

GIMLET GETS THE ANSWER

CAPTAIN W. E. JOHNS



First in the field of adventure

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He jumped the crack and ran on

GIMLET GETS THE ANSWER

By
CAPTAIN W. E. JOHNS

Illustrated
by
LESLIE STEAD

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*The characters in this book are entirely imaginary,
and have no relation to any living person.*

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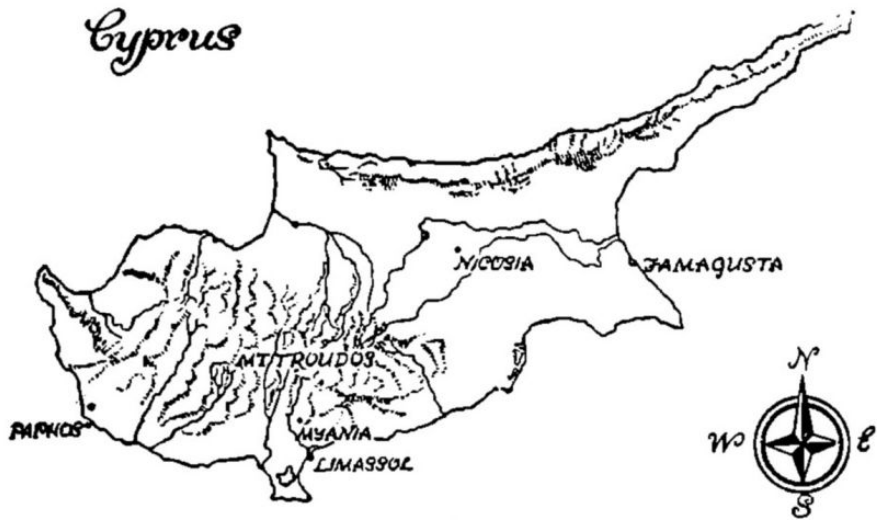
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AUTHOR'S NOTE

CYPRUS

Believing it to be in the interest of the reader to know something of the island whereon occurred the adventure narrated in the following pages, here, briefly, are some particulars which need not then be interpolated in the story.

The island of Cyprus, a British Crown Colony, is a hundred and forty-five miles long with an average width of forty-five. It lies at the eastern end of the Mediterranean, with Turkey to the north, Syria to the east and Egypt to the south, a position which, through the ages, made it the hub of the Old World, and, at the same time, a battlefield for the many races of three continents. Coveted by every great power since history began, its story has been one of war, massacre and persecution. As if that were not horror enough, it has over and over again been rocked into a state of devastation by earthquakes.

Seas of the most wonderful blue wash the golden sandy shores of this lovely island. Within, ranges of thickly-wooded mountains provide a last retreat for that rare animal, the moufflon, and form a mysterious and spectacular background for ancient pagan temples and mighty medieval castles. Some of these have been shaken to ruins by the earthquakes. Others remain more or less intact, impressive monuments to another age. Upon their marble floors and massive battlements have stood some of the most colourful figures of human existence.

Two thousand years before the birth of Christ the island was colonised by those great sea rovers, the Phoenicians. Here was born their Mother-Goddess, Astarte, who later became the Aphrodite of the ancient Greeks—to whom Cyprus was the home of the gods. In 1450 B.C. came Pharaoh from Egypt. It was of the timber from Cyprus that he built his ships. In turn, with appalling bloodshed, the island passed into the empires of Persia, Greece, Rome, Byzantium, Arabia, Venice and Turkey.

Richard Coeur-de-Lion, on his way to the Third Crusade, conquered the island and held it for seven years. It was here, with great splendour, that he married his beautiful queen, Berengaria. Their honeymoon was spent near Limassol, a town which comes into this story.

It was here, too, at Famagusta, that Shakespeare's Othello, the jealous Moor of Venice, murdered the fair Desdemona. Othello's Tower still stands, and the chamber where the murder is said to have been committed is pointed out to tourists.

Here, too, came St. Paul, St. Mark and St. Barnabas, to preach a new Gospel. St. Barnabas suffered martyrdom, but he did not die in vain. The island was the first to accept Christianity. Cyprus was the first country to be governed by a Christian ruler.

The Romans held the island for three hundred years. Julius Caesar, Mark Antony (who gave the island to Cleopatra) and Cicero, looked upon the same scenes that we may see to-day. Since 1878 Cyprus has been administered by Great Britain.

All over Cyprus are to be found traces of the island's mighty past; the ruins of cities, great in their day, with fortresses honeycombed with secret passages, dungeons, reservoirs and granaries, in which have been found the weapons and armour of those who fell in battle. Under a mantle of wild flowers and flowering shrubs, silent and abandoned lie the marble columns of ancient temples, and the tombs of those who worshipped in them. Their descendants, a mixture of East and West, remain. Churches and mosques stand side by side. On the dusty roads the camel still walks side by side with the modern motor-car. The capital of the island is Nicosia, in the interior. Other important towns, all on the coast, are Famagusta, Larnaca, Limassol and Kyrenia.

CHAPTER I

A RACKETEER COMES EAST

MAJOR CHARLES, of the Intelligence Office, Security Section, regarded with serious eyes the four men who had just seated themselves in front of his writing-table. They were Captain "Gimlet" King, "Copper" Colson, "Trapper" Troublay and "Cub" Peters, once comrades of the redoubtable commando troop known as King's Kittens. All were well known to the Intelligence Officer, who had entrusted them with more than one secret assignment in the interests of public security.

"As you will have supposed, I have a nut to crack," he said quietly. "I usually have, of course; but that's my job. There may be nothing inside this particular one, in which case you will be able to enjoy a pleasant holiday at the Government's expense. On the other hand, there may be an exceedingly tough kernel, one that will take you all your time to chew. That remains to be seen. When I spoke to Captain King on the phone, and he told me that he was meeting the rest of you to-day for your monthly luncheon party, I suggested that you might as well all come along to hear at first hand the details of the proposed operation. It has some unusual features. The affair may turn out to have a military or political angle, or it may be entirely criminal. Again, it may resolve itself into a mere private feud—or even nothing at all. I don't know. So far there's been no indication of any of these things, but I suspect that at least one of them will be involved. But let us start at the beginning, which takes us to the United States of America.

"As you will remember, during prohibition days in the United States there arose a gangster element so powerful that it almost ruled the country. These gangs made enormous profits from the sale of bootleg liquor, and when two or more gangs strove to get a monopoly in certain cities the result was often open and ruthless war. Men were shot dead in public places, and for some time it seemed that nothing could be done about it. The names of the leaders of the respective gangs became household words. However, it is not with them that I am concerned. Our business is with another lesser-known but similar type named Nicolou Kniftos, better known in his gang by the significant nickname of "Knifey." He is thought to be a Greek, or of Greek extraction. Subsequent events all tend to confirm this. It seems that just before Mr. Hoover's "G" men cleaned up this vile gangster business, Knifey made a mistake, or perhaps in some way broke the code of

gangsterism. At all events, he was put on the spot, and, knowing that meant certain death, he lost no time in getting out of the country. He came to Britain. We refused to allow him to land. He tried France with the same result. He got ashore in Greece, and there for a time he disappeared. Later he turned up in Cyprus, where most of the people are of Greek origin. Greek is the language in common use, although a good deal of English is spoken.

“We knew that Kniftos was in Cyprus, but as he seemed to be leading a quiet, respectable life, we left him alone. We kept an eye on him, of course, although he was unaware of this. Indeed, it is unlikely that he realised we knew about him being there. And so we come to the spring of last year, when Kniftos departed, taking the local boat service to Egypt, and from there booking a passage to the United States. We concluded that as the gangster business was dead, and almost forgotten, he thought it safe to go back.

“What he did in America we don’t know. The police—we tipped them off—lost sight of him. Imagine our surprise when two months later he turned up again in Cyprus, very well dressed, and apparently with plenty of money in his pockets. On this occasion he remained on the island only for a week, when again he went off to America. He has done that three times, staying only a week or a fortnight; and now we have just had word from the Federal Police that he is on his way back across the Atlantic, in—if you please—a private steam-yacht, which he must have bought or chartered, unless it has been lent to him by someone interested in his present occupation. That is a possibility. We have no proof that he is heading for Cyprus, but in view of what has been going on it seems highly probable. Naturally, we are curious to know what he is doing. Whatever it is, there is money in it. Kniftos never did anything except for money. Certain it is that he has a lot more money now than when he first landed on the island. I want you fellows to go to Cyprus, wait for Kniftos to arrive, and find out just what he’s up to.

“You may suppose this to be a simple undertaking,” continued Major Charles. “You may wonder why I should choose four soldiers of experience to do a job which, on the face of it, could be done by a police detective. I have a reason, and it is this. Kniftos is not alone. Apart from a crew of four, he has on his yacht six ex-gangsters who, although it was never possible to convict them, have all been guilty of murder. Every one of them has served a prison sentence. The worst character of the lot, apart from Kniftos, is one Antonio Torlino, who in the old days was Knifey’s second-in-command. Another is a gorilla of a man named Miguel Palvanez, known to his associates as Bandy. What all these thugs are doing in this new set-up, if

Cyprus is their destination, defeats imagination. Only money would tempt them to leave America, that's certain. And it must be something pretty big, too big for Knifey to handle alone, otherwise he wouldn't have risked his life by getting in touch with the very men who served a death sentence on him. Kniftos isn't the sort of man to share the swag of any racket, if it could be avoided, you may be sure. A partner might have been understandable. But six men!" Major Charles shook his head.

"It comes to this," he continued. "Here we have a bunch of the most dangerous crooks on earth, brought together by something so important that they are prepared to forget old scores, and put to sea in a small ship. As I have said, that can only mean money. But how? From what? What do they hope to get in Cyprus—if that's where they're going? What is there to attract them? Oranges, raisins, almonds, cheese? These are the chief exports. Oh no. Whatever it may be, make no mistake, this gang is about as safe as a high explosive bomb with the fuse fizzing. That's why I'm asking you to tackle the job. Any questions?"

There was silence for a few seconds. Then Gimlet spoke.

"I take it you have absolutely no clue as to how Kniftos occupied himself whilst he was in Cyprus?"

"Absolutely none, beyond the fact that he appeared to be living a simple life on very little money."

"We can assume that what he is doing is illegal?"

"Definitely. These men are all confirmed criminals. Nothing straight would interest them."

"Has nothing happened in Cyprus to give us an idea? I mean, nothing in the way of scandal, blackmail, kidnapping, for example?"

"Nothing. Kniftos lived a secluded life in a cottage called Casa Stefanita, near the hamlet of Myania, which lies behind Limassol, at the foot of the Olympus range of mountains."

"Did he buy or rent this house?"

"At first he rented it. Later on he bought it. We supposed that he chose a spot so remote in order to hide from his enemies, should they follow him. He used to take long walks in the mountains, and returned cautiously, as if afraid he might have visitors. As far as we know he had none. He always had enough money to keep himself without working. You could say that such a life would hardly suit a man of his type, and I would agree with you. It was easy to suppose that he had got sick of it, and decided to return to the cities he knew. That was what we thought. It was to be expected. But why did he come back? From what source did he obtain money? Now, to cap all,

not only is he coming back again, but he is bringing with him the very men of whom he had most cause to be afraid. It is a queer business altogether.”

