tertre at Montmartre. Up there, at the top of the hill, the air was less oppressive and at least it did not smell of burnt petrol. He sat under the trees in the *place* and a waiter came out from the café of the Mère Catherine to serve him with cool beer in a tall glass and incredibly thin ham in crisp sliced rolls. Hambledon said, "Ah," and had a second glass, after which he noticed that night seemed to be approaching abnormally quickly and that lights were being switched on in the houses. He came out from under the trees and looked up to see that the bulging black clouds now covered half the sky.

He cantered down the hill to Abbesses station with the first lightning leaping in the west and found himself involved in a stream of people who all seemed to have had the same idea at the same time—of course, it was the rush hour. The stairs were crowded and the platform was packed.

"Not my lucky day," said Hambledon, and managed to shoulder his way into a coach so congested that he had only room to stand on both feet if he kept them together and, having put up one arm to hold a strap, could not take it down again for the press. However, even Métro journeys come to an end at last and he managed to wriggle out of the train at the Madeleine, to find, when he reached street level, that the rain was coming down in torrents. The thunder bellowed and roared, the lightning was incessant and already the streets were running with water. It was not far to his hotel; he turned up his coat collar and ran.

"Monsieur has been caught in the storm," said the hotel porter as Hambledon dashed into the hall. "He is wet," added the man in a concerned voice. "Let Monsieur change instantly and his clothes shall be carefully dried."

"Good idea," said Hambledon heartily.

When he was taking the various oddments out of the pockets of his very damp coat he found something which had not been there before he left Montmartre. A rather creased envelope with his name written outside: "Mons. T. E. Hambledon. By hand."

Speaking Tube

HAMBLEDON tore the letter open; inside the envelope was a slip of paper neatly typed:

Monsieur Hambledon and his friend Monsieur Letord may be interested to know that the lawyer whom they wish to interview has a country house, Les Bouleaux, at Sens, where they call him Monsieur Marcel.

“Oh,” said Hambledon aloud. “Oh, thank you very much. How nice.” He made a rush for the door, since the room had no telephone, but remembered in time that he was only in his underwear. “Neat but inadequate,” he said, and hurriedly repaired the deficiency. He flung the window wide open; though the rain was still drumming on the glass roof of the dining-room below, the air was fresh and clean again, and while he knotted his tie he was cheerfully if tunelessly whistling.

He took his damp suit down to the porter and telephoned to Letord.

“Will you be in your office a little longer? I’ve got something to show you. Something interesting. No, not a bloodstained dagger; a note. An instructive and helpful note. I come at once.”

When Letord read the note his face cleared for the first time since he had seen a tall house that afternoon with the flames breaking through the attic window.

“We go,” he said. “I think, you and I alone, eh? You shall be the English tourist in tweeds with large boots and a camera. You have a camera? No? You surprise me. I will borrow one for you. If we need help I can call on the local police. I cannot give them orders, as you know, but I think there will be some there who will be prepared to assist Letord of the Sûreté. We will go armed and we will take also small electric torches. I know Sens, a pleasant small town if not maddeningly exciting, and I tell you something, *mon vieux*. At Sens one can eat; at the Hôtel du Commerce the proprietor is a

man of discrimination who understands the importance of food. My friend, he cooks to enchant; with him it is not a profession, it is an art to be revered. Let us go there and reverence it.”

“Certainly,” said Hambledon. “By all means.”

“Very good. We will go there tomorrow afternoon, we will dine there—ah!—and after dinner we will have a little glass in one place and another and see what we can pick up about a house called Les Bouleaux. Then, when everyone else has gone to bed, perhaps we take a little walk by ourselves, eh?”

“Excellent,” said Hambledon.

Letord’s face darkened suddenly and he tapped with his fingers on the desk.

“About this note of yours, did you notice something?”

“Notice what?”

“That the writer once again knows too much about what is happening within the Sûreté? I told none but you that I proposed to arrest Écritec this afternoon; even my men in the squad car did not know where we were going till I gave the driver his instructions as we were starting. I do not like it.”

“I do not see it,” said Hambledon firmly. “Our informant knows a very great deal about the gang, much more than we do. He may have seen you taking Paul Joseph away, he may know all about the pictures. He gives you credit for using the brains the good God gave you; if you have talked to Paul Joseph you will naturally want to talk to Écritec. It is as simple as that.”

“I hope so,” growled Letord. “I have also another slice of trouble on my plate this evening. It is being said that the criminal called Rosalie is back in Paris. You remember——”

“The man who plays with beads.”

“Precisely. So annoying, when I had hoped that he was dead in some gutter in Algiers.” Letord sighed. Then, with one of his lightning changes of mood; “Never mind. Perhaps it is not true or perhaps somebody will shoot him on sight this time instead of the other way round. In the meantime, we take a little trip to Sens, eh?”

They reached Sens in the late afternoon next day. The Hôtel du Commerce was an inconspicuous place, which one might easily pass without noticing; there was one wide window on the street, an entrance door no larger than that of an ordinary shop and, next to it, wide and high wooden doors solidly built, crossbarred and with heavy bosses at every intersection. These doors completely filled the archway which they closed and which

presumably led to some yard within. Once inside the restaurant, Hambledon was surprised to find how large the place was. The long narrow room ran back from the street; as they walked down it they came to French windows on the left standing open to a cobbled yard big enough to accommodate a stagecoach; round this yard the hotel was built. The entrance to the residential part was within the yard, double doors like French windows at the head of three shallow steps, like the garden entrance to a country house, and all round creepers climbed the walls to the tiled roof and hung down, swaying gently like green curtains.

“This takes you back some centuries, *hein?*” said Letord’s voice at his shoulder. “Strange to say, there is another Hôtel du Commerce at Troyes which is the duplicate of this one in every respect. I have never discovered how that came to be. Even to the cooking, which there also is as excellent as here. Come in now, for I hear the clatter of plates.”

They went in and fed as Letord had promised they should and the delighted proprietor revolved round them, purring, for like all genuine artists his soul requires intelligent appreciation. One of these days, when just one tourist too many has come in demanding cold ham, just cold ham, thank you, nothing more, there will be an assault case in Sens.

After dinner Hambledon and Letord strolled round the little town, dropping in here and there, asking about houses. Letord, attired in a wonderful version of the French idea of clothes *pour le sport*, said that he was in the market for a small house in the country, to which to retire. An uncle, he said, had died and left him a modest competence; not enough, be it understood, to live upon in Paris, where everything cost so much that a man could not afford to breathe, but enough for a comfortable little *ménage au pays* where a man could fish and perhaps shoot a little and grow his own cabbages. The English monsieur, his friend, had come with him to help him to choose; the English, as everyone knew, were connoisseurs of country life.

Local suggestions ranged from the temporarily vacant cottage of the level-crossing keeper—“It is an interest, to open the gates and see your trains go by”—to the gaunt ruin of a Cistercian monastery on an adjacent hilltop. “Many of the rooms are, even now, almost habitable; it is only to cause to be done a quite reasonable amount of interior decoration.” Into the flood of suggestions and recommendations Hambledon, in very British French, dropped the name of Les Bouleaux. A relation of his, he said, motoring through France, had seen the house and was so attracted by it that he had enquired the name.

Heads were shaken and lips pursed. Yes, yes, very pleasant to the eye, no doubt, but not a house to attract the discerning. There were stories about that

house. Of course, sensible men of a reasonable standard of education would not believe in the supernatural, of course not. Nevertheless, there was about that house a certain aura not of this world. These things were inexplicable, but we have all heard tales of certain places here and there which have something about them which is not quite—the messieurs understood. One's aunt undertook, out of the goodness of her heart, to go there as cook. She is not what one would call a sensitive, no, but before the end of the week she retired from the post. Uncertain voices, monsieur, and footsteps where no one was. Dim lights also. A place which was unendurable to a—to be frank with Monsieur—an old battle-axe like one's aunt, was no place for a Christian. Besides, it was in the possession of a businessman of Paris, though it was true he was there but seldom. A Monsieur Marcel; it was understood that he was something in shipping.

