



# GIMLET COMES HOME

Captain  
W.E.  
JOHNS

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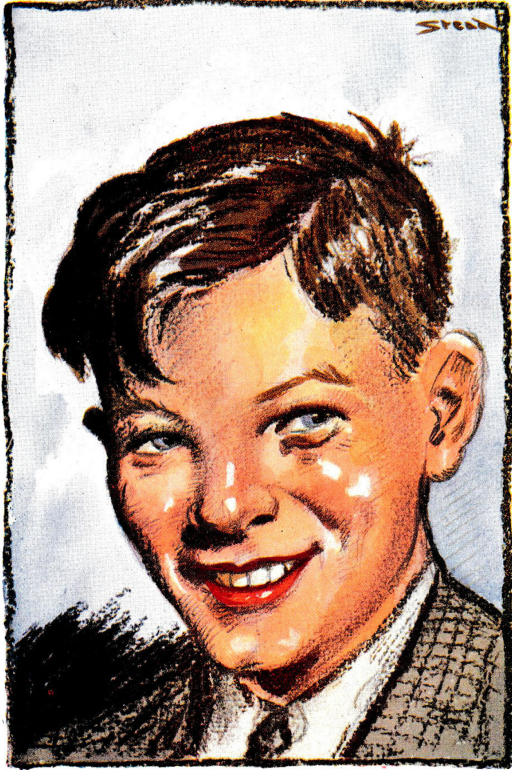
*Author:* W. E. (William Earl) Johns (1893-1968)

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"CUB" PETERS

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# GIMLET COMES HOME

ANOTHER ADVENTURE OF KING  
OF THE COMMANDOS AND HIS  
THREE MUSKETEERS, "COPPER"  
COLSON, "TRAPPER" TROUBLAY,  
AND "CLUB" PETERS

By  
CAPTAIN W. E. JOHNS

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A MYSTERY NEEDS EXPLAINING

---

NIGEL NORMAN PETERS, better known in his disbanded Commando unit as “Cub,” halted in front of the Ritz Hotel in Piccadilly, and inclined his head towards the massive portal. “This is it,” he announced.

His two companions, ex-Corporal “Copper” Colson, of Bow, London, late of the Metropolitan Police Force, and taciturn ex-Trooper “Trapper” Troublay, of Canada, both one-time members of the Commando troop known as King’s “Kittens,” looked at the door, at the attendant commissionaire, and back at Cub.

Copper spoke, and he spoke with feeling: “Not fer me, mate. That ain’t my joint.”

Cub smiled, “What’s the matter—scared?” he bantered.

“Scared stiff,” admitted Copper, eyeing the commissionaire with hostile suspicion.

Trapper shrugged, as only a French-Canadian can. “For me, I’d rather go through Dieppe again than wrinkle my way through this place.”

“All right,” agreed Cub lightly. “I’ll go in and find Gimlet, and tell him that for the first time you’re windy of following him.”

“It ain’t that I’m so windy—but look at us,” complained Copper.

Cub raised his eyebrows. “What’s wrong with us?” he demanded, a justifiable question, for all were neatly dressed in dark lounge suits, their demobilisation outfits. Admittedly, Copper’s right jacket-pocket bulged in a rather slovenly manner, due to the presence of a Service automatic which he had retained, either as a souvenir or because, as he once remarked, after five years of having it on him he felt undressed without it. The Indian hunting-knife which Trapper carried on his belt was only revealed when he put a hand in his trousers pocket for some small change. For sentimental reasons Cub still clung to his little Mauser thirty-eight, but its presence in his hip-pocket would not have been suspected. On the whole, as he pointed out, there was nothing wrong with them.

Copper braced his muscles like a man confronted by mortal danger. “Right you are, Cub,” he said shortly. “I’ll try it. You lead the way. But if anyone tries any half-larks with me——”

“They won’t, don’t worry,” Cub told him, laughing.



He went in, the others following, and deposited their hats in the cloakroom.

Copper let out a stifled shout as his eyes met those of the cloakroom attendant. “Blimey! Look who’s ’ere!” he cried. “If it ain’t Shorty Hughes.” He gave the attendant a friendly push that sent him reeling. “What-ho, Shorty, me old Hun-hunter. How goes it?”

Private Hughes, late of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers, looked up and down the corridor with a nervousness he had never shown in Normandy. “Shut your face, you big lout,” he snarled. “What is it you want to do—get me the sack, look you?”

“Who’ll give you the sack?” enquired Copper belligerently.

“The manager.”

“Where is ’e? Who does ’e think ’e is? Let’s knock ’is block off.” Copper looked round, presumably for the manager.

“Behave yourself,” requested Cub curtly. “This isn’t a raid.” To Shorty he explained that they were there by appointment to dine with their old C.O., Captain Lorrington King, D.S.O., more often known to his Commandos as “Gimlet.”

“Then push along to the grill-room and leave me alone,” muttered Shorty, “I’ve only had this job a week, and if I lose it my missus’ll tear the hide off me.”

“Serves yer right fer getting hitched,” said Copper coldly. “We ain’t got jobs at all, yet. Still, we’ve got a bit of dough left, so why worry. So long, Shorty. If you dish out your tickets like you used ter dish out machine-gun bullets, you’ll do.”

Cub walked down to the grill-room, where the party was intercepted by the head waiter.

“We are guests of Captain King,” explained Cub.

The waiter glanced at a card which he held in his hand. “That’s right, sir. A table for four. This way, gentlemen, please.”

Copper nudged Cub. “What do yer know about that?” he whispered hoarsely. “He mistook us fer gentlemen.”

The waiter pulled out three chairs with the dexterity of long practice. “Captain King hasn’t arrived yet. Can I get you anything while you’re waiting?”

“Yes, you can bring me a pint,” answered Copper promptly.

The waiter looked pained. He winced. “A pint of what, sir?” he enquired frostily.

“Anything you like, old cock,” answered Copper cheerfully. “I ain’t particular.”

“Very good, sir.” The waiter drew a deep breath and departed.

“Not a bad sort of cove,” observed Copper as he sat down. “Did yer notice ’im call me sir? Maybe he was in the Guards. They still call N.C.O.’s sir at the depôt, I hear.” He looked around. “I remember once heaving a sticky-bomb into a gin palace like this at a place called Le Touquet. Didn’t ’alf make a mess and no blinkin’ error. Cleared the Jerries out, though.”

The waiter returned with a tankard which he put on the table, and after a sidelong glance at Copper withdrew.

Copper drank deeply. “Wonder ’ow long Gimlet’s going ter be?” he remarked. “I’m ready for me rations. It ain’t like Gimlet not ter be on parade at the time shown in orders. He said seven sharp. It’s five past. That ain’t like ’im. There’s somethin’ queer about it.”

“Give him a chance; he’s held up in a traffic jam, perhaps,” suggested Cub. “He’ll be along.”

Minutes passed. The grill-room was beginning to fill. Copper fidgeted. “Quarter past,” he muttered, glancing at his watch. “There’s something funny about this. I don’t like it. Gimlet once had me on the mat for being thirty seconds late on parade—and we hadn’t had no sleep fer two nights. I hope this place ain’t made ’im soft.”

“Tch! Nothing would make Gimlet soft,” put in Trapper quietly.

More time passed. The room was full now and the waiters busy. There was an appetising smell of food.

“Here, I’m getting peckish,” growled Copper. “How about slipping out ter some little joint fer a plate of fish and chips while we’re waitin’?”

“Gimlet must have had an accident,” decided Trapper.

A quarter of an hour later Copper said: “Ten to eight. I don’t like it.”

All Cub could say was: “We’ll give him till eight, anyway.”

At eight o’clock the waiter approached the table.

Said Cub, in a low voice, seeing him coming: “He’s going to say that Gimlet has rung up to say why he couldn’t come. I was wondering why he didn’t ring up.”

Cub’s guess was wrong. The waiter came to seek information, not to give it. “Have you heard anything of Captain King?” he enquired.

Cub answered. “Not a word.”

The waiter went on. “The chef is getting worried. The captain came here in person and ordered special dishes. They will be ruined.”

“I don’t like it,” muttered Copper.

“Don’t keep saying that,” reproved Cub irritably. “I’ll admit it’s queer, but there is probably a simple explanation. Gimlet wouldn’t leave us sitting here if he could get in touch with us. Yet he must be in London, and in London one is seldom far from a telephone. It certainly is odd.”

In the end the party waited until nine o’clock. Then Copper got up. “Gimlet ain’t comin’,” he asserted. “If ’e was comin’, he’d be ’ere. Am I right, Trapper?”

“Sure you’re right,” agreed Trapper without hesitation. “Let’s go.”

They went out, found a small café, and had a cheap but satisfying meal. The conversation still ran on Gimlet’s unaccountable failure to turn up at a reunion party which he had suggested and arranged.

“Could we have made a mistake in the date?” suggested Copper.

Cub shook his head. “No. He said ‘Wednesday, seven sharp,’ and the waiter at the hotel knew about it. We couldn’t both be mistaken. This is the day right enough, and when Gimlet fixed it he intended to be here, there’s no doubt of that. Something must have stopped him. What was it, I wonder?”

“Nothing,” muttered Copper. “I never knew anything stop Gimlet when he wanted to get some place.”

“All the same, something *has* stopped him,” said Cub. “We’ll go back to the Ritz a bit later on to see if they’ve heard anything. Ten to one there’ll be a message.”

But when, just before eleven, the party returned to the hotel, it was only to be informed that no message had been received from Captain King. The manager was somewhat concerned because—as he now divulged—Captain King had booked a room at the hotel for the night. He had not claimed the room. It was very strange, the manager thought, because Captain King was an old client who did not do that sort of thing.

“Strange!” exclaimed Copper. “I should say it’s more than that. It’s phoney, that’s what it is. I don’t like it.”

“Had Gimlet been involved in an accident, providing he wasn’t unconscious he would ask the police to let us know, or let the manager here know, what had happened,” opined Cub pensively. “Of course he may have gone back to his home in Devonshire for something. But there’s nothing we can do about it.”

“Ho! ain’t there?” muttered Copper. “If something’s happened to ’im in Devonshire, what’s wrong with slipping down to report fer duty, as we might say? I reckon he’d be glad ter see us, fer old times’ sake.”

“Yes, we could do that,” agreed Cub. “We could go down on the first train in the morning. It would be a trip, anyway.”

“*Bon*,” declared Trapper. “We can sleep at the Y.M.C.A. tonight and take our small kit with us in our haversacks when we leave. How about rations? We’ll take some along, I reckon; then we shall be all right whatever happens.”

“We shan’t need rations,” averred Cub. “There are still plenty of eating places in the country.”

“Yes, and by Jumbo, don’t they know ’ow ter charge,” sneered Copper. “You please yerself, but I ain’t bein’ stung by no lily-fingered soup-wallah. I’ve managed fer meself all right fer the past five years, and I reckon I can go on doin’ it. If you’ve got yer grub on yer back, you always know where you are. Am I right, Trapper, old chum?”

“Sure, pal, you were never more right,” drawled Trapper. “We don’t have restaurants in the backwoods where I come from. We learn to do without ’em. When I travel, my kit goes with me, and that includes rations—and I can still travel light.”

“Okay,” agreed Cub. “Maybe you’re right. It’s nice to be independent, anyway.”

“Nothing nicer,” murmured Trapper.

And so it came about that when the first west-bound train left Paddington the following morning three seats were occupied by passengers who, now that the time had come, were a little nervous at their temerity. But, having started, they went on, and by noon were in the village of Lorrington. At twelve-thirty they were ringing the front-door bell of an imposing Elizabethan manor which they had been informed was Lorrington Hall.

The door was opened by a man in black clothes whom Cub presumed to be the butler. There was nothing of the jovial countryman about him. On the contrary, he was a small, hard-faced little man with a sallow complexion and dark active eyes that surveyed the callers with suspicion if not actual hostility. His manner was in accord with his appearance.

“Yes, what is it?” he asked sharply.

Cub answered. He did not say much, for one thing because he did not like the man and half expected a rebuff. He merely explained that they were old comrades of Captain King. They had called to see him.

The butler’s manner remained uncompromising. He told them, shortly, that Captain King was not at home.

“Do you know where he is?” asked Cub.

“Captain King does not tell me his business,” answered the butler stiffly.

“When are you expecting him back?”

The door started to close. “He may be away for some time—that’s all I can tell you. Good day.”

“Thanks,” said Cub, and turned away.

“That poodle-faker wants his face pushing in,” rasped Copper, staring at the closed door. “Looks as if we’ve come all this way fer nothin’.”

“This gets odder and odder,” said Cub as they started back up the drive. “What can Gimlet be doing?”

“There’s somethin’ fishy about it,” declared Copper. “I don’t like it.”

“I can’t believe that Gimlet would let us down,” put in Trapper moodily.

“Nor he wouldn’t,” growled Copper.

Near the gate a youngish man, in well-worn khaki battle-dress with Service insignia removed, was trimming the edge of the drive.

Copper accosted him with the easy confidence of one soldier addressing another. “Say, chum, when did you last see your boss?” he asked. “We served under ’im in the recent fuss, and we thought we’d like ter see ’im.”

The soldier stopped work, leaning on his hoe. “I saw him three days ago. I drove him to the station when he went off to Scotland.”

Cub started, a puzzled frown lining his forehead. “Off to *where*?”

“Scotland.”

“Blimey!” ejaculated Copper. “What did ’e want ter go there for? We ’ad a date with ’im in London.”

“He said something about seeing some old comrades in London,” admitted the soldier. “He said he thought he had time to slip up to Scotland first and look over the property.”

“Property? What property?”

“It seems his uncle died while he was away at the war, and left him a big property up in the Highlands—grouse moor, deer forest, lodge, and all the rest of it. There was a bit in the paper about it. I cut it out. I think I’ve still got it.” The soldier took a much-worn wallet from his pocket, selected a slip of paper from sundry photographs and letters, and handed it over.

Cub took it and read it with interest. From time to time for the benefit of the others he made a comment. “House called Strathcarglas Lodge . . . near a place called Auchrory . . . nearest station Tomnarrow. Phew! An estate of nearly a hundred thousand acres.”

“Make a good Commando battle-training ground,” suggested Copper. “Maybe that’s his idea.”

“You can keep the paper if you like,” offered the soldier. “I’ve done with it.”

“Thanks.” Cub did not really want the clipping, but to be friendly he folded it and put it in his pocket.

Copper jerked a thumb towards the house. “That nasty-looking head-cook-and-bottle-washer who runs your show wants ’is mug pushin’ in,” he remarked. “Why didn’t he tell us the boss ’ad gone ter Scotland? Did ’e know about it?”

“I suppose so. Maybe he thought you were just touting for jobs and it was no business of yours.”

Copper’s shrewd Cockney eyes narrowed. “Not our business, eh? That’s where ’e’s wrong. And suppose we was toutin’ fer jobs—who’s got a better right?”

“No one,” admitted the soldier warmly, eyeing Copper’s massive figure. “Haynes—that’s the butler—is a queer type. I don’t like him and he doesn’t like me; but I can’t afford to fall out with my job.”

“Did your boss say anything else when he went off?” asked Cub.

“He said I was to have the car at the station to meet him off the noon train today.”

“Come to think of it, I saw you at the station,” observed Copper. “I didn’t recognise you just now in yer workin’ kit.”

“That’s right. I was at the station.”

“That was the train we were on,” declared Cub. “Gimlet wasn’t on it.”

“You’re telling me he wasn’t!” muttered the soldier. “I’ve mucked up the car for nothing.”

Copper turned towards the gate. “Well, so long, chum. We’ll be on our way.”

“My name’s George Vass,” called the soldier. “If I can be of any help, let me know. So long.”

“S’long.”

Copper walked on, his forehead creased by the effort of deep thinking. “I don’t like it,” he muttered. “Gimlet can’t ’ave changed so much that ’e’d say one thing and do another. No bloomin’ fear. It’s fishy, mates . . . fishy, that’s what it is. Well, let’s get back ter London town.”

“And when we get to London, what then?” asked Trapper.

“We could call at the Ritz to see if he’s been there—that’s about all we can do,” suggested Cub.

“All right. Let’s do that,” agreed Copper. “But I don’t like it.”

“So you said before,” murmured Cub.

The party returned to London, and that evening made enquiries at the Ritz. Nothing had been seen or heard of Captain King. The reserved room had not been claimed. The manager was rather annoyed about it.

“Strike a light!” muttered Copper, “That beats anythin’ I ever ’eard of. Why, we might ’ave bin sittin’ in that place waitin’ till now, swelp me. That ain’t like Gimlet. Something’s ’appened to ’im, I’ll take my oath on it.”

“I think you’re right,” said Cub. “There is something queer about it. Even if Gimlet went to Scotland he could have sent us a wire. He must still be there. Why doesn’t he get in touch with us?”

“There’s only one answer ter that,” asserted Copper. “’E can’t, and you can bet yer sweet life on that. And I’ll tell yer somethin’ else. I’m goin’ up there ter find out why. What’s the name of this place ’e went to, Cub?”

Cub referred to the clipping. “Strathcarglas Lodge. The nearest station is Tomnarrow-on-Spey.”

Copper looked at the others. “Well, what about it? I ain’t never bin ter Scotland, but I knew some of the boys in the Fifty-first Highland Division, and I reckon it’s time I saw where they came from.”

“Tch! What are we waiting for?” asked Trapper. “Let’s shove along. There’s too many people in London to suit me, anyway.”

“When I was a kid I used ter sell papers outside Euston Station,” said Copper. “There was a fast train north at seven-twenty. We can just do it, and have time ter pick up some grub at the coffee-stall outside. Come on.” He made a run for a passing bus.

And that is how it came about that shortly before eleven the following morning found three strangers, with haversacks slung, and raincoats over their shoulders, standing on the little lonely platform of Tomnarrow station, watching the train puff out of sight on its unhurried run to Aberdeen. The travellers, with their war gratuities sadly depleted, looked about them for a town or village. There was none. The tiny station stood alone, in the centre, it seemed, of unlimited solitude, a silent world of rounded purple hills that towards the east rose ever higher to merge at last into a group of rugged peaks. A questing buzzard floated past on lazy wings. After the noise and bustle of the south, Cub found the complete absence of sound almost uncanny. Only one other human being was in sight. A man, the stationmaster or porter, was walking towards his little grey-stone house.

“Blimey! Where ’ave we got to?” enquired Copper plaintively.

Cub inclined his head towards the solitary man, who had now started to stack peat against a shed. “Let’s ask him,” he suggested.

## CHAPTER II

### FIRST RECONNAISSANCE

---

THEY soon came up with the man, a lean, weather-bronzed Highlander. He turned when he heard them coming, slowly, as if time was a thing of no account.

“Can you direct us to a lodge called Strathcarglas?” requested Cub.

The Highlander, evidently a man who used words carefully, considered the question and the questioners. He pointed to a narrow heath-fringed road that wound an undulating treeless course across the moor to disappear into distant hills.

“How far is it?” asked Cub.

Again the man gave the question some thought before answering in the true soft Highland brogue. “Seventeen miles.”

Copper drew a deep breath. “Seventeen . . . stiffen the crows!” he exclaimed. “I swore when the war was over that I wouldn’t do any more walking.”

Further enquiries produced further facts. The village of Auchrory lay at a distance of twelve miles. It was not actually a village but a district, a few crofts scattered along a glen—Glencarglas, the valley of the River Carglas. There was no transport available between the station and the glen; there never had been, and—added the man—it was to be hoped that there never would be. Motor-cars ran over the sheep and disturbed the grouse. The shooting lodge, Strathcarglas, was five miles beyond the village.

“The new owner of the lodge was here the other day,” prompted Cub, seeking information.

“Aye. Frae London.”

“Did you see him?”

“Aye. I mind him fine.”

“How did he get to Auchrory?”

“He walked.”



“When did he come back?”

“He hasna come back.”

“He might have come back without you seeing him,” suggested Cub.

“Och! If he’d come back this way, I’d have seen him,” said the Scot. “Unless he went across yon hills to Deeside,” he added.

“Is that the nearest place in the other direction?”

“Aye.”

“How far is it?”

“Forty miles.”

Cub was slightly incredulous. “Do you mean—if we started across the hills there is nothing for forty miles?”

“A croft or two, maybe, or a stalker’s hut for the red deer on yon high tops.”

“Did the gentleman who came here say anything to you before he started walking?”

“He asked the road.”

“What did he do about his luggage?”

“Och, he carried it. ’Twas only a bag.”

Cub looked at the others. “That settles it. Gimlet went this way, and he hasn’t come back. It’s pretty certain he’d come back the way he went.” To the man he said, “Is there a tavern or an inn at Auchrory?”

“Aye, there is that. The Glencarglas Arms. A mon named McTaggart keeps it now since old Coutts died sudden twa years back.”

“I see. Thanks very much.” Cub turned back to the others. “We’d better start walking.”

“Aye,” said the Scot, “ye’d better away. ’Tis a fine dee, but the weather on yon hills is not to be trusted at this time of the year. She changes quick.”

“What are those mountains?” enquired Cub, pointing to the east. He used the word “mountains” naturally, for that is what in fact they were, although he noticed that the Scot referred to them as hills.

“The Cairngorms.”

“And that’s the direction of Auchrory?”

“Aye.”

Cub glanced at the blue sky overhead and smiled. “A little rain wouldn’t hurt us,” he remarked.

“When it rains doon here ’tis snow on the hill, or maybe hail, which is worse. The hail cuts the face off ye,” explained the Highlander. “If ye’re caught on the hill by the weather, ye dinna last long. If the clouds come down, make for the glen, or find a ledge and stay there; for there are places where if ye fall ye can fall an awfu’ long way. Watch the deer. If ye see them coming doon the hill ye’ll know a change is on the way.”

“Thanks,” said Cub. He paid little attention to this advice at the time, but he was to be reminded of it later.

“Come on,” said Copper impatiently, “let’s be moving.”

As they started down the road, for the first time Cub found time to appreciate the scenery. As he remarked to the others, he had no idea that such wild solitude was to be found in the British Isles.

“What’s the odds?” growled Copper.

“The trouble with you is you’ve no imagination,” retorted Cub.

“There are bigger places in Canada,” observed Trapper casually.

“That may be, but this isn’t Canada,” answered Cub, surveying the panorama ahead with interest and not without concern, for the road, which could be seen for miles except where it dived between the hills, seemed to have no end.

For its greater part the road wound a serpentine course between heather-clad hills, but there were places where, its way barred, it was forced to climb high to surmount them. At more or less regular intervals tall posts accompanied the road on its winding way, and these puzzled Cub until Trapper announced their purpose.

“We have them on open roads in Canada,” said he. “They mark the road when she is under snow.”

As the time of the year was late September, the heather was beginning to fade, but the predominant colour was still purple. Only the distant Cairngorms, towards which they were marching, were blue, navy blue, hard and clear-cut against the sky. The nearer, lower hills, bathed in autumn sunshine, seemed friendly enough, being for the most part smooth, rounded contours, curiously blotched, like wartime camouflage, with dark patches where the heather had been burnt, to provide—as Cub learned later—grazing for sheep and resting-places for young grouse. Sometimes as they walked on, a cock grouse, master of a covey, would leap into the air, and remain poised for a moment on hovering wings, to survey the intruders before sinking back out of sight into the heather. The curious, strident crowing of these birds seemed to go with the landscape, thought Cub, as they trudged along. Very soon the sound, by constant repetition, became part

of it. It was, in fact, the only sound. There were, he noticed, places on the sides of the hills where the eternal heather was streaked with vivid yellow or green. He had no idea what caused this, but here again he was soon to learn. Once, at a tremendous height, a bird, that from its size could only have been an eagle, passed over on rigid pinions. For a little while the grouse fell silent.

Copper mopped his face with a large handkerchief, for the sun blazed down on the open road with surprising force. "We must be nuts," he muttered petulantly. "As if we ain't done enough marchin' ter larst a lifetime. If my old Ma could see me she'd think I was outer me mind—my oath she would."

"Then let's go back," bantered Cub.

"What!" Copper glared. "Me go back! What we start we finish. Am I right, Trapper, old pal?"

"Sure you're right," agreed Trapper without enthusiasm.

The party strode on.

"I'm trying to work this problem out," said Cub presently. "Gimlet travelled to Scotland on Monday. His intention must have been to spend Tuesday here and catch the night train back, arriving in London in plenty of time for our party. He intended staying the night at the Ritz and catching the early morning train back to Devon. We know that because he arranged for George Vass, his chauffeur, to meet him. Something went wrong with the timetable. What was it? All I can think of is, he didn't know it was seventeen miles from Tomnarrow station to the Lodge. If he did, then he must have reckoned on getting transport, otherwise he would have realised that it was impossible for him to get from the station to the Lodge, look round, and get back to the station the same night. That's all right so far as it goes, but he would have discovered all this at Tomnarrow station, before he started for the Lodge; in which case he would have sent us a wire calling the party off. I'm convinced that either he would have postponed his trip to the Lodge and gone back to London on the next train, or he would have let us know. In any case, even if he had done none of these things, why is he still here? Why didn't he catch the London train yesterday—or today? Today's Friday, and he's still missing. He's been missing since Tuesday, when he left the station, until now—Friday afternoon. Of course, there may be nothing to it. We may find him at the tavern, the Glencarglas Arms. He may be at the Lodge, but as we don't know whether it is furnished or not or if there is any staff there, it's no use guessing about that. I still think it's queer. It isn't like Gimlet to stay on up here without a word to let us know what has happened.

Well, he'll be surprised to see us. We shall find him, of course. There can't be so many strangers in these parts that the locals don't notice them. In fact, I should say a stranger here is an event."

It had turned three o'clock when the travellers reached what they took to be Auchrory; at least, for some time they had been passing an occasional grey-stone croft, usually some distance from the road, although fields of arable land were few and far between. Sheep, wandering on the hillside, or shaggy long-horned Highland cattle deep in a glen, were the only stock. Cub noticed an isolated cottage that had been turned into a little general shop. A red posting-box had been let into the front wall.

Eventually, ahead, at a bend in the road where the glen with outcrops of naked rock rose almost sheer, they observed what they assumed to be their objective, the Glencarglas Arms, a long, low building of some size, with a thick-slatted roof, standing with its feet almost in the heather. Outbuildings formed a rough square behind the main premises. There was no garden, not even an apology for one. The only growth that appeared to flourish was dank moss. So much could be seen at first glance.

"That must be the pub," said Copper.

Cub agreed.

As they drew nearer, two other features were revealed. For some time Cub had been conscious of a sound which, as they walked on, increased in volume. It was not unlike the noise made by a distant train. Now he saw the cause. It was a river, a turbulent stream that came pelting between the hills to skirt the tavern and go plunging on under an ancient single-span stone bridge to an unknown destination. This river had nothing in common with leisurely, reed-fringed southern streams. Its way was hard, for it was governed by rocky banks which controlled its width from ten to thirty yards. Fallen rocks impeded its progress. The water was clear but dark peaty-brown in colour. In the widest places it was shallow, but where it was hemmed in by rock it formed deep, sinister pools.

There is always a fascination about a river, and Cub stopped to look at it. He himself had had few opportunities for fishing, but his father was a keen fisherman, and from his conversations he had learned a good deal about the art.

"This must be the Carglas," he remarked. "There will be trout in that river—probably salmon, too. Pity we didn't bring a rod. The river, I suppose, accounts for the inn."

"What do you mean by that?" demanded Copper.

“The Glencarglas Arms is obviously a fishing hotel. There’s no other reason for a pub to be here. You’ll find these fishing hotels all over Scotland. I know, because my father used to come up here a lot. He was going to bring me, but the war put an end to that.”

The second feature to present itself was a road, a side turning; or, not to create a wrong impression, a track. Joining the road at right angles it twisted across the moor for a short distance before losing itself in the hills. At the junction of the two roads a notice-board had been erected. It bore two words: Dangerous Road. Cub looked at the notice, then at the track. He walked a pace nearer and looked again.

“Why stick that notice up?” questioned Trapper. “Who’d want to go up there, anyway?”

“You never know,” answered Cub. “In normal times cars use these side roads, cars belonging to shooters who want to get to the grouse moors, or fishermen who want to get higher up the river.”

A small boy came along the main road, driving a black cow. Cub accosted him, pointing up the track. “Where does that road lead?” he asked.

“To the Lodge,” was the answer.

“What lodge?”

“Strathcarglas.”

“Then that’s the way to Gimlet’s property,” said Copper.

“Must be,” returned Cub.

“What about it? Shall we tackle it now?”

Cub glanced at the sky and saw that it was clouding over. “We haven’t a lot of time if we don’t want to get caught out for the night,” he answered. “We’d better go to the pub, first, to see if they can put us up. While we’re having something to eat, we can decide whether we go straight on or wait until tomorrow. The chances are that we shall find Gimlet staying at the pub. If the Lodge hasn’t been used for some time, it’s unlikely that there will be any staff there, and if there’s no staff Gimlet won’t be likely to stay there. It’s almost certain that he’d stay at the inn. Let’s go and ask.”

They walked on to the tavern. As they drew nearer Cub paused again, this time to watch a man who was fly-fishing a pool just above the hotel.

“Looks like you were right, Cub,” observed Copper. “This must be a fishing pub.”

“That’s funny,” murmured Cub, half to himself.

“’Strewth! What’s wrong now?” grunted Copper. “According to you there’s always somethin’ funny about somethin’.”

“There’s something queer about this place, anyway,” said Cub quietly.

“What are you gettin’ at?” demanded Copper.

“To start with, look at that fellow fishing,” invited Cub. “Most people who fish in Scotland, whether they are locals or visitors from the south, are real fishers. That fellow doesn’t know what he’s doing. I’ll swear he’s never fished before. That’s a salmon rod he’s using. He’s fishing a fly straight upstream, and that’s something you just don’t do. Not that he can cast a fly, anyway.”

“Perhaps he don’t know any better?” suggested Copper.

“The man who keeps the pub should know. Why doesn’t he tell him? Another thing that’s queer is that lane we’ve just passed.”

“What about it?”

“The notice about the road being dangerous is new. It has only just been put up. Who would put it there, and why?”

“You tell me,” suggested Copper.

“Obviously, it would only be put there to stop people using it.”

“Who would want to use it?”

Cub shrugged. “I don’t know. But someone *has* used it, and recently.”

Copper raised his eyebrows. “How do you know that?”

“I noticed motor-car tyre tracks in the mud—not one mark, but several.”

“That bloke at the station said there wasn’t no transport on this road,” remarked Copper.

“And since we haven’t met or been overtaken by a single vehicle, it seems that he is right,” replied Cub. “That there are tyre marks on the track leading to the Lodge seems all the more queer. I may be crazy, but there are things about this entire set-up that don’t hang together. Remember, it was somewhere about here that Gimlet disappeared. If he isn’t at this pub or if he doesn’t soon turn up, I shall be more than ever convinced that this place isn’t what it seems. Let’s go to the pub and make some enquiries. Leave the talking to me. I have a feeling that we ought to be careful.”

Entering the hotel, they found themselves in a small hall. A door, standing wide open, gave access to a bar. There were no customers in it, but a middle-aged man in his shirt-sleeves sat behind the bar, reading a newspaper. He glanced up when the newcomers entered and rose to his feet. There was nothing remarkable about the man. In fact, his general appearance was what might have been expected.

Cub came straight to the point. “Can we stay the night here?”

The answer was even more to the point. “No,” was the curt reply.