“Did he sell this house of his when he first left it?” asked Cub.

“No. He just locked up and departed.”

“Then it looks as if he knew then that he was coming back.”

“I agree.”

“What happened when he returned?”

“He unlocked the door and just carried on as before.”

Gimlet stepped into the conversation again. “I imagine these crooks will be armed?”

“Of course they will. Guns are as much a part of their normal equipment as handkerchiefs are to us.”

“Which means that we shall have to carry guns ourselves?”

Major Charles smiled wanly. “You’d be foolish to fall foul of that crowd without any means of hitting back.”

“Assuming that these men are all American citizens, what happens if one of them gets killed?”

Major Charles shrugged. “I wouldn’t worry too much about that. The newspapers, pandering to the public, might set up a bleat, but the Federal Police would be only too glad to strike these rogues off their record.”

“Have you a photograph of this fellow Kniftos, so that we shall be able to recognise him when we see him?”

“Of course. I’ve had photographs of all of them sent over from the U.S.A.” Major Charles passed the docket. “Here they are. Study them at your leisure. You have this advantage. They won’t know you, or what you are. But you’ll know them. Your best plan would be to assume the roles of camera-clicking tourists. Plenty go to the island.”

“Where is the yacht now?” enquired Gimlet.

“In the Atlantic. Her name by the way is *Sandra*—American registration. We’ll keep an eye on her and let you know when she enters the Mediterranean. She’ll probably put in at Famagusta. There’s a harbour there. At most other places landing can only be effected by a small boat, which means that the sea must be calm.”

“You could, I imagine, refuse to give them permission to land, on the grounds of being undesirable?”

“Yes, but I’d rather not. It might cause friction with America—you know how it is. They’d probably find a way of landing anyhow. I think it would be

better to let them land, as if we suspect nothing.”

“I agree.” Gimlet got up. “This sounds all very interesting. We’ll go and see what it’s about. Can you think of anything in particular we’re likely to need?”

Major Charles thought for a moment. “No. In the matter of clothes, well, this is March, and you may find the weather cool. But presently it gets really hot, so you’d better take some light kit.”

“What about accommodation?”

“Please yourself. You can take a furnished villa if you prefer it that way; but there are plenty of hotels, large and small, in the towns.”

“We’ll make arrangements to start right away,” promised Gimlet. “If any other points occur to me before we go, I’ll get in touch with you. If you hear of anything you can give me a ring.”

“Right. You’ll usually find me here,” said Major Charles. “By the way, as a matter of formality, I’m sending a secret report to the Governor of the Island, so don’t hesitate to call on him for assistance should you need it.”

CHAPTER II

THE *SANDRA* ARRIVES

A FORTNIGHT after the conference in Major Charles' office Cub sat alone near the Sea Gate at Famagusta and regarded the port, and the blue Mediterranean beyond, with an interest that was beginning to wane, for he had looked upon the same scene every day for a week. The magnificent palms, the frowning fortifications, the grim-looking Othello's Tower, Cypriot officials in smart British uniforms, Turkish women with gaudy veils, men in their national baggy trousers—all these things had become commonplace. He wanted to see the yacht, *Sandra*, sail into the harbour. So far there had been no sign of it. All that was known was, the vessel had passed through the Strait of Gibraltar.

Gimlet's party had flown out from England on the regular service, and by that time certain difficulties, not taken into account at the conference, had become apparent. The first resulted from the size of the island, taken in conjunction with the lack of information concerning the gangsters' port of disembarkation—supposing Cyprus to be their destination. It was obviously impossible for four people to watch the entire coastline: yet Kniftos might come ashore anywhere. As Gimlet pointed out, the *Sandra* might put in, and be away again, with its purpose concluded, before they were aware of its arrival. Wherefore the party had been broken up, each member being given a section of the coast to watch as far as this was possible. Gimlet had stationed himself at Limassol, which, being the port nearest to Kniftos' cottage, was reckoned to be the most likely place for the yacht to make its landfall. Nicosia, Gimlet decided, lying in the interior, could be ignored.

Cub had been detailed to watch Famagusta. Copper had gone to Larnaca and Trapper to Kyrenia. These towns were some distance apart, so at once arose the question of transport in order that contact could be made, one with another, at any hour of day or night. The problem had been solved as far as was practicable by the purchase of a second-hand motor-car and four bicycles. Gimlet had the car, with a bicycle in reserve. The others each had a bike.

Gimlet did not pretend that he was altogether happy with this arrangement. Bicycles were slow, although, on the other hand, they had the advantage of being inconspicuous. A cavalcade of four cars could hardly

race about the island, as might be necessary, without attracting some attention. Certainly the bicycles would fit in with their roles of tourists.

Cub had found quarters in a small hotel named the Excelsior, which gave a view of the sea, and settled down to watch. He had not heard a word from any of the others since their second day on the island, when, in order that they should get to know the lie of the land, they had made a trip together in the car, an old Ford, to the Casa Stefanita, Knifto's cottage near Limassol. The expedition started from Famagusta, where Gimlet bought the car, for this was before the party had split up to their respective stations.

It was a fine morning and Cub enjoyed the drive of rather more than sixty miles. For the most part the road ran parallel with the sea, although sometimes it struck inland through ranges of low hills. Near Limassol there was a good deal of cultivation, wheat, barley, grapes and olives being the chief crops. Carob and eucalyptus trees lined the road. Everywhere there were the crumbling ruins of the island's mighty past. Often, too, the rugged hillsides were honeycombed with tombs, some dating, so it was said, to prehistoric times. Inland loomed the pine-clad slopes of the Olympus range, with seven thousand feet Mount Troodos over-topping the rest.

They had some difficulty in finding the cottage, for it lay farther back from the town than they had been given to understand. They found the village of Myania, but there the road appeared to end. After some enquiries it was a Cypriot shepherd, with his long staff and skin water-bag over his shoulder, who showed them the way to the Casa Stefanita. The man did not speak English, but he knew the name of the house, and pointed to a rough, steep track, that wound a zigzag course up the flank of a nearby hill. Gimlet decided not to risk the car, not so much because it could not take the hill as because it would have been difficult to find a convincing excuse for putting the vehicle to such a test. As he observed, tyres leave tracks. So they put the car in the yard of the village inn, a primitive establishment, and continued on foot.

After a walk of something over a mile they found the cottage nestling in silent isolation on a small area of level but rock-strewn ground, just below where the pine forest began. It was a picturesque spot some four miles or so from the open sea, which, being high on the hillside, it overlooked. On the other side, the house looked down into a small deserted creek of turquoise water in which the broken columns of an ancient temple were reflected with melancholy effect. A more unlikely place for an American gangster to choose for his retirement would be hard to find, thought Cub, turning about to gaze at the towering crags on the landward side.

The house was small, embracing, as far as could be judged from the outside, not more than five rooms. It had obviously been built simply as a residence, there being no arable land of any sort around it. In construction it was like most of the rural houses they had seen—bricks of sun-baked clay and straw, with a flat roof. It stood quite alone, four-square in a jungle of overgrown orange trees under which flourished tangles of fennel, poppies and large yellow daisies. Emerald-green lizards sunned themselves on a rough, dry-stone wall that bounded the property. At one place the wall had fallen, or had been knocked down, to give access to what looked like a goat-track that wandered up the hillside until it lost itself in the pines. It all looked very peaceful, beautiful and quiet.

There was one outhouse, a rectangular building, perhaps twenty feet long by ten feet wide, with the customary flat roof. Little attention was paid to it at first. Gimlet walked slowly round the house. Both doors and all the windows were shut, and there hung over the place that complete absence of sound that is usual when a building is unoccupied. This, of course, was expected. Gimlet knocked, having an excuse ready, but there was no answer. No attempt was made to force an entrance, but they satisfied their curiosity to some extent by peering through the windows. All that could be seen was some simple furniture. The kitchen was untidy, pots and pans standing on the table, and ashes in the fireplace, as if a man had been living there alone. This again was in accord with what they knew.

“Well, at least we’ve had a look at the place,” remarked Gimlet, stepping back.

His eyes went to the outhouse, standing as if it might have been a garage about a dozen yards from the side of the cottage.

“What’s this place, I wonder?” he murmured, walking nearer. “It isn’t a garage. There’s only an ordinary door.”

Gimlet gave the door a knock with his knuckles. “I wouldn’t call that an ordinary door,” he added. “The bloke who built that must have been scared of burglars. Sort of door they put in a church.” There was no handle, only—surprisingly in such a place—a new lock of the Yale type.

They walked round the building. “No windows, either,” remarked Copper. “That’s a bit queer, ain’t it?”

“What’s that?” Cub pointed to a single, unglazed opening just below the roof.

“I don’t call that a window, I’d call it a ventilator,” said Copper.

Gimlet, who had been examining the wall, turned a puzzled face. “This place is new,” he asserted. “The whitewash hasn’t even started to flake. It

can't have been here more than a month or so."

"Which means that Knifey must have put it up, or had it put up," Cub pointed out.

"The place looks to me as if it was built for an ammunition magazine," contributed Copper.

"That's exactly what it does look like," agreed Gimlet.

"Maybe Knifey was going to shut himself up in there if his pals followed him up to bump him off," suggested Trapper.

Gimlet did not answer. He regarded the building thoughtfully. At last he shook his head. "Very odd," he said. "Well, we shan't learn any more by staring at it," he concluded, turning away. "Let's go back to the car."

That same evening they separated for their respective posts. That was a week ago, and Cub had been alone ever since. He had employed the time between watching the sea and exploring the many monuments of days long gone by. The walls of the old town, seventeen feet thick, with their tremendous bastions, still amazed him. He would have thought the place impregnable, but history revealed that it was not. The living-quarters of the old garrison, with their dungeons, secret passages and other essentials of medieval warfare, captured his imagination. For the rest he had plenty to occupy his mind. How they were going to keep close watch on the gangsters when they landed, without their purpose being suspected, he did not know. Natives of the island, in their conspicuous costumes, might hang about the cottage all day without giving rise to comment; but not four European visitors. Time, too, he realised might turn out to be a vital factor. How long the yacht would stay, if it came, would depend of course on what Knifetos wanted to do, and that was something they did not know. Nor was it possible to hazard a guess.

Glancing at his watch he saw that it was nearly lunch time. However, before going in, he turned his steps, as was his habit, to Othello's Tower, which commanded a wider view of the sea. A steep flight of stone steps gave access to the top. Reaching the ramparts he looked around. To the east, below, lay the harbour. Beyond, behind the city walls, lay the Messaoria, the vast plain that occupied the centre of the island. To the north-east rose the pine-clad mountains of the long Kyrenian Range. Turning, he gazed out across the incredibly blue waters of the Mediterranean. His eyes, moving slowly along the horizon, stopped suddenly, focused on a tiny white speck. It was obviously a small craft of some sort. Could it be the *Sandra* at last? For a little while he watched it; then, realising that some time must elapse before the vessel was close enough for identification, he departed to have his lunch.