Hambledon asked where the house was, he would like merely to go and look at it—by daylight, naturally, and from a distance—in order to be able to tell his relation all about it. He might even take a few snaps of it, and he tapped the borrowed camera which swung, on a strap, from his shoulder. He received detailed directions for finding it; it was outside the town on the road to Auxerre, and the conversation passed to more normal subjects such as the increase in tobacco duty to pay for the war in Algeria.

Much later that night, actually in the very early hours after midnight, Letord came along to Hambledon's room, which had the inestimable advantage of a lean-to roof of a shed just below the window. This permitted of their leaving the hotel without disturbing the proprietor.

"I have brought these," said Letord. "One puts them on over one's shoes."

They were felt bedroom slippers of dimensions suitable for the purpose, and Hambledon looked at them without enthusiasm.

"Have you ever been in America?" he asked.

"Never. Why?"

"For some reason, these remind me of what are called funeral parlours. Never mind, I daresay they will be useful. Shall we go?"

The moon was a little past the full and the night was clear and fine; they saw no one about in the town, and on the main road to Auxerre the few cars which passed naturally paid them no attention. A mile out of the town they turned off through a pair of drive gates which had stood open until the grass had grown up round them, and up a drive which time and neglect had carpeted with weeds.

“But cars do come up here sometimes,” said Tommy, throwing a shielded light down upon a soft patch. “Not, I think, very recently.”

“Monsieur Marcel has been busy in Paris,” said Letord.

The wind was rising and moving the branches of the trees which lined the drive. Both Hambledon and Letord found themselves stopping from time to time to listen. A noise like sweeping was identified as a long tress of ivy swinging from a tree, an intermittent tapping as a broken branch still hanging by a strip of bark and tapping against the parent trunk. Letord lost patience.

“It is only the wind, I tell you. Are we, then, a brace of shivering schoolgirls out in the dark for the first time?”

“It is many years since I was a schoolgirl,” said Hambledon placidly. “I mean schoolboy. But we are approaching the house of intelligent people who do not welcome visitors; it is only sensible to make sure that we are not being stalked. There is the house at last.”

They rounded a bend in the drive to come within view of the house, plainly visible in the moonlight. It was not large for its type; there were eight windows in a row with a door in the middle on the ground floor, nine windows above that and nine smaller ones on the top floor, but it was of the classical style, with shallow fluted columns up the flat front to support a balustrade at roof level. The main door was large, with a pediment above it; three semi-circular steps led up to it. There was no light visible anywhere nor any chimney smoking. As they drew nearer they could see that all the shutters were closed inside the windows.

“But, it is a mansion,” said Letord.

“It is charming,” said Hambledon. “No wonder my touring relative was enchanted with it.”

Letord chuckled. “And those idiots in the town there tried to make us believe that it was all there is of the most sinister. It does not look as though anyone were at home.”

“I think that we shall be a little conspicuous walking up to that front door; there isn’t cover for a rabbit and it is very light. Let us go round to the back where there is shadow.”

They went round in the shade of trees; if anyone had been looking from a window he could not have seen them.

“What did they say, back there, about servants?” asked Letord. “When the aunt left, what happened?”

“Two old sisters go together, by day. They are a little simple, but one can cook and one can clean and what more is required? Let us go close to the house now we are in shadow, perhaps there is a window broken or left open.”

But the windows on the ground floor at the back of the house were all barred and the two men came to a door.

“Locked and bolted also, no doubt,” said Letord, and laid his hand upon the door handle. He turned it and the door opened.

“Dear me,” said Hambleton. “I do hope that nobody is expecting us.”

Letord grinned and led the way indoors. They closed the door after them and put on Letord’s felt slippers, since the passage in which they found themselves was stone-flagged. There were doors upon either hand, open doors upon dark silent rooms of which one was faintly warm and smelt of wood smoke, another was cold and smelt of beer and a third smelt of garlic. Kitchen quarters only; Letord pushed on through a door at the end of the passage, which admitted them to a square hall with rugs here and there on the stone floor and the moonlight slanting in through the fanlight over the front door.

“No one about,” murmured Letord in Hambleton’s ear. “The two old girls forgot to lock up when they went home.”

In the ground-floor rooms, with the shutters closed, it was perfectly dark. Hambleton and Letord padded silently through half-furnished sitting-rooms which had not the air of being much used. They were completely dark but not completely silent; here on the windy side of the house there were incessant small sounds which never seemed to be in the room they were in but always in the next ahead or the one they had just left.

“You know,” murmured Hambleton when he had looked sharply over his shoulder for the sixth time, “there is something a little eerie about this place.” He laid a hand on Letord’s arm. “Someone talking somewhere? Listen.”

“In the room beyond,” said Letord, and drew his gun.

“Talking in the dark?”

Letord checked for a moment and then moved on with Hambleton at his elbow. They stood in the doorway without lights, listening, and there was a sound like whispering with pauses between phrases.

“If there are people in there,” breathed Letord, “they are blind.”

Hambleton thought of the blind men in Paris; his hair prickled at the back of his neck and the whispering went on.

“Is anyone there?” said Letord, switching on his torch and throwing the beam to left and right. But the room, furnished only with chairs and settees about a cold hearth, was completely unoccupied.

“No one here,” he said, “but——”

“But there is still whispering,” said Hambledon. “Over in that corner.” He threw his shoulders back and strode across the room with his torch in one hand and his gun in the other. He stooped to listen at the shutters of the furthest window and broke into a low laugh.

“What is it?” asked Letord.

“Only a keyhole in the shutter and the wind blowing through it. Come and listen.”

Letord said that he would take Hambledon’s word for it and that there were many more useful things to do in that house than listening to the wind blowing through shutters. “I wish,” he added, in the low-toned murmur which was all that they permitted themselves, “that there were even some locked cupboards here. There is nothing, nothing. It is like suites of furniture set out in showrooms.”

They passed quickly back through the rooms they had seen to those upon the other side of the hall, and here Hambledon shivered and said that he felt as though people whom he could not see were looking at him. Letord said that he also had much the same sensation, but at least they were not whispering about it, and at that point something in the hall they had just left said “Hoo-oo,” softly but distinctly. They both spun around and someone in the room ahead rattled what sounded like a bunch of keys.

Hambledon went back—Letord appeared to have taken root—and traced the hoo noise to the keyhole of the front door. After that they went on together to the further room—a dining-room—to find that the rattling keys were in fact rattling keys. The window shutters were locked, like doors, and someone had left a bunch of keys hanging in the last of them. The shutters moved in the wind—there must have been a pane of glass missing outside—and the keys clinked musically together.

“I shall not apply for the tenancy of this house, should it become vacant,” said Letord primly. “Now we go upstairs.”

The staircase wound up at the back of the hall; it was uncarpeted, but their felt slippers made no sound. At the top there was a square landing with, for once, an unshuttered window letting in the moonlight, and to right and left at the head of the stairs there was a long and wide passage with doors opening from it. Hambledon stepped first on the landing, glanced to his right and immediately froze. Letord came up beside him.

At the far end of the passage, which was otherwise completely dark, there was a patch of dim radiance as from a torch turned away from them, and faintly silhouetted against it what looked like the head and shoulders of a man.

They groped their way along the passage towards the light. There were pieces of furniture against the walls between the doors; a flat-fronted cupboard, a shallow bookcase or a console table with a marble top. As they drew nearer to the light they could see that it was within a room of which the door was standing wide open; the object upon which the light fell was a safe, and the man kneeling before it was working on the lock.

Letord stretched out a hand to assure himself that Hambledon was beside him and then went forward with long silent strides. At once he felt something light and thin touch his hand, before he could check himself or realize that it was a strand of cotton across the passage, something slid from a table on their left and a china object fell to the ground with a startling crash to break into a score of pieces.