Cub looked surprised. "Why not?"

"Full up."

"Oh!" said Cub. "In that case, can we have something to eat and drink?"

The man thought for a moment. "I could let you have a bit of bread and cheese," he answered slowly. "And I've got some beer."

"All right. Bread and cheese will do," returned Cub. "I'd rather have a pot of tea than beer." He sat down.

The man nodded and disappeared into the back regions.

Cub looked at the others. "He's lying," he whispered. "He isn't full up. There must be eight bedrooms at least. If this place was full, the hall would be littered with rods, gaffs, fishing-bags, mackintoshes, and all sorts of clobber. I've seen fishing pubs. There wasn't a single hat or coat on the hall-stand. I'll tell you something else. That fellow's name may be McTaggart, but he's no Scot."

The hotel keeper came back with three plates of bread and cheese, to which presently he added cups and saucers and a pot of tea. Having put these on a small table, he retired behind the bar.

"Where are you making for?" he asked in a casual voice.

"Nowhere in particular," answered Cub. "We were hoping to find a man here whom we thought might give us a job."

There was a short, curious silence.

"Oh!" said the man slowly. "What was his name?"

Cub looked up. "Captain King," he said distinctly.

The man, who was wiping down the bar with a rag, stopped short. His head came round so that his eyes met Cub's. "King," he said slowly, as if weighing the word.

"That's right—King," repeated Cub. "Has he, by any chance, been here?"

The man shook his head. "No. No, he hasn't been here."

At this juncture the man who had been fishing came in. He found a seat at the end of the bar and ordered a glass of whisky. With the glass in his hand, he contemplated the travellers thoughtfully.

Cub returned the inspection. The man, a big florid fellow with a heavy fair moustache, wore tweeds; to be precise, the garments commonly called plus-fours. He was, in fact, dressed for the country, but it seemed to Cub that he did not wear his clothes like a countryman. It was hard to say exactly what caused this impression. Perhaps the man was too immaculate to be a genuine fisherman. His plus-fours were cut in an exaggerated fashion. His

tie was too loud. With one thing and another, Cub formed the opinion that this man was pretending to be something that he was not.

The man spoke first. "You boys going far?" he asked carelessly.

"It all depends," answered Cub cautiously.

"Depends on what?"

"How we get on."

"So you're on the loose, eh?"

"More or less."

"Ah-ha." The man sipped his whisky. "Not running away from— anything . . . are you?" he suggested slyly.





“WE’RE MINDING OUR OWN BUSINESS,” REPLIED CUB SOFTLY.

“Why—are you?” returned Cub curtly.

The man’s expression changed. He frowned. “I just wondered what you were doing here, that’s all.”

“We’re minding our own business,” replied Cub softly.

“Quite right. No offence meant.”

Cub went on with his bread and cheese. Presently the man got up and went out. The barman leaned on his bar, apparently reading his newspaper,

but, Cub thought, actually paying more attention to them than the occasion warranted.

Cub broke the silence. "There's a lane turns off to the right, just above the hotel. Where does it lead to?"

"Nowhere," was the half-humorous reply.

"It must have led to somewhere sometime?" suggested Cub. "Else why put a notice up saying the road is dangerous?"

"The road *is* dangerous," answered the man. "There are places where it has almost disappeared. I've never been up it myself, but they say it leads to an old disused tin-mine. Hasn't been worked for years, of course."

"Why of course?"

"Because the metal petered out, I suppose."

Another short silence. The travellers finished their meal.

"Sure you can't fix us up for the night—we aren't particular where we sleep?" said Cub.

The man shook his head. "Sorry. Haven't a corner anywhere."

"In that case we'd better push along," murmured Cub, taking out some money to pay for the meal. A coin fell on the floor and he stooped to pick it up.

The others rose, and with a nod they all left the hotel.

Close outside the front door the fisherman had left his rod—at any rate, a rod stood there, fourteen feet of cane, leaning against the wall. As Cub drew level, he stopped to look at it. He reached out, took the gut cast in his hand and allowed it to run on to the fly, which he examined with interest.

"What's the idea?" enquired Copper sarcastically. "Thinking of tryin' your luck?"

"No," answered Cub, speaking softly. "That cast confirms my opinion that the man using it is no fisher. No fisher ever tied knots like those. If he hooked a fish they'd slip, so whether he knows it or not he's wasting his time. And the fly isn't the sort of lure I'd use on a day like this." Cub parted his lips as if to continue his criticism, but changed his mind, and after a quick glance at the door walked on. Nor did he speak again until they came to a bend in the road, where a shoulder of rock hid the hotel from view. Then he turned to the others. His manner was crisp.

"Copper was right at the beginning," he said tersely. "This place is phoney. Those men are lying—both of them. Gimlet's been to that pub. After walking twelve miles from the station he was bound to call there, if only for a drink. That man calling himself McTaggart is no Scot, and the

fellow pretending to be a fisherman is a fake. It sticks out a mile. We needn't argue about it. Gimlet has been to that pub. I *know* he's been there. If he did nothing else, he sat in that bar and smoked a cigarette."

"How do you know that?" demanded Copper.

Cub held out his right hand, open, palm upwards. "I picked this up from a join in the linoleum," he said quietly.

"A matchstalk," murmured Copper.

"A match torn from a *book* of matches," corrected Cub. "Read the name on it."

Copper looked at some tiny printed words on the side of the minute slip of pasteboard; and as he read them he drew in his breath sharply.

"Ritz Hotel, London," he breathed. He turned slowly to stare at Trapper. "Cub's right," he muttered. "Swelp me!"

### CHAPTER III

## THE RECONNAISSANCE YIELDS RESULTS

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"I THINK we take a hand in this," said Trapper, softly but meaningly, when the full significance of the discovery had been realised.

"That lying swine in the bar," growled Copper. "For two pins I'd go back, cut his feet off at the ankles, sharpen the stumps and hammer him into his own backyard."

"We shan't get anywhere by resorting to violence—at any rate, not at this stage," said Cub. "Let's use our heads. This is how I see it. Gimlet came here. He went to the pub, as he was bound to, if only for a drink and to ask the way. He might never have got beyond it, or he might have gone straight on to the Lodge. He hasn't gone back to the station. Incidentally, talking of the Lodge, you'll notice that the barman didn't say anything about it when I asked him where that track led to. He said it went to an old mine—which may, of course, be true. But why didn't he mention the Lodge, which is a more important building than an abandoned mine? He must have had a reason for not mentioning it. That boy I spoke to said the Lodge was up there; he's a local kid and I bet he was telling the truth. It all smells fishy to me. I feel it in my bones that these people are in some way mixed up with Gimlet and the Lodge. How, I can't imagine. But there it is. It was obvious that he didn't want us hanging around here. What are they up to? They can't

be highway robbers—that sort of thing is past and done with, even in remote Scotland, where I believe it was once a profitable line of business.”

Copper struck his thigh a violent blow. He became suddenly excited. “Holy winkles!” he cried. “I’ve got it.”

The others looked at him in astonishment.

“Now what have you got?” enquired Cub.

“That barman,” said Copper fiercely. “When I first went in and clapped eyes on him, I said to myself, I’ve seen that chivvy before. In the Force we’re trained to remember faces, you know. It’s over five years since I was a London bobby, but I ain’t forgot. All the time I was inside I kept wondering where I’d seen ’im before, but I couldn’t remember. Now I’ve got ’im.” Copper leaned forward and went on in a hoarse whisper. “Do you remember just before the war there was a scare about two criminals who got away from Dartmoor? Both were in for a long stretch. Forsyth and Burke were their names. It all comes back to me now. When they were on the run Forsyth shot a policeman. With half the country lookin’ for ’em, they managed to get to Scotland and find a hide-out somewhere in these parts—in an old ruined croft right off the map. But as it happened, two keepers see smoke comin’ out of the chimney and went to find out what was goin’ on. Forsyth and Burke must ’ave seen ’em comin’. They opened up on ’em. One of the keepers was hit. He died later. The other went ter fetch ’elp, but by the time he’d got it, the crooks were away again. They took ter the hills—there was nowhere else. But the game was up. Forsyth was run down and shot dead by a policeman—near Aberdeen, I think it was. But Burke got away, and as far as I know ’e was never rounded up. The war came along and the story sort of faded out, but during my last few months in the Force I see Burke’s photo every day, on the divisional notice-board, amongst the wanteds. That man inside the pub is an older-lookin’ fellow than Burke—but then ’e would be, after six years. He’s grown a moustache, too, but I’ll take my davy that’s ’im. I’ll let the Yard know about this.”

“Just a minute,” put in Cub, who had listened to this recital with wonder on his face. “Not so fast. This handing over of a wanted man, if it *is* Burke, may be all right; but we came here to find Gimlet. Calling in the police at this stage will throw the wrench into the gears. There will be a general rumpus and Gimlet may disappear for good.”

“True enough,” agreed Copper with some reluctance.

“We can afford to bide our time,” Cub pointed out. “Burke, who must have changed his name to McTaggart, doesn’t suspect that we’ve spotted

him. He'll hang on here. I think it will pay us better to play fox for a bit before calling in the police."

Trapper nodded. "*Zut!* I think so. What shall we do, then?"

"Personally, for a start, I'm in favour of exploring that road that leads to the Lodge," advised Cub. "We might have a look at the Lodge itself, in the hope of locating Gimlet or picking up the trail. The weather is still fair. We've got rations, and we can sleep rough if necessary. We've done it before often enough."

"Burke's an old lag," muttered Copper. "Once a crook always a crook. If he's 'ere, then there's a racket of some sort goin' on—you can bet yer life on that."

"Gimlet must have blundered into it," opined Cub. "Let's try the Lodge. It won't do to be seen going up that lane, but if we cut round the back of the hill behind us and then swing to the right, we ought to strike the track well up the glen, out of sight of the pub."

"Okay," agreed Copper. "Let's march. I'm aching fer action now I know what's what, but we ain't got too much time if we're goin' ter give the Lodge the once-over before it gets dark."

Without further parley they set off, following the course of a burn that babbled round the foot of a hill, which they kept between them and the tavern. This brought them to a growth of stunted birches, and using these for cover they swung round behind the hotel and struck the track some distance above it. In order to reach the track, however, they had to wade the river, which, it was now revealed, followed the same course as the rough, stony road. Or it might be more correct to say that the track ran through the same deep glen as the river. There was no difficulty in fording the river at some broad shallows. Presently it was possible to see that the water, in its headlong rush from the hills, had cut a deep gorge into the earth. There were places where the sides of this gorge were sheer cliff, glistening with dripping peat-water that drained out of the hill above; there were also places where the banks, less sheer, were clad in dense stands of spruce, larch, and fir, with the result that the scene presented was wild in the extreme. And as the party proceeded, the picture, instead of softening, became ever more harsh and forbidding. The cliffs towered for three hundred feet or more, so that the river at the bottom appeared to be no more than a brook; the noise of its turbulent progress was always audible.

"Strike a light!" exclaimed Copper once, keeping well away from the lip of the chasm at a point where a landslide had carried half the track away

with it. "No wonder they said the road was dangerous. I'd be sorry to bring a jeep along here on a dark night—my oath, I would."

"All the same," Cub pointed out quietly, "cars do come up here. You can see the tyre marks. Look here." He pointed at some soft ground caused by water oozing out of the heather across the track. Such places were common. No effort was required to see the wheel tracks, for the imprint of the tread of the tyres was plain enough. "The people who use this road must know it pretty well," went on Cub. "There are places where there are not more than six inches to spare between the bank and the edge of the cliff. Even knowing the road one would have to drive slowly and carefully."

"You're telling me," muttered Trapper. "*Ma foi!* This reminds me more and more of the foothills of the Rockies." He frowned suddenly, his eyes still on the ground. "But nobody said anything about a farm up here," he murmured.

"Farm? What about a farm?" enquired Copper.

Trapper stooped and picked up three or four grains of corn, which on closer examination turned out to be barley. It was quite clean and fresh, because—as Trapper pointed out—it had not been pressed into the mud. It lay on top and had obviously been dropped quite recently. "Barley to me means a farm," he asserted. "Threshed barley would hardly be coming *up* this track. It must have been on its way to the main road—which means, I think, that there must be a farm up here, some place. Not only a farm but land good enough to grow corn."

"You ought ter be a blinkin' detective," averred Copper. "Suppose there is a farm. What about it?"

Trapper shrugged. "Nothing. I do not know Scotland, but there seems something wrong about this. The moor does not look to me like arable land. And if there is a farm, why were we not told of it? Why didn't the boy mention it?" He studied the road again and the surrounding country. "This does not look to me like a farm track. What sort of farmer would let his road get in such a state?"

"When we see him, you can ask him," suggested Copper with mild sarcasm.

They went on, scanning the track ahead for the first glimpse of the Lodge. For a time, as the light slowly began to fade, they saw nothing—nothing, that is, except the wild creatures that had found safe sanctuary in the remote glen. Foxes, stoats, mountain hares, and rabbits were common. Once, rounding a bend, a golden eagle that had been standing on the edge of the precipice launched itself into space on majestic wings; on another

occasion a roe-deer bounded away into the cover of a wood. Trapper watched it go with reflective eyes, and a little later, with his jack-knife in his hand, disappeared into a copse, to return with a stout ash wand some two and a half feet long. This, as he walked, he proceeded to trim. From time to time he made other sorties, and returned with smaller sticks, always straight ones.

The others knew what he was doing, for in the past they had had ample opportunity of observing his masterly skill with the primitive weapon known as a bow and arrow.

“What’s the idea?” enquired Copper, after a wink at Cub.

“I could live in this country without money,” said Trapper simply. “I have lived for weeks in territory where there is less game. Our rations will not last long—unless we add to them a little fresh meat, or perhaps fish.”

“That would be poaching,” warned Cub.

“This is Gimlet’s property,” returned Trapper. “If he is not available for us to ask his permission to hunt, we shall have to hunt without his permission. But he will not mind. He would not have old comrades starve to death. Besides, what is a rabbit, more or less?” He went on trimming his stick. “I wish I had brought my bow. But how should I know I might need it? Still, I always have arrow-heads and feathers in my kit. Tch! You will see.”

A few minutes later he stopped, picked up another grain of barley, and after a glance at it tossed it aside. “Someone has been this way lately,” he announced. “Barley does not travel by itself.”

“Why lately?” asked Cub.

“Because corn would not lie for long on this track without a bird finding it,” answered Trapper.

“So what?” queried Cub. “Barley is a common enough crop in Scotland.”

“Still, I don’t see any farm,” murmured Trapper, walking on.

Twilight was softening the harshness of the scene when, turning a corner, Copper uttered an exclamation and pointed up one of the mysterious little side glens which had at frequent intervals invited attention and speculation as to where they ended. Standing in this particular glen, which, treeless, was as bleak as anything that could be imagined, bounded by dark hills that bore many scars, was a fairly extensive stone building, grey, dilapidated, as cheerless and forlorn as an abandoned prison. There were no windows. An arched entrance, gaping like a mouth that would not shut, gave

access to it. The merest outline of an overgrown track, leading to this entrance, could just be discerned.

“Swelp me!” muttered Copper. “That ain’t a house. What can it be, stuck away up there?”

“It certainly isn’t a farm. I’d say it’s the tin-mine Burke spoke about,” guessed Cub.

“Then he wasn’t lying about that.”

“Apparently not. The place, whatever it is, is deserted.”

Copper surveyed the building, which stood at a distance of perhaps a quarter of a mile. “My gosh!” he breathed. “I never saw a drearier-lookin’ place than that. What a spot fer a murder. Fair gives yer the shivers ter look at it, don’t it?”

“It certainly does,” agreed Cub, who was examining the ground closely. “The wheel tracks don’t go up to the mine—they go straight on. Wait! Yes, they do, by Jove! That’s queer. What do you make of that? Most of the tracks go straight on, which means, I imagine, that the Lodge is still somewhere ahead; but there are two sets of tracks leading to the mine—or maybe it’s one up and one down. Anyway, somebody has been up here, and lately, too. You can see where the wheels have cut into the moss.”

Copper still stood staring at the building. “This beats cockfighting,” he remarked. “I wonder . . . ?”

“You wonder what?” queried Cub.

“What fools we should look if we was makin’ a mystery outer nuthin’—if Gimlet suddenly came strollin’ round the corner and said, Come on, boys, you’re just in time fer supper.” He turned a knowing eye on Cub. “It’s easy ter let yer imagination run away with yer. I’ve ’ad this sort of thing before, when I was in the Force. There’s always somethin’ creepy about an empty house.”

“So far as this one is concerned, we can settle any argument in ten minutes,” replied Cub. “Let’s have a look at the place. What have we to be afraid of, anyway? If there’s nothing here, well, we’ll just carry on to the Lodge.”

“Okay,” agreed Copper.

The party turned off the track and headed direct for the building.

“Don’t you think we ought to be a bit more careful how we approach?” suggested Cub.

“No,” answered Copper shortly. “We ain’t in France now. I’ve done with soldiering.” He tapped his pocket. “If anyone wants ter start an argument



with us, why, 'e can 'ave it—my oath, he can, after us paddin' the hoof all this way. Am I right, Trapper?"

"Sure you're right, pal," agreed Trapper.

They went on, their feet making no noise in the lush moss. The only sounds were the murmur of an unseen burn and the resentful cackling of grouse deep in the heather. The building did not improve on closer acquaintance; it remained as silent, as cold, as cheerless, as dead as the boulders that lay around it.

Copper made straight for the entrance. At a distance of ten yards he stopped to make another scrutiny of the pile. "What a 'ole," he muttered. "Blimey! What a 'ole." He strode on through the entrance, which now took the form of a short tunnel giving access to a central courtyard of some size. The others followed closely, their footsteps echoing with a hollow sound as they passed through the tunnel into the yard, which was bounded on three sides by long, low buildings now in the last stages of dilapidation. The walls, built of local stone, were more or less intact, but the roofs had collapsed, or had been blown down, exposing the broken wooden skeletons of the roof-trees. A doorway, with its door hanging drunkenly on one hinge, invited exploration. Copper went through and into the building. It was empty. There were signs of oil stains on the earth floor as if the place had once housed machinery, but if so the machines had been taken away. The scars on the hillside beyond were now obvious excavations, presumably where ore had been mined. Some took the form of short caves driven into the hillside.

The centre of the courtyard was occupied by a conspicuous feature—a rough wooden structure with a roof, now awry, that had once covered a windlass of some size, so that the whole thing had the appearance of a large well. A rusty steel cable, broken off short, hung from the wheel over a vertical shaft, and this, Cub surmised, was the original mine. He walked up to it and looked down. This at first was no more than idle curiosity, for he was satisfied that the place was, in fact, an abandoned mine of some sort. But then, as he stood there, he saw something else, something that raised his casual curiosity to a spirit of definite enquiry. The earth round the edge of the shaft was soft. In it, clearly imprinted, was the mark of a heavy nailed boot. The astonishment of Robinson Crusoe on first observing the footprint on the beach of his desert island no greater than that of Cub when his eyes fell on this significant sign of human activity. The boot print was on the very edge of the mine and pointing towards it. It could only mean one thing.

Advancing a pace and taking his pocket torch in his hand. Cub turned the beam down the shaft, in order, if possible, to ascertain the depth of it—a

natural enough thing to do. The shaft turned out to be more shallow, much more shallow, than he expected. He judged it to be about twenty feet deep. His curiosity satisfied, he was about to turn away when an object at the bottom caught his eye. He looked again. He stared, stared hard, while a sensation like pins-and-needles crept down his spine.

“Copper,” he called in a queer strangled voice, “come here.”

Copper came, increasing his pace when he saw the expression on Cub’s face. “What is it?” he asked quickly.

Cub passed the torch with a hand that was no longer steady. “Look down that shaft,” he requested. “I thought I could see—something. Can you—or am I imagining things?”

Copper looked down the shaft. He stiffened. Then, lying flat and extending his arm to full length, he looked again. Suddenly he scrambled to his feet. His face had lost its colour. “You ain’t seein’ things, mate,” he said tersely. “There’s a corpse down there. Some poor blighter must ’ave fallen in . . . or else . . .”

For several seconds they stared at each other in mute horror.

“What—what are we going to do about it?” asked Cub through dry lips.

“We’ve got ter get ’im up,” declared Copper. “We can’t leave ’im there. This looks like bein’ a police job, after all—my oath, and not ’alf.”

“How are we going to get him up?”



“EASY DOES IT,” SAID TRAPPER. “HOLD TIGHT!”

“There’s only one way,” asserted Copper. “One of us will ’ave ter go down. I’ll go.” He ripped off his coat.

“It’s a long drop,” warned Cub.

“Gimme your belt,” ordered Copper. “And yours, Trapper. Now the slings off the ’aversacks—that ought ter just about do it.”

With hands deft from long Commando training Copper buckled the three belts together, and to the end buckle linked the haversack slings, so that he soon had a rope about eighteen feet long. One end he took in his big hands with a firm grip. "Let me down slowly," he commanded. "I don't want ter land on top of the poor cove. When I sing out okay, haul away. Stand fast." With the rope in his hands and the others hanging on, Copper disappeared over the edge of the shaft. Slowly the improvised rope ran out. There was a short delay. Then a voice came up from the depths. "Okay—haul away!"

Trapper and Cub, with their feet braced against a rough brick coping, not without effort, hauled up a heavy weight.

"Easy does it," said Trapper, through his teeth, as a limp body came into view. "Hold tight!" Releasing his grip on the rope, he reached out and caught the body by the jacket in the small of the back.

The entire body came into view, to flop like a sack on the dank earth. It rolled a little and lay face downward. Without speaking, Trapper turned the body over so that the face was exposed. His breath hissed through his teeth.

"My God!" cried Cub in a choking voice. "It's Gimlet!"

"Let's get Copper up," said Trapper through tight lips.

## CHAPTER IV

### ACTIVITY IN THE GLEN

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A MOMENT of wild, almost frenzied energy, and Copper, pale-faced, grimed with mud, came scrambling over the edge of the shaft. He went straight to Gimlet, muttering, "How is he?"

"Isn't he dead?" cried Cub, who had taken this for granted.

"He wasn't a minute ago," answered Copper. "His heart was beating—I felt it. I don't fancy he's been down that hole for very long. He's in a mess, though."

This last remark needed no qualification. Gimlet's face was ashen. There was a bruise on the side of his face and a line of congealed blood from his forehead to his chin. His hair was matted with blood, or mud, or both. His clothes, a grey lounge suit, were caked with mire. A quick examination disclosed no other wounds; nor, as far as could be ascertained, were any bones broken. Cub soaked his handkerchief in a nearby pool and bathed the pallid face.

“What are we going to do with him?” he asked hoarsely.

“Yeah, what?” queried Trapper.

“We ought ter get ’im to a hospital, or a doctor, right away,” declared Copper.

“We’ve got to be careful,” put in Cub quickly. “Don’t let’s kid ourselves. Gimlet didn’t *fall* into that hole. Left alone, he’d never have come this way. He was brought here and thrown in. And if he was thrown in, those people at the pub had a hand in it. Who else could it have been? The pub is the only house for miles, yet obviously we can’t go there. We can’t even get on the road without them seeing us. We shall have to think of something, but that’s no use. We must get him somewhere safe until he recovers consciousness and is able to tell us what all this is about.”

“How about one of the crofts we passed on the road?” suggested Copper.

“The nearest one must be close on four miles from here; that’s too far. Besides, news travels like radio in these rural districts. The people at the hotel would soon get to hear of a wounded man being carried off the moor.”

“Then where can we take him?” Copper looked helplessly round the darkening landscape as if seeking inspiration from it.

“He’ll have to stay here—I mean, in there,” growled Trapper, nodding towards the main building.

“I think that’s the only answer,” agreed Cub. “We can’t carry him fifteen miles to the station, that’s certain. This seems to be the only place, but it’s dangerous.”

“Dangerous? How?” demanded Copper.

“In the first place, we shall have to light a fire if we don’t want Gimlet to die from exposure, and a fire would be seen by anyone on the track—and we’ve got a good idea of who’s using the track,” asserted Cub. “In any case, the skunk who hit Gimlet on the head may come back to see if he’s still alive.”

“Ho! That suits me fine,” grated Copper. “’E’ll find something ’e don’t expect if ’e comes back ’ere, my oath ’e will.”

“Let’s take him in and see what we can do for him,” said Trapper. “I go farther up the glen to see if I can find a better place. *Alors*, it may be there is a cave, or a ruined croft, or something.”

They carried Gimlet, who still showed no signs of recovering consciousness, into the building, and, making a bed of raincoats and jackets on the hard earth floor, got him as comfortable as the circumstances permitted. Cub tried chafing his hands, but without effect. Trapper went off.

Copper went over Gimlet again and discovered a small mat of bloodstained hair on the back of his head. Cub resoaked his handkerchief and cleansed the wound.

“It’s clear enough what happened,” said Copper viciously. “Some skunk lambasted ’im on the back of the skull and knocked ’im out. Gimlet couldn’t ’ave bin expecting it or the bloke who did it wouldn’t ’ave got away with it so easy. Then ’e was dropped down the shaft. Lucky no bones are broke. If that crack on the nut ’as fractured ’is skull, this is goin’ ter be a long job; but it may only be concussion.”

“A question is, how long has he been down that hole?” queried Cub.

“Not very long, I’d say, otherwise ’e would be stiff by now,” answered Copper pensively. “Look at it this way. ’E travelled ter Scotland, as we know, on Monday, arriving Tuesday. Let’s say ’e got ter the pub durin’ the afternoon, the same as we did. Today’s Friday. Call it three days ’e’s been ’ere. I reckon ’e couldn’t ’ave been lyin’ down that hole longer than yesterday. What could ’e ’ave been up to on Wednesday? No wonder ’e didn’t turn up fer the party.”

“We aren’t likely to know any more until he wakes up and tells us,” rejoined Cub moodily. “We’d better risk lighting a fire to keep him warm.”

Copper felt in Gimlet’s breast pocket, half took out a wallet and allowed it to slide back. “Robbery wasn’t the motive, anyway,” he observed.

At this juncture Trapper hurried in with good news. He had, he said, found a hut higher up the glen. It was round the corner, out of sight of the mine and the road. It was just a plain stone building, but there was, among other things, a stove. The door had been locked, but he had forced it open.

“That will be a deerstalker’s hut, I expect,” remarked Cub. “They put them about the moors in case the hunters get benighted or caught in bad weather. Let’s get him along.”

With the raincoats arranged as a sling, Gimlet, still unconscious, was transported to the new quarters, with which Copper and Cub expressed themselves well satisfied. They had good reason to be satisfied, for nothing they could have hoped for would have better suited their purpose. There was a stove, a table, and two forms for seating. Even more important, there was a charred, battered kettle, an old iron saucepan, a frying-pan, a teapot, and two cups. Two small tins were found to contain a small quantity of tea and sugar. There was a bottle of salt and a supply of dry sticks for firewood.

“Blinkin’ marvellous,” declared Copper. “Someone must ’ave known we was comin’. I’ll soon ’ave a fire goin’. Fill the kettle, Cub; we’ll see what some ’ot water will do. What are you up to, Trapper?”

Trapper was finishing an arrow with feathers and a barb which he had taken from his haversack. "I think perhaps a little fresh meat, for soup, would be *bon*," he answered.

"Okay," agreed Copper. "Let's see what we've got in the grub line ourselves."

Now, when they had packed their haversacks each had provided himself with the type of "iron" rations most suited to his taste. Inroads had been made into these during the long train journey to Scotland, but, nevertheless, the bags yielded a fair assortment of foods—an assortment which would have been a guide to the nationality of the selector. Copper produced some bread (very stale) and cheese. From a greasy newspaper he turned out some chipped potatoes, the fish counterpart of which he had already consumed. He also had an onion. Trapper's contribution was a sausage, a tin of meat-paste, some biscuits, a tin of sweetened condensed milk, and coffee essence. Cub, rather shamefaced, could only provide a rather battered lump of cake and three bars of plain chocolate. The accumulated result was, as Copper remarked, nothing to shout about, but it was better than nothing. Trapper departed to augment the larder, and the others turned their attention to Gimlet, who was now moaning feebly.

"That's a good sign," stated Copper. "I reckon 'e won't be long now comin' round."

Actually it was two hours before Copper's sanguine prophecy was fulfilled. Trapper had long ago returned, carrying what Cub took to be a small leg of mutton, but which turned out to be a tiny haunch of venison. The carcass of the roe-deer that had provided this was hanging outside, Trapper informed them.

Cub perceived that in the circumstances in which they found themselves, Trapper's long experience as a hunter was likely to be put to good practical use. "At last you're living up to your name," he remarked, smiling.

"We do not starve, I think," returned Trapper complacently. "What Gimlet will need when he comes round is soup, hot soup." He went out with the saucepan for water from a nearby burn.

Later, Gimlet, who for some time had been stirring uneasily, opened his eyes. At first there was no recognition in them, although this may have been due to the absence of light, for the only illumination was the glow of the fire through the open flap at the bottom of the stove. Without using Cub's torch, the battery of which would soon have been exhausted had it been kept on all the time, there was no way of improving this.

Copper knelt beside Gimlet. "How are yer feelin', sir?" he asked gently.

Gimlet started. He tried to sit up, but sank back. In his eyes dawned the light of full consciousness. “Am I dreaming, or is it Copper?” he said in a weak voice.

“We’re all ’ere, sir. You’re okay now,” answered Copper.

Gimlet’s eyes went round the party. “Hello, Cub. Hello, Trapper.” Then, after a pause, “Where are we?”

Cub answered. “In Scotland, sir. Somewhere near Strathcarglas Lodge.”

“How in the name of all that’s miraculous did you get here?”

“Oh, we just followed you up, sir,” announced Copper breezily. “When you didn’t turn up fer the party, we knew somethin’ was wrong. Old soldiers ain’t absent from parade without good reason.”

“I’m sorry about the party,” said Gimlet, trying to raise himself.

Copper propped him up, using the haversacks as a backrest. “What happened to you, sir?”

Gimlet wrinkled his forehead in an effort to think. “I’m trying to remember. Where did you find me?”

“At the bottom of an old mine.”

“Good God!” Gimlet looked startled and amazed. “And where are we now? Whose house is this?”

“’Tain’t a house, sir. It’s a hut near the mine. Take it easy, sir. Presently you can tell us all about it.” To Trapper he said. “Get some soup in a cup.” Then, turning back to Gimlet, “How do you feel, sir?”

“Not too bad,” returned Gimlet, putting a hand to his forehead. “My head’s opening and shutting.”

“I don’t wonder at that,” replied Copper. “Someone pasted you on the back of the skull.”

“So that was it,” murmured Gimlet.

Trapper dropped on one knee and handed a cup of soup to Gimlet, who sipped it. There was a short silence until he had finished. “That’s better,” he declared. “Give me a cigarette, someone. You’ll find a case in my jacket pocket.”

The cigarette was soon got going. Gimlet took a few draws.

“What’s this all about, sir?” asked Copper.

Gimlet exhaled smoke. “I haven’t the remotest idea,” he surprised everyone by saying.

“You mean—you don’t know?” returned Copper incredulously.



“I have no more idea than you have,” said Gimlet weakly. “I’ll tell you all I know—it won’t take long. I came to Scotland on Monday to look over some property that was left to me while I was away at the war. It was my intention to return for the party. I thought I had plenty of time. I got here on Tuesday, and walked along the road to the hotel.”

“The Strathcarglas Arms,” murmured Cub.