When he returned, he saw with mild excitement that the vessel was a smart steam-yacht and that it was obviously making for the harbour. Its size and general lines corresponded with their description of the *Sandra*, but it was still too far off for the name to be read. All he could do was put a curb on his impatience as it slowly drew nearer. Presently a footstep made him turn, and he saw, standing beside him, an elderly woman, an Englishwoman by her dress, obviously a tourist. In addition to the usual camera, a pair of binoculars hung from her shoulder.

“Pardon me,” said Cub “would you mind telling me the name of the yacht that is just coming in?”

The woman took out her glasses and raised them to her eyes. “*Sandra*,” she announced.

“Thank you,” acknowledged Cub.

As the yacht came on some men appeared at the rail. This was natural enough. What caused Cub a qualm of uneasiness was the fact that some suitcases were brought up from below and put beside them; for this suggested that not only were some of the men coming ashore, but that they intended to stay ashore.

A pinnacle, flying the Cyprian flag, the blue ensign with the two scarlet lions of St. Mark on the background, glided out, and up the steps that were dropped for them went the Customs’ Officials. Presently, under the direction of the Harbour Master, the yacht made fast to a buoy about a hundred yards from the quay.

Now although Cub had had plenty of time to envisage just such a situation he was in some doubt as to what to do for the best. Knifey had arrived. The sooner Gimlet knew the better. Should he go at once to the post office and send him a telegram? That would mean losing sight of the yacht, in which case he might miss something. He decided to wait a little while, at least, to see what happened.

Presently he was glad that he had taken this course, for as soon as the port formalities had been completed, and this did not take very long, the yacht’s dinghy was dropped alongside and no fewer than five men got into it. One, apparently a member of the crew, took the oars, and the boat came over to the quay. Cub joined the Greek and Turkish vendors of hand-made souvenirs and watched the new arrivals come ashore. Kniftos, a swart, thick-set little man, expensively dressed in rather bad taste, he recognised at once. Bandy, too, with his long arms and bow-legs, he also identified. A slim, dark, tight-waisted little man, he suspected was Toni Torlino. One of the men struck Cub as different from the rest. From his clothes, and his accent

when he spoke, he was obviously an American, but there was something about him, a sort of easy confidence, almost an air of authority, that put him a cut above the others.

The man who had rowed them ashore picked up their suitcases, and under Knifey's instructions put them into one of the little two-horse open carriages that ply for hire in Famagusta. Two of these vehicles were needed to carry the entire party, which did not, however, include the oarsman, who returned to his boat. The two carriages set off towards the town.

This move caught Cub on one foot, so to speak, for he had not expected such a rapid development. There were no other carriages available for the moment, so all he could do was follow at his best speed, hoping that the party was not going to Varosha, the residential district of Famagusta and a good mile distant. In the event this hope was fulfilled. The party entered the old city near the harbour, and rounding a corner Cub had the satisfaction of seeing the carriages standing outside an untidy-looking garage. His satisfaction was short-lived, however, for just as he reached the spot a saloon car emerged, with the men inside and the luggage on the top. Knifey himself was at the wheel. A man in mechanic's overalls watched them go. As the car moved off Cub heard him call, "So long, boss!"

To say that Cub was shaken would be to put it mildly. He was dismayed, and furious with himself for being utterly unprepared for such a contingency. He had supposed, naturally, that the party would go to one of the several hotels, at any rate for the night. That they might leave the town immediately, in a car, was a possibility that he had not considered. He hadn't even his bicycle handy. Not supposing that he would need it so soon, he had left it at his hotel. But what startled him more than anything was the garage man's valedictory remark. "So long, boss!" The words had been spoken with an unmistakable American accent. Obviously the man was either an American or had been to America. Did this mean that Knifey already had accomplices planted on the island? It looked like it. Certainly Knifey had friends at his command, if nothing more.

While these thoughts were passing through his head Cub came to a stop. He became aware that the garage man was looking at him enquiringly. Realising that he would have to say something to account for his behaviour, he said: "Do you speak English?"

"Sure," was the reply.

"Have you by any chance got a motor-cycle for hire, or for sale?" asked Cub, still hoping that he might find a means of keeping in touch with Knifey.

“No,” answered the man curtly, and, turning his back, strode into the garage.

With a sickening feeling of helplessness Cub realised that he had failed in his task, and there was nothing he could do about it. His brain was still whirling as he retraced his steps, making for the post office. There he sent a telegram to Gimlet, at his hotel at Limassol. It merely said:

ARRIVE HERE TODAY STOP URGENT NEWS STOP
AM WATCHING STOP WILL WAIT FOR YOU ON QUAY

That, he knew, would be sufficient to bring Gimlet over. Provided there was no delay, he could expect to see him in a couple of hours.

CHAPTER III

CUB TAKES A CHANCE

AFTER sending the telegram there was nothing Cub could do but take up a position from which the yacht could be watched. He found it still made fast to the buoy. There was no sign of anyone coming ashore, so it seemed safe to suppose that those who had remained on board intended to stay there. Otherwise, they would by this time have moved into an hotel. He had, of course, a double purpose in watching the yacht. There was always a chance that Kniftos and his party would return to it to sleep. Not that he thought this probable. The fact that they had taken suitcases with them made it fairly certain that they intended to remain, at least for one night, at wherever they had gone.

As the sun went down, bathing everything in a warm pink glow but leaving the melancholy battlements silhouetted darkly against the sky, Cub made his way to one of the small cafés on the waterfront and had a cup of tea. And there Gimlet found him.

“What happened?” asked Gimlet tersely. “I see the yacht’s still here.”

“I’m afraid I made rather a mess of things,” confessed Cub ruefully. He went on to narrate exactly what had happened.

“Knifey hasn’t come back?”

“No—none of them, as far as I know.”

“Don’t worry,” said Gimlet. “I imagine they’ve gone to the cottage. Knifey was almost certain to go there, since the place belongs to him, even if it isn’t actually involved in his scheme. I met several cars as I came along. One of them may have been his. Don’t blame yourself. You couldn’t have watched both the car and the yacht, anyway. Of the two, the yacht was really the most important, because the gang will have to rejoin it sooner or later.”

“I don’t think Knifey’s party can intend coming back here to-night or they wouldn’t have taken suitcases,” opined Cub.

“Quite so,” agreed Gimlet. “This business of the garage man being ready with a car, as obviously he was, is a bit of an eye-opener. The possibility of Knifey having friends on the island was something I didn’t take into account. There’ll be other things to surprise us before we’ve finished, no doubt.”

“What do we do next?” enquired Cub.

“Wait for Copper and Trapper to come. I’ve wired them to meet us here. There’s no point in them staying where they are, now. Besides, we shall need all hands to watch things. We have two parties to keep an eye on. I’ll put Copper and Trapper on to watch the yacht, while we go in the car to see if we can locate the others.”

“Tonight?”

Gimlet hesitated. “I’ll think about that and decide when Copper gets here. Meanwhile, all we can do is watch the yacht. Anything might happen.”

“Such as?”

“Knifey, or some of the others, might come back. The yacht may move off to another mooring. It might go altogether. Is there any room in your hotel, in case I need a bed?”

“Plenty. The place is practically empty.”

“Good.”

There was silence for a little while. The sunset faded. Stars appeared in a clear sky. Riding-lights appeared in the harbour, including those of the *Sandra*.

“I’ve got an idea,” stated Cub suddenly.

“Go ahead.”

“While we’re waiting for the others to come, what about me swimming out to the yacht and trying a spot of eavesdropping? I might learn something about Knifey’s programme.”

Gimlet looked doubtful. “You’d be spotted in that calm water.”

“By whom?”

“By those on the yacht.”

“They wouldn’t be likely to guess what I was doing.”

“The harbour police?”

“There’s no law against bathing, or even resting on the buoys,” declared Cub. “I’ve bought a costume, and I’ve had a swim every day. That was in daylight, admittedly; but I don’t see why I shouldn’t bathe in the dark if I want to. The police could only tell me to come out, so we’ve nothing to lose by trying.”

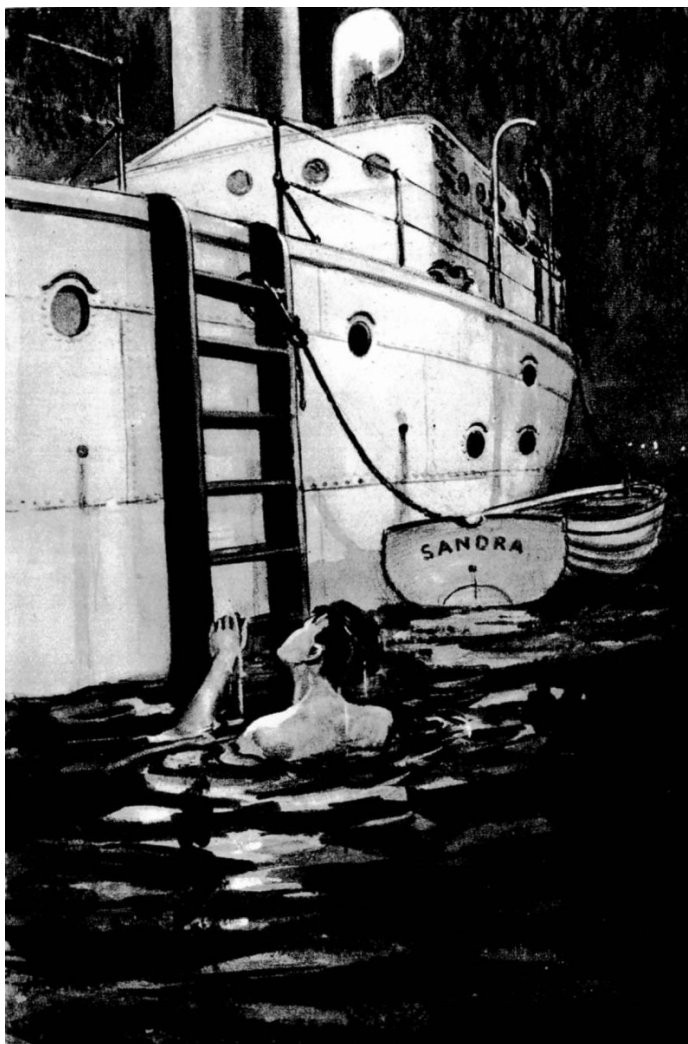
“True enough,” conceded Gimlet. “All right. I’ll watch you from here. Be careful; we don’t want any sort of trouble that might call attention to ourselves.”

“I’ll be careful,” promised Cub. “I shall have to slip home to get my costume. Shan’t be long.”

He was back in about twenty minutes, with a towel over his arm and his costume on under jacket and grey flannel trousers. Standing in a shadow he soon had these off, and leaving Gimlet to take care of them advanced quietly to the edge of the quay. Iron steps let into the wall took him down to the almost tepid water. With no more disturbance than was unavoidable, he lowered himself up to the neck and then struck out gently for his objective.