Instantly the light ahead of them went out and all was dark. Letord said: "Take that man," switched on his torch and ran forward into the room with Hambledon close beside him; even as they did so the door closed behind them and they heard a key turn in the lock. Hambledon turned and threw himself against the door, but it was very solid and excellently fitted and did not even rattle.

"Had for mugs," said Hambledon briefly. "Dodged us in the doorway."

Letord hammered on the panels and shouted but there was no response.

"Not even a low fiendish laugh," said Hambledon. There were electric-light switches by the door and he clicked them all on without any result. "Switched off at the main."

They went round the room with their torches, but there was no other door and the shutters were firmly locked. Letord broke a thumbnail and then a blade of his pocketknife trying vainly to force them; there was nothing in the room which could be used as a lever. The place was furnished as a study with bookcases full of books, a large roll-top desk, which they were unable to open, and several comfortable armchairs. Hambledon eventually settled down in one of them and whistled softly what he believed to be the air of "Someday My Prince Will Come." He desisted when Letord asked him what there was about their situation which reminded him of "O My Papa." Tommy was painfully unmusical.

"In the morning," he said, "the dim-witted sisters will come and let us out. Or send for the police."

“I wish to heaven someone would——” began Letord.

“Listen! What was that?”

The sound was a soft high-pitched whistle on one note.

“A police whistle somewhere outside the house?”

“No, no,” said Hambledon, cocking his head. “It is in the room somewhere.”

“You are right,” said Letord and, putting his torch on again, he began to prowl round the room. “It is here, by the fireplace. It is one of those old-fashioned speaking tubes you blow down to tell the butler to bring up champagne.” He took out the stopper with the whistle in it and shouted “‘Allo, ’allo?” down the tube. He then applied his ear to the orifice and a voice came up to him.

“Monsieur Hambledon?”

“Someone wanting you,” said Letord, and gave place to him.

“Hambledon here.”

The voice spoke in English with a faint French accent.

“Monsieur Hambledon, I am so sorry to hold you captive. But I think, if you are patient, you will enjoy yourself presently. Wait, please, just wait, I am so sorry. But presently you have your reward. Patience, please, patience.”

“Who are you?” asked Hambledon, but there was no reply to that or any other question. He put the stopper back in the tube and told Letord what had been said. “He sounded quite friendly.”

Letord grunted. “I thought I knew the voice but I cannot place it.”

“From only two words?”

“Even from two words the voice was familiar.”

Hambledon sat down again in his chair and lit a cigarette. “I did not know it and I wonder that you could, coming up a tube like that. It sounded to me like a budgerigar shouting down a well.”

They settled down again in a darkness lit only by the glow of their cigarettes and waited for what should come.

Jean Télémaque

ILLIMITABLE ages passed which may have been an hour and then Hambledon, who was dozing, was roused by Letord's moving sharply.

"A car," he said, and Hambledon heard it too. It came up the drive and stopped, the engine was switched off. After a short interval a car door slammed. Another interval and a house door closed sharply.

"The front door," said Tommy. "Master come home?"

They listened until their ears ached and heard no more, but quite suddenly all the lights in the room came on, for Hambledon had left the switches turned down, and they blinked painfully in the glare.

"Main switch on again," said Hambledon.

"I think we will have them out," said Letord. He crossed the room and switched the lights out. Presently a thin line of light showed under the door as the passage lights were put on outside the room, and quick decided steps came towards the door; as a key turned in the lock, Hambledon and Letord separated. One gun could not now cover both of them.

The door opened and the figure of a man was silhouetted against the passage lights. He was carrying a briefcase in one hand. As he came in he used the other to switch on all the lights in the room; he saw the two men and stiffened; it was the lawyer, Robert Écritet. In the same instant a half-seen crouching form appeared behind him and a violent push sent him forward into the room, where, from either side, Hambledon and Letord leapt at him simultaneously. Even so, the man fought like a trapped weasel, kicking and biting; in the end he crashed Letord back against a small table which collapsed in pieces, and Hambledon hit Écritet behind the ear with all his strength. The lawyer staggered and his knees gave way. As he sank to the floor Letord handcuffed his hands behind him and he lay there, half conscious and still glaring.

"Well, well," said Hambledon, dabbing at a damaged knuckle, "who would have thought the little beast could put up a scrap like that?"

“Who shut the door?” asked Letord suspiciously. Tommy walked across and tried the handle.

“Locked again. Presumably by whoever it was who pushed him in.”

“Someone pushed him?”

“Certainly, didn’t you see it? Someone ran across, stooping, and more or less butted him in. After that, no doubt, he civilly shut the door again, but I was too busy to notice.” Letord kicked the door and shouted for it to be opened. “That,” added Hambledon, “is a waste of time,” and he was quite right. “Our friend will open it when he’s ready. I wonder whether there are drinks in that cabinet? I expect the keys are in his pockets.”

Letord bent over Écritet, who spat at him, tried to kick him and uttered a scream of abuse so foul that even Hambledon was startled.

“Good gracious,” he said, “wherever did you learn all that? From your distinguished clients?”

Letord rescued a bunch of keys and opened the cabinet, which contained restoratives in admirable variety and glasses to pour them into. These proceedings put the last touch to Écritet’s exasperation; he rolled about and kicked and his remarks were such that Letord gagged him with his own handkerchief.

“I would have given you a drink,” he said cheerfully, “but now you can go without. It may teach you to remember in future that you must not call a high-ranking French detective a ——. It is definitely not according to protocol.”

Ten minutes later, when Letord and Hambledon were recovered from their exertions, the whistle blew again and this time Hambledon answered it.

“Ah, Monsieur Hambledon. I hope you like your present. You will find the contents of his safe most interesting, I am sure. Also there is his briefcase. He was going to put the contents of that in the safe also, I believe. I hope you think your time of waiting was not wasted. By the way, the door is unlocked now, so I am going away quickly before you see me. Good-by.”

“Here,” yelled Tommy, “just a minute——”

But there was no answer and before he had replaced the stopper there came to their ears the sound of a motorcycle going fast round the house and away down the drive.

Once safely in prison, with a very black count against him, Écritet talked.

“I have not been in this business very long,” he said, “and I should not have been in it at all but that I was inveigled into it——”

“You can sing that sad little song to your judges,” snarled Letord. “The only motive which induces me to listen to you at all is the hope of obtaining some useful information—true and accurate information, Écritet. First of all, how many of your wretched gang now remain uncaptured?”

“Three, only three. Peder Smolensky, an Ukrainian, Louis Boulanger and Veron. I do not know his real name, I take Veron to be a nickname.” For *véron* means a minnow.

Letord nodded, for an intensive study of the papers in Écritet’s safe and in his brief case confirmed this.

“Now, who is your gang leader?”

“I do not know, monsieur.”

Letord had been sitting with his chair tilted and swinging gently on the back legs; at this he brought the front legs down to the floor with a bang which made Écritet start nervously.

“You do not know? You stand there, under arrest in my office with a dozen charges against you including murder, and you have the blazing insolence to bleat that you ‘do not know’? I tell you this, that you shall not sleep or eat until you do know and tell me.”

“But monsieur, I do not! I have never seen him or heard his name. Always he gives his orders by telephone——”

“And when you have pulled off a successful robbery, you blow the loot to him down the telephone also, no doubt?”

“Monsieur, I receive instructions to make up the money into a parcel, write upon the outside the name of Monsieur So-and-so—every time the name is different—and leave it at a certain café to be called for. The café, also, it is a different one every time.”

“He thinks of everything, doesn’t he?” said Hambledon from his chair in a corner of the room. “But do you expect us to believe, Écritet, that you never make the slightest attempt to find out who he is?”

“Monsieur, I wish to continue to live.”

“No hanging about the café to discover who comes to collect the parcel?”

“Monsieur, I did that once only. On my way home that night I was waylaid and severely beaten up; for days I could not move without pain, and the next morning my Principal rang me up and said that it was a lesson to me for prying; if I did it again it would not be a beating but a killing. Also,

the parcel was not collected; I had to go and reclaim it and take it to a café out at Barbizon, I who could hardly move.”