“That’s right. I went in for a drink, to ask the way and to see if they could put me up for the night.”

“Who was there?” asked Copper.

“There were two men—one man behind the bar, and another fellow, a fisherman, I think.”

Copper nodded. “Go on, sir.”

“I don’t believe in telling everyone my business, so I didn’t say much,” resumed Gimlet. “Without mentioning my name, I said I was interested in a grouse moor and thought of looking over the Glencarglas property; whereupon the barman said he would be glad to run me up to the Lodge in his car—an offer which, naturally, I was glad to accept. The chap went on to say that, as it was getting late and the road was in a dangerous state, it would be better if we went in the morning. He said that, after seeing the Lodge, he would run me back to Tomnarrow station in time to catch the London train. This sounded a very reasonable suggestion and I agreed. I stayed the night at the hotel. That’s really all there was to it. In the morning we set off. The fisherman chap said he would come with us for the ride. He had never seen the Lodge, he said, or the country behind the hotel.”

“The lying hound,” muttered Copper.

“So he came,” continued Gimlet. “I sat in front with McTaggart; the fisherman chap—I think he said his name was Smith—sat behind. We seemed to go for some distance. I remember admiring the landscape . . . and . . .” Gimlet puckered his forehead. “I can’t remember anything after that.”

“Ah,” breathed Copper. “That’s because the fellow in the back seat bashed you on the head.”

Gimlet thought for a moment. “I suppose that was it. I remember going up the road well enough, but from then on my mind is a complete blank.”

“I can tell you what happened after that,” said Copper. “They took you up to the mine and chucked you down the black hole of Calcutta.”

“But why?”

“That’s what we’ve got to find out and, if I know anything about it, we shan’t be long,” asserted Copper. He went on to give an account of their own

adventures, concluding with his suspicions of the man Burke, alias McTaggart.

“If you are right about this, it puts the affair on a different, not to say serious, footing,” remarked Gimlet.

There was silence for a little while. The firelight cast a crimson glow across the floor, and the homely smell of burning wood filled the hut. Gimlet drank another cup of soup and declared that it had put new strength into him. He smiled when he was told what formed the base of it—the venison that Trapper had procured. After a while he sat up. He admitted that he felt a bit shaky, but nothing worse than that. “What’s the time?” he enquired.

Cub looked at his watch. “Ten o’clock.”

“I suppose we’d better stay the night here,” decided Gimlet.

“That’s the idea, sir—there’s nowhere else,” said Copper.

“Are you fellows in a hurry to get back to London?” questioned Gimlet.

“No, sir. Our time’s yours as long as you want it,” replied Copper.

“In that case, we’d better work out some kind of plan—I mean, how we are going to start sorting this business out,” suggested Gimlet.

“I think it would be better if we left that until the morning, sir,” advised Cub. “No doubt you will be feeling more yourself then.”

“Perhaps you’re right,” agreed Gimlet. “There isn’t much we can do tonight, anyway.”

“I’ll bring in some heather and make some beds,” offered the practical Trapper.

It did not take long to make the hut snug for the night. The fire was allowed to die, and everyone settled down for the night.

Whether Cub actually went to sleep or not he could not afterwards remember; nor had he any idea of how long the hut had been silent; but he was suddenly aware that Copper, who lay next to him, was listening. He had raised himself slightly and his breathing was suspended.

Trapper must have heard something, too, for after a few seconds he whispered, “It’s a car.”

By this time Cub could hear it—the purr of a car running in low gear. The sound was some distance away, but there was no mistaking it.

Gimlet did not speak. His easy and regular breathing suggested that he was asleep.

“Let’s see what goes on,” said Copper softly, getting up.

Cub rose, too. They went outside, closing the door quietly behind them. It was at once possible to locate the sound of the engine. The vehicle was on the road leading to the Lodge, not far from the point where they had left it to reach the mine.

Without a word Trapper set off at a dog-trot, the others following. The night was clear, with bright starlight, although the moon had not yet risen, so it did not take them long to reach the mine. They reached it just in time to see what appeared to be a large touring car pass across the bottom of the glen. It was travelling towards the main road—that is, the road on which the hotel was situated, so it had obviously come from higher up the glen, from a district which the comrades had not yet explored. The car carried no lights. In spite of the state of the road, it was travelling fairly fast. It went on. The sound of its engine faded and eventually merged into the silence.

“No use chasing it,” said Copper.

“That fellow must know the road well to travel on it at night without lights,” remarked Trapper.

“Why no lights, anyway?” put in Cub. “There’s no law against headlamps, and they would certainly make driving easier. That in itself is fishy.”

“You’ve said it,” asserted Trapper. “That driver doesn’t want to be seen, and in country like this, where there are no lights, headlamps would look like lighthouses. They would soon be spotted by somebody, and, having nothing else to talk about, the locals would soon start wondering about them.”

“That car must have been up to the Lodge,” conjectured Cub.

“Looks like it,” agreed Copper. “It was a big car, too.” He turned back up the glen. “This gives us something else to think about,” he remarked pensively.

Gimlet was awake when they got back to the hut. “Where have you fellows been?” he demanded.

Cub told him about the car.



“WHERE HAVE YOU FELLOWS BEEN?” DEMANDED GIMLET.

“Looks as if somebody is using my Lodge without permission,” said Gimlet thoughtfully.

“Is there anybody there, as far as you know?” questioned Copper.

“Not a soul,” replied Gimlet. “The place is fully furnished, but it has been shut up since the first year of the war. There was a caretaker, of course, but he died some time ago and, owing to the war, he couldn’t be replaced. There’s no one there now.”

“That, I should say, is where you’re wrong,” observed Copper. “What say you, Trapper? Am I right?”

“Tch! Every time,” responded Trapper.

“Well, there’s nothing we can do about it tonight, so let’s get in all the sleep we can,” advised Gimlet.

The party settled down. Silence fell, this time a silence that was to remain unbroken until dawn.

## CHAPTER V

### CUB GOES ALONE

---

TRAPPER was the first to wake. No one saw or heard him get up and creep quietly out of the hut. He announced his return, however.

“Come on, you guys, show a leg,” he requested. “*Enfin!* Daylight’s running to waste.”

Cub, opening his eyes, saw him standing in the open doorway, bow in one hand and a string of four gleaming speckled trout in the other.

“Here’s breakfast,” said Trapper, tossing his catch on the table.

Cub pulled on his shoes, got up, and, going to the door, inhaled the crisp morning air with satisfaction. Day was dawning and the sky was pink with the glow of it. A slight frost had spread a gossamer film over the heather. The atmosphere sparkled. The babble of a nearby burn took on a joyous note. Birds were astir. A mountain hare, probably disturbed by Trapper, lolloped to a distant ridge, where it turned to watch the invaders, its long ears twitching like semaphores.

Gimlet was still sleeping comfortably. His breathing was easy and regular.

“We shall need some more wood for the fire, Cub,” announced Copper. “There’s plenty down at the old mine—those rotten roof battens will do a treat.”

“I’ll fetch some as soon as I’ve had a wash,” promised Cub. Taking soap and towel from his haversack, he walked over to the burn, where Trapper was already shaving in the crystal water, and made a quick toilet. This done, he set off down the glen on his errand.

Perhaps it was the clean fresh air that exercised his mind and put a spring into his stride; it may have been that his brain, refreshed by sleep, was working more smoothly than on the previous evening. Anyway, as he walked he found himself considering the mystery of Gimlet's misadventure from a new aspect. In describing what had happened, Gimlet had implied, if he had not actually stated, that he did not mention his name at the hotel. He had not divulged that he was the new owner of Strathcarglas. He had merely asked the way to the Lodge. Yet, judging from what had happened afterwards, it seemed probable that Burke and his fishing friend knew who he was. At least, it did not seem feasible that they would murder a casual wayfarer. The more Cub pondered over this, the more he became convinced that the people at the hotel knew Gimlet for whom he was. Indeed, it was practically proved by the fact that when, on the occasion of their visit, he had mentioned Captain King, the publican had stated definitely that he had not seen him. Had he not known Captain King, the natural question he would have asked was, Who is Captain King? Yes, decided Cub, the people at the hotel had known who Gimlet was when he arrived. Apparently they were not surprised to see him. It looked as if they had been prepared for his arrival. But how did they know he was coming? Who could have told them? Was there, somewhere, a spy . . . a confederate who . . . ? Cub remembered the butler at Lorrington Hall. The fellow had lied to them when he had said that he did not know where his master was. Why should he lie? He must have had a reason. Was it because . . . ?

Cub was jerked from his reverie by a shock so rude that these vague suspicions were erased from his mind in an instant of time. Curiously, perhaps, as he had rounded the bend that brought the old mine into view, no thought of danger was in his mind. He supposed—without justification, as he afterwards realised—that he was alone in the glen. His surprise, therefore, was in the nature of a shock when, rounding the bend, he saw a man beyond the mine running towards the road. Cub assumed, naturally, that the man had seen him, and was running away in order to escape observation; and his first reaction was to give chase, even if only to get a better sight of the man, who, he felt sure, he had never seen before. He was dressed in a dark lounge suit of town cut, so it was certainly neither of the men he had seen at the hotel. Of that he was sure. Hurrying on towards the mine he could see, through the archway in the main building, a car standing on the road. Realising that he had no chance of overtaking the man, Cub stopped. It also occurred to him that he might be ill advised to show himself. And it was as well that he did stop. For hardly had he come to a standstill when a violent explosion somewhere near at hand hurled him into the heather.

Slightly stunned, wondering what could have happened, he raised himself on an elbow just in time to see the car disappear beyond the hill on the right-hand side of the glen—that is, in what he supposed to be the direction of the Lodge.

Cub's first impression was that he had stepped on a land mine, or a booby trap, set by the man who had run away. This opinion did not last long, however; for, looking round, he saw something that more or less explained what had happened. A cloud of smoke was drifting up from the mine shaft—or where the shaft had been, for the hole was no longer there. The sides had caved in and the superstructure had been blown down.

It did not take Cub long to grasp the fairly obvious truth of the affair. The man had thrown a bomb or had fired an explosive charge in the mine, to destroy for ever all trace of what lay—or what he supposed lay—at the bottom of it. Gimlet's body. Had Gimlet not been found murder would have been committed and all trace of the crime wiped out. Gimlet's bones would have lain deep in the earth, beyond possibility of discovery, till the end of time. Cub went cold as this gruesome yet undeniable fact penetrated his racing brain. Shaken, he was picking himself up when Copper and Trapper came pelting round the corner.

“What was that—who did it?” demanded Copper fiercely, looking round, gun in hand.

Cub pointed to the remains of the mine. “Take a look at that,” he invited. “A fellow bombed it—to bury Gimlet, I imagine. At least, I can't think of any other reason.”

“Did you see him?”

“Yes. He had a car on the road. I was just in time to see him running towards it.”

“Did he see you?”

Cub hesitated. “I don't think so. At first I thought he was running because he had seen me, but his back was towards me when I came round the corner, and I don't remember him looking round. Thinking it over, it seems more likely that he was running away from the explosion which he knew was coming.”

“Who was he?”

Cub shook his head. “I don't know. I've never seen him before.”

“It wasn't one of the fellows at the pub?”

“No—I'm sure of that.”

“Then there are three of them in it, at least,” declared Copper. He took another look round. “Well, it’s no use hanging about here. Let’s get back. We might as well take some firewood.”

Loaded with fuel, they returned to the hut.

Gimlet was anxiously awaiting their return. Cub described what had happened.

“Good thing you fellows came along when you did, or you’d have been a long time finding me,” remarked Gimlet drily. “I’m much obliged to you.”

“Don’t mention it, sir,” replied Copper, grinning.

Cub stepped into the conversation. To Gimlet he said, “May I have a word with you, sir?”

“Go ahead,” invited Gimlet. “What is it?”

“It’s about your butler at Lorrington Hall.”

Gimlet’s eyebrows went up. “What on earth has he to do with this?”

“I don’t know, but I have an idea he might be in it,” answered Cub. “Did he know you were going to Scotland?”

“Of course. He has to know my movements in order to run the house.”

“He told us he didn’t know where you were,” stated Cub. “But we’ll let that pass. Did I understand you properly when last night you said you did not tell the hotel people who you were? You said, if I remember rightly, that you didn’t believe in telling people your business?”

“That’s right.”

“You didn’t mention your name?”

“I did not.”

“But they knew who you were.”

“Did they? What makes you think that?”

“In the first place, you are not going to tell me that people sit beside a public highway and murder passing strangers. Secondly, when I asked if they had seen you, they said no. If Burke hadn’t known who you were he would not have said that. He would have said, Who is Captain King? or something of that sort. I’m convinced that not only did they know who you were, but they knew you were coming. Everything points to it. The reason they decided to murder you was because they knew you were the new owner of Strathcarglas. Very well. If they knew you were coming, how did they know? Obviously, someone must have tipped them off. It must have been someone at Lorrington Hall. We know that Haynes, your butler, is a liar, so suspicion is bound to fall on him.”



“There was no reason why he should tell you, a stranger, where I was,” Gimlet pointed out.

“Perhaps not, but he needn’t have lied about it,” persisted Cub. “He said he didn’t know where you were. That was a lie. If he didn’t like the look of us, he could have told us to mind our own business. How long has he been in your service?”

“Not very long—about two months.”

“How did you come to take him on?”

“My old butler died while I was away at the war. I was thinking of advertising for a new one when, by a curious coincidence, this fellow Haynes turned up, seeking employment.”

“I have a feeling that that was not such a coincidence as you supposed,” averred Cub.

“Anyway, his references were excellent, so I took him on,” concluded Gimlet.

“His references were bound to be in order,” declared Cub. “Anyone can forge references.”

“Well, all I can say is, he has been satisfactory in every way.”

“Naturally, he would be,” said Cub cynically. “You can think what you like, sir, but I shall keep this chap in mind. Apparently you made up your mind suddenly to go to Scotland?”

“Yes, on the spur of the moment.”

“Then there would not have been time for anyone at Lorrington Hall to write a letter here, saying you were on your way? It must be a two or three days’ post.”

“Probably, but there are such things as telephones, don’t forget.”

“Not here,” argued Cub. “The pub isn’t on the ’phone. I noticed that. There were telegraph wires along the road, but only as far as the cottage with the red posting-box outside. I noted the post-box in passing, thinking the cottage must be the local post-office, in case I wanted to send a letter home. It’s about half a mile up the road from the pub.”

Gimlet shrugged. “Very well. Anyone wanting to get an urgent message through could have sent a telegram.”

“In which case a record of it would be kept,” declared Cub. “It would be interesting to know if such a telegram was sent.”

“I doubt if the postmaster, or whoever lives at the cottage, would tell you.”

“He might. There would be no harm in trying,” asserted Cub. “Country people are usually ready to gossip, and up here they can’t handle so many telegrams that they forget about them. I’ll tell you what, sir; we’re in no great hurry, and you’ll need a bit of time to recover your strength. After breakfast, how about me going along to the post-office and having a word with the man there? By cutting across the moor I could get to it from the back, so the people at the hotel wouldn’t see me—not that it would matter a great deal if they did. After all, they don’t know anything about me or why I came here, I could be back in a couple of hours or so.”

“I’ll come with you,” said Copper and Trapper together.

“No need for that,” disputed Cub. “If we’re seen walking about in a mob, Burke might get suspicious—and so might the man at the post-office. One person could get into his confidence where two or three might cause him to shut up like an oyster. I had some experience of that sort of thing when I was in the Fleas.<sup>[1]</sup> I’d rather go alone. Anyway, it’s better for Copper and Trapper to stay here with you in case of trouble.”

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<sup>[1]</sup> See *King of the Commandos*.

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“All right,” agreed Gimlet thoughtfully. “There may be something in what you say. I don’t see that any harm can come of making enquiries. Don’t be too long away.”

“I ought to be back in a couple of hours,” said Cub. He turned to Copper. “By the way, what was that man Burke in prison for?”

Copper screwed up one eye. “Now, what makes you ask that?”

“Because,” answered Cub, “I once read in a book that most criminals specialise in one particular racket, and stick to it.”

“That’s true enough,” admitted Copper. “But I’m afraid that ain’t goin’ ter help you in this case. Burke’s racket was all washed up soon after he was arrested.”

“What was it, exactly?”

Copper scratched his head. “I don’t remember the details, but to the best of my recollection Burke was mixed up with a big American rum-running gang, when they had prohibition in the United States. He was a sort of special agent for the gang over this side, sending the stuff out to them or something of the sort. The New York police asked us to pick him up. When

America repealed the prohibition law, the rum-running racket ended and the big booze bosses faded out.”

“I see.” Cub sat at the table and made short work of one of Trapper’s trout, with a cup of tea.

“That’s all the tea we’ve got,” remarked Trapper.

“Another reason why I should slip down to the post-office,” returned Cub. “It’s a little general store as well. I’ll take my haversack and pick up some tea and sugar, and tinned milk, and anything else they have in the grub line.”

“Don’t forget coffee,” murmured Trapper.

“Bring me a couple of packets of fags,” requested Copper, laying half a crown on the table.

“Okay.” The meal finished, Cub rose and slung his haversack over his shoulder. “Shan’t be long,” were his parting words as he strode off down the glen.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE POST-OFFICE HAS VISITORS

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THE weather remained fair, and Cub, travelling cross-country to avoid the hotel, had no great difficulty in reaching his objective. But it took him longer than he expected, for the natural obstacles in his way were not so easily overcome as he had supposed; not that he had given any serious thought to them. But it was his first experience of travelling in the Highlands off the beaten track, and he soon discovered that this was something not lightly to be undertaken. As it happened, and as he was to perceive later, this short experience was to stand him in good stead.

First there was the heather. It was higher, much higher, than he had supposed. And thicker. The tough woody stems dragged at his legs so that at each step he was forced to pick up each foot almost vertically. The ground from which the heather sprang was not, as he had imagined, soft earth. There were invisible boulders and outcrops of rock, usually set at oblique angles, expressly, it would seem, to impede progress. Burns gurgled and chuckled deep in the heather, in which they had cut beds in the manner of slit trenches. These trenches could not be seen because the heather met over them, and therein lay the danger of a false step, which could throw a

traveller on his face and possibly break a leg. Last, but by no means least, there were the bogs. From the road the slopes of the hills appeared dry enough, but this again was a trap for the unwary. Fortunately the bogs were advertised by areas of sphagnum and stagshorn moss, forming the bright green and yellow streaks that Cub had already observed. These gave no indication of the soft mud that lay beneath them; but after once or twice floundering above his knees in mire, Cub soon learned to avoid such places. In due course he saw the road below him and the little shop that was his objective. Descending the bank, he made his way to the door.

The cottage, as he had surmised, was the sub-post-office of Auchrory. It was tended, he found, not by a man, but by a little grey-haired old woman who, looking at him over her glasses, greeted him cheerfully enough.

Now, on the way Cub had thought out his line of approach, and this he now proceeded to follow. He started by making his purchases, and while he was being served with these he had no difficulty in opening a conversation. As he packed his haversack, selecting things which he thought might be useful, not forgetting Copper's cigarettes, he spoke of the weather, the beauty of the glen, and passed on to discuss the fish in the river. "I saw a gentleman fishing a pool lower down," he remarked. "Does he have any luck?" He gave a brief description of the man in plus-fours.

"That will be Mr. Smith," said the postmistress. "No, I don't think he catches many fish."

"He stays at the hotel," prompted Cub.

"Aye. He does that."

"Has he been here long?"

The woman's reply surprised Cub. "Aye. He's been with us now for . . . it must be getting on for eighteen months."

"Then he must have been here when fishing was out of season?" murmured Cub.

"Aye. But he's not only a fisher, ye ken. He's in a line of business here. Everyone knows Mr. Smith."

"In business—here?" Cub was incredulous.

"Aye. He buys all the barley from the braes. Pays good prices, too. We should be sorry to lose Mr. Smith."

The word barley struck a sharp note in Cub's memory. He remembered the grains of barley on the track leading to the Lodge. "And what does he do with all this barley he buys?" he questioned, hardly expecting an answer.

"Och. He makes it into dog biscuits," returned the old woman.

“So he’s . . . a dog-biscuit . . . manufacturer?” muttered Cub, conscious of a feeling of frustration. This was certainly not what he expected. No trade could have sounded more prosaic.

“Aye. A lorry comes once a week for the barley, regular as clockwork,” went on the postmistress. “Mr. Smith, he lives at the hotel to be handy for it.”

“I see,” said Cub slowly.

“And what would you be doing in these parts, young mon?” asked the postmistress, who seemed to have nothing else to do but talk.

“I was expecting to meet a friend here,” answered Cub. “He was to have sent me a telegram if he couldn’t come. Have there been any telegrams in lately?”

“Telegrams? Bless you, no,” was the reply. “We don’t get many of them things here. One came on Monday for Mr. Smith and I haven’t had one since.”

Cub’s nerves tingled. “So Mr. Smith had a telegram—about the barley, I suppose?”

“Och, no. ’Twas to say royalty was on the way, although what royalty would be coming to Glencarglas I dinna ken.”

Cub blinked, frowning. Royalty . . . again he was conscious of a sense of disappointment.

The old woman chuckled. “I’m minded it’s the king hisself coming to see us,” she joked.

Cub heard only one word. The word was “king.” Again his nerves tingled. Royalty . . . King . . . So he had been right, after all. Royalty was obviously a code word for king—Gimlet King. “Now, who would send a telegram like that?” he asked carelessly. “Some silly southerner, I suppose?”

“Aye, the telegram came from the south,” confirmed the old woman. “I ken the place well. ’Twas handed in at Lorrington, wherever that may be. You’d know it, perhaps?”

Cub did not answer at once. He was thinking hard. He now had the information he wanted, and there seemed no reason to linger. He half turned, and then decided to try one last shot.

“Yes, I know this place Lorrington,” he asserted. “In fact,” he added, truthfully enough, “I have a friend there. But he wouldn’t send such a daft wire. Who could it have been, I wonder?”

“I can verra soon tell ye,” declared the willing postmistress, opening a folio and turning over some papers. “Ah. ’Tis here the noo,” she went on,

picking up a flimsy. “ ’Twas sent by a Mr. Singer.”

“Singer?”

“Aye, Singer. ’Tis the last word on the telegram. You’d know him, maybe?”

Cub shook his head. “No, I’ve never heard of him.”

The postmistress suddenly looked past Cub’s shoulder and smiled. “Och! Here’s Mr. Smith,” she exclaimed. “Na doot he’ll tell ye all about it.”

Cub started and, swinging round, found himself face to face with the last man he wanted to encounter at that moment. It was, as the old woman had said, Mr. Smith, of the Glencarglas Arms, still in his vulgar plus-fours. Cub could have kicked himself for his carelessness in being so caught off his guard.

Smith paid no attention to Cub beyond a swift suspicious glance. His eyes moved on to the postmistress. “What is it I can tell you about?” he asked sharply.

“Och. The young mon here——” began the old woman.

Cub broke in. The old woman’s prattle, while it had suited him until now, was, he thought, likely to become embarrassing. “I must be getting along,” he announced. “Good day.”

“Guid dee to ye,” called the old woman cheerfully.

Cub departed. He strove to keep his actions natural, but aware that Smith’s eyes were on him he was for once self-conscious. However, the man made no attempt to detain him, so he went on to the road, where now stood an old, rather dirty car, a Buick—presumably Smith’s. Turning to the right he strode away in the direction of the inn, and the lane that led to the Lodge. Once out of sight of the post-office, a matter of a few yards, he increased his pace. He chose the road because now that he had been seen by Smith there was no point in taking to the moor, and he was anxious to get back to report the result of his enquiries to the others. Apart from which he had no desire at that moment to find himself involved in an argument with the alleged barley dealer.

He had not gone far when he heard the car, or a car, cruising down the road behind him. He assumed, correctly as it turned out, that it was Smith, who had not stayed so long at the post-office as he hoped he would. Cub thought swiftly. Two courses were open to him. The first was to turn off the road on to the moor, where the car would not be able to follow. But he realised that Smith must have already seen him, and he recoiled from the idea that the man might think he was afraid of him; that he was running away from him. The second course was to stay on the road, to ignore the

man, or, if he was accosted, to bluff the business through. If a conversation ensued Cub thought he might learn something. So this was the course he chose.

The car stopped beside him abruptly as the brakes were applied, and a glance over his shoulder revealed Smith sitting at the wheel. But the barley buyer did not remain long in that position. The car door was thrown open and he stepped out—stepped out with a businesslike alacrity. His eyes were on Cub's face, and Cub did not like the expression in them at all. He perceived that something more than argument was probable. He glanced down the road. Not a soul was in sight.

Smith opened the conversation. "Going far?" he questioned in a hard voice.

"No, not far," answered Cub, adopting a nonchalant attitude.

"No matter. Get in and I'll give you a lift." The tone of Smith's voice when he said this made it clear that it was an order, not an invitation.

"I'd rather walk," replied Cub. "Thanks, all the same."

"I said *get in*." This time there was a real edge on Smith's voice.

Cub raised his eyebrows. "Are you telling me what I can do?"

"I am," was the harsh reply. "You're going for a ride. Quit yapping." Smith now backed up his argument by producing a Colt automatic—a big, heavy weapon.

Cub smiled faintly. "What are you going to do with that blunderbuss?" he bantered. "And where do you think you are—Chicago?"

Smith's face set in even harder lines. "This isn't an ornament," he grated.

"I can see that," conceded Cub. "But tell me," he went on, "why are you so anxious to take me for a ride?" This really was to gain time, for he saw that his position was really serious, and he was thinking fast.

"I want to talk to you, my cock, that's why," answered Smith crisply. As he said this, into his eyes, which up to now had been frankly hostile, crept a look of curiosity. "I thought you said you came here to mind your own business?" he challenged.

"That's right," acknowledged Cub.

"You didn't act that way in the post-office," rasped Smith. "You seemed more interested in *my* business."

Cub expected this. No doubt the old woman in the post-office had given the man the gist of their conversation. "No," he parried, "I'm not interested in barley. I thought your line was something more remunerative," he added slyly.

A puzzled frown that might have been genuine—at least Cub thought so—lined Smith's forehead. His manner became almost confidential. "Y'know, I can't get you weighed up," he confessed. "You're too young to be a——"

"Cop?" suggested Cub naïvely.

The word darkened Smith's brow again. "Okay, cop if you like," he rapped out. "But why am I standing here arguing with you? Come on, get in; we'll soon get to the bottom of your little game."

Now Cub had already resolved that whatever happened he was not going to get into the car. Remembering what had happened to Gimlet, it was too much like taking a running jump into the lion's den. Where Smith would take him or what he would do, he did not know; but he could guess. So he determined to stay out. While they had been standing there, the sky in some mysterious way had become overcast. The tops of the hills were lost in a grey mist that came rolling down into the valleys, reducing visibility to about a hundred yards. Cub perceived that if he could get outside that distance he would be safe, for Smith would not be able to see him, and even if he gave chase it should not be difficult to elude him. The difficulty was the automatic which Smith still held in his hand.

"Come on, get moving," ordered Smith impatiently.

"Okay—okay," agreed Cub, taking a step nearer to the car. "There's no hurry, is there? Put that gun away; it scares me. Besides, someone might come along the road."

Smith smiled cynically and put the gun in his pocket.

"I'll tell you something else," went on Cub evenly. "That cannon of yours is too big, too clumsy, for real fast work. It isn't the size of the bullet that counts; it's where you hit your man. You ought to try something smaller—like this." Cub's hand slipped easily into his pocket and came up holding his thirty-eight. The muzzle covered Smith. "See what I mean?" he concluded blandly.

Smith's face was a study. "Why—why—you little rat," he choked.

"Now—now, no hard names," chided Cub. "I didn't call you names, did I? By the way, don't forget what I said about hitting your man in the right place. If you have any doubts as to whether I can do that I'll be pleased to give you a demonstration. Keep your hands away from your pockets and turn round."

Smith glared.

Cub's manner changed. "You heard me," he snapped, jerking up the muzzle of his pistol.



Smith turned.

“Don’t be in too great a hurry to see where I’m going or you’ll get that demonstration I spoke about,” warned Cub. “Just stand still and you’ll be all right.” He started backing away from the road, up the hillside into the mist.

He had covered some seventy or eighty yards before Smith turned. By that time the man and his car were mere vague shapes in the mist. The heavy Colt roared, and a bullet zipped into the heather not far from where Cub was still climbing. But Cub only laughed and ran on. In a few seconds he was out of sight of the road. All he could see was the thin grey mist that enveloped him. Well satisfied with the way he had handled a difficult situation, he struck off on a course for the hut.

After a few minutes, hearing no sound of pursuit, he dismissed Smith from his mind. Smith, having a car on the road, would not be likely to follow him, he thought. It was more probable that he would go as quickly as possible to his friend Burke and tell him what had happened. Cub was quite sure now that some shady business was afoot. When the postmistress had first made mention of the barley buying he had wondered for a minute if the man was honestly engaged in business; but Smith’s subsequent actions banished such a notion. Barley buying did not call for the employment of a heavy automatic, pondered Cub, as he strode on, dodging the obstacles he had learned to avoid.

Just when the thought first occurred to him that he was off his course, he could not afterwards recall. The mist persisted; indeed, it thickened, and the temperature dropped several degrees, so that the air was both damp and chilly. All he could see was heather, and as this all looked alike there was nothing to guide him. It was an uneasy feeling inside him rather than the sight of any definite object that made him steady his pace and look around for a landmark. He could see nothing that he could recognise; and when, soon afterwards, he found himself confronted by a towering crag, beyond which the ground fell away into a deep gully, he knew that he was wrong. He had never seen this particular spot before. Changing direction to avoid these obstacles, he plunged on for the best part of an hour. Then he stopped again. He considered each direction in turn, and as he concluded his inspection he was conscious of a sinking feeling in the stomach. One way was as good as another. What was even worse, all sense of direction had departed. Any direction, he became painfully aware, might be north. Or south. There was no indication. Absolutely none. It was a nasty moment—one that many a traveller in the Highlands has experienced. It seemed useless to go on, because for all he knew he was travelling in the direction opposite to the one he wished to take. Yet it was futile to stand still.

He remembered the advice of the man at the station. He could not find a ledge under which to take shelter, so he squatted down on the damp heather, hoping that the mist would lift. Chafing at the delay, he sat there for nearly two hours, and by the end of that time his irritation had turned to vague alarm. Suppose the mist did not lift? It might, as he was well aware, persist for days. It had turned bitterly cold. His limbs were becoming numb. He stood up and stamped to restore his circulation, angry now at his foolish predicament.

It began to rain. Not big drops, but a clammy soaking drizzle, so that he was soon wet as well as cold. The drops grew larger and turned to sleet, tiny particles of ice that hissed as they pattered on the heather. When the sleet turned to snow he could hardly believe it. It seemed ridiculous at that time of the year. The snow did not lie—at any rate, on the heather. In some strange way the heather seemed to absorb it. He remembered that he was not in England, but in the Highlands of Scotland, at an altitude of something over two thousand feet. It made, as he perceived with dismay, a lot of difference.

Finding the cold intolerable he began to walk, feeling that if his senses would not help him luck might. Anyway, he decided, anything was better than sitting still and slowly freezing to death. Bending his face to the weather he floundered on through a grey-white world. Earth and air were the same colourless hue.