Reaching the buoy he held on to it for a moment to allow the ripples to subside, and at the same time give anyone who might have been watching a chance to ask him what he was doing. All remained quiet. Not a sound, not a movement, came from the yacht, which hung motionless to its mooring. Satisfied that he had not been seen, he again lowered himself into the water, and, with only his head showing, worked his way along the side of the vessel to the dinghy, which had been made fast to the ladder that gave access to the deck. Again he paused, listening; but all he could hear was a faint murmur of conversation which he could not locate, but seemed to come from somewhere deep down in the vessel.

This was disappointing, for he was now under the portholes, and it was from this position that he had hoped to achieve his object. But this, obviously, was not to be. Quite slowly he worked his way right round the yacht, listening under the various portholes, most of which were open, but without the slightest promise of success. Eventually, he found himself back at the dinghy having learned precisely nothing. This lack of animation of the *Sandra* puzzled him, for he knew there must still be several people aboard.



([See page 29](#))

All he could hear was a faint murmur of conversation

Now he had by this time gone as far as he intended when he started. But no one cares to admit failure; and the usual result of this is to proceed farther than was originally planned. Thus was it with Cub. He found the idea of going back to Gimlet, with absolutely nothing to report, distasteful. Hanging on to the bottom step he told himself that he had gone as far as Gimlet would approve; yet such is human nature that he pulled himself up, took another step, and another, until his face was level with the deck. Still no sound came. His eyes roved the deck, fore and aft, but not a sign of life could be seen.

Having gone so far is seemed a simple matter to go as far as the companion-way, a matter of a mere half-dozen steps. He would hear anyone coming from below, in which case he could retire. So he told himself. And at that juncture it did seem a justifiable risk. His mistake, as he presently realised, was the assumption that no one was on deck behind the funnel or superstructure, neither of which places had been investigated. But he supposed, naturally, that had anyone been there, there would have been some movement, or in the case of more than one person, conversation.

This oversight was brought to his notice in a manner as abrupt as it was unpleasant. He caught the whiff of a cigar. For a brief moment he thought the smoke was coming up from below; but even as he suspected the truth, the glowing end of the discarded cigar spun through the air and fell with a hiss in the sea. It started from the far side of the wooden structure by which Cub was crouching. Simultaneously a deck-chair creaked as someone vacated it, and a voice with a strong nasal accent spoke; spoke so close to him that for a horrible moment he supposed that it was he who was being addressed.

“Say! this is kinda dull. Guess I’ll go ashore and brighten things up,” were the words that crashed into Cub’s ears.

“You lay off the booze,” remonstrated another voice.

“Aw shucks!” growled the first speaker. “The trouble with Knifey is he’s losing his nerve.”

Shock had for a couple of seconds deprived Cub of the use of his limbs, and as it turned out, the time lost could not be recovered. For by the time he had pulled himself together a footfall warned him that he could not hope to reach the rail without being seen. All he could do was slip into the small space between the companion-way and a hatch; and there he lay, calling himself several kinds of a fool, while the speakers walked slowly to the rail, at the top of the steps, and there stood regarding the lights of the town.

It need hardly be said that by this time Cub’s one concern was to get off the yacht as quickly as possible. He could have done this, of course, by making a run for it and diving into the sea. But that was not how he wanted it. He wanted to get off without being seen or heard, for fear of starting an alarm that might have embarrassing consequences. Not seeing how this could be achieved, he lay still, praying that the men would move away and so give him a chance to reach the ladder—the only way he could get into the water without making a noise.

The two men resumed their conversation in a desultory manner. Said one: “I still ain’t sure about Knifey. D’you reckon he’s on the level?”

“Don’t see how he could help himself while we’re all cooped in this pen,” was the answer.

“I still don’t see why he needed to bring this guy Rocheter along.”

“Couldn’t help himself, he says. Rocheter has got the dough. No come, no dough. The ship belongs to him.”

“I reckon he wouldn’t take Knifey’s word that the stuff was here.”

“More would I.”

“But he’s got some of the stuff away already. That’s how he got Rocheter in.”

“Yeah, but only small stuff. It’s the big stuff Rocheter wants now.”

“Knifey says it’ll take some shifting.”

“Sure, that’s why he brought us along.”

“There is this. Rocheter will keep his mouth shut. He can’t talk without giving himself away.”

“That’s how I figure it.”

“Why a fellow with all his dough should go to so much trouble beats me. And for what?”

“Sure. As you say, for what? I like my dames alive.”

This remark produced some coarse laughter.

“What about a drink?”

“Better get one below. Knifey says stay aboard. If he finds out you’ve been ashore he may turn nasty.”

“What are the others doing down below?”

“Playing gin rummy, as usual, for a guess. Let’s go down.”

Cub held his breath as the two men passed within a yard of him on their way to the companion steps. No sooner were their heads below the level of the deck than he was over the side and into the water, making for the quay.

Gimlet—Copper and Trapper now with him—was waiting. “You’ve been a long time,” he greeted, somewhat curtly, holding out the towel.

“I got into a bit of a jam and couldn’t get away without being spotted.”

“Were you seen?”

“No.”

“Learn anything?”

“I heard quite a lot, but I couldn’t make much sense of it. Perhaps you’ll be able to. Let me get my togs on and I’ll tell you all about it.”

“All right. Let’s go to the hotel,” answered Gimlet. “Trapper, stay here and watch the yacht. Let us know if anything happens. I’ll send Copper to relieve you when he’s had some food.”

“Okay, sir,” said Trapper.

In Cub’s room, Gimlet and Copper listened to the story of what had happened on the yacht. The conversation that had been overheard was repeated. “What do you make of that?” concluded Cub.

“Not much,” admitted Gimlet. “One or two points stick out. This fellow Rocheter, for example, must be a newcomer. Who’s he? Where does he come in? Apparently he isn’t one of the old gang. Apparently he’s the one with the money. He, presumably, has financed the expedition. If he has as much money as that, why has he got himself mixed up with this bunch of crooks?”

“It sounds as if his interest is in what the gang has come here to fetch,” said Cub thoughtfully.

“Yes. What have they come to fetch? That’s the crux of the matter.”

Cub shrugged his shoulders. “The only clue we have to that is, it’s something heavy—so heavy that it’ll take some shifting. That’s what one of the fellows said.”

“How are we to reconcile that with this talk of dames?” enquired Gimlet. “Are you sure he said dames?”

“Quite sure. He liked his dames alive. That’s what he said.”

Gimlet shook his head. “This doesn’t make sense. By dames they could only mean women. If the dames aren’t alive they must be dead. No, there’s something wrong somewhere.”

Cub raised his hands. “I can only tell you what they said. According to the conversation Knifey has already taken something to America—something small.”

Gimlet smiled. “Some small dames, perhaps. This is nonsense. It isn’t getting us anywhere. Knifey, I imagine, has gone off to collect the stuff, whatever it may be. That’s going to take time, or suitcases wouldn’t have been needed. But it’s no use guessing. In the morning we’ll run out to Knifey’s house to see if we can get some facts. Copper and Trapper can stay here to take care of the yacht.”

“You’re going to start to-night?”

“No. I don’t think we can do much in the dark. There doesn’t seem to be any desperate urgency, anyhow. Let’s see about getting something to eat.”

CHAPTER IV

A LITTLE WHITE HAND

THE following morning, the dawn of what promised to be a fine day, saw Gimlet and Cub, with cameras and guide books conspicuous to conform to their role of tourists, on their way to the Casa Stefanita, leaving Copper and Trapper to maintain a round-the-clock check on the *Sandra*, in case it showed signs of moving. In their pockets they carried packets of sandwiches, biscuits and chocolate, to make them independent of eating establishments. On their feet were the crêpe-rubber "creepers" to which they had become accustomed in the War days when noiseless movements were often vital. Apart from that, such footgear makes for easier going on rocky ground, being less inclined than leather to slip on rocks, and absorbing the irregularities of broken ground.

Passing through Limassol Gimlet stopped the car outside his hotel to make an excuse for his absence and see if there were any letters for him. There was one, and he read it sitting in the car. It was from Major Charles. In accordance with his promise, he said, he was passing on a scrap of information that had just reached him from America. It might, or might not, be important. Anyway, he was sending it on for what it was worth. The yacht *Sandra*, it appeared, belonged to a wealthy American named Silas K. Rocheter, well known in New York as a gambler in a big way, and also as a collector of works of art. He had let it be known that he was going to Europe for a holiday. There was a chance, Major Charles thought, that he might in fact be on the yacht.

"Hm," murmured Gimlet, as he burnt the letter. "Charles made a good guess. However, the letter doesn't tell us much we don't know. Rocheter is on the yacht. The question is, what is he doing with a bunch of crooks? But when we know that we shall know the whole story." He drove on.

Reaching the village of Myania, he parked the car in the yard of the one small inn that it boasted, and after exchanging smiles with the good-natured proprietor, who spoke only one or two words of English, continued on foot. Tyre marks on the occasional patches of sand deposited on the track by the storms of winter told them that a car had gone up since their previous visit; and as it was unlikely that the vehicle belonged to anyone but the owner of the Casa Stefanita, they proceeded in the manner of casual hikers, often

looking round to admire the view, in case their approach had already been observed.

This, as it turned out, was unnecessary, for a careful survey of the villa, at first from a distance and then close at hand, revealed that no one was there. Everything was as they had last seen it, except that a car was now parked deep in the shade of the orange trees. It might easily have been overlooked had they not suspected that it was there. For the rest, all was quiet. The door was locked. Cub found a screwed-up empty cigarette carton in the grass. The brand was “Camels.”

“Where there are Americans, you’ll usually find ‘Camel’ cigarette stubs,” said Gimlet. “I think our friends must have gone up into the mountains. Had they gone down the track we should have met them. They’d hardly travel across country, over rocks and through that undergrowth, so I imagine they’ve gone up that little path over there.” He indicated with a nod the goat-track they had remarked on their earlier visit to the house.

“Are we going up?” enquired Cub.

“We can try it,” answered Gimlet. “I don’t think there’s much risk of being seen. I mean, we should hear them from some distance away. In a party that size there’s bound to be plenty of talking. Come on. We’ll take it slowly, and keep our ears open.”

They set off up the track, which was for the most part merely a water-worn furrow half overgrown with the shrubs that flourish on the sun-drenched hillside—wild lavender, rosemary and acacia. Their aromatic perfumes mingled with the sweet-smelling blossoms of an occasional orange tree, or an even more pungent group of dwarf pines. All the while the path wound steadily upwards towards the forest. Cub stooped, picked up a cigarette end, looked at the brand and tossed it aside. “Camel!” he said laconically. “They’ve been up here, anyway.”

After about a mile the path ended suddenly, to their surprise, at a cottage, a dwelling as primitive as might be imagined. The first indication that they might be approaching a human habitation was the appearance of a dog, a thin, wolfish-looking hound, that rushed at them, barking, snarling and bristling. It was an awkward moment, for the beast looked as if it meant business; but Gimlet snatched up a piece of dead wood, whereupon it retired, with its hackles still up, to some shrubs, where it lay watching him. A few more paces and the cottage came into view.

Gimlet stepped quickly off the path into a tangle of bushes, and Cub followed, expecting to see the owner of the dog appear. But although the

door of the cottage gaped open no one came out. All remained silent, except for the chirping of innumerable grasshoppers.