“But you took it there?”

“Oh yes, monsieur, I took it.”

“You know,” said Letord to Hambledon, “this Principal does not trust any of his gang one little thousandth of a centimetre.”

“Be reasonable,” said Hambledon. “Would you?”

“No. He has sense, that one. Écritet, you understand that it is of the utmost importance to us to arrest your leader because, compared to him, all the rest of you mangy disease-ridden rats are of less importance than so many pats of mud in the gutter?”

“Y—yes, monsieur.”

“Very well. You will not talk because you are afraid of him and you are probably wise. But if he were arrested, you would have nothing to fear from him because he would be in prison for the rest of his life. Understand that?”

Écritet nodded.

“Also, in prison you are safe from him because he cannot get at you; but I can, Écritet, I can. You are completely in my power and I can crumple you up like this piece of paper. You have not, now, to fear him, but I warn you, you have to fear me. Now then. Do you know nothing, not even the smallest trifle, that you can tell me about him?”

“Nothing, monsieur, absolutely nothing. I never saw him to my knowledge, I never heard his name, I have no idea where he lives. I have no means of getting into touch with him, I have always to wait until he telephones to me. Sometimes it is a long-distance call—that is seldom—usually it is a local call in Paris.”

“What sort of voice?”

“A slow, even voice. I would say, an educated man, but he enunciates his words so slowly and distinctly that it is difficult to be sure even of that. Monsieur, it is like one of those gramophone records from which one learns a foreign language, every syllable is so clear and distinct that it is not natural. Certainly he has no dialect.”

“An assumed manner of speaking, you think?”

“I would say so, monsieur. I never heard any person speak normally like that.”

Letord retired into thought; the prisoner, who was tired of standing, shuffled his feet and sighed; Hambledon uncrossed his legs, crossed them over the other way and lit another cigarette.

Letord came to life again.

“This meeting which is fixed for tomorrow, I read about it in your diary. It is at what time?”

“Seven-thirty in the morning, monsieur, as there stated.”

“An odd time for crooks to arrange a meeting?”

“Yes, monsieur, that is why we chose it. Crooks are always supposed to creep about under cover of darkness and the police watch them closely, but early in the morning when all the *ouvriers* are going to work, that is different. It is nearly a reference for a good character, to be about at seven-thirty in the morning.”

“I see. It is at that address you give—I have it here somewhere——”

“Yes, monsieur.”

“Louis Boulanger, the Ukrainian, and Veron, is that all? Yes, now tell me this. Is there any password, or any sign of any kind necessary to gain admittance? Do you walk up to the door whistling some particular tune, anything like that?”

“One knocks, monsieur, in this manner; one, one-two, one-two-three.” Écritet illustrated by tapping the edge of Letord’s table with his knuckle and thereafter stood leaning on his hand on the table for support.

“Take your filthy paws off my desk and stand up. What is your boss’s name?”

Écritet merely shook his head in silence. Letord glared angrily at him for a moment and then spoke into his office telephone.

“Send up an escort for this prisoner.”

When two policemen came in, Letord told them to take Écritet away for the time being, he would see him again later. They went out and the door closed behind them.

“You see, my friend,” said Letord, “how this case goes. We have not been without our successes: we have found the Maharanee’s jewels or most of them; we have recaptured the pictures, yes, they were there under those paintings of Berger’s; we have roped in most of the gang and we shall I hope have the last three tomorrow morning——”

“With the help of my Monsieur X,” urged Hambleton.

“Certainly. I was about to say so. But I tell you, Hambleton, that all this is but blowing bubbles and capturing cobwebs if we do not get their leader, for all he will do is to stay quiet for a time until he has got another gang together and then he will start afresh.”

“Yes,” said Hambleton. “This is an odd case. It is common to have to hunt for one man who is doing something, one works patiently and at last one gets him and that is the end. This time there are two mystery men, your gang leader and my Monsieur X and the only connection between them is that they are fighting each other.”

“There is a difference between us, *mon vieux*; it is that I have my whole heart set upon finding my quarry, whereas you would greatly prefer not to find yours. Eh?”

“But I shall find him in the end. Letord, I had an idea about that. Those two typewritten notes; one stuck on a cigarette packet in Fréchant’s pocket, the other pushed into my pocket in the crowded Métro coming back from Montmartre. Letord, if you were going to type notes which the police are going to do their utmost to trace—by the way, I assume that you have been doing your utmost?”

“Your assumption is fully justified. Without result. Go on.”

“What typewriter would you use? Your own?”

“Certainly not. Every police officer in the Sûreté would recognize it at once. If I were a private individual, perhaps yes, I might use my own. On second thoughts, no, some evil chance might provide a connection; I should use someone else’s. Preferably that of a man who has annoyed me. There is a large choice available.”

“But the evil chance might still operate and your annoying friend, confronted with the note, would say: ‘Oh no, I never. But at about that date I lent my typewriter to that poisonous old rogue, Letord of the Sûreté.’ Eh?”

“I am only moving the risk one step away,” nodded Letord, “not removing it altogether. You are right. I tell you what I should do. I should hire one.”

Hambleton smiled and Letord dragged open one of the drawers in his desk and produced the note which had told them about the house called Les Bouleaux at Sens.

“The capital Ms, of which there are four, are out of alignment, they are all a little high. Yes. Now one of my men can go round to all the places in Paris where they let out typewriters on hire and find if they have one of the make which typed this which has a capital M out of alignment. Magnificent. I only hope there are not more than seven hundred of them——”

“I should not think that there are seventy,” said Tommy encouragingly. “Not in all Paris *et ses environs*. What? You are not looking for one barber’s shop of whom all you know is that once he had a razor with a nicked blade.”

“No. That is true. Let my man find the place. He returns with a list of all the people to whom that typewriter has been hired out over the last twenty years.”

“Oh no, he doesn’t. Listen, Letord. I had occasion once to enquire into the workings of a typewriter-hire service. When a machine is returned by a hirer, they immediately run off some lines of typing as a test to find out how much damage the muttonheaded clumsy-fisted customer has done to their delicate machine. If there is anything wrong, they send the machine to their tame typewriter mechanic, who repairs the damage and sends them in a detailed report of work done. ‘To correcting 1 cap M out of alignment,’ for example, and this is filed in that machine’s dossier, together with the test lines already referred to earlier in this lecture. Because—attention, please, the class, don’t fidget, Letord—because if the same fault repeatedly recurs it is a weakness of that machine and not blamable upon the user. Now then.”

“Thank you, teacher,” said Letord meekly.

Hambledon left him giving instructions and walked away along the Quai des Orfèvres, wrapped in thought. Perhaps, in the light of what they had recently learned about the jewel gang, some accounts of earlier crimes might be more helpful now than they had proved at the time. The trouble was that he had only the vaguest idea what crimes this gang had actually committed. Of course Letord could tell him and furnish the details, but he felt a certain delicacy in asking the Sûreté man to let him read over files from the Sûreté records. It would look as though Hambledon thought himself more capable of deducing evidence than Letord himself, which was quite untrue, for Letord was very capable indeed. Still, there might be something, some name mentioned or some place. The only case he could remember offhand was that of a journalist who was murdered; Le Boueur, he called himself; in the language of Bunyan, the Man with the Muck Rake. A journalist, so the case would be fully reported in the newspapers. Tommy lengthened his stride and went to the offices of *Le Temps*. Might he look up the back files of that so-famous paper for some account of a murder in Paris? No, he was not sure even of the year, but the victim was a well-known journalist who signed his articles Le Boueur. But, certainly, monsieur, just a short moment while one turned up the index. One moment—yes, here it was. The issues of May 17, 18, and 19, 1952. If Monsieur would be so good as to seat himself at one of those desks, the issues should be forthcoming in a matter of minutes.

They were. Hambledon spread the august pages before him and looked for an account of the murder; he found it, a quarter column at the bottom of an inside page, for *Le Temps* is no sensation-monger. It was headed “Murder of a journalist.”