Pausing to get his breath, for the going was heavy, he started back in affright when vague shapes loomed suddenly in front of him. He laughed foolishly when he recognised the shapes for a stag leading a herd of hinds. Again he remembered the advice of the man at the station. The stags were coming down from the high tops. The information, he thought bitterly, had come too late to benefit him.

Somewhere on the hillside a grouse cackled harshly.

Silence fell. The persistent unchanging hiss of the snow could hardly be called a sound.

## CHAPTER VII

### COPPER MAKES A CALL

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At the hut, Copper waited with some impatience for Cub to return. Not that there was any particular reason for impatience. A vague suggestion had been made that they might walk as far as the Lodge, but it was not pursued. Gimlet, now on his feet, was fast recovering from his misadventure, but there was obviously no point in taxing his strength without a good reason. Trapper killed a rabbit, skinned it, and made a stew in the saucepan for lunch. And so the morning wore on, with the weather slowly deteriorating. Copper eyed it with misgivings.

“What ’e’ll do is mess about and get himself wet through,” he remarked, obviously referring to Cub. “What’s ’e up to?”

When the mist rolled down the hills, enshrouding the landscape in its clammy folds, he expressed his views more strongly. “He said ’e’d be a couple of hours,” he muttered. “ ’E’s been more than four.”

Trapper looked up from the arrow he was refeathering. “*Tiens!* If he’s got any sense he’ll stay where he is,” he drawled. “If he tries short-cuts across the moor in this fog he may wish he stay at home—*hein.*” He joined Copper at the door.

A minute or two later as they stood there, gazing down the glen hoping and expecting to see Cub emerge from the mist, there came the sound of a distant shot.

Trapper looked sharply at Copper. Copper looked at Trapper, a question in his eyes. “What was that?” he demanded.

“Someone shoots,” answered Trapper.

“I worked that out fer meself,” replied Copper. “Who was it?—that’s what I want ter know.”

“A poacher, maybe.”

“Poacher my foot,” growled Copper. “Poachers use shot-guns. That wasn’t a shot-gun. That was a rifle or a heavy pistol. Don’t tell me it wasn’t—I’ve heard enough in my time. I don’t like it.”

Gimlet joined them at the door. “What don’t you like?” he enquired.

“Someone has just fired a shot, sir.”

“I heard it.”

“I made it out ter be a pistol shot,” said Copper. “You can’t mistake that short, flat bang.”

“What of it?”

“Cub may be in trouble. The report came from his direction.”

“*Tch!* He can take care of himself,” put in Trapper.

"I'm not so sure of that," returned Copper. "Why was there only one shot? It wasn't Cub's gun. That makes a crack like a whip. If somebody took a shot at Cub, why didn't he shoot back, eh?"

Nobody answered the question. Copper stared in the direction from which the report had come, the expression on his face suggesting that he was wrestling with a difficult problem. Suddenly he reached a decision. "I'm going ter see if 'e's all right," he declared. "I don't like it. I might as well go as stand here doin' nothing."

"You stand a poor chance of finding him in this fog," said Trapper.

"If 'e's all right, I reckon I shall meet 'im comin' up the road," asserted Copper. "'E won't be such a mug as ter leave the road in this muck. I'll go as far as the post-office."

"Mind the people at the hotel don't see you," warned Gimlet.

"Not in this fog they won't," stated Copper. "And if they do—what of it?" he demanded aggressively. "Whose property is it, anyway? If anyone wants any back-chat with me, 'e can 'ave it. I never said no yet to anyone who fancied his chance. S'long." He set off.

The sleet which started soon afterwards damped his ardour somewhat, but he kept going, and, without seeing any sign of Cub, in a trifle under an hour he reached the post-office. He went straight to the door and walked in. The postmistress, from behind the counter, greeted him with a smile.

Copper did not beat about the bush. "Did you 'ave a young feller 'ere this morning, ma'am?" he enquired.

"Aye. There was a young mon here a while back." The old woman gave a pretty accurate description of Cub.

"That's 'im," confirmed Copper.

"Then you must be the gentleman he was expecting to meet here?" conjectured the postmistress.

"I dunno about that," answered Copper bluntly. "What I want ter know is, what 'appened to 'im?"

"Och, he went away down the glen."

"'Ow long ago?"

"Some time now."

"Was 'e 'ere long?"

"Aye, he was that. Half an hour maybe. We were talking about Mr. Smith of the Glencarglas Arms. He went off when Mr. Smith came in."

Copper had half turned to the door. He came back. "What was that you said?"

"I said the young mon went off when Mr. Smith came in."

"I see." Copper spoke slowly. "And what about Mr. Smith—where did 'e go?"

"Away doon the glen."

"How long was that after my chum 'ad gone?"

"Two or three minutes."

"Was that before or after that shot was fired? You must 'ave heard it?"

"Yes, I heard it—it made me jump," admitted the postmistress. "It would be about five minutes after they left here."

"Ah," breathed Copper. "Did Mr. Smith come back?"

"No. He was in his car."

"Oh, 'e was, was 'e?" Copper nodded thoughtfully. "Thanks, ma'am, I'll be gettin' along."

Leaving the post-office he strode down the road towards the hotel. He had no fixed plan. He was by no means sure what he was going to do, but the information he had acquired convinced him more than ever that Cub was in trouble; that the shot had some connection with him. Fine snow was now falling, but he ignored it. He walked with his eyes on the road, thinking he might see car tracks or oil stains if the car had stopped.

He found both. And he found something else, something that, as he stooped to pick it up, made him catch his breath. It was an expended brass cartridge, calibre forty-five. His face set in harder lines as he looked at it, for his worst fears were now confirmed. After listening for a few moments, for it was impossible to see more than a few yards, he quartered the area carefully, afraid of what he might find. He fully expected to come upon bloodstains, and he was relieved when this sinister expectation was not realised. He returned to the place where he had found the cartridge, and there he stood for a full minute. "He walked into trouble all right," he told himself.

Now Copper, as we know, was a simple man. Anything in the nature of finesse, of intricate planning, filled him with contempt. For Copper, the shortest and quickest way to his objective was the only way. If Cub had run into trouble, he reasoned, it would be with Mr. Smith or someone at the hotel. Obviously, the hotel was the place to look for Cub. He set off.

Had it not been for an old, dirty, Buick car, that stood in the yard, the hotel, when he reached it, would have appeared entirely deserted. Not a soul was in sight. The door, he discovered, was locked. Undeterred, he banged on it with his fist. No one came, so he used the toe of his boot. The door was

opened by Burke. “We’re closed——” he began, and would have shut the door in Copper’s face had he been quick enough.

Copper’s heavy boot prevented this. “Not so fast,” he growled, “What’s wrong with you? You act like you was scared of somethin’. I’ve come ’ere ter ask you a question or two, mate, and I ain’t goin’ till I’ve asked them—see?”

Burke hesitated for a moment. Then he stepped back, opening the door wide. “Come in,” he invited smoothly.

Copper went in. They went through to the bar, against which Smith was standing, a glass in his hand. Leaving the door open, Burke retired to his usual place behind the bar. Smith remained where he was.

Copper accosted him bluntly. “You’re Smith, ain’t you?”

“That’s my name,” was the answer.

“I’m lookin’ fer that kid who you saw at the post-office this mornin’,” said Copper shortly.

“What kid?”

“Don’t give me that,” flashed back Copper. “You know the kid I mean.”

“Why ask me?”

“Because you was the last ter see ’im.”

“Yes, I did see him,” admitted Smith. “So what? He isn’t here.”

Copper took a pace nearer. He was getting angry. “What did yer do with ’im?”

“Why should I do anything with him?”

“Maybe you know that as well as I do.” Copper got down to brass tacks. “You carry a gun, don’t you?—come on, no lies; I can see your pocket bulging. Don’t try ter pull it on *me* though. I was a Commando for five years and I ain’t forgot what I learnt. Now then, you shot at that boy, didn’t you?”

“No.”

“You’re a liar. What *did* you shoot at?”

Smith faltered. “Who says I shot at anything?”

“I do.” Copper tossed the empty cartridge on the counter. “What ’ave yer got ter say about that, eh? Don’t tell me you go out shootin’ at cock-robins.”

“The last I saw of the boy he was running up the hill,” muttered Smith sulkily.

This was, as we know, the truth, but Copper may be pardoned for refusing to believe it. “I ain’t leavin’ this house till you tell me where ’e is,” he said grimly. “And I ain’t goin’ ter wait long. I’m in a hurry—see? You

give me any more lies and you'll be sorry—my oath, you will. Now, what about it?"

What Smith's reply to this would have been is a matter for conjecture. He never made it, for at this juncture a light lorry pulled up outside the hotel. The driver got down, stretched himself as if he had travelled a long way, and came into the bar. He paused on the threshold when his eyes took in the scene before him.

"What goes on?" he asked suspiciously.

Copper answered with easy familiarity. "It's all right, mate. Nothing to do with you. You keep out of this and you'll be all right. I'm just havin' a bit of an argument with these two birds." This said, he turned his back on the newcomer and paid no further attention to him. Consequently he did not see the swift meaning glance that passed between the driver and Burke. Nor did he see Burke nod significantly.

Copper had reopened his interrogation of Smith. "Come on, out with it," he ordered, and then paused, waiting for the answer.

Smith laughed.

"What's the joke?" demanded Copper.

"You'll find out," sneered Smith. His eyes were looking past Copper's shoulder.

Suddenly Copper understood. He whirled round. But he was too late. He caught a fleeting glimpse of a heavy spanner upraised. Before he could make a move to defend himself, it crashed down on his head. The world seemed to explode in a flash of crimson flame which, spinning and contracting, became darker and darker until it ended in black night.

He slumped heavily to the floor and lay still.

## CHAPTER VIII

### CUB GOES TOO FAR

---

LOST on the hill, Cub walked on. Blundered would perhaps be a better word, for now that he was getting tired the strain of dragging his legs through the deep, shrubby heather became more acute. Moreover, the ground was seldom level; always it appeared to slope one way or another. If he went up, the cold became more intense; if he went down the hill, invariably he found himself faced by a torrent too broad or too deep to ford

without wading in icy water. So in the end he scrambled transversally across the face of interminable hills, one foot lower than the other, a laborious business, but one which, at least, kept him reasonably warm. All the time he hoped that either the weather would clear or he would come upon some landmark which would give him his position. He lost all count of time. It seemed to him, in his impatience and distress, that he had been walking for days rather than hours. Occasionally he paused to rest, and when he did this his breath hung in the air like smoke.

When at length the light began to fade he became seriously alarmed. The temperature dropped still lower. This, in the end, may have been his salvation, for the snow, after persisting for a while as tiny frozen particles, stopped. As darkness fell, the air cleared. Miraculously, it seemed, stars appeared overhead. The moon had not yet risen, but as the frost conquered the humidity visibility improved. The scene around him lay open to his anxious eyes.

The panorama was much as he expected. It was not one to excite enthusiasm. He was alone in the centre of a silent world, his horizon on all sides bounded by dark, rounded hills. The question now arose, which direction should he take, for one way was as good as another. True, the stars gave him the points of the compass, but as he did not know the general direction he had taken since leaving the road, this was of scant assistance. Not a light showed anywhere. Ragged clouds still drifted low across the sky, giving promise of more snow to come.

In the end he did what in the circumstances was probably the wisest thing; he climbed to the summit of the nearest hill to get a wider field of view. In this he was successful. From his eminence he could just discern the general line of a deep valley running from north to south which he knew could only be Glencarglas. To support this opinion there were places where starlight glistened faintly on the turbulent waters of the River Carglas. There could not, thought Cub, be two rivers of such size in the district. Anyway, he decided, this was a risk that would have to be taken. He could not see the hotel. It was too dark for that, or, as the hotel lay deep in the valley, his view might have been interrupted by an intervening hill. He did not know. But the course of the glen gave him his approximate position, and he decided to work on that. There was no point, he reasoned, in going back to the post-office in the upper part of the glen, for this was now miles out of his way. It would be easier and quicker, he thought, to take a line that was bound, sooner or later, to cut across the lane leading to the Lodge. Once he found the lane, it would be a simple matter to locate the hut. He wondered what the others would be thinking about his long absence. Naturally, they would be



anxious. The sooner he was back with them the better. Anyway, he needed food, and he needed it badly.

Confidently now he set off, his strength restored by the knowledge that his ordeal was nearly over.

In this, as it turned out, he was mistaken. It was, he found, one thing to plan a direction, but quite another matter to follow it in a direct line. Burns, which always seemed to flow through a deep gulley, and steep faces of rock, and valleys between the hills, all necessitating detours, impeded his progress and threw him constantly off his course. Occasional flurries of frozen snow urged him on, however, and in due course he reached his objective—the track leading to the Lodge. He switched on his torch and looked at his watch. The time, he observed with some dismay, was eleven o'clock.

Having reached the track, he surveyed it with fresh misgivings. It was hard to say for certain because the landscape was so much alike, but he had a feeling that he had not seen this particular stretch before. A little way to the right the track took a sharp bend, and with the object of seeing what lay beyond he walked along to it. One glance was enough, for there before his eyes was something he had certainly not seen before. At no great distance loomed the bulk of a house of some size, almost a mansion; and it did not take him long to realise that this could only be Strathcarglas Lodge. He perceived that he must have struck the track some distance above the turning that led to the mine and the hut.



CUB REALISED THAT THIS COULD ONLY BE  
STRATHCARGLAS LODGE.

He observed that whoever had built the Lodge had had an eye for effect. No aspect could have been more inspiring. The approaching track, which at one time must have been a well-made drive, swung round the sharp corner so that the first view of the house was presented, suddenly, in its entirety. On the right-hand side of the drive, the bank, which rose almost sheer, was clad in a dense coppice of sombre firs. On the left the ground fell sharply into a

fearful gorge, with the torrent of the Carglas thundering round and over a chaos of fallen rock in the depths.

His first inclination, a natural one, was to turn back and carry on with his original project, which was to get back to the hut where he had no doubt the others were impatiently awaiting his return. Then he remembered that none of them, not even Gimlet, had seen the Lodge. It struck him that as he was now so close he might as well cast an eye over the place, if only from the outside. It would not take ten minutes, and as he had been away for a matter of hours, a few minutes more were neither here nor there. Even then he hesitated. He was tired and hungry. Was it worth while? He decided that it was. It should be possible to learn without much trouble whether or not the place was occupied. If it was occupied there would be lights. That would be useful information to take back to Gimlet.

Having made his decision, which, although he had no reason to suspect it, was to have far-reaching results, he advanced cautiously on the Lodge, a massive stone pile with a turret at either end. A thin powdery covering of snow lay on the road, so he left it for the grass verge, where there was also a little snow but not enough to make footmarks conspicuous. His eyes were on the building. Not a light showed anywhere and, as far as he could see, no smoke came from the chimneys. Silence reigned.

His approach became even more cautious as he neared the building. Occasional groups of fir trees offered cover, and of these he took full advantage. From a distance of twenty or thirty yards, first he surveyed the house from the front. There was not a sign of life anywhere. Rather nervously he walked forward and tried the front door. As he expected, it was locked. He listened at the windows, but no sound of voices or of movement came from within. The whole place had a hopeless, abandoned look. Following the weed-conquered drive he made his way round to the back premises, but here he was confronted by a more difficult proposition, for the outbuildings were numerous and extensive, as was only to be expected at a building of such importance. They formed a quadrangle round an open courtyard. What they comprised he could only guess. They appeared to be stables, harness-rooms, kennels, wood sheds, and the like. No sound of life came from any one of them. He noted that some of the windows were curtained while others were not. Many were broken. It was a dismal picture, more depressing than the open moor. Such neglect conveyed an atmosphere of things past, of things dead and forgotten; the heather was at least alive, something of the present.

He turned his attention to the house. From this aspect it was, of course, less pretentious than the front, otherwise it was much the same. Not a light

anywhere. Not a movement. Not a sound. Satisfied with his inspection, he turned away, but as an afterthought he walked across and tried the back door. His nerves tingled when it opened easily. He closed it again, quietly, and for a minute stood listening there, aware that his heart had increased its tempo. The door was unlocked. That, surely, was a sign of occupation? Or was it? It didn't necessarily follow, he decided. Very quietly he opened the door again and, taking a step forward, listened. Nothing happened. A deathly silence, the chill silence of a tomb, worried his eardrums.

Again he hesitated. Perhaps, after all, there was nothing to fear. Taking out his torch he switched on the beam and saw in front of him a short stone-flagged passage, with, as far as he could make out, a turning on either side at the far end. Closing the door behind him he walked on tip-toe to the end of the passage. To left and right now ran what was obviously a main corridor. He turned to the right. A door stood ajar. Encouraged by the utter absence of sound, he looked inside. It was obviously the dining-room. A massive table occupied the centre of the room, with chairs round it, all deep in dust. Heads of stags long dead stared down with glassy eyes from the walls. A picture had fallen and lay in a litter of fallen glass. From the mantelpiece a stuffed wild-cat, its back arched, teeth bared in a long last fixed snarl, glared at the intruder in dumb fury.

He returned to the corridor. Still no sound came. He would almost have welcomed one, so grim and unnerving was the silence. Just in front of him a flight of broad oak stairs gave access to the next floor. There seemed little point in going up. Had anyone been upstairs, he thought, he must have heard some movement.

Turning back along the corridor he found himself in the kitchen, an enormous chamber with a great iron range that would have cooked for a troop of Commandos. An enormous dresser, devoid of ornament, entirely occupied the end nearest to him. There was a long table of plain, scrubbed deal, and it was this that held his attention, for here at last were signs of life—an empty whisky bottle, some beer bottles, and half a dozen tumblers. A candle had been stuck in an empty bottle. Cigarettes had been stubbed on the table. Ends lay about the floor, as they might lie in the bar parlour of a public-house. Visitors there had certainly been, thought Cub. Who were they? How long ago?

The next thing he noticed—and he made the discovery with fresh trepidation—was that the room was blacked-out. Not only blacked-out, but blacked-out with a good deal of care. Heavy curtains that obviously did not belong to the kitchen, but had been brought from another part of the house, had been nailed up to completely cover the windows. It was evident, as he

now realised, that had lights been on in the kitchen he would not have known it when he was outside. What, he mused, was the object of such an elaborate arrangement? The answer was not hard to find. To prevent any ray of light from being seen outside. What light? No form of illumination was there, except a candle.

Cub decided that he had learned enough to go on with. He would come again, with the others; and in daylight they would be able to make a more detailed inspection. The outstanding fact was, there was no one in the building. This did not fit with the theory he had formed, but there was no getting away from it. He would get back to the hut. He turned to go.

At that precise moment, that which he had at first expected, but which he had now dismissed from his mind, happened. There came a sound—a series of sounds; strange sounds. They came from outside, and he stiffened to attention, listening, trying to sort out the medley of noises that now came clearly to his ears. They reminded him of something he had heard more than once in France during the war—the arrival of a train of horses or mules. He knew, of course, that such an idea was too fantastic to be entertained; yet it was of such an event that the sounds reminded him. Switching off his torch he went to a window that overlooked the courtyard and, carefully lifting the curtain aside about an inch, peeped out.

It was, of course, dark outside, and at first he could only discern a number of dark figures; but as his eyes became accustomed to the darkness these took shape, and he saw with no small astonishment that his guess had not been far wrong, after all. There, standing head to tail in the courtyard, obviously having just arrived, were three ponies, heavily laden with loads which, apart from the fact that they were bulky and heavy, were too indistinct to convey any idea of their contents. With the ponies were four men. The arrival of men in such strength was something on which he had not reckoned, and he viewed them with apprehension. Who they were, where they had come from, and what they were doing, he had no means of knowing. For the moment he was content to watch, wishing that Copper or Gimlet was at his side to lend him support.

There was nothing remarkable about the proceedings that followed. A man opened the door of one of the outbuildings—presumably a stable. The ponies were led in. The door was closed. There was a short pause. Then the stable door was opened and the ponies were brought out, now without their loads. Two men took charge of them. After a brief conversation in low tones, they walked away and were soon lost to sight in the surrounding gloom. The two men who remained, to Cub's consternation, walked over to the house—

worse, to the back door. It was opened and shut. Boots scraped on the stone floor of the passage.

For an instant Cub stood still, nerves quivering, muscles tense. He hoped, hoped desperately, that the men would go to some distant part of the house, leaving him at liberty to retire by the way he had entered. He was not kept long in suspense. His hopes were dashed. The men, talking in low tones, came towards the kitchen. A sea of light announced their approach.

Cub had already left the window. He stood behind the door. In this position, he realised, discovery was inevitable. Where else could he hide? He could see only one place, and it was, on the whole, a good place. The top of the dresser was long enough and wide enough to hold half a dozen men. In a flash, using the shelves as steps, he was on his way up. Reaching the top he lay flat, vainly striving to stop the pounding of his heart, for although he had done his best to be quiet there had been a certain amount of noise. One of the shelves had creaked under his weight. The men were then only just outside the door.

“What was that?” said one.

“Rats, I expect,” was the reply, made in a voice with a pronounced American drawl. “The place is lousy with them.”

So far all Cub had seen was the play of light on the ceiling; now, moving his head a trifle, he saw that this was cast by an electric lamp of the hurricane type and of considerable power. A moment later he saw the men. Both wore overcoats with the collars turned up, and soft hats pulled well down, so it was not possible to see much of them. One, who had his back to him, was a tall, burly fellow, whose movements were slow and ponderous. The other, facing him, was as different as could be imagined. He was a dapper, sleek little man, immaculately dressed, whose actions when he moved were as quick as those of a weasel. His face was pale, sallow, with a pronounced shaving mark. He wore a tiny black moustache, cut straight, on his upper lip. The eyes were dark, long and narrow, heavily lidded, under black brows. A Latin type, thought Cub; probably an American with Italian ancestry. He reminded Cub vaguely of an American dance-band conductor—the last type he expected to see on a Scottish moor.

The big man carried the lamp. Said he, as he stood it on the table: “Billy ought to be here with the car. I hope he ain’t going to keep us waiting. This is a hell of a hole. Gives me the jitters.”

The other took a silver flask from his pocket and poured a generous measure of the contents into two of the glasses, one of which he passed to his companion. “He won’t be late,” he said in a quiet voice but one which

carried authority. Intuitively Cub judged him to be the leader. “No, he won’t be late,” he went on in his pronounced American twang. “He knows I want to see him about these three strangers who are hanging about. There’s something queer about it. We’ve no sooner got rid of one than three more turn up. Well, if they get in our way, they’ll go the same way as the other.”

The big fellow laughed unpleasantly. “That was a good idea of yours, Slim. It’ll be a long time before anyone finds *him*.”

“It saved digging a hole,” returned the man named Slim, with an oily smile.

This half confirmed what Cub already suspected; this was the man who had bombed the mine.

He was feeling better. His breathing was easier. Not once had the men glanced in his direction. It was evident that they suspected nothing. From their conversation it was clear that they expected someone, a man named Bill. Cub hoped that he would come, after which they might all depart, for he was far from comfortable. He had not long to wait.

“Billy will be busy bringing up the rest of the barley,” said the big man.

Slim inclined his head at a listening angle. “This sounds like him now,” he remarked.

Cub heard the purr of a car outside. A door slammed. Voices spoke in the courtyard, revealing that at least two more men were arriving. He heard the back door open and shut. Footsteps approached with a curious shuffling noise, as if one was reluctant. Slim opened the door from inside.

Three men entered. One was the barman, Burke. Another was the man called Smith. Both carried guns. As Cub’s eyes fell on the third man he had to clench his teeth to choke back a cry. It was Copper; Copper, pale, his face streaked with dirt and a livid bruise on one cheek.

## CHAPTER IX

### HOT WORK IN THE KITCHEN

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TO say that Cub was shaken by this utterly unexpected development would be understatement. He was shocked. To use a well-worn expression, he could hardly believe his eyes. Indeed, for a few seconds he was so completely flabbergasted that his brain seemed temporarily paralysed. It

may have been the smooth monotone of Slim's voice that restored his power to reason.

Said Slim, "Well—say! What have we got here?"

"He's one of the three I told you about," answered Smith.

"Who is he?"

"He won't say. I thought you might be able to persuade him to talk."

"Why, sure. That shouldn't be hard," drawled Slim.

"I had a shot at the young 'un this morning, but he got clear," went on Smith. "He carries a thirty-eight and seems pretty smart with it."

"H'm. So they're heeled, eh? What about this one?"

Smith laid Copper's forty-five on the table. "I found this on him."

"Does he know how to use it?"

Smith grinned. "He didn't get a chance."

"Tell me about him," invited Slim.

"The young 'un spent some time this morning in the post-office, making enquiries about us," explained Smith. "That fool woman told him plenty. She talks too much. I arrived in time to hear the tail end of the conversation. When he left I followed him down the road to have a word or two with him, but before I could open my mouth he pulls a gun on me—pulled it like he knew how to use it, too. How was I to know he carried a rod?"

Cub smiled faintly at this distorted description of the affair on the road.

"I couldn't do anything," went on Smith. "He pulls out across the heather; I went after him, but I lost him in the blasted fog. So I went back to the pub. Presently this fellow comes along and starts shooting off his mouth, asking where the kid was. Things looked awkward for a bit, but luckily Larry happened to turn up with the lorry. Seeing what's going on, he crowns big-mouth here with a spanner and puts him down for the count."

"How much did the young 'un learn at the post-office?" asked Slim.

"As much as the old woman knows, I reckon. That isn't much, but it's enough. She told him about the barley, and about the wire I had from Singer; that's what they were talking about when I went in. He didn't hear me come in—I took care of that. He shuts up, of course, as soon as he knows I'm there. I couldn't give it to him in front of the old woman, so I let him get a little way down the road, then I went after him. He got away. It was the blasted fog that did me."

"Which way did he go?"



“Up the hill and across the moor, as far as I could make out. I reckon he must be somewhere on the moor now.”

Slim nodded. “Okay. We’ll find him, then we’ll deal with him. There’s another somewhere. Keep your eyes skinned for him. You’d better go on with your fishing so that you can keep an eye on the road. There may be more of them, for all we know. Did this fellow let anything drop when he was yapping?”

Smith thought for a moment. “He said something about being a Commando for five years.”

Slim started. “Why didn’t you say so before?”

“Why, what’s the angle?”

A sneer curled Slim’s lips. “It’s a good thing I’m here to do the thinking for you. King was in the Commandos, wasn’t he?”

“That’s right.”

“Well, there’s your hook-up.”

“You mean—King brought a bunch of Commandos up here with him?” Smith looked startled.

Slim nodded thoughtfully. “It could be. We’d better find out. I guess this fellow will tell us.” He glanced at Copper.

“You guess again, slimy,” growled Copper.

“Do you think you can make him talk?” questioned Smith to Slim.

“I’ve been known to make dumb men talk,” boasted Slim. “Okay. Leave this to me. You two had better load up with the vinegar and get along.”

“Can’t I stay and watch the fun?” complained Burke.

“There’s no sense in wasting time. Larry will want to be getting back. I’ll put you wise when I know what I’m going to find out. You and Billy get back and watch things at your end.”

“If you say so,” agreed Burke. He went off, Smith following. There was a certain amount of noise in the courtyard. Car doors slammed and a vehicle was driven away. Only Slim, his big companion, and Copper remained.

Speaking to his assistant, Slim said, “Okay, Tiny; let’s get busy.” As he spoke he produced an automatic from his armpit and with it motioned Copper towards a chair. “Sit down,” he invited in a smooth, oily voice. “No need to get tired standing up.”

Cub, who had all along wondered why Copper had remained so passive, now saw the reason. His wrists were tied together behind his back.

Copper drew a deep breath and sat down. "It's all the same to me," he said evenly.

Slim smiled. It was not a friendly, not a pretty smile. His top lip curled, showing white teeth. His eyes, under their heavy lids, were as cold as those of a snake. With studied deliberation he laid his pistol on the table and from somewhere in the region of his hip produced a narrow-bladed stiletto. He whetted it slowly, almost lovingly, on the palm of his left hand, and then held it up in front of Copper's face. "See this?" he enquired.

"I ain't blind," answered Copper shortly.

"You soon will be—unless you answer my questions," returned Slim softly. "And that's only the beginning. And I ain't kiddin'. Now, let's make a start. Where do you come from and what's your racket?"

Copper sneered. "So you think you can make me squeal? You've got the wrong man, fish-face. I've used better men than you for sandbags."

Slim's nostrils quivered. "So that's how you feel, is it?" he almost whispered. He took a pace nearer.

With what emotion, not to say consternation, Cub watched the impending drama can be better imagined than described. He came near to panic. Of one thing he was certain. Slim, as he had asserted, was not kidding. A man with such eyes was capable of any devilment, he thought. The very way he handled the knife was sinister. It was evident that unless something was done and done quickly, Copper would be mutilated. That at any cost must be prevented. Copper would not talk. Cub was certain of that, too. Nothing would make him open his lips. By nature he was as stubborn as only a Cockney can be, and neither threats nor punishment would move him. It was clear that only direct action could prevent a tragedy. Cub had no hope of achieving anything by mere words. This, he felt sure, would only expose his position to no purpose. This left only action, and the only action likely to succeed was the use of weapons. There seemed no point in shooting the big man, leaving Slim on his feet, for of the two Slim was the most dangerous, the most to be feared. That he thought nothing of murder was evident from his treatment of Gimlet. Yet Cub dare not shoot at Slim for fear of hitting Copper who was directly behind him. There was, he decided, only one way to handle the situation. It would at least put a stop to the present proceedings, although what would happen afterwards was a matter for speculation.

Very gently, hardly moving his body, he slid his right hand into his pocket and drew out his thirty-eight. Extending his arm he took careful aim at the electric lamp, which still stood on the table not far from Copper,

where the big man—Tiny, Slim had called him—had put it. Out of the corner of his eye Cub saw the stiletto move. His finger tightened on the trigger. The weapon blazed. Mingled with the report came the crash of splintering glass. The room was plunged into darkness. In a moment of inspiration Cub yelled, “Come on, get ’em, boys!” This was to create an impression that he was not alone, and the ruse, judging by what followed, may have succeeded.

From the darkness came a shout of alarm. Slim cried, tersely, “Beat it!” Footsteps clattered in swift movement. There was a crash and a curse as someone collided with the table. A gun roared and Cub flinched as a stream of sparks leapt towards him. The bullet smashed into the dresser. Cub snatched a quick shot at the flash and took a flying leap to the floor. He landed heavily and fell. Someone fell over him and he twisted as he rose. Again a gun streamed flame, this time from somewhere near the door, and a bullet ricocheted, whining shrilly, from floor to ceiling. Again Cub fired at the flash, and keeping low scrambled in the direction of Copper, whose voice, adding to the uproar, was yelling: “Let ’em have it, kid, let ’em have it!” A bullet crashed through the bottles on the table. Glass flew. Pieces tinkled on the floor. Then, as suddenly as it had started, the commotion subsided.

Cub paused, tense, braced for quick movement, as the unnatural silence fell—a silence more dramatic than the din had been. Somewhere liquid was splashing gently on to the floor. Apart from that the only sound he could hear was someone breathing. Who it was he did not know. He himself held his breath, pistol at the ready, finger crooked. Nothing happened, so feeling his way he crawled to Copper, and taking out his knife cut free his wrists. He heard Copper get up. The chair went over. It seemed to make an extraordinary clatter. Again Cub crouched, waiting. What Copper was doing he did not know. From somewhere in the direction of the door, or from the passage, came a rustle of stealthy footsteps.

“Watch out, Copper,” said Cub in a tense whisper.