“I don’t quite know what to make of this,” murmured Gimlet. “I wasn’t expecting another house. If there’s a dog around, there should be a man not far away.”

“There must be someone about, or the door would have been shut,” said Cub softly.

They waited for some time, listening; but only the drowsy hum of insects came through the sun-soaked silence. They walked nearer, cautiously, Cub keeping an eye on the dog, which he expected would renew its attack as they neared the house. But far from paying any attention to them it began scratching at the ground where it had been lying, an occupation in which, from the hole it had made, it had been engaged when they arrived on the scene. Cub supposed that the animal was trying to dig out a rabbit. He had seen several.

Walking on, Gimlet pointed to a mound of charred wood and a heap of turves. “Charcoal-burner,” he observed.

They continued on to the door. Gimlet called, but there was no answer, so without speaking they crossed the threshold and looked about them.

A glance showed that the place was of the simplest possible construction, as might have been expected considering the man’s humble occupation. It consisted of a single square room. A rough wooden ladder, raised in a vertical position against the wall and ending at a hole in the ceiling, gave access to what was evidently the sleeping accommodation under the roof. The furniture was in keeping with the rest. It comprised a table and two chairs, obviously home-made. A primitive fireplace, with a soot-encrusted pot hanging over it, occupied a corner. Around it lay several cigarette ends. One or two cheap cooking utensils, showing signs of rust, hung on nails, Gimlet unhooked an iron coffee-pot and looked inside it. “This hasn’t been used for some time,” he remarked. “It looks as if no one lives here now.”

“What about the dog?” asked Cub.

“It must have been abandoned,” answered Gimlet. “That’s just about what it looks like. The poor brute’s half-starved. No wonder it’s bad-tempered. Hallo! what this?” From a length of rough board that represented the mantelpiece he took a dusty cigarette carton. The trademark was a picture of a camel. There were two cigarettes inside. The paper was stained with age. Gimlet looked at the cigarettes, then at Cub.

“Knifey must have been here,” suggested Cub.

“Judging from the number of cigarette ends on the floor, also Camels, he must have been a frequent visitor here,” asserted Gimlet. “No doubt he gave cigarettes to the man who lived here. That, I imagine, is how this packet came to be on the shelf. But that hasn’t happened lately. From the state of these cigarettes they must have been lying there for weeks—if not months; certainly before Knifey made his last trip to the States. What it really boils down to is, when Knifey lived down below he must have made frequent visits here. There’s nothing remarkable about that, of course. Naturally, he’d often walk up the path, and so get to know the man who lived here.”

“The man might be up the path now with Knifey.”

“I doubt it. If he still lived here some of the cigarette ends on the floor would be fresh. They’re all stale.”

“In other words, Knifey doesn’t come here any more.”

“That’s how I read it. Go and have a look upstairs.”

Cub mounted the steps. He was soon down. “Only a bed—if you can call it that,” he announced. “Just a heap of straw and some old sacks.”

Gimlet was looking at a mark, a tiny hole, on the wall, perhaps five feet from the ground. Without speaking he took out his penknife, opened the small blade, and probed. The point tapped against something hard. Still without speaking, he dug into the plaster, and after a little trouble withdrew, impaled on the end of the blade, a small grey object. Taking it into the palm of his left hand, he held it out for Cub to see.

A sudden chill seemed to fall on the room as Cub stared at it. “Bullet!” he breathed.

“Pistol bullet—thirty-eight calibre.”

Cub’s eyes went to Gimlet’s face. “A charcoal-burner would hardly be likely to possess an automatic.”

Gimlet shrugged. “As you say—hardly. He wouldn’t need one. Oh no. There’s been ugly work here. That needn’t surprise us. Knifey’s been around. He carries a gun. We can draw our own conclusions.”

“You think he—shot—the man who lived here?”

“Not necessarily the man who lived here. But he shot someone, or *at* someone. If we look outside we might find the cartridge case. An automatic would eject it. Knifey would hardly leave it on the floor. He’d pick it up, go to the door, and chuck it outside—like this.” Gimlet went through the actions of tossing something away, and then, walking to the spot indicated, began to look about. “You watch the path,” he told Cub. “We don’t want to be caught napping.”

It took Gimlet five minutes to find what he sought. "Here we are," he said at last, and held up the brass case. "Mauser automatic," he went on, looking at it closely.

Cub said nothing.

Gimlet put the case, with the bullet, in his pocket.

Cub's eyes wandered over the ground, as if expecting to find more evidence of foul play. He did not. Instead, he saw, and picked up, an object so unexpected that he could only stare at it. It was a tiny, exquisitely-finished hand, of some white material. He showed it to Gimlet. "What do *you* make of that?" he enquired, in a puzzled voice.

Gimlet took the little hand in his own and looked at it for some time. "What do you make of it?" he asked at last, in a curious voice.

"The man who lived here had a wife and a child, and the child had a doll," stated Cub. "What other explanation is there?"

"That could be the answer," admitted Gimlet. "But the doll from which that hand was broken was no ordinary doll."

"What do you mean?"

"It was made by an artist who knew his job."

"You think it's—old?"

"Yes—and no," replied Gimlet. "I should have said it was very old, but for the fact that it looks new. It's perfect. If it was old, surely it would show some signs of wear, the result of handling. If it had been lying for any length of time where you picked it up, the weather would have affected it, even though it's marble; at least, I think it's marble." He had another look at the hand. Then, putting it in his pocket, he looked around. "We seem to be collecting some unusual souvenirs," he remarked whimsically. "We may find some more."

They looked for some time, but found nothing of particular interest. There were some empty cans, but rain had made the labels illegible. An old spade lay in the grass. All the time the dog watched them from the position to which it had retired, but it took no aggressive action unless they tried to approach it, when it bristled, showing its teeth.

"The poor brute's half-wild," said Gimlet. "We'd better leave it alone, or we may get bitten."

"How about going on for a bit?" suggested Cub.

The suggestion was adopted, but it was soon evident that they were merely exploring at random, with nothing to guide them one way or another. There was no longer even a suggestion of a path, and once they were past

the area of the stumps of trees, presumably cut by the charcoal-burner, one way was the same as another: at first the jungle of undergrowth over rocks, and then the outposts of the pine forest proper.

After casting about haphazard for a while Gimlet gave it up. "I don't understand this at all," he said, frowning. "I can't believe that bunch of crooks has gone mountain-climbing for fun, yet what reason could they have? If they're not up the hill, where have they gone? It looks as if we should have to come back here to-morrow morning early and watch which way they go. All we can do for the moment is go down to Knifey's house, find somewhere to hide, and watch the gang come home. There's just a chance that we may hear or see something to give us a clue as to what they intend doing next. We shall at least see which direction they come from."

"Why not wait here to check that they have been up to the high ground?" suggested Cub.

"Yes, we could do that," agreed Gimlet.

So they found a place in the shade, just above the cottage, and ate some sandwiches, with oranges plucked from the trees under which they sat.

Further investigation in the afternoon, always keeping a watchful eye open for the return of the Americans, supplied nothing new. The day wore on. The shadows began to lengthen. The sun disappeared behind the mountains that filled the western sky. A haze blurred the details of the plains below and twilight slowly dimmed the scene.

"Well, if they are up on the mountain, they're certainly making a day of it," remarked Cub.

"I am beginning to wonder if they are up there," returned Gimlet. "I assumed that they were because they hadn't used the car; and unless they set off at daybreak, which doesn't seem likely, we should have met them on our way to the Casa Stefanita. I took it for granted, therefore, that they had gone up the hill. When we found those cigarette ends, which pretty well prove that Knifey has been in the habit of going up there, I no longer had any doubt about it. But it begins to look as if I had jumped to a wrong conclusion."

Hardly had the words left his lips than the sounds for which they had so long waited reached their ears.

"Here they come," whispered Gimlet. "Keep quiet! Don't move!"

A babble of voices drew nearer, and presently, peering through the shrubs in front of him, Cub could see the men coming down the hillside in single file. They did not come from immediately above the cottage, but diagonally across the face of the hill from the direction of the highest crags,

which perhaps explained why no tracks had been found. For no particular reason it had been assumed that the Americans, if they were in fact on the mountain, had gone straight up behind the charcoal-burner's cottage.

Snatches of conversation, at first disjointed but then more coherent, became audible. There was some raucous laughter.

"They seem mighty pleased with themselves," breathed Gimlet.

Still talking and laughing the men came on.

"Watch out for that blasted dawg," said a voice.

"He'll get a bellyful of lead if he comes my way," growled another.

"You keep duh gun in your pocket," snapped a voice which Cub recognised as Knifey's. "Dis ain't no place for dat kinda work. We ain't in New York where dere's plenty of noise. Up here it's so quiet dat any shooting ud be heard for miles. Bring duh copper, maybe."

"Okay—okay. Only I don't stand for being bit by no dawg."

"Say!" put in Rocheter, "what about having a rest while I look around for that little hand?"

"Oh shucks, not now," answered Knifey. "We're tired. Dere's plenty of time for dat."

"You reckon it got knocked off around here?"

"Sure it did, but I ain't stopping now. What's a hand? Dere's plenty more. I need a drink. It's nearly dark, at that."

"I'll give a thousand bucks to whoever finds the hand," answered Rocheter.

"We'll look some odder time in daylight," said Knifey. "Watch youse legs."

The reason for the warning was obvious. The dog had broken cover and was rushing up and down, barking and snarling in a frenzy of fury. It put an end to the conversation about the hand. There was some lurid language. Stones were thrown. One, thrown by the man who had wanted to shoot the dog, a slim, dark-skinned, black-haired gangster, struck the dog. It let out a yell of pain and went off, limping.

"Good shooting, Toni," drawled one of his companions.

"Sure! I'm always good when I shoot, ain't I?" answered Toni proudly.

There was more laughter and the party went on. Slowly the noise subsided. The dog, whining softly, crept back into the bushes. Silence returned. Twilight deepened to gloom.

“Very interesting,” murmured Gimlet, standing up. “So Rocheter values the little hand I have in my pocket at a thousand dollars. I wonder why? With a little luck we shall soon know. By the way, did you get a good look at those fellows?”

“Yes.”

“Notice anything about them?”

“They all looked hot and tired, and dusty, as if they had been lying about in the dirt.”

“It looked to me,” said Gimlet slowly “as if they had been digging. But let’s get along.”

They set off down the track.

Darkness had fallen by the time they reached the Casa Stefanita. Lights were on inside, but the blinds were drawn. All they could hear as they went past was a medley of low voices and the chink of glasses. Gimlet did not stop, but went on to the village inn where they had left the car.

“If there’s no word from Copper when we get to Limassol, we’ll spend the night there,” he decided. “There’s no point in going back to Famagusta. Besides, I want to be on the job at the crack of dawn, to watch which way those fellows go, and, if possible, find out exactly what they’re doing. It won’t be easy to follow them without a risk of being seen, but I can think if no other way. We might wander about in that forest for weeks without finding them.” They reached the inn, and returned through silvery moonlight to Gimlet’s hotel in Limassol.