We regret to announce the brutal murder of a journalist attached to one of our esteemed contemporaries; the unfortunate man was stabbed in the back by an unknown assailant in a café in the Bastille area last night.

The victim, who signed his articles *Le Boueur*, had made a specialty of exposing, in a series of articles headed “Into the Limelight,” such crimes and malefactions as too often escape the effective vengeance of their country at the hands of the police. Fraud, dishonest dealing, robbery and even murder were made the subject of his unwearied investigation and vigorous denunciation.

Jean Télémaque Guernan received his early training in the——

“Guernan,” thought Hambledon, and laid down the paper. “Guernan. That’s the name of Letord’s favourite Inspector, the man who is so ill. Coincidence, probably. I daresay Guernan is a common name enough. Might be some relative, perhaps. A little awkward for a promising young officer in the Sûreté to have a relative writing articles in the press demanding ‘What Are The Police Doing?’ If I were policeman Guernan I should keep quiet about my cousin, journalist Guernan, by heck I would. I expect he did, too, or Letord would have known about it. That is, if he were a relative, of course. Probably no connection.

“But the gang are being mopped up by someone with a grievance against them, and that someone does know too much about what goes on in the Sûreté; Letord is right there. The fingerprint found in Dubois’s flat, for example. No doubt Guernan’s colleagues go to visit him and cheer his bed of pain with juicy details about their latest cases. He is still on the strength, of course, it wouldn’t be a breach of confidence.

“But Inspector Guernan is paralyzed from the waist downwards; he cannot be hopping about Paris looking people in the Electricity Company’s kiosks or shooting up bank robbers. Or even rescuing me from what is rightly described as a watery grave.

“No, but he might be assisting with information and advising someone else who is on the trail of a gang who murdered another Guernan. That is within the limits of possibility.”

Hambledon picked up the paper again and finished the paragraph. Jean Télémaque Guernan received his early training in the office of the Besançon

Clarion and later came to Paris, and so on. No mention of his having a relative in the Sûreté. Of course not, why should there be? Hambledon skimmed through the increasingly brief notices in subsequent issues, but they told him nothing more. He returned the papers with thanks to their custodian and walked out, thinking so deeply that he almost walked under a bus and was only rescued from destruction by the presence of mind of a large but active woman who looked like a laundress and smelt of soap. She dragged him back, shook him, addressed him on the subject of road safety in terms suitable for the mental deficient she certainly thought him and advised him to take a taxi back to the Home he came from before he disfigured the Paris streets with his dismembered carcass. Tommy took off his hat and held it in his hand while he thanked her in Anglo-French, whereat she said ah, Monsieur was English which explained all, and trotted away.

He went into the nearest café and restored himself with a cognac while he thought matters over. The question was whether he should tell Letord about the other Guernan, Jean Télémaque. Almost certainly a mere coincidence of names; if a near relation of an officer of the Sûreté is stabbed in a café, the fact would be known and remembered. Hambledon had no wish to present Letord with a piece of completely useless information, like a well-meaning dog who brings master the wrong slippers.

There was, of course, the typewriter line of enquiry which no doubt was already being actively pursued. Hambledon decided to wait a day or two and see what that produced, if anything; if any evidence were found which pointed the same way, that would be time enough to produce Jean Télémaque.

Bravo

EARLY upon the following morning the last three remaining members of the jewel gang, Peder Smolensky, Louis Boulanger and Pierre Veron, were arrested, charged with, among other things, complicity in various robberies and held in custody pending trial.

“I have now,” said Letord, “as you put it, peeled off all the skins of the onion and now I come to the very core. If I do not secure that also, all that I have done is wasted.”

“Courage,” urged Hambledon. “‘Patience, fleas, the night is long.’”

“Much too long,” grumbled Letord.

The safebreaker, Rosalie, dropped in to his usual café for a glass of wine; when the proprietor came to serve it he brought also a note addressed in a copper-plate hand to “Monsieur Rosalie.”

“Who gave you this?”

The proprietor lifted his shoulders. “Who knows? When I opened up this morning I found it dropped through the letter slit in the door.”

Rosalie nodded, waited until the man went away and then opened the note.

Monsieur Rosalie, if you will sit at an outside table of the Café of the African Lion at twenty-one hours tonight, an arrangement of mutual benefit might be initiated between us.

Rosalie read the note twice, tore it into small pieces and burned them in an ash tray.

“Since Écritet has been arrested and I have no telephone,” he murmured, “he had to do something like this. I thought he would.”

Late that same evening Letord telephoned to Hambledon at his hotel.

“Could you come here at once? I have been told something.”

“I come,” said Hambledon, and took a taxi. He found Letord sitting at his table, with an unusually grim expression.

“Your suggestion about the hired typewriter has borne fruit,” he said in a heavy voice. “The machine in question has been traced. For a week, covering the time when that note which you received was typed, it was on hire to Monsieur Georges Guernan at his home address. Inspector Guernan. One of my inspectors.” He clasped his head in both hands. “One of my own men.”

“I am sorry,” said Hambledon.

Letord’s head jerked up. “You are not surprised; why?”

Hambledon told him about the report in *Le Temps* of the murder of Jean Télémaque Guernan, alias Le Boueur.

“I see,” said Letord. “I told you, it was not one of my cases and I took very little interest. *Mon Dieu*, there are so many murders, one cannot excite oneself over every one. Guernan was working for me then, he was detective sergeant and already I had my eye upon him for promotion. He made no sign of any interest in that affair, and I—if I had noticed the name I might not have spoken—I did not notice it—he would not have told me, or would he?”

“Calm yourself,” said Hambledon. “He is paralyzed; the most he can possibly have done is to give advice.”

Letord got up abruptly. “He is now going to tell me exactly what he has done.”

Inspector Guernan was a bachelor and lived in a small flat on the third floor of a block of flats in the maze of narrow streets between the Boulevard St. Germain and the Quai Montebello, on the Left Bank opposite the Île de la Cité. It was no distance from the Sûreté. Letord and Hambledon crossed the Seine by the Petit Pont and in ten minutes had reached the place where Guernan lived.

The concierge, a stout elderly woman, laid down her knitting and came out to see what or whom the visitors wanted.

“Good evening, madame,” said Letord, and walked straight past her and up the stairs. Guernan’s door was not locked; Letord knew that it had been left unlocked since Guernan had been laid up, because he had many visitors and could not rise to admit them and one could not expect Madame the concierge to toil up three flights of stone stairs six or eight times a day. Letord turned the handle and walked in, calling out: “Guernan? It is I,

Letord,” as he did so. But there was no answer and Letord walked straight into the bed-sitting-room where Guernan had been lying on previous visits. This time the room was empty and the bed neatly made. There were clothes thrown over a chair, as though someone had changed in a hurry, and drawers not quite shut.

“What?” said Letord and strode across to a further door which disclosed a kitchen where the tenant normally ate such meals as he did not have in some restaurant. That also was quite empty, though there was used crockery piled up in the sink.

“Has he been taken to hospital?” asked Hambledon. “You said something about some treatment.”

“Ah. Most probably. We will ask Madame.”

They went down again to find Madame absent from her office for the moment, though her voice was audible from within the door of the ground-floor flat, explaining to someone why the washing had not been returned from the *blanchisseuse*. “Her son’s wife has borne a daughter, yes, yes, early this morning, she was with her all day yesterday and all the night also——”

The office was tenanted only by a dog on a chain which was attached to the table leg. He got up from his mat and came forward, stretching and yawning, to greet the visitors. He had a long body covered with grey hair in thick tufts, short thick legs and a long thin tail. He had an almost square head of the most surpassing ugliness and the most complete amiability of expression; Hambledon, fondling the creature’s ears, amused himself by estimating the various strains which had contributed to his make-up.

Madame returned full of apologies. Some people had no Christian forbearance—how could she assist Monsieur?

“I came,” said Letord, “to visit Inspector Guernan, but he does not seem to be at home. Has he, perhaps, been taken to hospital?”