“We’ll show the dirty rats,” returned Copper, in a voice vibrant with anger.

“They’re in the passage,” warned Cub.

“That suits me,” muttered Copper. “Come on.”

Cub heard him move forward. Groping his way he followed, but the darkness pressed on him. Such conditions were impossible, hopeless, he thought. Presently they would be shooting each other. He felt in his pocket for his torch. “Copper, where are you?” he called.

GIMLET TAKES A HAND

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IT is not to be supposed that while these events were occurring Gimlet and Trapper were at the hut doing nothing or merely stoking up the fire. They had, it is true, remained at the hut long after Cub had departed; and after Copper had gone to look for him it was some while before his prolonged absence was considered worthy of remark. As the afternoon wore on, however, and twilight began to dim the scene, Trapper looked up the glen with increasing frequency. At last he went to Gimlet, who was sitting by the fire, and said, "Copper should have been back some time ago—if he was able to get back. This staying away is bad. It is not like him. Something is wrong or he would be back."

"I've been thinking the same thing for some time," returned Gimlet. "I should have done something about it before this had I been able to think of anything to do. There didn't seem any point in wandering about in the fog with no particular objective. I'd rather not go near the pub just yet. I'm sorry I let Cub go off alone, in the first place. What's the weather doing now?"

Trapper smiled wanly. "It has done everything—fog, rain, sleet. There has been a little snow, but it has stopped and the sky is clearing." He went to the saucepan on the stove and stirred the contents. "They will be hungry, those two. My beautiful soup, she is ruined. Soup will not keep hot for ever."

Gimlet thought for a little while. "We'd better have a look round," he decided. "I'll write a note and leave it here in case either of them comes back, then they'll know what we're doing. While I'm doing that, you might make a sortie as far as the road to see if you can see any sign of them."

"Okay, sir," agreed Trapper.

"Don't go too near the pub and don't be too long away."

"If I'm not back in an hour, sir, you'd better start looking for me too," replied Trapper. He went out and set off down the glen.

He had an open mind about the probable result of his investigation. He would not have been surprised to meet Copper or Cub, yet, paradoxically, he was not very hopeful of finding them. They were in a big country and they might be anywhere in it. Had it not been for the revolver shot earlier in the day, he would have concluded that Cub had got lost in the fog, and Copper, looking for him, had made the same blunder. He knew only too well from his experience in the backwoods of Canada how easy it was to become lost

in country without conspicuous landmarks. But he did not like that pistol shot.

He reached the mine. Finding nothing there, he went on to the road. He looked up and down. A little snow lay about. He examined that nearest to him, but it was unbroken by a mark of any sort except in one place where a rabbit had crossed a smooth patch. He walked a little way towards the tavern, but finding nothing he turned and walked back the other way, passing the glen that led to the mine, and so on into country new to him. He did not go very far, for it was now dark, and while the stars and the snow between them made it possible to see a little way, he could not see enough to make further exploration worth while. Moreover, it was time, he decided, that he returned to the hut. Before turning he subjected the track ahead to a final close scrutiny. A mark in the thin film of snow some distance away attracted his attention. Taking care to leave no trail himself, by keeping to the heather, he walked up to the mark and saw at a glance that it was a human footprint. There were, he now observed, several footprints, some more clearly defined than others. He bent over the clearest one he could find, and striking a match, which he shielded with his hands, examined it minutely. Drawing a deep breath, he straightened his back and stared up the tracks; then, as if he had reached a decision, he swung round and made the fastest time he could to the hut.

Gimlet was there, waiting. "Any sign of them?" he asked.

"Plenty," answered Trapper. "Cub has been back this way."

"How do you know?"

"I found his tracks in the snow. They come down the hill and strike the track some distance above the turning to the mine. He was lost, I think. Instead of the tracks coming this way, as they should have done, they go the other way. They go—but they do not come back."

"Then he must still be up there somewhere."

"Nothing is more certain."

"You're sure they're his tracks?"

"It is impossible to be mistaken. Always the heel of his right shoe is worn, where he twists a little on it as he walks."

"Were there any other tracks?"

"I did not see any. He was alone. He did not hurry, either. The tracks show that he waited a little while, as if in doubt."

Gimlet pondered. "I think it's all very strange," he murmured. "We can only conclude that something must have happened or he would have come

straight back. The thing becomes more and more perplexing. You didn't see any sign of Copper?"

"Not a thing."

Gimlet rose. "We have at least something definite to go on now," he said. "We'd better try to follow up Cub's tracks. I've written the note. I'll leave it here on the table. Let's go."

They left the hut, but they had not gone a dozen yards when Trapper caught Gimlet by the arm. "*Tch!* Here comes the car again," he whispered.

Standing still, they could hear the car distinctly. It was possible to tell the direction it was travelling from the sound. It was going up the track from the main road towards the Lodge. They hurried forward, hoping to catch sight of it, but by the time they had reached the old mine it had gone past. The purr of the engine faded.

Trapper said nothing. He strode on to the track, where the marks of the tyres were plain to see. Still without speaking he walked on to the footprints which, he had asserted, could only have been made by Cub. The moon had not yet risen, but even in the wan starlight the dark tracks in the white snow could be followed without difficulty. "See," he said. "He came down the hill from the right. What he was doing on that hill I do not know, for it is not the direction of the post-office. But he may have been lost. He reaches the tracks, he hesitates a little while, and then goes on."

"All right. Follow his trail as far as it goes," ordered Gimlet.

They had not travelled very far when a sharp sound, no great distance ahead, brought them to a halt.

"That was a car door being slammed," stated Gimlet.

"Yes. Now the engine has started. The car may be coming back. Yes—she comes," snapped Trapper. "Quick!" They just had time to throw themselves in the deep heather at the side of the track when the car appeared round the bend about a hundred yards ahead of them. They lay still as it came on, travelling fairly fast. Carrying no lights, it passed them quickly and disappeared from sight down the track.

Gimlet got up. "Could you see who was in it? I couldn't."

"No," answered Trapper. "I looked hard, but I couldn't see a thing."

"Pity," murmured Gimlet. "No matter. Let's push on. That car started from somewhere not very far in front of us. I don't think we have much farther to go."

With some difficulty Trapper picked up Cub's tracks again, on the verge, and, following them, soon came to the bend. He stopped and clicked his

tongue, pointing. Words were unnecessary.

“The Lodge, by Jove!” muttered Gimlet. “So that’s the answer. It will be interesting to see just what is going on here.”

Trapper advanced, still following the tracks. He looked at the spot where Cub had made his first survey in front of the Lodge. This yielded nothing, so he went on round to the rear. But he stopped abruptly, with a low whistle of surprise, when he reached the courtyard.

“What is it?” asked Gimlet, catching up with him.

Trapper waved an eloquent hand at a medley of tracks that had almost trampled out of existence the thin mantle of snow. “*Sacré!* Someone has been busy here,” he ejaculated. “If——”

He got no farther. Whatever he was going to say was cut off short by the crack of a firearm inside the house. It was followed by a shrill muffled cry. Came another shot, a heavier report this time, and another, and another, and another. A moment later a door was flung open and two men dashed out. In a flash, before either Gimlet or Trapper could recover from their astonishment at this unexpected development, they had vanished into an opening between the outbuildings and the house. Their footsteps could be heard running on.

Trapper would have followed, but Gimlet held him back. “Steady,” he cautioned. “One of those fellows was carrying a gun—I saw it in his hand. I fancy that first shot was Cub’s thirty-eight. We’d better see what’s happened inside before we start chasing about the moor in the dark.”

The back door had been left wide open. Gimlet went in, Trapper close behind. They felt their way down a short corridor. Vague sounds came from the left, so they turned in that direction. Then, in the darkness ahead someone spoke. Unmistakably it was Cub’s voice. “Copper, where are you?” it called.

Gimlet relaxed. “Okay, Cub. Go easy with your gun. It’s me—Gimlet,” he said quickly.

There was a gasp in the darkness. A torch flashed and the scene was revealed. The most conspicuous object in it was Copper, a chair raised above his head as if to strike. Seeing Gimlet, he lowered it, slowly, like a man who doubts his eyes.

“Sufferin’ whelks!” he muttered. “Another second and I should have brained you, sir.”

“How the deuce did you get here?” demanded Gimlet crisply. “What’s going on, anyway? Can’t we have a proper light?”

Trapper struck a match, and, seeing the candle on the table, lit it.

Gimlet looked at Copper and Cub in turn. He looked at the smashed lamp, splintered wood, and broken glass. “Are you both all right?” he asked. “You seem to have been having some fun here.”

“Right as rain, sir,” answered Copper cheerfully.

“Then perhaps you wouldn’t mind telling me what all the fuss was about?”

Copper looked at Cub. “You tell him,” he pleaded.





“ANOTHER SECOND AND I SHOULD HAVE BRAINED YOU,  
SIR.”

“It’s a bit hard to know where to begin,” said Cub. “I don’t know anything about Copper. I only know what happened to me. But there are two men in the house.”

“They’ve gone,” interrupted Gimlet. “They went in such a hurry that I doubt if they’ll come back. Were they doing the shooting?”

“I started it,” admitted Cub. “A little while ago there were some other men in the yard, with a string of ponies.”

Trapper butted in. "With what?"

"Ponies."

"You do not see very well in the dark," said Trapper. "They were stags; come down from the hill for shelter, no doubt."

"Are you telling me that I don't know the difference between a horse and a stag?" demanded Cub indignantly.

Trapper shrugged. "There have been stags in the yard."

"They were horses when I saw them," snorted Cub.

"Don't argue," broke in Gimlet curtly. "We'll settle that later. Trapper, wedge a chair under that door handle so that no one can open it. Let's get down to brass tacks. What happened to you, Cub? Why did you come here?"

"It's rather a long story," answered Cub. "Those fellows might come back, and there's quite a gang of them. Wouldn't it be better to go back to the hut before we start comparing notes?"

"Leave my house?" retorted Gimlet with some warmth. "Certainly not. What the deuce next? This happens to be my property, as that bunch of thugs who have been using it without my permission will presently find out. We'll stay here; but that doesn't mean we need live in this disgusting mess." Gimlet eyed the dirty glasses and broken bottles with disapproval. "In the morning we'll get the place tidied up. There should be mattresses and blankets upstairs, so there's no reason why we shouldn't be quite cosy. More important still, there's a bathroom. I need a bath. You look as though you could do with one, too, Copper. And see about getting your hair cut."

"Yessir."

"We can collect our kit from the hut in the morning."

"Yessir."

"I got quite a few things from the shop," interpolated Cub. "Tea, sugar, flour, some candles and so on. They're in my haversack. I left it on top of the dresser."

"Good."

"Did you get my fags?" enquired Copper.

"I did," answered Cub. "And, knowing your low taste, I also got you a jar of pickled onions."

"What-ho! Onions, eh? There ain't no nicer fruit." Copper climbed on the dresser and, lifting down the haversack, emptied the miscellaneous contents on the table. "'Strewth! We'll be able ter live like blinkin' dukes," he observed.

Gimlet frowned. "All I ask is that you don't eat onions for breakfast," he said coldly. "Go ahead, Cub. Tell us what happened to you."

Without omitting anything of importance, Cub gave an account of his adventures from the time he left the hut up to Gimlet's arrival at the Lodge.

When he had finished, Gimlet turned to Copper. "What about you?"

Copper told his story.

"Well, well," murmured Gimlet at the end. "This begins to get exciting. It looks as if we may have bigger game than grouse to shoot at. There are still a lot of pieces missing, but our jigsaw puzzle is beginning to take shape. As far as Trapper and I are concerned, there was nothing remarkable about our turning up here. Trapper went out to look for you and found your footprints in the snow. Naturally, we followed on. It's all turned out for the best. There wasn't room to swing a cat in the hut; this will make a much better headquarters. It's no use starting anything tonight, but in the morning we'll get down to things. Tracks in the snow should show us the way those fellows went. Meanwhile, we'd better get some sleep. Copper, make a raid upstairs for blankets. Cub, you should find a broom in the scullery; get this pigsty mucked out; we can't sleep on broken glass. Trapper, get a bucket of water."

As they went about their tasks Copper whispered to Cub, "The skipper's more like his old self. We look like havin' a busy day tomorrow."

Trapper was the last to return. "We were both right about the stags and horses," he told Cub with a smile.

"Don't talk nonsense—how could you both be right?" enquired Gimlet, who had overheard.

"*Zut!* The hoof marks were those of stags," answered Trapper. "But a heap of horse droppings gave the game away. It's an old Indian trick—to have ponies shod with shoes the shape of stag's hooves. People looking for ponies don't follow a trail made by a stag. *Enfin!* One of these guys, at least, has brains, I think. Stags are common here. No one would think much of any marks they made; but horses—that would be different."

This announcement was greeted by a short silence. It was broken by Gimlet. "You're right about someone having brains," he said seriously. "We shall have to watch how we go. Did you lock the back door behind you?"

Trapper put the key on the table.

"I ain't sorry Slim forgot to take my gun with him; I've got an idea I shall need it," said Copper grimly, as he picked up the pistol, which had been left on the table, and put it in his pocket.

Gimlet nodded. "It wouldn't surprise me if you're right," he said quietly. "But that's enough for tonight. Let's turn in."

## CHAPTER XI

### GIMLET SUMS UP

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IN spite of the lateness of the hour at which they had retired, Gimlet was early astir the following morning, getting the place "organised," as he said. With blankets folded and mattresses stacked under the long table, everyone was soon busy on a task. Cub tidied up. Copper prepared breakfast. Trapper went off to the hut to fetch the things that had been left there. He brought back a brace of grouse for the pot and some disturbing news. The wind had swung round to the west, causing a sharp thaw, with a result that the snow had gone and all tracks with it. Not a footprint remained.

"That means we shan't be able to trail the guys who were here last night," he observed, pulling up a chair and reaching for the coffee.

"Pity about that," murmured Gimlet. "Before we start wandering haphazard about the moor, we'd better talk things over and try to arrive at some sort of plan. We've quite a lot of information now, but it needs sorting out. I've been thinking it over." He poured another cup of coffee and lit a cigarette. "The main factor is, we are up against a big thing; let us have no delusions about that. No ordinary racket would bring American gangsters here. Moreover, if that fellow Smith has been here for eighteen months, as the post-woman says, the business, whatever it is, has been going on for some time, and must now be well established. And remember, it's a racket big enough to make murder worth while. Secondly, it must be highly profitable to support the big gang which we know now is at work."

"I reckon that there are eight of 'em in it that we know of," put in Copper.

Gimlet resumed. "There's Slim, whom we have good reason to suppose is the boss. There's the fellow who was with him last night—Tiny. There's Burke and Smith at the hotel; there's the man Singer who sent the wire from Lorrington; there's Larry, the truck driver; and finally, there are the two unnamed men whom Cub saw go off last night with the ponies. As Copper says, that tots up to eight, and there may be more. I think it's highly probable that there *are* more. Now, let us try to figure out how the organisation works. It seems pretty clear. Singer, who may, as Cub suspects, be Haynes my

butler, looks after things at Lorrington, in case trouble of any sort promises to start there. His chief job may have been to watch me and keep the gang informed of my movements. While I was away at the war, it was unlikely that I should trouble them, but once it was over the gang must have known that it was only a question of time before I came here. So they planted Haynes, alias Singer. He did his job all right, too. As soon as he knew I was bound for Scotland, he sent off a wire, with what results we know. It would have been risky to bump me off at Lorrington, where I'm well known and where there are always people about. Here it would be a fairly simple matter, and, in fact, if you fellows hadn't turned up they would have got away with it. Larry drives the truck, so we may assume that he is the contact man between here and the south. Smith and Burke handle the hotel. That arrangement serves a double purpose. The gang had to control the hotel, otherwise there might have been all sorts of people staying there for the fishing, and someone, spotting the traffic between the hotel and the Lodge, might have wondered what was going on. From the hotel Burke and Smith can watch the road; at the same time they are in an ideal position to operate up and down the glen, using an old Buick car for the purpose. The rest of the gang is somewhere up here. Just where, we don't know. Nor do we know what they are doing. That's what we've got to find out. Where the Lodge comes in isn't clear, although the indications are that it is a sort of halfway house between the pub and Slim's end of the glen. The road goes no farther than this, remember, so the car couldn't get past this point. Beyond here they use ponies, shod with fake shoes. As Trapper has pointed out, deer tracks are too common in these parts to call for comment, but too many pony tracks might excite the curiosity of a passing keeper or shepherd. Thinking over what Cub saw going on in the yard, it would seem that some product is being manufactured away up the glen, something heavy enough to need horse transport to carry it over country where mechanical transport could not operate. The question is, what are they producing? The only clue we have is that it may have some connection with barley, although that is by no means certain. The local people think it is dog biscuits, which would account for the comings and goings of the lorry; but I don't think we need pay any attention to that. That, obviously, is a cover-up. The barley business may be merely a blind."

"Slim referred to the stuff as vinegar," put in Cub.

Gimlet smiled cynically. "My answer to that is, as Slim would probably say, hooley."

"Just a minute," interposed Copper. "They make malt out of barley, and they make vinegar out of malt. I've seen the words 'pure malt vinegar' on

the bottles in old Ma Smith's fish-shop thousands of times."

Gimlet shook his head. "These people are not likely to bother about a commodity that can be bought for a shilling a bottle," he observed drily. "It's more likely Slim has set up a press for making counterfeit silver coins. In bulk, they would weigh heavily."

"About this fellow Slim," said Copper. "One of the big noises in America during the gangster days was a chap named Slim Delano. I never saw his picture, but I'm wondering if this Slim could be the same chap."

"Might be."

"He was wanted for a nice crop of killings; but I don't think they ever got him," went on Copper.

"That fellow last night had the face of a killer, if ever I saw one," murmured Cub. "Delano sounds Italian, and Slim—our Slim—certainly looked like an Itie."

Gimlet nodded. "It's worth bearing in mind." He looked at Copper. "What about this chap Singer? That obviously is a nickname, too. Queer how crooks adore nicknames. Does Singer suggest anything to you?"

Copper thought for a moment. He shook his head. "I can't say as it does." He grinned. "Unless it's anything to do with Sing-Sing, the big jail in America."

Gimlet smiled. "There might be something in that."

Cub stepped in again. "But surely, sir, with all these crooks about our proper course would be to go to the police."

"And tell them what?"

Cub faltered. "Well—that the country is crawling with crooks."

"And what charge could we or the police bring against them? In order to arrest a man you have to bring a definite charge. What can we accuse these people of? Buying barley? Making vinegar? No, that won't do. The police wouldn't issue a warrant without more information than we can provide. If they did and if at the finish they could prove nothing, the crooks might turn round and bring an action for wrongful arrest."

"The skipper's right," muttered Copper. "I've been in the Force and I know. We've got to know more about this racket than we do at present before we can call in the police. Of course, the police might send a man along to have a look round, but all that would do would be to warn the crooks that the police were on the job. They'd either lie low for a bit or fade out."

“It might clear them off my property, but after the crack they gave me on the skull I don’t feel inclined to let them off so easily,” said Gimlet.

“But if this fellow McTaggart is really Burke, then he’s a wanted man already,” argued Cub.

“True enough,” agreed Gimlet. “Then what? The police arrest Burke—and the rest slide away. That won’t do. We’ve got to get the lot while we’re at it.”

“Dash it all, we could have them arrested for assault,” persisted Cub.

“Could we prove that?” asked Gimlet. “I doubt it. A clever defending lawyer would ask the jury what possible motive had his clients for interfering with us. We should have no answer to that. In Copper’s case, the three men who were present would swear blind that he was lying or that he was drunk. It would be three against one, and I doubt if any magistrate would convict on such questionable evidence. There was no question of robbery involved. They were too clever to touch my wallet. And look at this place. Apparently they haven’t touched a thing. Why? Obviously, because someone might come here, and if anything was missing the police would be informed. The crooks wouldn’t want that to happen. They’d be fools to spoil a first-class racket for the sake of a silly burglary—and they know it. They have used the house, we know, but we couldn’t prove it, and if we did it would amount to nothing. So, taking one thing with another, I think we can do without the police—at any rate, for the time being. We managed without the police in the old days in France, and I still prefer to think that we can look after our own affairs.”

Cub tried again. “If this gang is operating up the glen, then they must have a house, or a farm, or some sort of building to work in. They wouldn’t be likely to live in the open—not this weather.”

“They might be in a cave,” suggested Copper.

“Slim didn’t look to me as if he had just stepped out of a cave,” asserted Cub sarcastically. Speaking to Gimlet, he went on. “Do you know of any building higher up the glen, away in the hills perhaps?”

“I’ve never heard tell of anything of the sort,” answered Gimlet. “But that, of course, isn’t to say there is nothing. Remember, I’ve only just taken over the property. I’ve never been here before. I knew I had relatives here, that’s all, but I wasn’t particularly interested. I never expected to inherit the property. It only came to me because the two heirs next in line were killed in the war.”

“What about a map?” suggested Trapper, always practical. “There should be a map of the estate—huh? That might tell us something.”

“It’s an idea,” agreed Gimlet. “There might be a map in the library. It’s more likely, though, that any maps of the estate will be with the deeds, in the lawyers’ office, and that’s in London.”

“Then if it’s no use sitting here, let’s get after ’em,” suggested Copper bluntly.

Gimlet lit another cigarette and flicked the match into the fireplace. “No hurry,” he replied casually. “It’s always a good thing to consider the enemy’s point of view. After last night’s affair, they must be wondering at the sudden invasion of their hide-out, just as much as we are wondering what they are doing. Don’t forget they imagine I am under twenty feet of rock and rubble. What a shock they’ll get when they see me. They have evidently been in the habit of using this room as a meeting-place. What will they do now someone is in residence?”

“How will they know we’re here?” asked Copper.

“Unless I’ve missed my guess, Slim would send a man out this morning as soon as it was light enough to see, to find out if anyone was here. The fellow would see smoke coming out of the chimney and go back to report it. Slim’s problem would then be to find out who is here—how many there are of us. He only knows of two—Copper and the person who shot at the lamp from the top of the dresser. Cub says he shouted something about ‘get ’em, boys’——”

“I did that, hoping they’d think the place was surrounded by police,” explained Cub.

“From the way they bolted I imagine they thought something of the sort, too,” said Gimlet, smiling.

“It was to stop you living here that they tried to bump you off,” Copper told Gimlet.

“I don’t think there’s much doubt about that,” conceded Gimlet. “Now they’ll be wondering how many more people they’ve got to bump off. That’s why I think it might be a good plan—to use Mr. Churchill’s expression—to let them stew in their own juice for a while. We’re in no desperate hurry. That won’t suit them, though. They’ll want to get on with their racket, whatever it is, but they won’t dare to make a move while they realise that an unknown number of people are at the Lodge, sitting astride their lines of communication, so to speak.”

“Burke and Smith, down at the pub, won’t know anything about that,” Cub pointed out.

“Not unless Slim has let them know and ordered them to keep clear. If he hasn’t, Burke and Smith may roll up here; in which case we shall be only



too happy to receive them.” Gimlet got up. “For a start, it might be a good idea if we explored the house. Even if we learn nothing, we shall at least know our way about. Come on.”

An hour was spent exploring the Lodge from cellar to attic, and the outbuildings. The result was disappointing. It yielded absolutely nothing—that is, nothing in the way of a clue to the racket. It was a depressing reconnaissance. No spectacle could have been more melancholy than the dismal state into which the house had fallen. Except for one or two places where the rain had entered—probably due, as Gimlet pointed out, to the guttering being choked with dead leaves—there was nothing much wrong with the main structure. But dust lay thick on the furniture; there were places where plaster had fallen from the ceiling and soot from the chimneys, so that the general impression of neglect made everything look worse than it really was. There were, however, two items of passing interest. The first was the gun-room, which created a burst of enthusiasm, for there was an armoury of weapons in glass cases round the walls; shot-guns of various bores and rifles with calibres ranging from light twenty-twos to forty-fives. Gimlet said the heavier weapons were for deer-stalking. There was ammunition, too, in the cupboards.

“I wonder Slim and his mob didn’t help themselves to some of these,” remarked Copper, taking down a Mannlicher thirty-thirty automatic lever-action deer rifle, and looking through the barrel with professional aptitude.

“That Slim hasn’t touched them all goes to show what a shrewd fellow he is,” returned Gimlet. “Remember what I said in the kitchen? The lawyers are bound to have an inventory of the contents of the Lodge. Slim isn’t such a fool as to risk a charge of housebreaking while he’s on a much better proposition. What would they do with weapons of this sort, anyway? Slim carries all he’s likely to need, under his armpit or in his pocket. Still, it’s nice to know that if it comes to open war, we shan’t be short of equipment. Help yourselves to anything you fancy.”

Copper took a twelve-bore sporting gun. “Give me a double-barrelled scatter-gun and buckshot for close work,” he declared. Trapper said he would take the Mannlicher. Cub selected a heavily built Remington twenty-two repeater with a bolt action and telescopic sight. Gimlet said he wouldn’t bother just then. If it came to shooting, he would see about it.

The second item of interest was a bed which, from the crumpled heap of blankets that lay on it, had been used. Several match-sticks and cigarette ends on the floor lent colour to this view. From the dust and a small quantity of plaster that lay on top of the blankets, this was evidently some time ago.

Cub put forward a theory. “What happened here, I should say, was this,” he observed. “When Burke was on the run in Scotland he came across this place and decided that it was a lot more comfortable than sleeping rough on the open moor. He stayed here for a while and used this bed. Walking about the hills looking for food, he tumbled across something that gave him his big idea. It was too big to start single-handed, so he got in touch with his pals across the Atlantic, and they, being out of a racket on account of prohibition coming to an end, came over here and joined him. They got the thing going, and they’ve had it all their own way ever since. When the war ended they knew you’d be coming here, so they planted Singer to tip them off when you headed north. All went off as arranged, but what they didn’t reckon on was the three of us following you up. As you say, that’s got them guessing.”

“I don’t think you’re far wrong,” agreed Gimlet. “It must have been something like that.”

They turned their attention to the library.

“’Strewth!” exclaimed Copper, looking round the shelves with their vast array of books. “We shan’t get short of reading if things get dull—my oath we shan’t.”

“I don’t think we shall have much time for reading,” returned Gimlet quietly. “There’s just a chance that we may find a map here, but it’s a bit hard to know where to start looking.”

“Don’t you think it’s time, sir, we started lookin’ fer Slim and ’is pals?” muttered Copper impatiently.

Gimlet dropped into an easy chair. “I’ve no intention of looking for him—not yet, at any rate.”

“Not—look for him?” Copper seemed astonished.

“I’d rather he came here, to us.”

“You think—he’ll come—*here*?” Copper was frankly incredulous. “Slim didn’t strike me as being crazy.”

“Put it this way,” went on Gimlet. “In the first place, I don’t think you quite realise what you’re talking about when you speak of looking for anyone in a region like this. My estate alone is nearly as big as a normal English county. And it isn’t flat, open country. None of it is level. It’s either mountain or valley, and, as Cub has already discovered, the going isn’t easy. An army could search these hills for a week without finding a man who happened to get lost. That’s why, in days gone by, a clan could make a cattle raid and disappear as completely as if the earth had swallowed them up—that’s really what it amounted to. What hope have we, then, of finding Slim, who has no doubt taken care to camouflage his hide-out? Another point is,

he might occupy this house during our absence, in which case it would be a sticky job to get back into it. If we had something to go on it would be different, but we have absolutely no idea where to start. There's another point. Suppose, by some miraculous chance, we did run into Slim and his associates; what then? What could we do?"

"Do? Why, knock their blocks off; what else?" replied Copper promptly.

Gimlet frowned. "Don't be ridiculous, Copper. The war's over. If we start making a private battlefield of the Highlands, it will be us the police will be looking for. According to the law, we should only be justified in employing force if we were attacked. In other words, in this country you can't start shooting people unless they try to kill you."

"I get it," replied Copper bitterly. "We stand up and let them have first crack at us. If they miss, we have a go at them. Blimey, sir, what sort o' war do yer call that? There wasn't nothin' like that in *my* trainin'. Shoot first and say you're sorry afterwards has always been our motto—what say you, Trapper, old pal? Am I right?"

"*Tch!* Every time," responded Trapper faithfully.

"Well, I'm afraid I must rule that out at Strathcarglas," insisted Gimlet.

Copper shook his head sadly. "'Strewth! I call that a bit 'ard. For five blinkin' years we've risked our precious 'ides killin' the King's enemies; now we're not allowed ter knock off one or two of our own. It ain't fair—no, my oath, it ain't."

"Still, that's how it is; that's the law," said Gimlet. "Don't worry though, I think you'll get your chance before this business is over."

"If we can't go gunnin' fer Slim, how are we goin' ter get a chance?" demanded Copper.

"I've already told you," answered Gimlet evenly. "We'll stay here and let Slim come to us. He won't run away, don't worry. He's not going to abandon a valuable racket on our account. At the moment, like us, the enemy will be talking it over. While we stick our toes in here, they won't dare to carry on with the racket. They'll soon get tired of that. What, then, will they do? They'll come here and try to shift us."

"What they'll do is try to bump us off, in case we go to the police and kick up a stink," asserted Copper.

"I think that's more than likely," admitted Gimlet. "I hope they'll find we are not so easy to bump off as all that."

"When do you think they'll come here?" asked Cub.

“They might come any time. After all, we haven’t attempted to conceal our presence here. Confound them; I’m not going to hide in my own house. I don’t think it’s likely that they’ll come in daylight, for fear we spotted them coming. They’re more likely to come after dark. Presently we’ll arrange things to ensure that they get an appropriate reception. Incidentally, by the look of the sky we’re going to have some more snow. I’ll have another look to see if I can find a map. Trapper, I think it would be a good plan if you took your bow and stocked the larder, just in case we found ourselves besieged. Copper, go up to one of the turrets and cast an eye over the landscape. We should look silly if we allowed ourselves to be taken by surprise. Cub can stay here with me. After that, we’ll go back to the kitchen; it’s warmer there. Later on we’ll arrange things so that if we should have visitors, we’ll be able to keep the party in order.”

For more than an hour Cub helped Gimlet to search the library for a large-scale map of the district. The quest, to Gimlet’s disappointment, proved unsuccessful, so they gave it up and returned to the kitchen, where they found Trapper skinning a rabbit. A hare, hanging on a peg with the grouse he had killed earlier in the day, showed that he had not wasted his time.

Presently Copper came in and reported that although the turret commanded a fine view of the moor, and he had watched patiently for a long time, he had seen no sign of life anywhere.

“All right,” said Gimlet. “As soon as Cub has finished his lunch he’ll relieve you. After that, we’ll take regular watches till sundown. Then we’ll fix things ready for the night. I don’t think Slim will disappoint us. From what we know of him, he doesn’t seem to be the sort of man to tolerate opposition for very long.”

## CHAPTER XII

### SLIM MAKES A PROPOSITION

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WITHIN the kitchen of Strathcarglas Lodge silence reigned. Gimlet sat in a chair near the range in which a small fire smouldered, reading a book which he had brought from the library in the light of a candle that stood on a corner of the table near his elbow. Cub, also reading, shared the candle. Trapper, in his shirt-sleeves, with infinite care and patience whittled a new arrow. To a casual visitor it would have been a homely scene in a peaceful setting.

Gimlet looked at his watch. “Ten o’clock,” he announced in a low voice. “Your turn, Trapper.”