CHAPTER V

DRAMATIC DEVELOPMENTS

ALTHOUGH, as planned, Gimlet and Cub made an early start the following morning—the sun was only just clear of the sea towards the coast of Asia Minor—luck was against them; or so it seemed at the time. At all events, they arrived at the Casa Stefanita too late to witness the departure of its unusual occupants.

There had been no word from Copper, so it could be assumed that the yacht was still at its mooring at Famagusta. Well satisfied with this, for it meant that they could proceed without any change of programme, they set off in the car, and all went according to schedule until they reached the village of Myania where Gimlet intended to park the car, and did in fact do so. It was as they walked out of the yard of the inn there occurred the delay that upset their arrangements. Unfortunately, as it could not be avoided without creating an awkward situation, they had to submit.

The village policeman, a Cypriot, of course, very neat and tidy considering the rural nature of his beat, was standing in the road in a manner that suggested he had seen them go in and was waiting for them to come out. He was a youngish man in the middle twenties, a cheerful-looking fellow, and from the way he hummed a tune it was clear that either he took his duties lightly or hadn't a care in the world. He greeted their appearance with a smile and a smart salute, and, walking forward enquired in good English: "Good morning sirs. God has given us a beautiful day. My name is Samodes. Can I tell you something perhaps, or show you which way to go? I know all about this place."

Gimlet thanked him and said no, he was not in need of assistance; and with that he would have passed on.

But the Cypriot was of another mind. Inspired either by a desire to practise his English, or to satisfy his curiosity as to what they were doing in such an out-of-the-way place, he drew nearer, twiddling the tiny apology for a moustache that decorated his upper lip. "I think you like our village," he remarked, with a smile that revealed a perfect set of teeth. "You came yesterday. I know. I see your car. I see everything here. Now you come back. Very good. It is lovely. I think so. Yes sirs."

“The scenery,” admitted Gimlet “is superb.” He touched his camera. “We’re going to take some photographs. That is why we came back.”

“I will show you the good places,” declared the policeman.

“Thank you, but don’t trouble; we shall find them,” answered Gimlet.

Samodes snapped his fingers. “I will show you the best place of all.” It was obvious from his enthusiasm that he was merely anxious to please, and had no ulterior motive.

Gimlet glanced at Cub and let out a sigh of resignation. “How far away is this place?” he enquired, obviously reluctant to hurt the policeman’s feelings.

Samodes threw out an ardent hand, with a finger pointing. “Just round the corner.”

“Which corner?”

“There. Just down the street by the house of old Stavromoulos, who makes sandals.”

Gimlet submitted. “All right. Lead on.”

Just down the street turned out to be a quarter of a mile, much to the disgust of Cub, whose interest was in a more serious project than photography. Still, the policeman had spoken the truth. The view was magnificent. Of course they had to take photographs of it. Then, when they thought they had finished, they had to take another, with their guide, in an elegant pose, in the foreground. Then he had to take one of them. It was impossible to avoid all this without wounding the feelings of a man whose one obvious desire was to be helpful. Talking volubly, he walked back up the street with them, setting an exasperatingly slow pace, trying to persuade them to let him take them to some more beautiful spots. He knew them all. Clearly, having nothing to do, he was all for making a day of it.

“We’ll go some other time,” said Gimlet. “To-day we have made arrangements to go up into the mountains.”

Cub was quite prepared for the man to say that he would go with them, which would kill their plan outright; but he did not go as far as that. “Ah!” said Samodes, like one who knows all the answers. “You go to make pictures of the eagles, no doubt?”

Cub was mildly interested for the first time. “Are there eagles in the mountains?”

“But, of course,” asserted the policeman proudly. “Very good eagles. Very big. Very wild.”

“Then we’ll look out for them,” said Gimlet briskly. “Now we must go, or it will be dark before we get back. Thank you for being so helpful.”

Bowing, Samodes agreed that they had better start. He warned them not to get lost, and to be careful how they climbed on the high rocks, which were not safe. “If you need anything, send for me,” he concluded. With that he saluted, turned about and strolled away, a little song on his lips.

“Confound the fellow!” muttered Gimlet, as they set off up the track. “He meant well, of course, but all that nonsense has wasted so much time that we may be too late.”

His fears were soon to be realised. By the time they reached the Casa Stefanita the doors and windows were closed, and it was soon apparent from the lack of any sound or movement that the occupants had departed. This could not be ascertained definitely without a cautious reconnaissance, and so more time was lost.

They went on quickly up the track in the hope of overtaking or seeing something of Kniftos and his companions; but the effort was in vain, and, perspiring in the heat, for the sun was now well up, they reached the charcoal-burner’s humble domain to find precisely the same conditions as on the previous day. The dog was still there, and gave them the same hostile reception.

“Pity,” murmured Gimlet, as he looked around. “I was afraid of it. Just one of those things. The only thing we can do now is strike across the hill over there to the right, where we saw them come down yesterday, in the hope of finding their tracks.”

They went on, and after several false casts succeeded in finding footmarks in the pine needles that covered the ground under a thick stand of trees. Unfortunately, this wood was only a spur of the main forest; and when, following the trail to the far side, they found themselves confronted by a broad screen, evidently a landslide, Cub suspected that they were beaten, for there were, of course, no tracks on the stones. They went on and hunted about for some time, having nothing else to do; but the ground was either rock or a tangle of dry herbage, and in the end they had to admit failure.

Cub was all in favour of going on up to the main forest and searching there, for, as he alleged, tracks could hardly fail to show up in a carpet of loose pine needles. And to this proposal Gimlet would probably have agreed, for the alternative was to do nothing, had not events taken an unexpected turn. This was due to the fact that from their elevated position they could look down on the track both above and below the charcoal-

burner's dwelling. As they sat resting, Gimlet called attention to a man who had appeared below the cottage, and from the way he was striding out was apparently making for it.

"Who the deuce can he be?" murmured Gimlet.

Cub stared down at the lonely figure in some surprise, for he was not the sort of person he would have expected to see in such a place. To start with, he appeared to be well-dressed in a navy-blue suit, and wore a bowler hat. He also carried a suitcase.

If the man was a Cypriot, he was certainly not of the peasant class, conjectured Cub. It was equally certain that he was not one of the gang from the Casa Stefanita, for he looked little more than a boy. The Americans he had seen were elderly, most of them powerfully built men. Anyhow, none of them was likely to wear a bowler or carry a suitcase.

Cub turned puzzled eyes to Gimlet. "What d'you make of him? He's no charcoal-burner."

"He doesn't look like a tourist. Tourists, unless they're crazy, don't wear that sort of kit for mountain-climbing. Nor do they carry suitcases with them. Besides, that fellow, from the way he's walking, knows where he's going. He's been here before."

"How do you know that?"

"Look at the dog!"

Cub looked and understood. Far from there being any barking or growling, the dog was wagging its tail as it threw handsprings of delight. The man put down his suitcase to fondle the animal. It was quite obvious that the dog knew the man and the man knew the dog.

"This is very interesting," said Gimlet. "I can't imagine who that chap can be, but he's obviously a frequent visitor here, in which case he should be able to give us some information. Let's go down."

They made their way back towards the cottage, and from a short distance watched the man, who still hadn't noticed them, walk into the house. The dog, still wagging its tail, followed him in. After a couple of minutes the man came out again, without his hat or suitcase, and walked round the house, calling.

Gimlet and Cub continued to advance, quite openly, until eventually the man saw them. He stopped, and regarded them with some surprise, as was understandable. Gimlet made a pretence of walking past, but he pulled up when the man spoke.

By this time Cub had decided that the newcomer, who was even younger than he had at first supposed, was, after all, a Cypriot. His smooth, olive-tinted complexion, was typical of the Greek islands. The puzzling thing was his suit; indeed, the whole style, quality, and method of his dress, was British. When he spoke, this was to some extent explained, for his English was idiomatic, and so nearly without accent, that it could only have been acquired in Britain.

“Excuse me,” he said, looking from one to the other, “but are you gentlemen English?”

“We are,” answered Gimlet.

“You are tourists, I suppose?”

“Yes.”

The young man hesitated. “I hope I’m not being impertinent?”

“Not at all,” said Gimlet. “Can I help you?”

“I think you’ve just been up the mountain?”

“Yes, we have been up some way.”

“Did you by any chance see an old man up there, an old man with a grey beard? He would probably be cutting wood.”

“No,” answered Gimlet. “We haven’t seen anybody.”

The young man shook his head, looking puzzled. “How extraordinary!” he said softly, as if expressing his thoughts aloud.

“Are you English?” prompted Gimlet.

“No,” was the quick response, “but, being a Cypriot, I am British. I have lived in London for some time now. I am a waiter at one of the big hotels. This is where I was born, in this funny little house. The old man who lives here is my father. I can’t understand why he wasn’t at the village, or at least here, to meet me. He knew I was coming. But he isn’t here. And what is still more strange, by the state of the place, he hasn’t used the house for some time. I can’t think of anywhere where he would go.”

“You say your father was expecting you?”

“Yes. As a matter of fact, the reason why I am here to-day is because he wrote to me asking me to come home, as he had news of great importance.

“Knowing that he wouldn’t ask me to leave my work, and spend a lot of money travelling, unless the matter was important, I came at once. Naturally, I expected to find him waiting for me. But he is not here. I don’t understand it. The dog is here, so he can’t be very far away. He wouldn’t go and leave the dog.”

“It is your dog?”

“It was mine when it was a puppy. When I went away, of course it had to stay with my father.”

“It looks as if it is some time since it was properly fed,” Gimlet pointed out.

The man looked at the animal. “Yes, you’re quite right,” he said thoughtfully. “The dog is thin. He must be hungry. Obviously, my father isn’t here. He would starve himself rather than allow the dog to go hungry. When I arrived in the village, I asked Samodes the policeman if he had seen my father about. He said no, but it was some time since he was up here. But I mustn’t worry you with my troubles.”

Gimlet made no move to go. “Is there anything we can do? What do you think can have happened?”

“The only thing I can think of is, my father must have met with an accident on the mountains, which is always possible. But in that case, the dog wouldn’t leave him, I’m sure.”

“What sort of accident are you thinking of?”

“He might have fallen. In places the rocks are treacherous. There are holes, particularly where the rock is exposed on the very top. It would be easy to break a leg. Something of the sort must have happened to my father, or he would be here.”

“What reason would your father have for going to the top of the mountain?” asked Gimlet. “From what I see, his work was cutting trees, and there are plenty of trees down here?”

“Well—er—yes.” For a moment the man hesitated, as if he had found the remark embarrassing. And it struck Cub, from the way he avoided giving a direct answer, that he had reasons for changing the subject, which he did quickly. “I must go and see if I can find Papa,” he said shortly, as if to close the conversation.

“There is a lot of ground to cover,” said Gimlet casually. “How will you know where to start looking?”

“Having spent the early years of my life here, I know the way he usually goes,” was the confident reply. “Good-bye. Thank you very much.” With that the man set off at a fast pace, the dog at his heels.

For a few minutes they watched him striding up the hill, hatless. When he had disappeared from their sight into the timber, Cub turned to find Gimlet looking at him with such an extraordinary expression on his face that for a moment he was startled. “What’s wrong?” he asked anxiously.