“Oh no, monsieur, he has but just gone out for the second time today.”

“I am delighted to hear it. In a wheeled chair?”

“A wheeled chair? Oh no. Monsieur Guernan walks perfectly well now; he does indeed rest for some part of the day, but he goes out every evening, monsieur.”

“I see,” said Letord silkily. “I understood that he was still suffering from the effects of some attack made upon him——”

“By a gang of criminals,” nodded Madame, “with an iron bar. The things these bad men do! Yes, when he came back from—Brussels, was it?—from somewhere abroad, he was indeed in pain with his back, but thanks to *le bon*

Dieu and the so faithful and skilful services of Monsieur Augustin, the doctor, he was restored after two—no, three days in bed. Lie down, Bravo! My dog, he is too friendly. Monsieur knows Monsieur Augustin, the doctor? He attended Monsieur Guernan two years ago when he was suffering from a bullet wound in the shoulder; Monsieur knew about that? Yes, of course. But not Monsieur Augustin? Ah, so kind, so clever, so devoted. In the early hours of this morning he has delivered the daughter of the *blanchisseuse* of a beautiful daughter, nearly four kilogrammes, monsieur. Everyone likes Monsieur Augustin. Lie down, Bravo. So, when my poor Monsieur comes home hurt in his back, Monsieur Augustin is here by the hour with hot fomentations—how do I know what he did? But in a week Monsieur Guernan is well again.”

“In that case,” said Letord, who had not announced his identity and to his rather pained surprise had not been recognized, “in that case no doubt he is back on duty?”

“Not yet, monsieur. Monsieur Guernan has said that he has had so much work lately that a little period on sick pay will do him no harm. And, of course, there was no difficulty about the certificate, since he and Monsieur Augustin were boyhood friends together; yes, yes, that is true, for the doctor told me so himself. At Besançon, wherever that is. Lie down, Bravo! Slap him, monsieur, if he troubles you. He is restless and disappointed, my poor Bravo, because Monsieur Guernan has gone out without him. Monsieur Guernan so often takes him for the little promenade, but today he would not. *Mon pauvre petit!*”

“A charming place, Besançon,” said Hambledon, to bring back the subject.

“Indeed, monsieur? So Monsieur Guernan has sometimes told me. He used to talk about it to me when he first came here, but since his brother was killed he does not speak of it so much. When one has suffered bereavement, it is painful to recall the old days, is it not? They came up to Paris, three young men together; yes, yes, it is sad. But we are all mortal, monsieur.”

“Have you any idea,” asked Letord, “which way Monsieur Guernan went?”

“That way,” said Madame, pointing to the left, “but as to where he was going I have no idea, but he had his rough clothes on and his face dirty. For the last ten days or so he has gone out like that in the evenings. I am accustomed, over many years, to seeing Monsieur go out dressed in various ways, no doubt in the course of duty. Monsieur knows that Monsieur Guernan is of the police? Yes. Twice I stopped him, here in this entry,

because I did not recognize him. But today I saw him go, he spoke to Bravo, saying that later, perhaps he would return for him, and the dog sat down to wait. He is like a Christian, monsieur, my dog; he understands what is said to him. The *blanchisseuse* also is coming back later to see Monsieur Guernan, she wishes to ask him if he will kindly stand sponsor at the baby's christening as then they will call her Georgette. Had it been a boy they would have called him Georges, naturally. It is her first, and——”

“Madame,” said Hambledon very loudly and firmly, “when my friend and I entered Monsieur Guernan's apartment just now, it looked to us very much as though someone had been in and ransacked it. Would you have the infinite goodness to go up with my friend here and tell him what you think? If it has, indeed, been entered and searched, the sooner the police are informed, the better.”

“Oh no, monsieur, it is impossible. No unauthorized person has passed in or out this evening.”

“But if you were absent for a moment—and why not——”

“It is true. It is very true. I slipped out for a cabbage and a few potherbs——”

“There you are,” said Hambledon, urging her towards the stairs. “Go, I beg of you, and give us your considered opinion as to whether all is well.”

She went, and Letord, who had received a wink from Hambledon, trailed off after her. When she had looked into the flat she took a couple of hundred words to say that the place was no untidier than he always left it and what could you expect of a bachelor living alone? After which they came downstairs again to find that not only was Hambledon gone but the dog Bravo also.

Letord took his leave of Madame and walked up the street, looking about for Hambledon. He was not to be seen, so Letord came back again, passed the flats and found him standing back in an entry and holding Bravo by the collar.

“What on earth——”

“Behold my bloodhound,” said Hambledon. “The dog knows where Guernan was in the habit of going, no one else does. Let him lead us, then, and we will follow; at least it is a chance. Where's master, then, Bravo? Find Guernan, then, Guernan, Bravo, Guernan. *Allons!*”

He let go of the dog's collar and Bravo started off at a canter which made Hambledon and Letord run to keep up with him. A moment later he caught wind of an enticing smell at a corner and turned back so abruptly that Tommy nearly fell over him. When the dog had finished with that he trotted

on more quietly and Letord said that the animal undoubtedly knew where he was going. It was a shabby street of small shops, one of which was a greengrocery with the window space extended by sloping trays propped upon shaky trestles. Suddenly Bravo uttered a loud snort and made a flying rush at a cat in a doorway, the cat bolted under the trestles, Bravo dived after her and the trestles failed to withstand him. They fell in a tangle of improbable angles and he got his tail pinched; the trays canted forward to scatter onions, brussel sprouts, carrots and apples across the path, the cat vanished without trace and Bravo, with a yell of pain and terror, bolted round the corner.

Hambleton and Letord walked past, trying to look as though they had never heard of dogs.

Round the corner the street was apparently dogless, but they walked on and heard a resounding crash from within a dark and noisome entry.

“F-f-f-f,” said Letord and looked in to see that Bravo had deliberately upset a dustbin and was investigating the contents. A broom came flying from a neighboring doorway and Bravo ran back, bringing with him a newspaper-wrapped bundle of organic refuse. He shook it once or twice and appeared not to care for what fell out, so he dropped it at Hambleton’s feet and trotted on.

Presently the dog checked and looked about him as though to see where, exactly, he was, and then turned into a café; Bravo’s followers stopped at once and examined petrol lighters in a showcase within a shop entry. Presently Bravo emerged again from the café, still with a purposeful air as of a dog with a mission, and went on.

The street was a busy one, if not very wide, and Bravo was looking across in gaps between the traffic. Suddenly and without the slightest warning he rushed across the road, dodging between vehicles to an accompaniment of shrieks, curses and the squeal of brakes, and threw himself upon a man who was sitting on the narrow terrace of a café opposite. Its long faded fascia board bore the inscription: “Café du Lion d’Afrique.”

Letord pushed Hambleton into a restaurant opposite the café, a restaurant with some pretensions, for it had tables with checked cloths upon them and muslin curtains over the window. They found a vacant table by the window and looked across the road. Bravo had recovered from his first excitement and was standing quietly resting his head upon the man’s knee.

“That is Guernan,” said Letord in a low tone. “I have seen him in disguise too often to be mistaken.”

“Yes,” said Hambledon, “yes. We received some illumination from the concierge, did we not? So many questions answered. Who is after the gang, and why; who is the Monsieur X who shot Teluga, how he knew what was being said at the Sûreté—by the way, how did he get Eddi le Chou’s handcuffs?”

“He may have taken them months ago,” answered Letord. “This assault upon the gang, it was not undertaken on the spur of the moment, it has been planned over a long period. I should guess, ever since it became plain that we of the police were not going to catch the murderer of Jean Télémaque Guernan, his brother. So he watches and waits and when Teluga comes back to Europe, he strikes.”

“He knew London well, did he?”

“Very well. He was there during the war.”

“I am a little surprised that he should have killed Dubois as he did, with a grenade. It is not in keeping, as it were.”