Trapper rose, put away his knife, donned his jacket and walked over to the door. All this he did very quietly. In his final exit from the room he made no more noise than a shadow, this being largely due to the fact that he wore his socks over his shoes.

A minute later, moving with the same uncanny silence, Copper entered. “All quiet, sir,” he reported in a low voice. “Sky overcast. Black as pitch, but the moon’s just comin’ up. Feels like snow.” He sat down and lit a cigarette. “If my old Ma could see me she’d wonder what the blue blazes I was playin’ at,” he observed reflectively.

No one answered.

Ten minutes passed with hardly a sound. Then Trapper came back. He still moved quietly, but now, as he closed the door behind him there was a quality of urgency in his manner. “*Ma foi!* You are right, sir,” he breathed. “They come, I think. I hear a movement on the moor. A grouse has just gone over, flying low. I hear her wings.”

Gimlet stirred. “That’s it. That bird wouldn’t have moved at this time of night if it hadn’t been disturbed. Did you close the back door?”

“I closed it but I did not lock it, as you ordered.”

“You’ve no idea how many there are of them?”

“No.”

“Never mind; you should be able to find out; let us know by the signal we arranged. Mark the direction they take when they leave. That’s the main object of this performance. But don’t let them see you.”

“We look like havin’ a lively time if the whole mob turns up,” muttered Copper.

“We’ll risk that,” averred Gimlet. “All right, everybody. Action stations.” Gimlet himself did not move. “Remember, do nothing unless you get a cue from me, or unless it becomes obvious that the situation is out of hand,” he cautioned. “Otherwise, not a sound.”

Trapper went out by the door through which he had entered. Cub went over to the big dresser, the lower part of which was a cupboard of some size. Earlier in the day it had been half filled with old-fashioned cooking utensils—saucepans, stewpans, and the like, but these had been removed to the scullery, where, arranged inside a door that gave access to some outer domestic offices, they ensured that no one could enter without making a good deal of noise. Cub crawled into the cupboard, pulling the double doors

behind him until they were within an inch of being closed. Copper moved to a pantry and did much the same thing; that is, he pulled the door to without latching it, leaving a narrow crack through which, from the inside, he could see into the kitchen.

These were the dispositions which, earlier in the evening, had been arranged and rehearsed with a good deal of care. The weapons selected in the gun-room, loaded, were already in their respective places. Only Gimlet was, or appeared to be, unarmed. He did not move from his position in front of the fire except to turn the chair a trifle more towards the door which gave access to the corridor leading to the back door. The candle still burned, casting distorted shadows on the walls. Silence settled again on the scene. So still and quiet was it that a cinder, falling from the fire, made an astonishing amount of noise.

Five minutes passed and still the silence persisted; but at last it was broken. The door handle moved, making a noise so slight that in the ordinary way it would not have been noticed. Gimlet smiled faintly as, glancing at the source of the noise, he saw the handle slowly turning.

“Come in, Mr. Delano,” he called in a clear voice.

The door handle stopped abruptly. There was a short pause. Then it was turned sharply and, with a bang, the door was flung wide open.

Gimlet did not move a muscle. Out of the corners of his eyes he could just see someone in a half-crouching position, one hand thrust forward, in the dark corridor.

There was another minute of palpitating silence. Nothing moved. Then, with an almost imperceptible gliding movement, an automatic held in front of him like the head of a snake about to strike, Slim advanced into the room. His eyes were on Gimlet. They never left him. They rested on his face as if it exercised upon him some fatal fascination. His own face, sallow at the best of times, was ashen. Cub, from where he squatted, could see the muscles of his jaws working. Still Slim stared, and stared, and stared again at the man sitting motionless in the chair.

Gimlet spoke again. “Aren’t you getting rather a big boy to be playing at soldiers, Mr. Delano?” he murmured in a voice tinged with sarcasm. “Or are you pretending to be the big bad wolf trying to frighten somebody? Come—come; put that nasty-looking weapon away. What are you going to do with it? You can’t kill the same man twice.”



SLIM STARED, AND STARED, AND STARED AGAIN AT THE MOTIONLESS FIGURE IN THE CHAIR.

Slim drew a deep breath. He made a beckoning movement to someone behind him. Tiny appeared in the radius of light, his lips parted, eyes wide, sweat running down his face.

“Let’s get outa here, boss,” he pleaded in a tremulous voice.

“What’s the hurry?” enquired Gimlet.

Slim found his voice at last. “What are you doing here?”

“Waiting for you.”

“Waiting—for us? Pah! Don’t give me that.” Slim’s voice was heavy with sarcasm.

“What I am going to give you eventually, Mr. Delano, will probably surprise you,” replied Gimlet easily.

“Where did you get hold of that name?” demanded Slim viciously.

“The dead know everything,” bantered Gimlet.

“You ain’t dead,” said Slim, showing his white teeth.

“Maybe it’s his brother,” suggested Tiny. “Watch he don’t pull a gun.”

“Had I wanted to pull a gun on you, Tiny, you wouldn’t have got as far as this,” said Gimlet. “I could have dropped you cold as you came in the back door. Why do you think I left it unlocked? My sentries warned me you were coming.”

“Sentries?” questioned Slim.

Gimlet smiled faintly. “The grouse. Every one is a sentry, and there are hundreds.”

Slim suddenly got angry, or perhaps he tried to cover his discomfiture by a show of anger. “Quit fooling,” he snarled. “How did you get here?”

“I just pushed aside twenty tons or so of rubble and walked along,” answered Gimlet nonchalantly.

“And you reckon you can get away with that?”

“Suppose you tell me what *you’re* reckoning on?” suggested Gimlet. “After all, this is my property. You are the intruder, not me. You’re housebreaking at this very moment. What are you going to say if I call in the police?”

“You ain’t calling the cops,” asserted Slim.

Gimlet raised his eyebrows. “How do you know what I’m going to do?”

Slim hesitated again. “Because I made a mess of putting you out of the way once doesn’t mean I shan’t do better next time.”

“You’d be silly to try anything like that again, Mr. Delano,” replied Gimlet. “You’re not in America now, you know. Our police take a very poor view of murder, and unfortunately for men of your type they cannot be squared. Suppose you stop making threats you can’t carry out and tell me what’s on your mind.”

“You are,” snapped Slim. “You’re in my way.”

“You’ve already made that abundantly clear,” answered Gimlet smoothly. “But there are two angles to that. You may be in *my* way. I object



to anyone, much less a bunch of crooks, using my property as if it were their own.”

Slim stared. “Crooks? What sort of talk’s that?” he demanded.

“You should know,” replied Gimlet. “Now tell me, Mr. Delano, what are you doing on my property that you are so anxious to stay on it?”

Slim frowned. “Are you kidding?”

“No,” returned Gimlet. “I was never more serious.”

“Suppose we say that’s my business?” suggested Slim. “This place suits me. I like it, and when I like a thing I’m always willing to pay for it. That’s fair enough, ain’t it?”

“The reception I received when I first arrived didn’t give me that impression.”

“Bah! That was Billy Smith. He acts kinda impetuous. I’m different. Suppose you and me get down to cases and get things fixed up as between gentlemen?”

The ghost of a smile crossed Gimlet’s face. “Go ahead.”

“I’ve done pretty well in this country since I came over here, I’ll own to that,” went on Slim.

“How did you get into this country, with a war on?” asked Gimlet curiously. “You’ve been here for some time, I understand.”

“Why, that?” Slim laughed shortly. “Nothing to it. I joined the army to fight the Nazis.”

“I see. And when you got over here you deserted?”

“Put it that way if you like.”

“Go on.”

“What I was going to say was, suppose you let me hire this dump and you go some place else and forget about it? I ain’t mean. I’m thinking of real money. How about ten thousand bucks for a year’s hire and no more questions asked? How’s that?”

Gimlet shook his head. “Nothing doing, Mr. Delano. I’m not for sale—neither is Strathcarglas.”

“Make it twenty thousand.”

“Not for twenty million.”

“What’s wrong with my money?”

“Since you ask me, Mr. Delano, I don’t think I should like the smell of it. Let me be frank. I don’t like you and I don’t like your friends. In fact, I dislike you so much that by the time I’ve finished with you I hope you will

be swinging on a well-built British gallows, or burning in one of your own electric chairs.”

Slim drew a deep breath. “So that’s how you feel?”

“That, Mr. Delano, is exactly how I feel. I hope I have made myself clear?”

“You’ve decided to stay here—huh?”

“Precisely.”

“And you reckon I’ll let you?”

“You barely come into my calculations.”

Slim took a swift glance round the room. “I guess I’ve got you where I want you right now,” he drawled.

“You’re not very good at guessing, Mr. Delano,” said Gimlet gently. “It would be more in accord with facts to say that the reverse is the case.”

“Is that so?” Slim spoke slowly. His eyes were never still. For the first time it seemed to occur to him that he might be in a trap.

“My advice to you, Mr. Delano, is that you depart as quietly as you came. Of course, if you’d rather have it the other way, go right ahead.”

“Yeah?” Slim’s lips closed in a thin line. He half raised his pistol. “What’s to stop me letting you have it?”

“Several things.”

“Where are they?”

“Oh no, Mr. Delano, I’m not showing you my hand,” replied Gimlet. “Perhaps I’ll show you one card.” Gimlet inclined his head towards the scullery door. “Copper,” he said quietly.

The muzzle of Copper’s twelve-bore appeared, covering Slim. The scullery door opened slowly, revealing Copper on the threshold. His face was a mask.

“You want me, sir?” he asked, without taking his eyes off Slim.

“I may. Stand fast.” Gimlet looked at Slim. “Is that enough or would you like to see some more?”

Slim swallowed hard. “Okay,” he said in a voice that had acid in it. “I get it. But don’t get the idea I’ve finished with you.”

“I hope you will not be so ill advised as to suppose that I’ve finished with you, either, Mr. Delano,” answered Gimlet quietly. “I’m glad we’ve had this chat. We understand each other now, I think.”

“I ought to have made sure of you first time,” grated Slim through his teeth.

“Quite right. You should. A lot of men, better men than you, Mr. Delano—many of them, alas, no longer with us—have thought the same thing.”

“I’ll get you yet, you smug Britisher.” Slim’s face had turned pale again, this time with anger.

“Don’t get abusive, Mr. Delano. Abuse is cheap. And suppose we leave nationalities out of it. You’re just as much an enemy of your own country as mine. You see, I know quite a lot about you.”

Slim drew himself up and put his pistol in its holster. “Okay,” he muttered. “You win this time—but I ain’t finished.”

“Neither have I, Mr. Delano,” answered Gimlet smoothly.

Slim turned to the door. “Come on, Tiny, let’s get outa this.”

“My tall friend will see you off the premises,” said Gimlet, inclining his head towards Copper. “He’s a short-tempered fellow; when he gets upset he suffers from a twitching finger, so be careful not to annoy him.”

Slim, followed by Tiny, walked to the door. “You ain’t seen the last of me,” he promised viciously.

“And you haven’t seen the last of me, Mr. Delano,” answered Gimlet.

Slim and Tiny went out. Copper followed close behind, the muzzle of his gun never far from Slim’s back.

Gimlet settled back in his chair and lit another cigarette.

Nevertheless, in spite of his careless attitude it was evident to Cub that he was listening intently. He listened for some time before he said: “All right, Cub. You can come out now.”

As Cub emerged from his hiding-place, Copper came in, grinning. “They’ve gone, sir—gone as quiet as lambs.”

“I wouldn’t call them lambs,” answered Gimlet. “Call them a couple of snakes that have had their tails trodden on. They’re just about as venomous. Any sign of Burke or Smith?”

“No, sir. The yard’s clear.”

“Then we may take it that Slim ordered them to keep out of the way. Or maybe it wasn’t the night for them to come here to collect their famous vinegar.”

“The weather don’t look too good,” said Copper. “It’s tryin’ to do somethin’, but I ain’t sure what.”

Nearly an hour elapsed before Trapper reappeared. From the state of his feet and legs he had obviously been on the moor.

“How did you get on?” asked Gimlet. “Which way did they go?”

“They went straight up the glen,” answered Trapper, sitting down. “I followed them a fair way, but *alors*, it started sleeting and I lost them in the murk. I dare not get too close because I was following them more with my ears than with my eyes, and there were places where the river made so much noise that it drowned all other sounds. But I know just where I lost them and I know the general direction they were heading.”

“Good,” murmured Gimlet.

“It seemed a pity ter have ter let ’em get away,” said Copper sadly, shaking his head.

Gimlet smiled. “That’s probably what they’re thinking about us.”

“What will Slim do next, do you reckon?”

“He’ll come back,” returned Gimlet without hesitation.

Cub looked up. “Do you really think so?”

“Without a doubt. He knows well enough that we’re not likely to run away, and obviously he can’t leave us here. He’s got to move us in order to carry on, and he won’t hesitate to employ the dirtiest gangster methods to do it.”

“And what’ll we do?” questioned Copper.

“We shall stay here.”

“Suppose he sets the house on fire?”

“And bring a crowd here to watch a spectacle which would be seen for miles? Not likely. He wants to discourage visitors, not encourage them. Besides, he wants to use the house himself.”

“What will he be most likely to do, then?”

“There are several things he could do,” asserted Gimlet. “We know he has explosives, because he bombed the mine. American cracksmen have a strong affection for nitroglycerine, for safe busting and similar playful diversions; so one thing he could do would be to come back here and toss a bomb through the kitchen window. That would be the quick and efficient way, because it would remove us all at one stroke—that is, if we were here. It won’t work, for the simple reason that we shall shift our quarters to another part of the house. A slower way would be to snipe us one by one.”

“Ah! What do we do if he starts that?”

“We snipe back.”

“But I thought you ses we wasn’t ter make the place a battlefield?”

“If he shoots at us we shall be in order in shooting back. That, in the eyes of the law, would be justifiable homicide. You were talking of attacking them. I’m talking primarily of defending ourselves. As things stand, if we

attacked we would probably be left with casualties which we should find hard to explain to the authorities. If Slim attacks, his casualties will be his own affair. I don't know what he'd do with them, and, frankly, I don't care."

"Sufferin' winkles!" growled Copper. "This is a new line of soldiering fer us—waitin' ter be attacked; my oath it is."

"Don't get upset about it, I didn't mean that literally; I was referring particularly to the use of lethal weapons. It isn't for us to start using them. We may manage without. But if Slim starts any really rough stuff, we'll hand him back everything we've got."

Trapper grunted. "*Bon, ça.*"

"I should thunderin' well think so," muttered Copper irritably. "Does this mean we stay here all the time?"

"Oh no. Nothing like it. This is only our headquarters. From here we can strike in any direction that suits us."

Copper drew a deep breath. "Thank gawd fer that. I thought from the way you spoke we wasn't goin' ter do no strikin'. What do we strike at first?"

"We can't really do any serious striking until we know what their racket is," answered Gimlet. "That is now the dominant factor. If we could find out what they are doing, we might have reasonable grounds for direct assault. One way to get that information would be to ambush the ponies and examine their packs, or intercept the car between here and the hotel, or stop Larry on the road to see what he has in his truck. I doubt if we have any right to stop the lorry on the road; if it came to a court case that could be made to look like highway robbery. But the lorry will have gone by now. Slim said last night that Larry was in a hurry to get back. It's a pity he didn't say where he was going."

"London, probably," put in Cub.

"I doubt it," said Gimlet pensively. "London is six hundred miles away. If Larry has gone to London, it will be at least four days before he's back. Even then, to do the trip in that time would require two drivers; I understand Larry was alone, so it doesn't look like London. It's more likely that he operates to Aberdeen or Perth, or some big town, and puts his cargo on rail for its final destination. In that case, he should soon be back. Which way was the lorry facing, Copper, when it stopped—towards Tomnarrow or Deeside?"

"Tomnarrow."

"Then, it looks as if Larry had come in from Aberdeen. If he's putting the stuff on rail there, we ought to be able to trace it—but we'll talk about

that later. Another thing we might do is tackle the car between the hotel and here, next time it comes. That would be on my property. But it's unlikely that the car comes up here every night, and we don't know the nights on which it does come. We can watch for it, but I doubt if Slim will allow it to come up while we're here."

"How about attacking the pub?" suggested Copper.

"I doubt if we should find anything there."

"We could grab a couple of prisoners."

"At the moment prisoners are the last things we want to be bothered with, unless we can scoop the whole bunch at one go."

"How about grabbing Singer and making him squeal?"

"He might not squeal. Anyway, we've no time to go to Devonshire. Here we are, on the main field of operations, and I don't feel inclined to leave it. If we left, it might look as though we were running away."

"Blimey! We don't want 'em ter think that," declared Copper emphatically.

Gimlet looked at his watch. "It's getting late. I'll think things over and have a plan ready by the morning. Let's get this kit shifted to one of the turrets. It's a nuisance, but I'm afraid we shall have to mount a guard to see that the enemy doesn't break in on us. Let's be moving. This kitchen is no longer healthy. Cub, you go first with your torch and light the way."

## CHAPTER XIII

### SLIM COMES BACK

---

CUB was awakened by an explosion of such violence that he was literally hurled from sleep to wakefulness. Such was the concussion, and so alarming the vibration, that his first thought was that there had been an earthquake and that the house was falling down on him. Then, remembering where he was, the thought flashed through his mind—Gimlet was right; thank goodness, we weren't in the kitchen. By that time, of course, he had realised that a bomb had exploded in some part of the house, and, recalling Gimlet's words overnight, he guessed it was the kitchen. He scrambled up. The others were already on their feet. There was no light in the turret, but he could just see their figures outlined against the windows, although it was still dark

outside. Copper was absent. Cub remembered that he had offered to do the dawn guard.

“Take it easy,” came Gimlet’s voice. Without opening a window, he was trying to see down into the grounds.

“Where was it, do you think?” asked Cub.

“In the kitchen, I fancy. Trapper, go and see if Copper’s all right. I warned him to keep clear of the back premises.”

“Here, take my torch,” offered Cub.

Trapper hurried off. Cub joined Gimlet at the window. He saw that the sky had almost cleared; a few stars sparkled frostily; a crescent moon was dying behind the Cairngorms, throwing their serrated peaks into sharp relief. Between the Lodge and the mountains the landscape rolled away like a vast crumpled blanket.

Cub tried to see the hands of his watch, but could not. He dare not strike a light for fear it would be seen from outside and draw a pistol shot. “I was trying to make out the time,” he told Gimlet.

“It can’t be far short of dawn,” answered Gimlet. “It’s hard to see anything, but keep your eyes open. Tell me if you see a movement. Don’t make a noise and don’t show yourself.”

Cub stared down into the overgrown grounds surrounding the Lodge. He could see nothing beyond the vague shapes of shrubs and trees; for the rest, the scene was as lifeless as the surface of the moon.

“I should say they’ve gone,” he said in a low voice.

“I shouldn’t,” answered Gimlet. “It’s more likely that they’ll wait to see how much damage they’ve done. They’ll have to find that out sooner or later. They’re too smart to show themselves too soon, in case their squib failed in what it was intended to do. I hope Copper’s all right.”

Trapper came back. “*Zut!* The kitchen’s had it,” he reported. “She is one beautiful mess.”

“Never mind that. What about Copper?” asked Gimlet.

“He was in the hall. He says the blast knocked him over backwards, but he’s all right.”

“What’s he doing now?”

“Waiting in the corridor by the kitchen, hoping, I think, to see someone to shoot at. *Mot de Cambronne!* He is angry. He swears like a lumberjack who drops an axe on his toe.”

“We might as well go down and see what’s going on before he gets into mischief,” decided Gimlet. “Go quietly. I don’t want the enemy to hear us

moving about. If they hear us, they'll keep clear. I'd rather they thought they'd wiped us out."

They went quietly down the stairs and found Copper kneeling in the corridor, gun ready for action, watching the kitchen—or what remained of it. The room was a wreck, a litter of plaster, splinters of wood and broken glass. The heavy table had been overturned, and the ceiling sagged towards a corner, where a section of the wall had been blown clean out. Framed by jagged walls, in the outer darkness was an area of overgrown lawn, a shrubbery, and beyond this a copse of Scotch firs.

"See anything?" Gimlet asked Copper in a whisper.

"If I could I should be pumping lead," answered Copper viciously. "That bang blame near blew my eyeballs out of the back of my head. How about goin' out fer 'em and doin' a little moppin' up?"

"That's just what they'd like us to do," replied Gimlet. "One step outside that wall and you'd run into a piece of metal coming the other way. We'll leave them to do the investigating. Be patient and you may get a shot. It will be getting light presently. What size shot have you got in that scatter-gun?"

"Buckshot, sir."

"All right. If you shoot, aim low. We don't want any stiffs left on our hands."

There was a short interval. Nothing happened.

"I think we might hasten the proceedings if you did a little quiet moaning, Copper," suggested Gimlet.

Copper looked up. "What's the idea o' that, sir?"

"It should make them impatient to count the casualties. They may suppose that we were together, and if they got one they probably got us all. Go ahead. Trapper, you watch the rear; we don't want them slinking in on us another way."

Copper's idea of a moan was so horrible that Cub recoiled in momentary alarm.

"Go easy, don't overdo it," muttered Gimlet. "I said moan, not howl. They'll think they've killed the cat."

"Sorry, sir." Again Copper rendered his version of a human being in agony.

Gimlet stopped him. "That's enough," he said shortly. "I can't stand it."

"I was doin' my best, sir," whispered Copper in an injured voice.

"Then all I can say is, thank heaven you didn't do your worst," adjured Gimlet curtly. "Quiet now."



Cub was watching the trees. He thought he saw a shadow flit from the trees to the shrubbery. "I think they're moving," he breathed.

A minute later a figure took shape in front of the shrubbery, a distance of about fifty yards. This time there was no doubt about it. Presently it was joined by another. The two held a whispered conversation and then made a cautious approach. A torch flashed, cutting a wedge of light between the men and the hole in the kitchen wall. Evidently they did not believe in taking chances, for they stopped again, the torch exploring the premises.

Gimlet spoke softly. "All right, Copper; let 'em have it. Keep low. You ought to wing a brace with a left and right."

The twelve-bore roared a double report. On the tail of the explosion came a yell of pain, or fear, or both. The flash of the gun momentarily blinded Cub; when he could see again the men had gone. A noise of groaning, cursing, and crashing came from the shrubbery.

"You seem to have stung one of them, anyway," remarked Gimlet lightly. "You might try browning the bushes to expedite their departure."

"Shall I follow up, sir?"

"Certainly not. Keep under cover. We don't know how many men there are in those trees."

As if to confirm Gimlet's warning, a spurt of flame jabbed the darkness from the base of the trees. A bullet smacked against the kitchen wall.

"See what I mean?" murmured Gimlet. "We must discourage that sharpshooter. Try a couple of shots at the next flash."

A moment later a firearm flashed in the trees, three quick shots. They did no damage.

*Bang—bang* blazed Copper's gun. The pellets pattered against the boles of the firs like wind-driven hail.

There were no more shots.

"That seems to be all—for the time being, anyway," observed Gimlet. "Now they know we're still on our feet they'll make what the High Command used to call a strategical withdrawal. The stars are paling. They won't dare to stay in range after daylight. I think we might see about a bite of breakfast. You can attend to that, Trapper. Cub, you mount guard in the turret. Copper, take care of the east end of the house; the library window will be your best place. I'll bring your breakfasts to you when I've had my bath. Keep your eyes open. Slim is probably feeling pretty sore. Presently he'll get really nasty."

Cub went up to the turret, and from its narrow windows watched the dawn break, cold and drear, over the lonely moor. He had one fleeting glimpse of the enemy. Two men, helping a third, showed for a moment on the brow of some rising ground a good mile up the glen. He had time to observe that they were walking away from the Lodge, before a fold in the ground hid them from view. He did nothing about it. The distance was far beyond the range of his little twenty-two, even if he had felt like shooting. But he told Gimlet about it when presently he arrived with a jug of tea, some home-made buns and a leg of cold rabbit. "I rather think one of the men was Slim," he concluded.

"He probably came to watch the proceedings," answered Gimlet. "We shall see more of him, but not just yet, I fancy. I'll relieve you presently to give you a chance to stretch your legs."

Still watching the moor, Cub ate his breakfast; and as he watched he found time to think. He considered the affair from every angle, and, pondering, a new thought occurred to him. Burke had used the house as a refuge when he was being hunted by the police. Of that he felt reasonably certain. During this period Burke had had a brainwave, or had discovered something that had led to the organisation of the racket. Gimlet had agreed with this theory. But up to now Cub had rather assumed that the discovery had been made on the moor. Now, thinking it over, it seemed just as probable, if not more likely, that he had made his discovery in the Lodge. What that discovery was Cub still hadn't the remotest idea, but he perceived that it was the key to the whole situation. The moor, seldom visited by a human being, was an ideal place from which to run a racket. Or was it? He was not so sure of that. Most rackets were run in big cities. Slim was a typical city rat. Surely, thought Cub, he must hate this unnatural solitude, this banishment from the bright lights and gay life to which he was accustomed. It would have to be a powerful incentive indeed to cause such a man to live in a remote Scottish glen. There could only be one incentive, the only impulse men of that type acknowledged. Money. Slim was making money, big money, or he would not stay there. And he was making money in a manner that would not be possible in a city.

Following this line of thought, Cub decided that the glen was not only associated with the scheme for making easy money, but that it formed an integral part of it. That it was, perhaps, the very foundation of it. Here, in the unbroken solitude of a deep ravine or amongst the frowning crags of the high tops, Slim could do something that could not be done in a city; something, in fact, that could not be done anywhere else. Yet, reasoned Cub, the remoteness of the glen could not in itself be a sufficient reason. There

were other places just as lonely. Why was he so desperately anxious to defend this particular locality? It looked as if the scheme upon which he was engaged could only be operated at Glencarglas; which in turn implied that there was something on Gimlet's estate that did not occur anywhere else. What could it possibly be? That question was not so easy to answer. The only things that occurred in abundance were things not likely to interest Slim—water, rock, heather, and the peat in which it flourished. Water in quantity was available anywhere. Rock was common enough. Heather grew all over Scotland. Peat could hardly be called rare; it was used as fuel in many places. It might be used to stoke a furnace. A furnace for what? There was, or had been, tin in the glen. Tin was quite valuable, but hardly of sufficient value to interest Slim. Was there gold, or some other precious metal, on the estate? It was possible but highly improbable. Thus pondered Cub, but in this direction he could get no farther.

He tried another line of thought. If Burke had made his big discovery either in the house or on the moor, there seemed to be no reason why they should not, by exploring, make the same discovery or hit on a clue to it. To go over the entire moor, as Gimlet had pointed out, was hardly a practicable proposition. It would take too long. Besides, the moor was now dangerous ground. But they had possession of the house, and it was open to investigation. There was, for instance, the room that Burke had used—or the room they presumed he had used. They had been in it once, and then only for a short time, during which they had given it no more than a cursory glance. Even if Burke had made his original discovery on the moor, Cub thought, it seemed feasible that he would return to the house to think it over. If he had, then there was just a chance that he had left some indication of it behind. A clue, however insignificant, might put them on the track.

So soliloquised Cub as he sat in the turret, his eyes working methodically over the eternal heather. Only once was his attention stimulated, and that was when a covey of grouse got up from behind a ridge in the middle distance, to skim on robust wings to another hill. He focused his eyes on the spot, and smiled when an old dog fox showed itself for an instant on the skyline, muzzle pointing in the direction of the birds he had failed to surprise.

Gimlet came in. Cub told him he had nothing fresh to report. Gimlet sat down, saying that he would take over for an hour, but Cub was not to leave the house.

Cub had no reason to leave the house. "I shall be within call," he promised, and, leaving the turret, he made his way to the room Burke had supposedly used. As his eyes swept over it again, his first sensation was one

of disappointment. There was very little furniture in the room, and it seemed to him that the chances of finding anything was small indeed. However, he set about his task, searching the room systematically inch by inch, exploring the fireplace, running his fingers round the picture-rail and standing on a chair to examine the top of the wardrobe. This producing no result, he picked up the match-sticks and cigarette ends. They told him nothing. Two of the cigarette ends bore the name of the makers, but the brand was so common that they conveyed nothing. He left the bed until last; one by one he removed the blankets, shaking each one out for anything it might contain within its folds. Nothing fell out. At last only the mattress was left. It was a very ordinary affair. He felt it, pummelled it. He prodded it with the point of his knife for any hard object. Finally, to examine the underside he turned it over. As he did this his heart gave a bound. Here at last was something. Again he was swept by disappointment. It was only a book; a book in a cheap-looking old-fashioned binding. Its style suggested the Victorian period. He picked it up, and the title at once killed any hope that may have lingered. It was: *A Short History of the Western Highlands*, by the Reverend James McPherson-Smith. The date was 1852. It was fairly evident that it had been brought from the library, thought Cub. Burke must have brought it up to read, to while away the time when he was in hiding. There was always a chance, of course, that it had been put there before his time by whoever had occupied the room. Still, it was the sort of book Burke might read, considering his position. But why should he conceal it under the mattress? Why not leave it on the bedside table or the chest of drawers? Why hide it?—for there could have been only one object in putting it under the mattress.

Cub examined the book with renewed interest. A table of illustrations referred to a map at the end. Cub remembered that they needed a map and turned to the place indicated. The map was not there. That there had been one was apparent from the rough edge where it had been torn out. Turning to the contents page, his eyes ran down the chapter headings. Most of the districts named were unknown to him. But not all. One caused him to stop abruptly. He had good reason to know the place. The chapter was headed, “The Story of Glencarglas.”

Cub, conscious that his heart was beating faster, feeling that at last he was on the trail of something, went over to the window and, finding a seat on a flimsy bedroom chair, began to read.

He was still reading when the door was pushed open with some force and Copper came in. He regarded Cub with irritable disaffection. “What’s the idea?” he demanded. “Didn’t you hear us calling you?”

Cub started. “Sorry. No, I didn’t hear a thing.”

“Well, come on. Gimlet’s waiting.”

Putting the book in his pocket, Cub followed Copper to the turret, where he found Gimlet and Trapper.

“Where the deuce have you been?” demanded Gimlet crisply. “I’ve been trying to get everybody together to outline my plan of campaign.”

“Sorry, sir, I didn’t hear you.”

“What were you doing?”

“I was reading,” said Cub contritely.

“All right. Sit down and listen. This is my idea.”

“Before you go into that,” said Cub meekly, “I have some information which I think you should know.”

Gimlet threw a glance at Cub and, noting the expression on his face, frowned. “What’s happened?”

“Plenty,” replied Cub a trifle breathlessly. “I think I’ve got Slim and his gang weighed up.”

“Meaning what?” asked Copper.

“I know what they’re doing.”

Gimlet stared. “You *what?*”

“I’ve rumbled their racket.”

“And just how did you do that?” asked Copper, with more than a suspicion of incredulity in his tone.

“Mostly by what is commonly known as putting two and two together and making them add up to four,” answered Cub. “There was, I own, a little luck attached to it,” he added modestly.

“Out with it,” requested Gimlet.

A curious, half-embarrassed smile spread over Cub’s face. “Just a minute, sir. First of all, did you have an ancestor by the name of Cunningham-King?”

“Not exactly an ancestor,” replied Gimlet. “The Cunningham-Kings were a different branch of the family. They were the people who originally owned this property. In fact, the uncle who left it to me was a Cunningham-King.”

“His grandfather would have the same name?”

“Of course.”

“And his son built this place?”

“So I believe.”

“He must have had a lot of money to build a place this size?”

“He had. The Cunningham-Kings were never short of cash.”