Gimlet answered slowly and with great deliberation. “You have my permission to call me every sort of a fool you ever heard of. I must be getting old, to be so beetle-witted.”

Cub’s eyes went round. “Why? What d’you mean?”

“For not seeing at once what was sticking out a mile,” said Gimlet grimly. “I’m afraid this business is going to take an ugly turn,” he added.

“Do you think that fellow’s father is involved?”

Gimlet shook his head. “No. He may have been. He certainly isn’t involved now.”

“What makes you think that?”

“Because I’m willing to make a small wager that he’s dead.”

“*Dead!*” Cub looked shocked.

“That’s what I said. To be more specific, murdered. Shot.”

“You think . . . ?”

“Knifey shot him—yes. It’s so plain to see now that I can’t imagine why I didn’t realise it earlier. The facts were all here. An abandoned house, a bullet, a spade, a starving dog digging a hole.”

Cub had turned a trifle pale. “So that’s why the dog was digging?”

“I think so. We’ll soon find out. Fetch the spade we saw lying over there in the grass.”

Cub brought the tool and handed it over. Gimlet took it, and walked to the place where the dog had been working so industriously. He had scratched quite a deep hole.

“You’d better keep out of this,” Gimlet told Cub in a hard voice. “It may not be very nice.”

“The old man had a grey beard,” reminded Cub.

“I haven’t forgotten it. Keep an eye on the track. We don’t want to be caught at this.”

Cub went off a short distance and found a seat under one of the orange trees. It seemed to him that the whole atmosphere of the place had suddenly changed. The heat had gone out of the sun.

Gimlet got busy with the spade.

For ten minutes or so he dug, at first quickly, then more carefully. Finally he stopped, peering down at something in the excavation he had made. Almost at once he began throwing back the earth he had removed.

“Is it . . . ?” asked Cub, in a flat voice.

“Yes.”

Cub sat still, his eyes moving uneasily over a scene which had now become sinister, while Gimlet finished his task, replacing the top turves as they had been. Then he threw the spade down where they had found it and joined Cub under the tree.

“So now we know why the old man wasn’t in the village to meet his son,” he said grimly.

“Was he shot?”

“Yes. In the head at close range. The first bullet must have missed. That’s the one I dug out of the wall. The old man stopped the second one.”

“Knifey must have done it.”

“Of course. At least, we can assume that, although we might have a job to prove it.”

“What a swine he must be.”

“We knew that when we started.”

“Fancy killing an old man like that in cold blood.”

“Age makes little difference to men of Knifey’s type. Well, that young man from London is wasting his time in the mountains.”

“Are you going to tell him?”

“No. That is, not yet.”

“But you’ll have to report this to the police!”

“That would come to the same thing. If we tell what we know, that would be the end of the business as far as we’re concerned. We should have to go home, having failed in the purpose that brought us here.”

“The police would grab Knifey.”

“Possibly. That wouldn’t alter our case. They might find it hard to pin the murder on him. Certainly some of his friends would get away. They would take the secret of the mountain with them, and we should never know what it was. Even if Knifey were hanged it would be of no interest to Major Charles. He wants to know what is, or has been, going on here. We were sent to find out, and I’m not going to ruin our chances of that by doing anything in a hurry. Put it like this. The poor old man has been dead for some time. He’s out of it. A few days more or less can make no difference to the others. To talk now would simply blot out our chances of discovering why the old man was murdered. When we know that we shall know everything, and the police will have a motive for the crime.”

“Why kill the old man? What harm could he have done Knifey and his beastly gang?”

“As I see it, he knew something—too much for his health. He wrote to his son asking him to come home in order to tell him about it. It’s a pity he didn’t say what it was. Obviously, the son has no idea. Foolishly, the old man told Knifey, who, living near, must have been a frequent caller. The cigarette ends confirm that. Knifey killed the old man in order to have the secret to himself. He then found the job—whatever it may be—was too big for him to handle alone, so he went to America and brought over his precious friends. That, roughly, is how the thing looks to me.”

“I see,” said Cub quietly. “If you’re not going to report the matter, what are you going to do about it?”

“I’m going on doing what we have been doing, until I know what it’s all about. In a word, we’ll keep our mouths shut and our eyes open.”

“For the moment you’re going to stay here?”

“Yes. We’ll watch the gang come down. Then we’ll watch what that young man does. He may go to the police about his father, in which case he may start something. Let’s get a bit farther away from the house.”

They moved off a short distance, and finding a suitable place from which to watch, sat down.

Cub’s eyes wandered up the mountain slopes to the jagged ridge of grey rock that formed the summit, four thousand feet above where they sat. It looked a wild, lonely spot. At one point he thought he could see, silhouetted against the blue sky, some square stones that could only be ruins of some sort; but he wasn’t sure. Then two moving specks caught his eyes. He pointed them out to Gimlet. “Those must be the eagles the policeman told us about,” he said.

“Yes, they’re eagles,” agreed Gimlet, gazing up. “The fellow we saw must be somewhere in that direction. Perhaps he disturbed them. Why on earth he should imagine his father to be up there, or why the old man should go up, is more than I can guess. He wouldn’t be interested in the view, however fine it might be.”

“Look!” Cub grabbed Gimlet’s arm in his excitement. “There he is! Although someone . . . See him? Against those square stones. He’s walking—no, he’s running—along the ridge.”

Gimlet did not answer.

Cub continued to stare at a tiny black figure that had appeared on the ridge, on the very lip, it seemed, of a formidable precipice. “Fancy running along a place like that!” he said tersely.

“It looks rough from here,” agreed Gimlet. “It must be very rough.”

“And he warned *us* to be careful! He must be——”

Whatever Cub was going to say, he never said it. For at that moment the running figure seemed to falter. It threw up its arms, stumbled and fell. It slid down a short, steep face of rock, and then plunged off into space, to fall at last into the tree-girt crests and valleys of a lower range of hills.

For nearly a minute neither Cub nor Gimlet spoke. Cub, for his part, was dry-lipped by the awful thing he had seen. Then, very faintly through the silence, came a sharp but unmistakable report.

“That was a pistol shot,” whispered Cub.

“Without a doubt.” Gimlet was still staring.

“Someone shot him.”

“Yes.”

“How dreadful! Knifey?”

“Or one of his gang.”

“For heaven’s sake, why?”

“He bumped into them. He said he thought he knew which way his father would go. He went—and found the gang there. I’d say he saw too much. They shot him, as his father was shot. That’s the way those thugs do things. They’d shoot us, too, or try to, if they knew what we were doing.”

“We shall have to go and see if we can find that chap. He may not be dead.”

Gimlet shook his head. “If he wasn’t killed by the shot, he’d be killed by the fall. Look at what he fell into. It’s virgin forest. We might look for a month in that jungle of hills and valleys without finding him. I doubt if, when we got to the place, we could find the actual hill. No. That’s a job for people who know this sort of country. They’ll send out a search party from the village.”

“You mean—you’re going to tell the police?”

“We can’t do anything else now.”

“And you’ll tell them everything?”

“No, not everything. We shall have to report the matter, because we can’t let that poor fellow lie out there while there is the remote chance of his being alive. It’s a pity, but there it is. No doubt there are foresters who know the ground. They’ll go, when we tell Samodes.”

“Will you say anything about the shooting?”

“No.”

“Suppose they find the body—with a bullet wound?”

Gimlet shrugged. “Let’s not anticipate events. If I know anything, that body will be in such a state that there won’t be much chance of finding a bullet hole. It would be hard to find, even if it were known to be there. But let’s not talk about it. Come on! We’ll get down to the village. Other people seem to be making our plans for us. I must admit that when we started out, I wasn’t expecting anything quite like this.”

“What about that fellow’s suitcase? He put it in the house?”

“We’d better leave it there. The police will find it. I’d rather not touch it. It might lead to awkward questions.”

They set off down the hill.

CHAPTER VI

A POLICEMAN TALKS

GIMLET led the way back to Myania, speaking hardly a word on the way. Cub, seeing that his mind was occupied with the strange and tragic events they had witnessed, did not break into his thoughts. He had a feeling that Gimlet, quite apart from the murders, was not at all happy about the way things were going, about the way their present course of action had been forced upon them. Forced was the word. There was no alternative. They could not go on with their own affairs while there was a chance, however slight, that the man who had fallen might still be alive, and helpless on the flank of the mountain. Even if he were dead, decency demanded that his body be found and brought down for burial.

Arriving in the village, they looked for Samodes, the genial policeman, but failed to find him. However, the innkeeper sent a boy to find him, while Gimlet and Cub took the opportunity to drink some mediocre coffee. Cub was feeling in need of something.

In due course Samodes arrived, very busy and still smiling, although after his alert eyes had noted the grave expression on Gimlet's face, the smile faded, as a blink of sunshine is smothered by a cloud. It was replaced by a worried frown.

"Ah! You have met trouble?" he queried eagerly, almost as if he were delighted to be thus presented with a reason for renewing their acquaintance.

"No," answered Gimlet "but I'm afraid someone else has." He pointed to the high tops. "While we were on the mountain, about half-way up, we saw a man fall off those rocks into the forest below." He indicated the precise position of the accident. He said nothing about the probable identity of the victim being known to them.

"Now who could it be?" murmured Samodes, his brows knit with the effort of thinking. Then he snapped his fingers. "Did this man wear a blue suit, such as is worn by the men in the towns?"

"It might be so," replied Gimlet. "We were too far off, you understand, to see details."

"I have it," declared Samodes. "It must be Nestor Paprapoulos. Doubtless, he would be looking for his father."

“On the hill,” volunteered Gimlet carelessly, “we saw a man in a blue suit. He carried a case.” He described the young man to whom they had spoken.

“Yes, that is Nestor,” asserted the policeman.

“We spoke to him. He said he was looking for his father.”

“It could be no one else,” declared Samodes. “At first I thought it might be Mr. Kniftos, the gentleman who lives at the Casa Stefanita, which you would pass on the way up. He is a friend of mine. But I must do something about this. I will send for foresters and they will help me to make a search. It will not be easy.” He spoke quickly in his native language to the boy who had fetched him, and had remained to watch the proceedings, as a boy will, in the hope of seeing something exciting.

The boy ran off, presumably to collect the search party.

“Who is this man, Nestor Paprapoulos?” prompted Gimlet, as the boy disappeared.

“He is a young fellow of the district,” answered Samodes. “He has been working in England.”

“But tell me this,” went on Gimlet, with a mystified air. “Why should this fellow expect to find his father on the very top of the mountain?”

“His father, old Socrates Paprapoulos, is a maker of charcoal. He lives in a cottage on the side of the mountain. You must have seen it.”

“Yes, we saw an old cottage,” stated Gimlet carelessly. “Being a stranger to these parts I don’t understand why such a man should go to the top of a mountain, where there are only a few trees, and very small ones, in order to make charcoal.”

“He did not go up there to make charcoal,” announced Samodes mysteriously.

“To watch the eagles perhaps?”

“Nor did he go to watch the eagles.”