“You are right. I do not think that Guernan did that, I think Fréchant did it. He had half the Maharanee’s jewels, if you remember; Dubois had the other half. Fréchant wished to have them all, so he murdered Dubois and then ransacked his flat. So Guernan dopes his drink and pushes him into that electrical kiosk for us to find. When we came to search Fréchant’s house thoroughly, we found some hand grenades in a box buried in the cellar. Did I not tell you? I forgot, then. They are not now of any importance, Dubois and Fréchant. If I can bring it home to Fréchant, he will go to the guillotine; if I cannot, he will go to penal servitude for the robbery. It does not matter.”

Hambledon strained his eyes to see across the road in a momentary pause in the traffic.

“What are you looking for?” asked Letord.

“Something which does not seem to be there. A conspicuous horizontal scar across the right cheekbone.”

“An old trick. Have you never used it yourself? You paint a scar faintly upon the skin and paint it over again with clear amyl acetate or some such preparation. It puckers the skin along the edges and gives it that slightly glazed look. Then, when everyone has noticed it and will include it in any description, you wash it off again. I tell you, even in the moment when Fréchant talked about that so noticeable scar, I wondered.”

Lament

BRAVO removed his head from Guernan's knee and sat down to scratch. Guernan, who was drinking coffee, picked up three cubes of sugar from the little saucer in which they are served and began to juggle with them, always two in the air at once and the third being tossed after them, round and round with never a slip. Letord's hand shot out and closed on Hambleton's wrist.

"So that is it," he said. "He impersonates Rosalie. I told you it was said that Rosalie was back. He——"

A dog passed by the Café of the African Lion and paused to sniff in the gutter. Bravo gathered himself and stalked out, stiff-legged, and immediately war erupted. Other dogs appeared as by magic to join in, and at that point one of them bit Bravo and he fled up the street, with the tide of battle rushing after him with yelps and snarls, "and on the mere the wailing died away."

"Is he, then, going to sit there all night?" grumbled Letord. "I was hoping to see someone come to sit at his table or hand him a note or merely speak to him in passing."

A man came along the pavement selling newspapers. He walked with a stick and could be seen to peer at a kerbstone or a step before he ventured upon it, and Letord, who noticed everything, noticed this also.

"Half blind," he said. "That man in the torn raincoat and the hat over his eyes, selling papers. Ought to wear glasses. He'll get run over one of these days."

Hambleton glanced at the man without interest and grunted. The newspaper seller entered the Café of the African Lion, passing from table to table. Some bought a paper from him; Guernan was one of those who did not, merely shaking his head when the man came to his table. The newspaper seller left the café and pattered on along the street; a moment later Guernan rose to his feet and walked slowly away in the same direction.

Letord finished his wine and stood up. "It is a failure," he said. "If he was, indeed, waiting for someone, he did not come. All the same, I will follow on and will see where he goes. What will you do? For I think we waste our time."

"If you will lead I will follow."

Letord went out; Hambleton, having paused in the doorway to light a cigarette, strolled after him ten paces behind.

After the dog Bravo had left him, Guernan sat on at his table watching the passers-by. The time was nearly half-past nine, whoever was coming was late for his appointment. Presently a newspaper seller, walking carefully with a stick, turned in at the café entrance and went round the tables offering his wares and repeating "*France-Soir*" in a flat tired voice. When he came to Guernan's table he said it again and Guernan shook his head without even looking up. The man leaned over the table, offering the papers, and said: "Monsieur Rosalie?"

"Well?"

"If Monsieur would be pleased to follow me."

He did not wait for an answer but drifted away at once; Guernan gave him ten metres start and went after him. The newspaper seller's pace was slow and he used his stick to steady himself where the pavement was uneven; when he turned to cross the road among the traffic, a casual passer-by took him by the elbow and helped him across in safety. Guernan, strolling along behind, had continually to find small excuses for stopping if he were not to overtake; Letord, for all his skill, found it almost impossible to proceed, since the loitering Guernan might look back at any moment. Letord fell back on Hambleton.

"Do you go on and I will follow; he does not know you so well as he knows me. At least, he may not."

"At least, he may not be expecting to see me," agreed Hambleton, and went into the lead.

The newspaper seller turned out of the busy street and mended his pace a little. He rolled up his papers and put them under his arm. Thirty yards down the side street he paused at the entrance to an alley as though to ensure that Guernan should see where he went, and then turned into it. Guernan followed and Hambleton came to the street corner just in time to see him turn.

When Hambledon in his turn came to the alley it was empty and he signalled to Letord to come nearer.

The alley passed through an archway and turned right. Hambledon was just in time to see someone disappearing round a corner at the end. Left, and left again, and the alley came to an end in a small paved yard, dark except for a low-powered electric light high upon the wall, but there was no one in sight.

There seemed to be storerooms round the yard in the ground floors of the tall buildings surrounding it. Only in one place was there what looked like a normal entry and that was an archway with a light somewhere inside it. Hambledon, with Letord now close behind him, walked on until he could see into this entry. The archway was deep indeed, almost a short tunnel, at the back of it a grimy electric light showed stone stairs going up and down.

“What we want,” said Hambledon in Letord’s ear, “is a bloodh——” but Letord’s hand closed on his arm and he stopped. Close by their feet there appeared a dim glow of light, it came from a cellar window some three feet wide and only eight or nine inches high, the bottom of it was level with the ground and it was heavily barred.

Inspector Guernan turned into the alley after the newspaper seller and found him waiting.

“This way,” he said in a quiet cultured voice very different from the hoarse croak which had advertised *France-Soir*. “Not, I fear, a very high-class neighbourhood, but at least we shall not be disturbed.”

“Suits me,” grunted Guernan.

“Very good,” said the other, and went on, with Guernan following, through the dimly lit alleys until they reached the yard and turned in under the archway.

“Follow me, if you please,” said Guernan’s guide, and led the way down the stairs at the back of the archway into a sort of underground lobby with cellar doors leading off it, all closed and for the most part barred and padlocked, as Guernan could see when his guide switched on a pocket electric torch and threw the beam round. One door had no padlock; the newspaper seller took a key from his pocket, unlocked the door and opened it.

“One moment,” he said, “while I light the candles. Electric light is not available down here.” He walked forward, striking a match as he did so, but

it merely flared and went out. "Curse the things," he added cheerfully. "I must be more careful this time, I only have this one left."

The second match behaved perfectly and he lit two candles, which, in accordance with traditional cellar *décor*, had been stuck in the necks of bottles. "Come in, Monsieur Rosalie."

Guernan entered warily and looked about him as the candle flames grew up. The place looked squalid to the last degree, the walls and ceiling grimy and the horizontal slit of a window having several panes missing. Guernan's host saw his eyes rest on this and said that since the window did not open, some ventilation had had to be provided somehow. "One cannot call the air fresh," he added with a laugh, "but at least one does not asphyxiate. I do not live here, you understand. There is another way out of this building; you might perhaps call this my dressing-room in the theatrical sense." He locked the door and put his roll of newspapers down on the table. "These are a good cover," he said, pointing at them, "for no one notices a newspaper seller and one can go where one will and speak to anyone without arousing comment. Do sit down. These chairs are deplorably shabby, but at least they will not collapse under you. Will you take a glass of wine?"

To Hambledon and Letord, crouched on the ground outside the window, the scene below them looked as unreal as a set on the stage. They could not quite see the door, but they could see a sort of stretcher bed with some rugs thrown upon it, a small washstand bearing a chipped jug and basin, an upended packing case with a Primus stove on it and a kettle, a cupboard which the host was now unlocking to bring out a bottle of wine and two glasses. There were two or three wooden chairs and one battered easy chair in which Inspector Guernan was sitting; he must have brought some sugar lumps with him from the café, for he was tossing them again while his eyes roamed round the room.

"Merely a Côte du Rhone," said Guernan's host, "but, I believe, drinkable." His voice, through the missing windowpanes, came quietly but distinctly to the ears of Hambledon and Letord outside. "I trust that it is to your taste."

"Thank you, yes," answered Guernan, sipping it. "Your health."