Cub’s smile broadened. “I’ll bet they weren’t. Do you know how they made it?”

“I’ve never been sufficiently interested to enquire.”

“If you had, you might have guessed what was going on. Would you like to know?”

“Now that the property has come to me, yes. What on earth are you driving at?”

“I’ll tell you,” replied Cub, taking the book from his pocket. “I found this under the mattress in the room we thought Burke had occupied. I can’t truthfully say that I was looking for it, but I was looking for something. This is what I found. It’s a history of the Western Highlands, written in 1852. Keep the date in mind. In the book there is a chapter on Glencarglas. I’ll give you one paragraph. It should be enough.” Cub started to read. “‘Although the private distillation of whisky in the Highlands had been terminated by Act of Parliament, the practice was continued until recent times in many a lonely glen, and of these Glencarglas was one of the most celebrated. The efforts of the Preventive Service to stop it were for many years in vain. Collisions between officers of the Crown and the convoys taking the illicit spirit to market were common. Blood was shed on more than one occasion. Night after night, guided by spies and guarded by scouts, ponies laden with the illegal produce of barley made their way by devious routes through the Eastern Highlands to the big cities of the south. Wits were matched against wits. One trick that long escaped detection was the shoeing of the transport ponies with shoes made to resemble the hooves of deer. This, it is said, was first practised by Mr. Cunningham-King of Glencarglas, whose distillery was hidden deep in the fastnesses of the glen, in the shadow of the Cairngorms. Only when Mr. Cunningham-King joined the ranks of those who, realising that in the end they were bound to lose the fight, applied to the government for an official licence, was the whereabouts of the distillery revealed. For many years this had been known only to the small handful of trusted servants who worked it. We are glad to be able to record that thereafter Mr. Cunningham-King conducted his business in a proper manner, so that the sinister reputation of Glencarglas was soon forgotten. This gentleman lived to amass an honest fortune for the well-being of his family and the prosperity of the glen. The distillery is no longer in use. The eldest son, Mr. Neil Cunningham-King, has recently pulled down the

farmhouse that was the family home, and on the site erected a fine hunting-lodge which he has named Strathcarglas.’ ”

Cub stopped reading and looked up. “I don’t think I need go any further,” he said quietly. “Burke learned of the old distillery. He found it. He turned the clock back a hundred years, and with his pals started turning out illicit spirit. He’s still doing it.”

There was silence for a full minute. It was broken by Copper.

“Whisky,” he breathed. “Well, strike me purple! Scotland—barley—malt—it was stickin’ out a mile. We were all round it and we couldn’t see it, swelp me. Whisky costs next ter nothin’ ter make, I’m told, but it fetches a fiver the bottle, black market, in London.”

“The duty alone is about eight pounds a gallon,” put in Gimlet. “Not that Slim would bother about a detail like paying excise duty. Nice work, Cub.”

“Having been in the booze racket, the idea would naturally occur to Burke,” went on Cub. “He knew it would appeal to Slim. They must have been having the time of their lives. No wonder they didn’t want visitors at Strathcarglas.”

“But if the distillery was so hard to find, how did Burke find it—huh?” grunted Trapper shrewdly.

“There was a map in the book on which I imagine the exact location was marked.”

“Ah!” breathed Gimlet. “Where’s the map?”

Cub shook his head. “That, I’m afraid, is a question I can’t answer. Burke must have torn it out. At any rate, it’s gone.”

## CHAPTER XIV

### COMMANDO WORK

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CUB’S final announcement was followed by another short silence.

Trapper clicked his tongue. “Now we know the racket, perhaps we should tell the police—huh?” he suggested tentatively.

Copper shook his head. “They’d laugh at you. Before they’d believe a tale like ours, we should have to show ’em the distillery and a barrel of booze; and we couldn’t show ’em either. So what? Suppose we tell the police that it’s up to them to find the distillery. From what the Skipper says

they'd have no more hope of doin' that than we have. According ter the book, the reason why the distillery lasted for so long in the old days was because it couldn't be found."

"I'm afraid Copper's right," said Gimlet thoughtfully. "Our tale would take a bit of swallowing. When we call in the police we've got to be able to prove our story, and the only way we could do that would be by showing them where the racket is being carried on. At the best, the police would start wandering about the moor, and the sight of the blue uniform would be enough to send Slim and his gang into hiding. No, we've got to find the distillery, and unless we're prepared to spend weeks hunting for it there's only one way of doing that. We've got to get that map. If Burke took it, then the chances are he still has it."

"Burke ain't far away," suggested Copper pointedly.

"That's what I was thinking," murmured Gimlet. "All the same, it wouldn't be much use calling at the hotel and asking him to let us see it."

"I wasn't reckonin' on doin' anything like that," muttered Copper.

"No, I don't suppose you were," returned Gimlet, smiling.

"I'd grab 'im and make 'im squeal."

"Exactly. In view of what we know, I think we're justified in taking a fairly strong line; and, having started, we've got to go on or our birds might take fright. The thing looks like ending at the distillery. I'm wondering how many men Slim has there. Frankly, I've no idea how many hands it takes to run a private still."

"Not many, according to the book," put in Cub. "The book says that in the old days it was run by a handful of men."

"That's true," agreed Gimlet. "No matter. If it came to a show-down, we should have to take our chance on that. But first, a visit to the hotel seems indicated. I wouldn't attempt it in daylight, because they'd probably see us coming. Tonight, just before the official closing hour, would be our best time. That is, just before ten. There is this about it. We do at last know what we're looking for. I doubt if Slim will try anything more today, but we'd better keep watch. Tonight we'll see what the hotel can be made to produce."

This belief, that Slim would not attack again that day, turned out to be correct. Strict watch was kept, but nothing was seen. Trapper made a short sortie for food without encountering any opposition. The weather remained fair. At last the day died with the sun and the long-drawn twilight came to an end. Gimlet waited until nine o'clock, and then announced that zero hour



had arrived. He admitted that he had no definite plan. "We'll wait to see how the land lies before we settle on a line of action," he asserted.

Leaving the house was a tense moment. Taking their weapons with them they used the front door, the key of which was on the inside. They did not all go together. Copper went first and, having reached cover without alarm, the others followed one at a time. All remained quiet, so in single file, at intervals of a few yards, they set off down the track towards the hotel.

It was a strange march. The gentle sighing of the breeze in the gloomy pines on the one hand and the sullen swirl of the river on the other. These were the only sounds. Never, thought Cub, had he seen anything quite so grim, so relentlessly impersonal, as if conscious of their age, as the hills that loomed darkly on their flanks. They made a man feel very conscious of his puny existence, he decided.

Gimlet called a halt about a hundred yards short of the inn. "It's ten to ten," he announced. "For a start, we'll go to the yard and see what there is there. I expect we shall see the Buick. The lorry might have come back. If it is there, we shall know Larry isn't far away. Then we'll look at the house. By law the bar is supposed to remain open until ten, in which case we shall find Burke, and probably Smith, in it. On the other hand, it's quite likely that they have locked up. They don't want outside business. Keep on your toes. They may be watching."

Still in single file, but closer now, they walked on towards the building, the silhouette of which they could see in front of them.

"Like old times, ain't it?" breathed Copper in Cub's ear.

Proceeding with increasing caution, they reached their first objective, the hotel yard, without interruption. The Buick was there. The doors were not locked, and a quick scrutiny in the light of Cub's torch revealed nothing of interest. The doors of the outbuildings were locked. Peering through a window, again using his torch, Cub saw many sacks of what was obviously corn, piled high. "I imagine that's barley," he whispered. "They must be distilling in a pretty big way or they wouldn't have laid in such a stock."

They turned their attention to the house, starting at the front. The window of the bar was blacked-out, but narrow strips of light framing the blind showed that there was a light inside. From the room came a murmur of desultory conversation. It was possible to distinguish two voices, but what they said could not be heard. Gimlet went on to the front door and tried it. "Locked," he whispered. "Go round to the rear, Copper, and try the back door. Take a look at the windows in passing."

Copper was away about three minutes. He came back with the information that the back door was also locked, and all the windows, so far as he could see, were shut.

“Then it looks as though we might as well use the front door,” decided Gimlet. “What we must do, at all costs, is prevent a stampede. Neither Smith nor Burke must get away down the glen to warn Slim that we’re on the move. Do you think you can open this door, Copper, without making a noise?”

“If it ain’t bolted, I can do it,” answered Copper. “Show us a light, Cub.” As he spoke Copper took out his jack-knife and, opening the marline-spike, bent the point at right angles against the wall. This done to his satisfaction he inserted it in the keyhole, Cub helping him by holding the torch close. There was a short interval during which the spike could be heard probing the lock.

“Can you manage it?” asked Gimlet anxiously.

“Easy as winkin’,” answered Copper confidently. “It’s one of the old-fashioned sort.” As he finished speaking there was a faint *snick* in the lock. “That’s her,” he announced, bending straight the spike of his knife and replacing it in his pocket.

Gimlet tried the door. It opened easily. Instantly through the narrow opening came the sound of voices, amplified.

Beckoning, Gimlet withdrew for a few yards. “It’s no use messing about,” he said in a low voice. “We’ve got to take what we want, if it’s here, by force; but I don’t want any shooting unless one of these fellows pulls a gun and looks like using it. If it comes to a rough house, use your fists.”

Copper held up a fist that looked like a leg of mutton. He kissed it affectionately. “All ready and waitin’, sir,” he announced. “Last time I was ’ere they slammed *me*, and I ain’t forgot it. No one slams me and gets away with it—my oath, they don’t. Am I right, Trapper?”

“Every time,” breathed Trapper.

“Burke may have the map on him,” went on Gimlet. “In that case it should be easy, but if it’s hidden somewhere in the house it may take us longer to find it. Now, this is the line-up. Trapper, go round to the back door and see that no one leaves. Cub, as soon as we’re inside, close the door behind us and stand guard over it. Don’t let anyone in or out.”

“Right you are, sir.”

Trapper went off to the back and Gimlet returned to the front door.

“You take my gun, sir,” urged Copper.

“No—no. I shall be all right,” murmured Gimlet.

They moved forward. Cub brought up the rear. With nerves tingling he watched the others quietly enter the hall and stand still. It was unlighted. Following, he closed the door gently and stood with his back to it. Three paces distant the bar door stood open. Light from the room fell athwart the hall. From the bar, too, came voices. Burke and Smith were talking.

“Well, I don’t like it,” Burke was saying. “The cops may have nothing on you, but they’ve plenty on me. If you want my opinion, Slim’s losing his nerve. He says he’s done for King—and what happens? King’s still walking about. Then look at this bomb business this morning. What good did it do? Slim and Tiny should have finished the job when they had ’em all together in the kitchen. Why didn’t they?”

Smith answered: “I spoke to Tiny about it. He says this fellow King is no ordinary guy. There’s something about him that makes you think twice before you try anything. He says you can’t tell whether he’s pulling a bluff or not. He’s as cool as they come.”

“Well, what’s Slim doing about it? I don’t feel happy while they’re in that house.”

“Slim knows all about that. He promised to fix ’em.”

“I wish he’d get on with it.”

“Aw, stop squawking. Give him time. Your nerves ain’t what they used to be, either. I own that Singer was right about this chap King.”

“Suppose he turns up here? You never know. What are we going to do, just the two of us?”

“Do? Give me the chance.” Smith laughed. “I’d soon show you what I’d do.”

Gimlet had taken a pace or two forward. He pushed the door with his toe so that it swung slowly open, revealing the two men sitting on stools on the customer’s side of the bar. Another pace took him to the threshold. The movement must have caught the eyes of both men, for their heads turned sharply.

Gimlet spoke quietly. “You’re in luck, Mr. Smith. This is your chance.”

Smith did not move. His eyes went round. His mouth opened. His jaw sagged. Burke, too, appeared to be frozen in his chair.

“If you’re wise you’ll do nothing, either of you,” said Gimlet, walking on into the room.

Neither of the men did anything. Their eyes switched to Copper, who, gun under arm, walked in on Gimlet’s heels. All this Cub could see plainly

from his position in the hall.

Gimlet went on in the tones of a kindly master addressing his pupils. "I want you both to put your hands on your heads and then stand over here with your backs to the wall."

Neither moved.

"I'm an impatient man," warned Gimlet, with steel creeping into his voice.

Burke put his hands on his head. "Go easy, gov'nor," he said nervously. "I haven't done any harm."

Gimlet inclined his head towards Copper. "See if you can induce Mr. Smith to be more obliging," he requested.

Copper stepped forward. "You 'eard 'im," he growled. "Get your 'ands up and smart's the word."

At last Smith moved. With a lightning sweep of his left hand he flung the muzzle of Copper's gun aside. His right hand shot down to his pocket.

Copper's right hand also moved. It swung up with the vicious force of a kicking mule and made contact with Smith's chin with a noise like a golf-club striking a ball. The blow lifted Smith clean off his stool. He and the stool struck the ground with a crash.

Copper turned a grim face to Burke. "I 'ope you've got more sense than ter try a balmy trick like that," he said casually. "Behave yerself and do as you're told, and we shan't 'urt a 'air of yer 'ead."

Burke, with his hands raised, walked stiffly to the wall and turned to face the room.

"That's better," said Gimlet approvingly. "Copper, to save any further misunderstanding, you might collect any hardware these gentlemen may be carrying."

Copper stood his gun in a corner. Then, stooping, he removed Smith's heavy automatic and put it in his own pocket. From Burke he took a revolver and handed it to Gimlet. "Souvenir for you, sir," he said.

Addressing Burke, Gimlet went on. "Now, Mr. Burke—I think that's your name, isn't it?—I want you to empty your pockets. Make a clean job of it because my corporal here will check up and, as you may have noticed, he takes a poor view of disobedience."

Burke obeyed without a word.

"Don't forget the breast pocket," reminded Gimlet.

Burke handed Copper a wad of papers.

“Just glance through those, Copper, and see if there’s anything of interest,” ordered Gimlet.

Copper went through the papers one by one. He put them on the bar. “’Tain’t ’ere, sir,” he announced.

“It may be in his room,” suggested Gimlet.

“What are you looking for?” asked Burke sulkily.

Gimlet answered: “I’m looking for a scrap of paper that happens to be my property. It’s a little map. You stole it from my lodge, remember?”

Burke did not answer, but from the expression on his face, Cub, who was watching, knew that Gimlet’s arrow had gone home. Apparently Gimlet realised it, too. “Cub,” he said, “you seem to be good at finding things. Slip up and try the bedrooms. We’ll take care of things here.”

Cub moved towards the stairs which, as is commonly the case, went up from the hall. But with his foot on the bottom step he halted, head turned towards the front door from the region of which had come an unmistakable sound. A motor vehicle of some sort had pulled up either in the road or in the yard. Cub realised, for it was evident, that if a vehicle had stopped someone was coming to the hotel. Gimlet realised it, too, and spoke sharply.

“Copper, get rid of that,” he said, pointing to the inert form of Smith, who still lay where he had fallen.

Copper reached down, took the man by the front of the jacket and with one heave swung him up and dropped him over to the other side of the bar, where, of course, he could no longer be seen.

“You can put your hands down, but be careful what you do with them,” Gimlet told Burke curtly.

“Shall I lock the door?” asked Cub urgently.

Before Gimlet could answer the front door was opened, and from the confident way it was handled it was at once evident that the newcomer was no stranger. Slamming the door behind him he strode straight towards the bar; but on the way, as was inevitable, he caught sight of Cub. He hesitated in his stride. “Who are you? I’ve never seen you before,” he said, and went on quickly towards the bar as if to take up the question with the proprietor.

As he entered the bar a voice, Copper’s voice, exclaimed, “Well, if it ain’t our old pal Larry! You’ve seen *me* before though, ain’t you?”

Larry took one glance at Copper’s face and moved swiftly; but not swiftly enough. His right hand flashed towards his pocket, but Copper’s arm shot out and his huge hand closed over the arm. “Easy, mate, easy,” he said in a low drawl.



“EASY, MATE, EASY.”

Larry struggled, but to no purpose. Copper’s arms closed round him, holding him in the embrace of a bear, pinning his arms to his sides. Cub, watching, could see Copper’s arms slowly tightening. And as they tightened Copper spoke softly, almost soothingly. “’It me on the back of the ’ead when I wasn’t lookin’, didn’t yer? ’It me ’ard. I don’t like people doin’ that ter me. It ain’t friendly. ’Ave another good look at me so as you won’t ever forget me, because you’re goin’ ter remember me, chum, yes, fer a long, long time.”

Larry's face was contorted with pain and fear. His lips were curled back, showing decayed teeth; his eyes bulged; the veins in his forehead stood out under the frightful strain that was being exerted on his body. A long-drawn gasp was forced from his lips as if his lungs were being crushed.

The end came suddenly. "Let this learn yer never ter 'it a man on the 'ead when he ain't lookin'," crooned Copper. With a swift movement he released his grip and took a pace back, leaving Larry standing just as he had been held, with his arms against his sides. His left fist slammed into Larry's solar plexus, causing the wretched man to fold like a jack-knife. A split second later his right fist swung up in a vicious hook to smash into the middle of Larry's face. Like a discarded scarecrow the unconscious man went backwards through the furniture and slithered along the floor until he was brought to a stop by the wall.

Copper brushed his palms together. "That should learn 'im," he observed with quiet satisfaction.

"By James! I hope you haven't killed him," said Gimlet anxiously.

"Killed 'im? Pah! It takes more than that ter kill a rat," sneered Copper.

Then the atmosphere stiffened to a deathly silence as a voice said, "What's going on here?"

Cub started violently and, looking in the direction from which the voice had come, saw that the front door was wide open. In the hall stood the very last man he expected to see. It was a policeman.

The officer took a step nearer the bar. He looked at Cub; from Cub to Gimlet; from Gimlet to Copper, and from Copper to the body on the floor. He surveyed the broken furniture. Finally his eyes came to rest on Burke in a manner which suggested that he knew who was the proprietor. "What's going on here?" he repeated.

"Nothing," answered Copper. He made a gesture. "We had a little argument, that's all."

The constable looked surprised—as well he might. His eyes went back to Larry. "What's he doing there?"

"Having a rest," answered Copper. "He's tired."

Gimlet joined in. "Between ourselves, officer, the man's drunk. He ought to be locked up for driving in that condition."

"What are you doing here?" demanded the policeman. "It's after closing time."

"We're residents," parried Gimlet.

Burke found his voice. "That's a lie," he said loudly. "They're not staying here. I've told them a dozen times to go, but they won't."

The officer nodded like a man who at last has a perplexing situation appraised. "Oh! So that's it," he observed. Like most policemen he was inclined to be tolerant. "Come along now, gentlemen, please," he requested. "Don't let's have any more trouble."

"I'll take care of him," said Burke, nodding towards Larry, who was now showing signs of coming to his senses.

Cub perceived that Gimlet was, as it is said, in a cleft stick. It was quite certain that if they left the house they would not be able to get back into it; Burke would see to that; yet to refuse to obey the law was to lay themselves open to arrest.

Gimlet spoke again. "I'm afraid this was really my fault, officer," he said apologetically. "We've all walked from Tomnarrow station and we can't get any farther tonight. Perhaps I didn't make it clear that we want to take rooms." Gimlet turned to Burke. "Did I, Mr.—er——?"

"McTaggart's the name," said Burke, with a nervous start.

Gimlet turned back to the policeman. "You know, I can't help feeling that I've seen Mr. McTaggart before," he said blandly. "I wonder where it could have been?"

"What's the odds?" put in Burke quickly. To the constable he went on. "It's all right. If these gentlemen are so anxious to stay, I'll fix them up."

The policeman looked from one to the other. "Are you sure you can manage them?" he questioned dubiously. It was apparent that he was by no means satisfied with the explanation given.

Gimlet clinched the matter by taking a visiting-card from his wallet. "Here's my card, officer. I'm the new owner of Strathcarglas. I hope you'll look in and see me some day when you're passing."

The policeman's manner became respectful, but there was still a shade of suspicion in his voice when he answered. "Why didn't you say that before, sir? I'll let the Inspector know you've arrived." He turned to the door. "Good night, sir," he said over his shoulder.

"Good night, officer," returned Gimlet.

The policeman went out. Cub saw him to the door and came back to the bar. "He's gone towards Deeside on a bicycle," he reported.

"This is a more popular establishment than I had supposed," murmured Gimlet drily. He moved close to Cub and went on in an undertone. "Slip out



and see where Larry left his truck. You might have a look at what he has on board at the same time.”

Cub was soon back. “The lorry’s in the yard,” he reported. “There are six casks in it—empty. They reek of whisky.”

“Any labels on them?”

“No—no mark of any sort.”

“I see. Close the door in case we have more visitors and we’ll see about the map.”

At this stage Smith appeared behind the bar, walking stiffly from the back premises, an expression of chagrin on his face. The reason for this was soon apparent. Close behind him, the muzzle of his gun in the small of his back, was Trapper.

“Where did you find him?” asked Gimlet.

“Tried to slink out of the back door, sir,” explained Trapper.

“Good thing you were there,” observed Gimlet. “You can stay here now with Copper to take care of this bunch. We’ve wasted a lot of time and we still haven’t got what we came for. We shall have to get busy.”

## CHAPTER XV

### GIMLET TAKES THE TRAIL

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IN the end Cub found the map, but it is doubtful if he would have done so had not Copper intervened.

For half an hour after the constable had gone Cub searched with hopes that waned as each successive room proved barren of results. He ransacked Burke’s sitting-room, his bedroom, and even the kitchen—all in a wretched state of untidiness and not to be associated with a decently run hotel. Gimlet, growing impatient, joined him, and together they devoted another half-hour to the search, covering much of the same ground again. One thing of interest did come to light. In a writing-desk in Burke’s sitting-room they found a large packet of printed labels. The address was the same in each case: Bechenstein & Co., Pure Malt Vinegar Works, Slavonia Street, Soho, London.

“Vinegar—fiddlesticks,” said Gimlet. “I’d say these are the labels that Larry tacks on his casks when he takes them from here. This precious

vinegar establishment must be the headquarters of the distributors in London. I'm glad we've got it. They'll be in the bag, I hope, with Slim and his friends, at the finish."

Cub was prepared to abandon his quest when, soon afterwards, Copper put his head round the door. "Any luck?" he enquired laconically.

"No," retorted Cub.

"Strike me purple," muttered Copper. "We shall be here all night at this rate. Look's as if I shall have ter do somethin' about it. Hold 'ard—shan't be long." He withdrew.

The significance of this remark did not dawn on Cub until afterwards.

Within five minutes Copper was back. "The map's in the lining of the old jacket hangin' behind Burke's bedroom door," he astonished Cub by saying.

Gimlet turned suspicious eyes on Copper. "How did you learn that?"

"Burke told me," answered Copper, gazing at the ceiling.

"Ah!" Gimlet nodded slowly. "I thought so. Did you . . ."

"Did I what, sir?" Copper affected a look of injured dignity. "I just asked 'im and he couldn't tell me fast enough."

"I see," said Gimlet grimly. "What did you do to Burke to induce him to part with that valuable information so readily?"

"Do to 'im, sir?"

"You heard me. Did you hurt him?"

"Hurt 'im, sir?" Copper looked shocked. "Why, I wouldn't 'urt a fly—you know that, sir."

Gimlet's eyes glinted. "Tell the truth."

Copper smiled sheepishly. "Between ourselves, sir, I own that I did 'ave ter persuade 'im—although mind you, I asked 'im kind enough at first."

"What did you do?"

"It was a little trick Trapper showed me once. 'E ses an Indian showed it to 'im. Never fails, 'e ses. Maybe he's right, too. Leastways, it didn't fail with Burke."

"I've told you before that I won't tolerate such methods," said Gimlet sternly.

"What about Slim's methods, sir?" said Copper in a hurt voice. "What about the way he asked *me* questions? Blinkin' bodkin in 'is 'and, 'e had. Was goin' ter prod out my blinkin' eyeballs, 'e was. I didn't need no knife.

Besides, time's gettin' on, sir. We don't want ter be messin' around 'ere all the bloomin' night, do we?"

"No, we do not," agreed Gimlet. "We've been here too long as it is. I'm by no means certain that the police officer was entirely taken in by our story. He was no fool. It wouldn't surprise me if he came back. There's always a chance that Slim may turn up here, too. Cub, slip upstairs and see if that map is where Burke says it is."

In a few minutes Cub was back, the map in his hand. "Yes, here it is," he said. "Burke wasn't lying."

"I didn't think he was," put in Copper. "I told him if he wasted my time, I might turn nasty."

Gimlet glanced at the map and put it in his pocket. "This is what we want," he asserted. "Let's be moving."

"What about the prisoners?" asked Copper.

"They're coming with us," decided Gimlet. "We're not going to leave them here so that they can take a short-cut to Slim the moment our backs are turned. They know too much. If Slim got wind of what was happening, he'd either lie in wait for us and pot us from cover, or he'd be off faster than a hunted stag. A few hours in one of the Lodge cellars won't do the prisoners any harm; in fact, it will give them time to cool down and think things over."

"It's a fair step back to the Lodge," remarked Copper.

"I've no intention of walking if that's what is worrying you—not with a Buick standing in the yard doing nothing," said Gimlet.

"That's more my idea of travellin'," approved Copper.

"Then let's get along."

That concluded the business at the hotel. The three prisoners, two of them looking decidedly the worse for wear about the face, were escorted out by Copper, who, having opened the breech of the twelve-bore to prove that it was loaded, told them in terms they could not possibly misunderstand what would most certainly happen to them if they tried what he called "half larks." These threats did not fall on deaf ears. It was obvious to Cub that the men were really scared of Copper—as indeed they had good reason to be. Even Cub was by no means sure that Copper was bluffing. Apparently the prisoners, by mutual consent, decided not to run the risk of finding out.

Gimlet locked the hotel door, put the key in his pocket and led the way to the car, where he ordered the prisoners into the back seat. Copper and Trapper sat facing them. Cub sat next to Gimlet, who drove, and was soon on the way to the Lodge.

The journey was uneventful, but as the car slowed to a stop in the courtyard there was a curious incident. Gimlet had swung open the door preparatory to getting out when a man—it was too dark to see his face—stepped from the shadow of a wall and said, “What’s the idea of coming up here? The boss said you was to stay put till he gave the word to move.” It was evident that the man was one of Slim’s watchers, who thought he was talking to Burke or Smith.

Gimlet got out. “Is that so?” he said evenly. “Well, from now on I’m the boss, and you’ll take orders from me. Stand still—unless you want some cold night air letting into you.”

The man did not move. He may have been too dazed with astonishment, or perhaps the sight of Copper’s twelve-bore, as he got out, had something to do with it. Trapper relieved him of an automatic. The man did not resist. Apparently he did not feel inclined to take on four armed men, men who spoke in a disconcertingly businesslike way. This was understandable. It takes a good deal of nerve to accept odds of four to one. So another prisoner was added to the party which, in the light of Cub’s torch, was marched to a wine cellar, where Gimlet spoke quietly but in a voice that discouraged argument.

“I want you men to understand clearly that we are no amateur performers,” he said. “Even though you were dodging the war in a Scottish glen, you must have heard of Commandos. Well, we’re Commandos; and Commandos don’t talk for the pleasure of hearing their voices; nor do they carry weapons for ornament. They know how to use them, and on the slightest provocation they do use them. Make no mistake about that. Disobey my orders and I won’t be responsible for the consequences. To remove temptation, I’m going to have you tied up. My men are experts in tying knots, so the ropes won’t hurt you unless you try to get them off, in which case someone is liable to get strangled.” Gimlet turned to Copper. “I’ll leave that to you,” he ended. “Some bell-cords from upstairs should suit your purpose. Trapper will give you a hand. Lock the cellar door when you leave. You’ll find us in the library. Come on, Cub.”

In the library, by the light of a candle, they examined the map. And there, soon afterwards, Copper and Trapper joined them.

“Did you get the prisoners settled comfortably?” asked Gimlet without looking up.

“Aye, aye, sir. I don’t think they’ll go far,” answered Copper.

“All right. Now pay attention.” Gimlet marked a spot on the map with the point of a pencil. “Here’s the Lodge.” He moved the pencil. “Here’s our

objective—the old distillery. The distance is about five miles. It’s away up the glen. There’s no road, not even a track. The moon should be up, but across difficult country, with probable obstacles, to get there will probably take not far short of two hours.” He looked at his watch. “It’s two o’clock now. We should be on the spot by four or soon afterwards. I think we’ve time for a cup of tea and a biscuit before we move off.”

“And what’s the plan when we get there, sir?” asked Copper.

“We’ll have a look at the place and go straight on in. It’s no use messing about. We’ll avoid shooting, if it is possible. We shall be dealing with desperate characters, some of them hard-boiled gunmen, no doubt, so we may have to shoot it out. I’d prefer to take prisoners and hand the whole thing over to the police; but if they want to fight, that’s the way it will have to be. Any questions?”

There were no questions, so the party adjourned to the kitchen, where Trapper soon had a kettle on a brisk fire. Cub mounted guard.

Half an hour later, in single file with Copper leading, they set off up the glen. A few flakes of snow were falling in a leisurely fashion, but nothing, as Gimlet remarked, to worry about.

Cub had made many night marches, but none like this, and none so hard. Usually they had been made across the cultivated fields of France, over country that he knew. The risks may have been greater, but the actual going had not been heavy. Here the going was exhausting. For this the heather was partly responsible, but steep gradients, up and down, did nothing to improve matters. Soft marshy ground was not uncommon. Outcrops of rock had to be surmounted or by-passed. Burns, with beds of slippery boulders, had to be crossed. Cub found it hard to believe that all this was happening in Britain. One thing he did find easy to believe was the reason why, in the old days, the preventive officers had been unable to locate the distillery.

After an hour of unbroken progress, Gimlet called a halt. The others were panting, but he appeared to suffer no distress. “Tough going, eh? But we’d better push on in case the snow starts in earnest,” was the only remark he made.

The party, after a short breather, pushed on.

Another hour passed. Cub had lost count of time; the feeling was coming over him that he had been marching all night; but the fact that Gimlet was now advancing with more caution told him that they must be nearing the objective. He was not sorry.

At length Gimlet halted. “We can’t be far away,” he said softly. “I rather thought we should be able to see the place from here, although we can

hardly expect them to be showing lights. Let's move up to the top of the hill—we should get a wider view.” He indicated some steeply rising ground on their right, and in this direction they turned. Near the top Gimlet halted again and surveyed the landscape as far as it could be seen. “Queer,” he said in a puzzled voice. “If the map is right, it should be here or hereabouts.”

“Perhaps the map isn't right,” suggested Cub.

“If it ain't, we're sunk,” observed Copper gloomily.

“Just a minute,” said Cub tersely. “I can smell something. There's a smell of burning. I thought I caught a whiff of it just now, but I got it then distinctly.”

“*Tch!* Cub's right,” asserted Trapper. “It's peat. We must be close.”

“What's that dark patch over to the left?” asked Gimlet.

Copper walked towards it, but after taking a few steps he drew back with a half-strangled cry of alarm. He came back quickly. “My gawd! I very nearly went over!” he exclaimed in a startled voice. “There's a socking great hole in the ground. There's smoke comin' out of it.”

Gimlet made a slow advance towards the spot, the others keeping him company. He paused near what Copper had correctly described as a socking great hole in the ground. From it a thin miasma of smoke was issuing. “This must be it,” he whispered. “This is the smoke from their boiler fire. I don't see that it can be anything else. It comes up through a flaw in the rock. But how the deuce do we get into the place?”