His host bowed, sipped a little from his glass, set it down upon the table and sat down himself upon a chair opposite to his visitor.

"This is an unusual departure for me, Monsieur Rosalie. It is many years since I have spoken face to face with any man whose services I wished to obtain."

"The loss of Monsieur Écritet," said Guernan harshly, "must be serious."

“An inconvenience, a definite inconvenience. However, these things happen and must be dealt with. I am going to be quite frank. I am aware, Monsieur Rosalie, that you have or had a very considerable grievance against certain men in my employ.”

“Grievance,” said the self-styled Rosalie, and laughed. “They shopped me to the police and I went inside for three years, if you call that a grievance. It was over that job in the Avenue Kléber, if you remember. They told me that the coast was clear and that they would keep watch, so I went in and started on the safe. Then the police seized me, for they were already in the house. You knew that, no doubt.”

“There was some carelessness——”

“There was no carelessness. The house was closed for August, quite empty. Dubois and Veron and Pepi l’Agneau told me that they had been all over it ten minutes before I went in.”

“Ah,” said his host. “That was not the story which I was told.”

“Naturally. It would not be.”

“In any case, those men responsible are now where they can do you no more harm. I wish to take you into my service, Rosalie.”

“I am not sure that I wish to enter it, monsieur. I have been shopped once and once is enough. If I work for myself alone, it may be that I do not make so much money but at least I am not sold like a sheep.”

“The first assignment which I should desire you to undertake is to open a safe in a château near Chambord. You will need two assistants—perhaps only one—you shall choose him yourself. I will myself give you full details of the house. The jewels are the treasures of the Comtes de la Fère.”

Guernan stared for a moment, since the treasures of the De La Fères have been famous since the time of Louis XIV.

“No,” he said, and looked away. “This is to get me into trouble again.” He got up. “Those jewels will be guarded like the strong rooms of the Banque de France. I will wish you good evening, monsieur.”

“Thirty per cent,” said his host briskly, and there was a pause. “Sit down again, Rosalie, and have a cigarette. Take time to think this over. I tell you, I know the place well.”

Guernan sat down again slowly. His host took a gold cigarette case from some recess of his deplorable clothing and offered it, opened, to Guernan, who took one with the absent manner of one deep in thought.

His host picked up the matchbox, found it empty and threw it down with an exclamation. He got up and took one of the newspapers from the table,

with the intention of tearing a strip from it for use as a spill at the lighted candles; his fingers had separated a single sheet and were tightening upon the edge to tear it when he stopped suddenly and stood completely silent and motionless. Guernan looked up.

“What is it?”

“Only a headline, Monsieur Whatever-your-name-is, only a headline. It is because my sight is so wretched that I did not see it before. ‘Felon Dies a Hero’s Death in Morocco. Légionnaire Rosalie, famous safebreaker, killed in action. Légionnaire Guillaume France fell in action yesterday, fighting with the greatest gallantry against overwhelming odds. After his death it was’—curse this filthy print—‘was discovered that he was the notorious Rosalie for whom the police——’ and so on.” He threw the paper down. “And now, who the devil are you?”

Guernan leaned back in his chair.

“I have the advantage of you, monsieur. You do not know who I am, whereas I do know you now that I see your face clearly under the light, Monsieur François de Montargent de la Sainte Croix. You have been pointed out to me as one who took a leading part in the Resistance, monsieur.”

A gun appeared in De Montargent’s hand.

“You realize,” he said calmly, “that after that I cannot permit you to live.”

“You are in the habit of not permitting people to live,” said Guernan coldly.

“Only if they call their fate upon themselves by their own acts. I do not kill for pleasure. You have recognized me. There was a man once before who found out who I was and blackmailed me. I made the mistake of wearing a signet ring; he stole it and identified the arms. I did not kill him, I only drove him out of France, but I should certainly have killed him if he had come back. However, he died abroad so he will not trouble me again.”

“There was also a certain journalist——”

“He poked his nose into what did not concern him; if he had kept quiet he could have lived for all I cared. He was warned.”

“Tell me,” said Guernan suddenly, “what made you take up a life like this? A man of your race to deal with scoundrels like Robert Écritet, thugs like Fréchant and Pepi l’Agneau, gutter scum like Veron and Eddi le——”

“I do as I please. You are going to die so I will tell you. In the Resistance I was happy; there was danger, action, excitement, life! Then I got this.” He touched the scar on his face. “I was an invalid, I could hardly see, I am still

half blind. I must live quietly at home with a manservant at my elbow for fear I fall downstairs or walk into the river. I can do a little quiet fishing.” He broke off and laughed bitterly. “I might have learned to knit. I did not think of that; they say the occupation is soothing. Then a man broke into the castle and my servants caught him trying to open the strong-room door. They brought him to me. His name was—never mind his name. He talked to me and I was interested. No, I did not kill him; he was stabbed in a brawl in Antwerp. After he died I made use of Écritez. At least I was not bored.” He stopped and thought for a moment. “How odd it is that it should be a pleasure to me to tell you this, I have spoken openly to no one for nine years. It is a pity you should have to die—who are you?”

The lounging figure in the chair stood up.

“I am Police Inspector Guernan of the——”

“Guernan?”

“The tiresome journalist’s brother, Guernan of the Sûreté, and I am taking you into custody on a charge of——”

Montargent fired instantly, Guernan sprang at him and there was a confused struggle.

“Down the stairs,” said Letord, leaping to his feet and making a rush for the doorway. Even as Hambledon turned to follow him, there was a loud clatter among dustbins under the lamp in the corner of the yard, a dustbin lid rolled noisily away and a rough-haired grey dog rose on his hind legs to thrust his head over the rim.

When Hambledon reached the bottom of the stairs Letord was already hammering on the door and shouting to Guernan to open. There was an answering cry from within, a crash which suggested the wash-hand basin, a yell of rage which was not Guernan’s voice and then silence.

“Guernan!” bellowed Letord. “Open this door!”

There came an answer from within which Letord caught.

“He says, ‘I cannot. Break in.’ ”

But the door was strong and it was locked. They threw themselves against it without effect, and Hambledon took Letord’s torch from him and went to look under the stairs. As he had hoped, in a pile of miscellaneous rubbish there was a length of flat iron bar, possibly part of a stove. When the door was attacked with this as a lever the lock burst open and the door swung wide.

The room was more of a scene of desolation than ever, though the candles still burned steadily and they could see the two men lying on the

floor; Guernan was the uppermost and he had his hands round De Montargent's throat. Letord stooped over his Inspector, grasped him by the wrists and dragged him away. Guernan opened his eyes and looked round.

"Monsieur Letord! How did you——"

"What the devil are you doing? The prisoner——"

"I could not let him go—he has got me—I have killed him, I hope——"

Tommy Hambledon bent over De Montargent.

"You have indeed. You have strangled him."

"Stand up," said Letord peremptorily and Guernan made an effort to rise.

"I cannot. He shot me in the body. I am sorry, monsieur——"

"I will summon an ambulance," said Letord.

"No good, I am bleeding internally. Listen, monsieur. As policemen we could not get them, I had to do it myself. My brother——"

"We know all that," said Letord.

"Oh? This man gave the order and Teluga did the stabbing. So I settled with Teluga in London and now this man——"

Hambledon poured out a glass of wine and gave it to Letord, who, with his arm under Guernan's head, offered it to him, but the dying man turned his head away.

"Thank you—I cannot—if I had known you were near I would have held him for you, but I could not hold him for long. I am sorry for all the——"

There was a long pause. Hambledon neither spoke nor moved. At last Letord slipped his arm away and stood up.

The door, which had swung to, was pushed open a few inches and a head looked in, the two men were looking down at the dead and they did not notice.

There came a low unhappy sound, which for the moment they did not recognize till it came again, rising in a long wail of wordless misery. Hambledon strode to the door and set it wide; upon the sill there sat Bravo, the dog, with his nose in the air, howling for a dead friend.

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *Death of an Ambassador* by Manning Coles]