The answer to this question was not so hard to find as they expected. Further cautious exploration revealed a gorge, a fearful gash in the side of the hill on which they stood. From the darkness of the depths, for they could not see the bottom, came the burble of running water.

“Either the distillery, or the entrance to it, must be in that ravine,” declared Gimlet. “The next question is, how do we get into it? Time's getting on. If we're caught up here in daylight, we shall lose our chance. Copper—Trapper, go along to the right and see if you can find a way down. There should be a path somewhere. Take care you don't go over. Don't go too far. Rally at this point. I'll go with Cub to the left.” Beckoning to Cub, Gimlet started exploring the lip of the chasm on their left hand.

They went some little way, slowly, for the nature of the ground discouraged hasty movement; but of a track or path leading down there was no indication. In some places the drop was sheer cliff; elsewhere the slope was too steep to be tackled in the dark without careful preparation.

“Of course, the only entrance may be at one end or other of the gorge,” remarked Gimlet. “The snag is, we've no idea how far away that may be. It's

snowing faster than it was, too. Confounded nuisance. We'd better start working back!"

"Just a minute, sir," whispered Cub. "What's that a bit farther on? Looks as if the ground slopes a bit more easily." He walked on to the spot and saw that his supposition was correct. A wide slide of loose shale fell away into the gloom of the ravine. There were places where a descent might be attempted, but still nothing resembling a path. He went a little farther and, peering down, made out what he took to be the faintest outline of a trail running transversely across the slide. "Does that look like a path to you?" he asked Gimlet who had followed him.

"It's hard to say," was the reply.

"At a pinch that could be a way down," declared Cub. "It seems to slope up towards the right. I wondered if we could have passed the beginning of the path without noticing it?"

"If so, we should probably pass it again on the way back," murmured Gimlet.

"We could easily get over that," asserted Cub. "I'm pretty sure I could get down to that path—or whatever it is. If I could get on it, by taking the upward slope it should bring me to the top. By keeping level you could watch me, and so we should discover where the path starts. Then we could collect Copper and Trapper and all go down together."

"Have a go at it if you like," invited Gimlet, "but for goodness' sake watch your step. Shale is tricky stuff."

"We shall have to try something pretty soon, anyway," declared Cub. "With luck I might strike the quickest way to the bottom."

In the event he did, but not in the manner he expected.

As soon as he started down the slope, a slope of perhaps forty-five degrees, he realised that the shale was more treacherous than he had supposed. Several small pieces, disturbed by his feet, went clattering to the bottom. The only comfort he derived from this was the knowledge that the bottom was not so far down as he had thought. More slithers of shale sliding away caused him to pause and reflect on the risk he was taking. Common sense adjured him to turn back; and indeed he would have gone back, but glancing up he formed the opinion that it might be harder to get to the top than to go on down to the path. The fact that he could see now that there was a definite path just below him was the deciding factor. He went on. Instantly, more shale began to slide. More and more pieces clattered down. He found that he could not stop, much less get back. He could hear Gimlet calling to him from above in a voice brittle with alarm, but he was no longer in a case

to heed warnings. The whole slope in his vicinity was on the move. He dropped his rifle and clutched at an isolated tuft of heather, but its roots were in the same unstable foundation as himself, and the shrub came away in his hands. In sheer desperation he threw himself backwards, flat on his back, but this did not stop the movement. At a speed still slow, but increasing, the landslide went on inexorably. There was a brief respite when his feet struck the path. He clung to it with the tenacity of despair; but a piece of shale striking him in the face caused him to release his hold. His speed increased. With a crash and clatter, an avalanche of loose shale, bearing Cub with it, rolled on down the slope into the ravine.



THE SHRUB CAME AWAY IN HIS HANDS.



## CUB TAKES A CHANCE

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THAT CUB was not seriously hurt in his fall was due to two reasons. The first was that the slide, as is commonly the case, fanned out at the bottom to a shallow heap of detritus, which first slowed down and then finally stopped his progress; and the second, that the slide ended in a peat hag. He did not know this. He knew nothing of peat hags, although he was vaguely aware that there must be places where peat was cut. At first, as he sat up, slightly dazed, he was only aware that he appeared to be sitting on a monstrous sponge.

It took him a minute to collect his senses, a minute during which he automatically tested his limbs to make sure that none was broken. Finding none, to his great relief and no small surprise, he looked about, and saw that he was, as he expected, at the bottom of the ravine, which was wider than he had supposed. He observed with mingled feelings of alarm and thankfulness that had he gone a little farther he would have finished in a burn. It looked cold and grim.

That he had made a good deal of noise in his descent he was painfully aware; so much noise, indeed, that anyone within a fair distance must have heard him. What Gimlet was thinking he could only surmise. He hoped that he would not attempt to follow him down the treacherous bank. Not that he was happy at being alone. Somewhere, at no great distance, was the distillery. There was just a chance that the clatter of the falling shale had been drowned by the babble of the burn, but he dare not count on this. Unless the men in the distillery were making a lot of noise themselves—and there was no reason to suppose that they were—they must have heard his precipitate arrival.

In this assumption he was correct, as he was presently informed. With the intention of looking for his rifle, he stood up and started walking along the peat towards the bottom of the slide; but before he had taken half a dozen paces he put his foot into a hole and found himself up to the knees in icy water. He did not mind the water, but he nearly broke his leg. As it was, he stumbled forward, and as he picked himself up he saw that the hag was pitted with such holes. He had already decided that a Scottish moor was not a thing to be trifled with, and this convinced him more than ever that he was right. Uncomfortable and feeling rather sorry for himself, he was about to resume his search when he heard voices approaching. The dampness of the

peat was no longer a matter for concern. He dropped flat and waited, hoping to escape detection. He had no intention of taking on the crew of the distillery single handed.

“I guess it was somewhere about here,” said a voice which he recognised at once as Slim’s.

“Another goldarned landslide,” answered another voice. “The stuff’s always falling. One of these days someone’s going to get crowned with a hundred tons of rock.”

Cub could just make out two men standing a dozen paces away, surveying the slide. They continued their conversation.

“It must have been a fair lot came down just now,” said Slim. “Wonder what caused it?”

“Might have been anything. I’ve seen a rabbit knock lumps down.”

“I’m thinking about that bunch at the Lodge,” said Slim, with concern in his voice. “Well, they won’t be there much longer. Tiny’s going to clean ’em up. He knows how. Let’s get back.”

The men walked off up the ravine in the direction from which they had come. Cub watched them, sitting up to see better. Little moonlight penetrated into the bottom of the gorge, however, and he soon lost sight of them. But, still watching, he saw something that aroused his curiosity. It was a beam of light that came and went as if a door had been opened and shut. This put him in something of a quandary. He would have asked nothing more than to get back to the others; and this was the course dictated by prudence. But the problem was, how to get to them? He did not relish the idea of trying to climb back up the slide, and he knew of no other way of getting to the top. He realised that there must be a proper path down, but it might take him the rest of the night to find it. The others would, he reflected, be certain to come down to him sooner or later. Gimlet had witnessed his misadventure and, before doing anything else, would come to his aid. Perhaps, after all, his best plan was to wait. This he decided to do.

Presently, as he sat there, it struck him that instead of doing nothing he might as well try to locate the spot, the source of light, where Slim and his companion had vanished. This would be useful information, the first thing that Gimlet would want to know. Rising, he began to walk cautiously towards the spot. As near as he could judge, it was between fifty and sixty yards away.

For a time all went well. There was no movement anywhere. Thinking that the burn would cover any noise that he might make, he advanced with more confidence. Not that he in any way relaxed his caution. Nearing the

spot he halted, peering into the gloom ahead. The gorge still ran on, but just in front of him there appeared to be something on the right. It was hard to make out what it was. At first he thought it must be a mass of rock jutting out from the cliff, which at this point rose almost vertically; but it had a certain regularity, a squareness, that discounted this. Advancing a pace or two nearer, he perceived that the mass was rock, but it was a building of some sort, constructed, as far as he could see, of the same rock as the cliff, against which it leaned. It struck him that from the point of view of camouflage, this must be a perfect example. Old Cunningham-King, when he built this retreat, knew what he was doing, thought Cub. No wonder it baffled the Excise officers. He went still nearer, and at last a tiny chink of light revealed what he supposed to be the place where the two men had disappeared. Further investigation showed that it was, in fact, a doorway, or rather, a wide arched entrance, overhung with a large tarpaulin, provided for black-out purposes—at least Cub could think of no other reason for it. Somewhere not far away a small engine was humming; precisely where, and for what purpose, was not apparent.

The temptation to return now to the others reasserted itself; but the temptation to see what lay beyond the chink of light, where the tarpaulin curtain fitted badly, was irresistible. It would not, he told himself, occupy more than a few seconds of time. It was a risk, but a risk worth while. A swift glance up and down the ravine gave no hint of danger. Everything looked quiet, deserted, harmless. Moving quickly now, he went forward and put his eye to the narrow strip of light.

The result was disappointing. He found himself looking into a fairly extensive chamber with an arched roof and bare whitewashed walls. Devoid of furniture, it appeared to be something in the nature of a vestibule, the sort of place where at a railway-station goods are loaded. But here the only goods were a number of barrels on end against the wall on the left. Cobwebs hung in festoons from the roof, giving the place a long-neglected appearance. The only other objects of interest, very mild interest, were a number of doors, four in all. One was open. It revealed a passage, like a tunnel, leading farther into the building. The three other doors, small wooden doors, were shut. They were painted dark red, and each bore a notice in white letters—curious, old-fashioned letters. On one: Duty Free Warehouse. On another: A Malt House. On the other: A Racking Store. Just what these notices signified, apart from the fact that they were obviously to do with the process of distillation, Cub did not know. Nor did he particularly care. This, without doubt, was Slim's workshop. That was all that really mattered. One thing that did surprise Cub was the lighting. An unshaded

electric bulb hung from the ceiling. Evidently the distillery produced its own electricity, he thought. A plant would not be difficult to install. It would be useful for more purposes than one. He could still hear an engine running, and decided that it must be a small turbine, or dynamo, operated perhaps by the burn.

This was as much as Cub wanted to know—at any rate, for the time being. Well satisfied with his inspection, he decided to return to the slope to see if Gimlet had arrived. It was there Gimlet would look for him. Deep in thought, he turned away, and at his first step collided with someone who had just arrived. Surprise seemed to be mutual. Then the man made a grab at Cub, at the same time letting out a yell. Cub sprang back to avoid the hand, for he recognised the voice and figure. It was Tiny. Thereafter things moved faster than they can be narrated.

In jumping backwards Cub fell against the tarpaulin, which must have been carelessly fastened. Anyway, his weight was sufficient to bring it down. It fell across him, and on Tiny, burying them under its slack coils. After a moment of confusion Cub was clear first, but Tiny was only a split second after him, and he, seeing that Cub was bent on escape, flung out his arms to prevent it. Cub realised only too well that if once those big arms closed round him he would be finished. He backed into the distillery, the only way he could go, looking desperately for another means of escape. Tiny evidently realised what was in his mind, for his hand went to his pocket and came up holding a gun. Cub, side-stepping, whipped out his thirty-eight. Two shots sounded as one. Tiny's bullet snatched at Cub's sleeve in passing. Tiny dropped his pistol and staggered back, cursing luridly. But he still occupied the entrance.

At this juncture Slim appeared, running, at the entrance to the inner passage. There were others behind him—more, Cub realised, than he could cope with. He could not remain where he was, and with his line of retreat to the ravine cut off he made a bee-line for the nearest available door, which happened to be one marked A Racking Store. He had no idea what a racking store was, but at that moment any room was better than the one he was in. As he slammed the door behind him a bullet bit into it—sufficient proof that Slim meant business. Before him was a plain corridor that long ago had been whitewashed. Its whiteness had succumbed to dust and dirt. Along this he sped, expecting that Slim would follow, expecting every instant to feel a bullet boring into his back. He heard the door behind opening. Confronting him at different angles were two more doors, one labelled A Mash House and the other A Draft House. For no particular reason he dived into the mash house. Again a bullet followed him, but he would not risk exposing himself

by shooting back. He found himself in a square room with most of the centre occupied by a strange-looking metal contraption. At the far side a step-ladder mounted upwards. He went up the ladder, thinking that the top would be as good a place as any to hold his ground. Around him all he could see was a shadowy expanse of wooden floor with another flight of steps leading still higher. In the distance he could hear heavy footsteps pounding and men calling to each other. It seemed that for the moment the enemy had lost him but were hunting for him. Eventually, of course, they would find him, unless he could get out of this maze, which did not seem likely. He considered the situation. Not that it needed much consideration. He was in the distillery. So much was certain. He had been anxious to find it; now he was even more anxious to get out of it. The chances seemed slender. He had no idea of his position in relation to the entrance. He only knew that it lay somewhere below him. A distillery, it was clear, resembled nothing so much as a rabbit warren. It was all doors and corridors. He doubted if he would be able to get out even if there had been no opposition. He could still hear people moving about, so he decided that his best plan was to remain where he was until something happened. He put his torch, which he no longer needed, in his pocket.

He had not long to wait. Somewhere above him a door creaked. Footsteps, stealthy footsteps that a man makes when he tries to move quietly, followed. He perceived that he had enemies above him as well as below. Looking up to the head of the steps that rose from the floor on which he rested, he saw a man looking down. The man shouted, "Here he is!" and Cub knew that he had been seen. The words were followed by the roar of a gun and a bullet came close enough to Cub to sting him to retaliation. He took quick aim and fired. Blended with the shot was the sickening *phut* of a bullet ripping through flesh. He did not wait to see the result, but keeping close to the wall darted across the floor. His eyes being upturned to the danger area, he did not see a square opening in the floor in front of him. The first he knew of it was when he stepped into space. The next instant he was sliding down a chute that sagged under his weight, with his eyes and nose full of dust. It was a terrifying sensation while it lasted; fortunately it did not last long; he shot out on to a heap of something soft. The warm sickly smell of malt filled his nostrils.

He felt quickly for his torch, for he was now in darkness, and switching it on he observed that he was in a cask of such enormous dimensions that for a moment he was dismayed. The sides rose far above him. Fortunately, at one place, apparently where the malt had been tipped in, the stuff was piled high. Staggering, sliding, his feet sinking deep into the malt that subsided

under his weight, he scrambled to the top of the heap, from where, to his relief, he found he could clamber over the side. He found himself on a wooden floor, in a place that had the appearance of a barn. There were doors round the walls. As before, they bore names that meant nothing to him. Opening the nearest, which happened to be labelled A Still Room, he gazed into an apartment larger than anything he had yet seen. He could see clearly, for the place was lighted by several grimy electric bulbs. What he saw was not so much a room as a large area, the ceiling far above and the floor far below, the whole criss-crossed with innumerable pipes, single pipes and pipes that writhed in bunches, like snakes. The place was a bewildering maze of pipes, but the most conspicuous object was a huge copper dome, shaped like a retort.

Cub was in no mood to speculate on the purpose of these things. More important were flights of steps, some going up, others going down. A flight near at hand ended near what seemed to be two great black beehives. Still concerned only with getting out of the place, he went down the steps, which ended on a stone floor. The nearest black beehive radiated heat, and he realised that it was a furnace. Not far away was a vaulted entrance. Stepping over coils of pipes he walked towards it.

It must not be supposed that while all this happened the distillery was quiet. There were shouts. Men called to each other. Feet clattered up and down steps. These sounds suddenly rose to a pandemonium, during which occurred a volley of shots. Among the shots was the heavy boom of a twelve-bore. Then a voice bellowed, "Cub, where are you?" and Cub smiled weakly from relief. Copper had arrived.

Advancing to the vaulted entrance, he shouted: "Hi! Copper!" At the same time he stood ready to take cover, for it seemed not unlikely that Copper, following his avowed principle, would shoot at the first figure he saw and ask questions afterwards. Walking on down a broad whitewashed corridor he came upon the body of a man, a man he had certainly never seen before. He was a negro. He lay huddled against the wall, a razor near his hand. Walking on he caught a fleeting glimpse of Slim, who darted from one door to another across the passage. More shots were fired, the reports seeming to come from different directions. Suddenly, out of a side door, burst Gimlet.

Seeing Cub, he hurried to meet him. "What the deuce do you think you're playing at?" he demanded crisply. "Why didn't you wait for us?"

"I wasn't given the chance," answered Cub.

"Have you seen Copper?"

“No, but I’ve heard him.”

“So have I. He’ll make a shambles of the place with that scatter-gun of his if I don’t stop him. My orders were that we should stay together, but when the shooting started we got split up; this place has more holes and corners in it than the Maginot Line. Where were you going?”

“I was trying to find my way out of this labyrinth. Do you know the way out?”

“I think so. We’d better head that way. If we don’t get together, we’re likely to be shooting each other.” Gimlet turned about and walked down the passage.

They came upon another man, dead or unconscious, sprawled across the floor.

“I fancy Copper’s been this way,” observed Gimlet grimly.

After passing through numerous doors they found themselves, to Cub’s relief, in the vestibule from which he had started his tour of the distillery. Tiny was there, propped up against the wall, supporting himself with his hands. Blood had run from his fingers to make a little pool on the floor. His face was grey. His eyes were open but lustreless.

Gimlet looked at Cub sternly and indicated the man with a jerk of his thumb. “Did you do that?”

“I may have done,” admitted Cub. “I had a crack at him, but he shot at me first.”

Gimlet turned to Tiny. “Hi, you, where’s Slim?”

“Gone,” was the reply in a dull voice.

“So he’s pulled out, eh?”

“Yeah. Left us ter take the rap, the cheap double-crosser.”

“Anybody with him?”

“No.”

Gimlet went to the entrance and looked out. The grey light of dawn was creeping into the ravine. More snow had fallen. “I think Tiny’s telling the truth,” he told Cub when he came back. “I can only see one set of footprints.” He went to the inner passage and shouted, “Copper!”

A minute later Trapper appeared. “Did you call, sir?” he enquired.

“Where’s Copper?”

“*Enfin!* The last I see him he is chasing a man up and down ladders.”

“The fool. He’ll lose his life in this warren.”

Cub opened another door and listened. In the distance he could hear Copper still shouting, “Cub!”

“Here we are!” yelled Cub. “This way.”

An answering yell told him that he had been heard. Soon afterwards Copper appeared, grey with dust and cobwebs. “Blimey! What a roundabouts,” he muttered, “Passages everywhere and none of ’em leading anywhere.”

“Never mind that,” interposed Gimlet curtly. “Slim’s got away. He’ll make for the Lodge and then for the hotel. I’m going after him. You stay here with Trapper. Collect the casualties and do what you can for them, but don’t trouble about anyone else who may be inside. They can’t get out while you’re here.”

“Aye, aye, sir.”

“We’ll get in touch with you as soon as we can,” promised Gimlet.

“Aye, aye, sir.”

“Come on, Cub.” Gimlet strode out into the cold grey dawn. “I imagine Slim knows the best way,” he said tersely. “We’ll follow his tracks. He can’t have got more than ten minutes’ start.”

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE ROUND-UP

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“How did you get down here?” asked Cub, as they followed Slim’s tracks down the ravine.

“Nearly broke my neck sliding down that confounded toboggan run,” answered Gimlet. “I couldn’t find any other way down. Copper and Trapper must have heard me and followed me—I haven’t had a chance to ask them.” Gimlet pointed, his finger indicating a line of tracks that mounted upwards. “Apparently that’s the path. We might have been hours finding it. No sooner were we down than we heard shots. Guessing that you had started something, we hurried along to see what was happening.”

It seemed to Cub that the return journey was not as bad as the outward trip. For one thing, it was slowly getting light, and for another, Slim took an easier route. It was some time before they saw him, but eventually they caught a glimpse of him as he topped a ridge about half a mile ahead. He



paused to look back, and they knew from the way he turned and went on that he had seen them.

“He won’t staying at the Lodge,” prophesied Gimlet. “He’ll make for the hotel, supposing Burke and Smith to be there.”

“If he gets to the Lodge first, he’ll beat us,” asserted Cub. “He’ll spot the Buick in the yard and use it.”

“In that case, we’ve got to beat him to the Lodge,” declared Gimlet, setting such a pace that Cub found it hard to keep up. In fact, he could not keep up, but gradually dropped behind. In half an hour he was nearly thirty yards in the rear, but he put on a spurt down a slope and made up some ground. He saw Slim running across the open moor, still with a lead of several hundred yards. Seeing his pursuers, Slim turned and fired two shots. They went wide, kicking up the snow some distance away.

“Silly fool, shooting at that range. Cost him nearly a hundred yards,” muttered Gimlet, who did not trouble to return the fire.

The chase continued. Cub was breathing heavily. Breasting each slope, sweat poured down his face. Gimlet maintained a steady pace and appeared to suffer no distress. Slowly but surely the gap between pursued and pursuers shortened, but when they came in sight of the Lodge Slim still had a lead of a hundred yards. Several times he had stumbled, and it seemed to Cub that his endurance must be giving out; but at the sight of his goal so close he put on a spurt.

Gimlet shouted to Cub, “This is it! Come on.” He tore on as though the race had only just started.

Slim was swaying now as he ran. It was clear to Cub that he was almost finished, but he nearly kept his lead. Reaching the nearest wall he turned, and leaning on it with one hand emptied his pistol at his pursuers. The bullets whistled close but did no damage. Gimlet ran on. Cub, putting every ounce of strength into a final effort, caught up with him. Slim disappeared round an angle of the wall. Ten seconds later came the sound Cub expected to hear. It was the whirr of a starter. An engine came to life. Gears clashed. When Gimlet and Cub burst round the corner the Buick was just moving. Gimlet made a dash for it; but the car was gathering speed, and he just failed to reach it. The Buick’s horn wailed sardonically.

“He’s done us, after all,” gasped Cub.

Gimlet, realising the futility of pursuit, had pulled up. “Looks like it,” he said calmly. Then he stiffened. “No! By gad! Look!”

The accident that followed occurred, as do most accidents, in a flash. Slim was hardly to be blamed. The last thing he could have expected at such

a place, and at such an hour, was another vehicle. Yet, just as he reached the first bend in the road, travelling at high speed, another car swung into sight, coming towards the Lodge. The same applied to the driver of the other car, of course. Both drivers were on the crown of the road. The oncoming car, if anything, was a trifle on its wrong side. Slim, going too fast to stop, and seeing that he had no chance of passing on his right side, tried to get through on the other. But the road was too narrow. For a brief instant it looked as if he might succeed; the Buick appeared to do no more than graze the other car in passing; but this, at the speed it was travelling, was enough to be fatal. The Buick tipped up on two wheels. For a few yards it ran thus, on the point of balance. Then it went over. There was a crash. For a split second it seemed to hang poised, its wheels spinning, on the brink of the steep bank that ran down to the river. Then, with a sort of horrible deliberation, it rolled over and disappeared from sight. It could be heard bumping and banging as it rolled over and over towards the rocky bed of the river far below. There was a final crash, then silence.

The other car had by this time stopped. The doors were flung open. Four men jumped out and hastened to the spot where the Buick had gone over. They were policemen. One wore three silver stripes on his arm. A constable turned and, looking up the road, saw Gimlet and Cub standing there. He touched the sergeant on the arm and pointed.

“I had an idea that policeman would come back,” said Gimlet softly. He walked forward to meet the sergeant.

“Are you coming quietly?” greeted the sergeant sternly, as he came within speaking distance.

Gimlet smiled faintly. “You’ll never have two more passive prisoners, sergeant,” he said evenly.

One of the constables followed the sergeant. Cub recognised the officer who had called at the hotel. The other two started scrambling down the bank in the wake of the wrecked car. The sergeant dangled a pair of handcuffs.

“You won’t need those,” said Gimlet.

The sergeant hesitated. “We’ll see.” He pocketed the handcuffs and took out a notebook. “Name?” he questioned.

“King. Captain Lorrington King.”

The sergeant looked suspicious. “This is no time for joking.”

“That’s the name he gave me last night,” put in the constable.

“Are you telling the truth?” challenged the sergeant, still suspicious.

“Every word of it,” answered Gimlet.

“What are you doing here?”

Gimlet raised his eyebrows. “Is there any law to stop a man living on his own property, in his own house?”

The sergeant seemed puzzled. “I’ve never seen you before.”

Gimlet smiled. “Probably because I’ve never been here before. I’ve never seen you, for that matter.”

“What’s been going on here?”

“You’d never guess,” replied Gimlet.

“Who was the man who went over that bank? A friend of yours?”

“Not exactly, sergeant. His name is Delano—commonly called Slim. He’s a notorious American gunman and racketeer.”

“What was *he* doing here?”

“Distilling whisky—illicit spirit, of course.”

The sergeant started. His lips opened. “He—*what . . . ?*”

“It’s chilly standing here,” complained Gimlet. “Suppose we go inside and I’ll tell you all about it. It’s a longish story, but I think you’ll find it quite entertaining. Incidentally, I’ve some prisoners in the cellar—as nice a bunch of crooks as you’ve ever seen under one roof. I believe you’ve been looking for one of them for quite a long time. His name’s Burke. With another fellow, he shot one of your men near Aberdeen some years ago. I’m sorry to say I’ve also got some casualties. You’ll need more men than you’ve got here. You’d better send one of your fellows for help. He’d better bring an ambulance and a doctor.”

“Where are these casualties?” asked the sergeant, as they walked on towards the house.

“Away up the glen, in an old distillery. I’ve two men taking care of them.”

The constables who had been down the bank now returned. They were pale. “Dead as mutton,” said one, “Smashed to pulp. The car’s half in the river. It’ll take a crane to get it out.”

“Perhaps it’s as well,” opined Gimlet quietly. “It may save a lot of complications.”

The sergeant ordered one of his men to take the car and fetch the help that Gimlet had advised. This done, they went into the house.

“Personally, I could do with a cup of tea,” remarked Gimlet.

The sergeant whistled softly when he saw the bomb-shattered kitchen. “My word! What’s happened here, sir?” he asked in amazement.

“Slim didn’t like the idea of us living here, so he tried to move us with a little arrangement of his own,” returned Gimlet casually. “Naturally, we had to defend ourselves—that is, I and my staff. In the final argument some of Slim’s men got hurt.”

The policemen righted the table. The sergeant rested his notebook on it and pulled up a chair. “Perhaps you’d care to make a full statement, sir?” he suggested.

“Of course,” agreed Gimlet. And for the next half-hour, while Cub made tea, he narrated the events that had occurred since his arrival at Glencarglas. More than once Cub had to turn away to hide a smile at the expression on the sergeant’s face.

“Are these other prisoners still in the cellar?” asked the sergeant.

“I should think it’s more than likely,” replied Gimlet. “Commandos have special training in tying knots that won’t come undone. I’d leave them where they are till you get assistance. They’re an ugly lot.”

“As you say, sir.”

Gimlet finished his tale. At the end he signed his name at the foot of the page in the sergeant’s notebook.

“There’s one thing this does explain, sir,” said the sergeant. “For months London has been flooded with black-market whisky—pretty raw stuff, too, from all accounts. The police couldn’t trace the source of it. Who’d have thought it was right here, under my nose?”

“Who indeed?” said Gimlet smoothly. “You’d better get in touch with London as soon as possible and ask them to have a look at this alleged vinegar outfit. I fancy the Metropolitan Police will get a bit of a shock when they see the sort of vinegar these people are bottling.”

“I’ll do that right away, sir,” asserted the sergeant. “What about this man of yours down in Devonshire—Singer?”

“You’d better have him picked up at the same time,” suggested Gimlet.

“Very good, sir.”

Soon after this two police cars arrived, with a motor ambulance. From the cars dismounted eight policemen, under an inspector, who read through the sergeant’s report.

“You’ve been having what you might call an exciting time, sir,” he observed as he put the book down. “Not a very nice welcome to Scotland; but if you’ll give us another chance, I think we can do better than that. We shall want you at the enquiry, I’m afraid. I’ll let you know when and where it is to be held. The coroner may ask some pointed questions about the

shooting and the car accident—but you can leave it to the police to handle that.”

“Thank you, Inspector,” returned Gimlet. “I’m sorry the affair came to a show-down before we could bring in the police, but that’s the way it fell out. You’d better send some men to the distillery. My fellows there will think I’ve forgotten all about them. You’ll need stretchers. You have only to follow the tracks in the snow and they’ll take you right to the spot.”

The inspector went off with his men.

It was three hours before they returned with the prisoners. Some were able to walk. Others were carried on stretchers. Copper and Trapper arrived on ponies, leading another. They said they had found them in a stable. They had brought them along, as there would now be no one to take care of them; moreover, the inspector wanted impressions of their fake hoofs for evidence.

“I hope you’ve got some grub going?” said Copper. “’Strewth! I’m near famished.”

“What did you find at the distillery, Inspector?” asked Gimlet.

“I’d call it a very interesting exhibit,” was the answer. “If you don’t mind, I’d like to have some photos taken of it for the jury to see. Not so many men there as I thought. We could only find six—three of them well plastered with buckshot. The man they call Tiny and a negro won’t give anybody trouble for some time to come.”

“Not many men to run a place that size?” suggested Gimlet.

“It doesn’t take many hands to run a distillery,” stated the inspector. “They were only working one still, but even that would turn out a good many gallons of spirit. It might have gone on for years if you hadn’t turned up. They had everything handy—water in the burn, peat for the fire, and barley from the braes. As a matter of fact, sir,” went on the inspector confidentially, “we haven’t been happy about the Glencarglas Arms for some time. That fellow who calls himself Smith had been there too long. Of course, we had no proof of any funny business, so there was nothing we could do. But my man Ross, who does that beat, has been keeping an eye on the place. That’s why he looked in last night. When he made his report at the station, I sent the sergeant along to have a look round. Finding the place empty and locked up and tyre marks leading up the glen, he came along to see if all was well at the Lodge. He didn’t expect to find anything like this, though.”

“I’ll bet he didn’t,” put in Copper softly, winking at Cub. “Neither did we.”

“By the way, we’d better have those fellows up from the cellar,” decided the inspector. “Fancy Burke being here all the time. Well, well!”

The four prisoners were fetched from the cellar, in handcuffs. They were a sorry-looking lot. They were now at war with each other, for Smith, the bounce gone out of him, had announced that he was ready to turn King’s Evidence.

“You’ll all get a chance to do all the talking you want at the station,” the inspector told them grimly. To Gimlet he added, “We shall be up here on and off for some time, I’m afraid, sir. The Excise people will want to see the distillery and dismantle it. The press will be here, too, no doubt, with photographers. It’ll be quite a big story when the newspapers get hold of it.”

“I was afraid of that,” murmured Gimlet. “I think we’d better clear out until the excitement dies down.”

“You’ll have to leave me your address, sir, of course,” said the inspector.

“Are you going straight home to Lorrington, sir?” asked Cub.

“Not necessarily,” returned Gimlet. “I seem to remember something about a party at the Ritz, when I was absent from parade. I don’t see any reason why we shouldn’t try again. How about it, you fellows?”

“Suits me fine,” answered Cub.

Copper looked at Trapper. “Suits us down ter the ground, I should say. What say you, Trapper, old pal? Am I right?”

Trapper clicked his tongue. “*Tch!* Are you right? I’ll say you’re right,” he agreed with enthusiasm.

## 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.

Some illustrations were moved to facilitate page layout.

[The end of *Gimlet Comes Home* by Capt. W. E. (William Earl) Johns]