“Then he must have gone to enjoy the view?”

The policeman’s manner took on that confidential, almost secretive air, that country people so often adopt when passing on a titbit of gossip about a neighbour. He stepped nearer, and after a glance around, spoke as if with reluctance. “I should not really tell you this,” he said in a low voice. “It is between ourselves, you understand.”

Gimlet nodded.

“Old Socrates thinks I don’t know, but nothing happens here that I don’t know about,” averred Samodes. “It is my business to know. After all, I am a

policeman.”

“Quite so,” murmured Gimlet hopefully.

“As I have said, old Socrates Paprapoulos is a maker of charcoal, and he lived by that trade for many years. That is his proper work.” Samodes flashed a meaning glance at Gimlet out of the corner of his eyes, and his voice dropped a tone lower. “I happen to know that he sometimes makes money in other ways—ways not so hard as chopping down trees.”

“Is that so? But in what other way could old Socrates, living where he does, make money?” Gimlet’s tone of voice implied doubt.

“All over these mountains in Cyprus there are ancient buildings and tombs,” whispered Samodes. “Those who know where to look sometimes find things of value.”

“Aha!” breathed Gimlet.

“Not of great value, of course, although that would be possible,” continued Samodes. “There are a great many tales of treasures,” he went on airily, “but I for one don’t believe them.” He shrugged, indicating his superior intelligence. “An old coin here and there, perhaps. Old Paprapoulos was always scratching about in the ruins. I knew that. But I did nothing about it. After all, the old man could do no harm. A few old pots and ornaments were all he ever found, I think.”

“But why should you do anything about it?” enquired Gimlet.

“Here a man is not allowed to keep the things he finds, much less sell them,” explained Samodes. “One must have permission to dig, and even then, everything found must go to the Cyprus Museum in Nicosia.”

“You suspect that old Socrates did not always do that, eh?”

“I know it. Of course, I shouldn’t talk about it, but sometimes he would sell an old relic—nothing very valuable, to some of the people who sometimes come here to look for such things. No doubt the old man hoped one day to find a big treasure. If he had, I would have reported it, of course.”

“He may not have told you about it.”

“I should have known. He is such a simple man. The day he found the little statue of Aphrodite, he was so excited that he must rush down and tell me about it. I let him keep it. If you went into the cottage you would see it there. It was very pretty.”

“Very interesting,” murmured Gimlet. “How long is it since you went to the cottage?”

“Oh, I haven’t been there for some time. I’ve no reason to go. The last time I went the old man wasn’t there. Always he is out among the ruins,

digging. I told him often that one day he would have an accident and lose his life.”

“Ruins? What ruins?” asked Gimlet.

Samodes indicated the mountain top. “There is a ruin there. Some say it is a temple of the very ancient days. Some say it’s an old fort. Others say it’s a monastery, not so old. I don’t know. No one knows. What does it matter? I’ve never been up there myself, but that is where old Socrates goes to look for things.”

“D’you never go up the hill at all?” questioned Gimlet.

“Sometimes I go as far as the Casa Stefanita. Mr. Kniftos is a very nice man. He always calls me in for some refreshment. He’s not always there. Now he has friends staying with him, so I keep away.”

At this point, to Cub’s disappointment, for he found the subject interesting, the conversation was interrupted by the arrival of three men who, from their rough clothing, had been working in the fields. Samodes spoke to them in his own language, obviously, from his eloquent gestures, explaining why he had sent for them. The men looked at each other, shaking their heads in a way which Cub took to mean that they considered their task a formidable one. Either that, or they held little hope that the man who had fallen would still be alive, even if they did find him. However, after they had all had a glass of wine at the inn, the search party set off, with the policeman leading the way.

Gimlet watched them go with speculative eyes. “An informative fellow is Samodes, but not quite as well informed as he imagines. He has no idea that anything unusual is going on. Never mind. I have a feeling that we are getting somewhere.”

“What are we going to do while the search party is out?” asked Cub.

“We might as well carry on with our original plan. We’re not likely to learn anything sitting here.”

“You mean, you’re going up to the Casa Stefanita?”

“Better still, up to the old cottage, to watch the gang come down. There’s no hurry. As we’ve time on our hands we might as well have a bite of something to eat.”

An hour later, after a simple meal of bread, butter, and an over-flavoured omelette which the innkeeper made for them, they retraced their steps back up the hill, slowly, for although the sun was now past its zenith the heat was considerable.

“This business is beginning to take shape,” said Gimlet after a while, as they strolled on. “Samodes gave us the clue to it. Old Paprapoulos made money on the side by digging in the ruins for relics and antiques which he sold to visiting archaeologists and collectors. I suspect he gave a share of the profits to the policeman to keep him quiet. Always the old man hoped to find something really worth while, and no doubt, at the finish, he did. He said nothing to Samodes about it. He wrote to his son. We don’t know what it was he found, but it must have been something important. That was the beginning of the trouble here. Kniftos, being handy, heard about it. Now he’s got his gang here to collect the loot. That’s about the English of it, I think.”

“From what Samodes said, the old man had an ornament or something, a figure that he’d found, in his cottage. What’s happened to it? We didn’t see it.”

“Knifey has it, I imagine. The hand we found may have been part of it—got knocked off somehow.”

“Whatever it was old Socrates found must still be where he found it, up the mountain.”

“Surely. Had it been brought down, Kniftos and Co. would have no reason to keep trotting up and down. Young Nestor must have known where his father usually searched for relics. He would know all about that, of course. He went straight to the place, presumably the ruins Samodes mentioned, and bumped into the gang. No doubt he saw what was going on. That’s why they shot him, while he was trying to get away.”

“Well, at least we know roughly where they are,” said Cub. “The place must be close to where we saw the eagles.”

“Yes. We’ll go up there ourselves to-morrow. Once we know what these toughs are trying to get out, I’ll contact Major Charles and pass on the information. That’ll probably be the end of the affair as far as he’s concerned.”

“But not as far as we’re concerned, I hope?” said Cub coldly. “Knifey may have been able to get away with murder in his own country, but he won’t find it so easy here.”

By this time they had arrived at the dead charcoal-burner’s cottage. In view of its sinister secrets it looked more melancholy than ever in the evening light.

“I wonder what happened to the dog?” remarked Cub.

Gimlet shook his head. “Anything might have happened to it. I didn’t see it when Nestor fell. Knifey may have shot it. Or Toni. He wanted to shoot it. He hit it with a stone, you remember.”

“The dog hated Knifey. Did you notice how it flew at him when the gang came past here yesterday? It was almost as if the poor brute knew he was the man who killed his master.”

“No doubt it did know,” averred Gimlet. “It must have been Knifey who buried the old man after he’d shot him. The dog would be watching. Dogs can work things out, make no mistake about that. When we saw it digging we might have guessed that there was something there—but then, I wasn’t thinking of anything quite so horrible. Let’s sit over here, where we can watch without being seen.”

Some time passed. Again the sun sank behind the hills leaving the scene in sombre shadow. All was silent, and very still. For a long while there was no sign or sound of the men for whom they were waiting, or of the foresters who were searching the deep woods at the foot of the precipice.

Not until dusk had darkened the picture was their vigil rewarded, and this came in a way that was as startling as it was unexpected. Naturally, Cub expected the gang to come down the hill as before, together, and with a good deal of noise. Instead, without a sound, one man appeared alone. A movement caught Cub’s eyes and he saw the man emerge from the trees, quite close, slowly, obviously making a reconnaissance of the cottage. He did the job thoroughly, too, before letting out a soft whistle. This was evidently a signal, for it was answered in a manner that sent a chill down Cub’s spine.

From out of the trees now appeared the rest of the gang, walking with the slow solemnity of a funeral procession, and carrying between them—to enhance this impression—a long object that looked unpleasantly as if it might have been a body wrapped up in a dust-sheet.

“Okay,” said the man who had done the scouting. “Keep going.”

“Take it easy. Watch you don’t drop her,” said Rocheter, who was leading the way.

The cortège continued on down the path until, rounding a bend, it disappeared from sight.

Not until two or three minutes had elapsed did Gimlet move. Then he said: “Come on. We’ll see the end of this.”

Cub rose stiffly to his feet. “You heard what they said,” he breathed. “Mind you don’t drop her.”

Gimlet nodded, but did not answer.

“This gives me the creeps,” muttered Cub. “That must’ve been a woman they were carrying.”

“We’ll try to find out.” Gimlet set off down the path, picking his way carefully in order not to disturb loose pieces of rock.

Cub, following closely, could sometimes hear the men in front of them. Occasionally one would swear as he stumbled in the dark, whereupon Rocheter would implore him to be more careful. Cub heard one say: “What about showing us a light, boss?” Kniftos answered: “Not here. If dat cop sees a light moving he may come up to see what goes on.” Another voice sneered: “Cop? Are you scared of cops now?” “Listen boys,” said Knifey plaintively. “We ain’t like at home. You can’t fix these guys so easy. Dat’s why I say no more shooting.” And so it went on.

In due course the Casa Stefanita was reached and the beam of a torch moved jerkily as it was turned this way and that. Cub, following close behind Gimlet, who was now creeping forward, saw that the procession had halted not outside the house itself but at the door of the outbuilding. The sheet-enshrouded object rested on the ground. Figures moved vaguely in the gloom. A key jangled. The door was opened. The burden was lifted inside. The door was closed. Silence fell. A faint glow of light came from the slit high in the wall, the aperture that looked like a ventilator. Perhaps five minutes passed; then the men came out. The door was locked, and the party made its way to the house. Cub heard Rocheter say: “Yeah, she sure is a beauty. We’ll have to handle her carefully.” Then the door of the house was shut and all was quiet.

CHAPTER VII

CUB GETS A FRIGHT

GIMLET drew back a little way and sat down on a rock.

Cub squatted beside him. "Well, what d'you make of that?"

"I don't know what to make of it," replied Gimlet quietly. "The whole thing is fantastic. There's an unpleasant suggestion about it of Burke and Hare, those monstrous body-snatchers who murdered people and then sold the bodies of their victims to a ghoulish doctor who ran an anatomical school. Somehow we've got to get inside that building and find out what it is they have put there. The problem is how to do it."

"Why not bring Copper over and let him force the door?"

"That's no use. I doubt if he could do it without making a noise. Besides, the state of the door would warn the gangsters that they were being watched."

Cub gazed up at the ventilator. "You know, if I could get on the roof, I believe I could hang over far enough to get a glimpse of the inside of the place—by using my torch, I mean."

Gimlet considered the suggestion. "You might be able to reach it, but it would be a tricky business. If you leaned over a bit too far you'd fall and crack your skull. I doubt if you'd see much, anyway."

"There's no harm in trying it. That's the only way to settle the question. If it doesn't work we shall be no worse off."

"True enough."

"By standing on your shoulders I could just about reach the coping with my hands and pull myself up."

"Let's try it." Gimlet got to his feet.

A short detour took them to the far end of the building without going near the house. They chose the far end automatically because, not only was it farthest away, but it was out of view of the larger building. Standing close against the bare wall, Gimlet stooped. Cub got on his shoulders, fingers resting on the rough brick. Gimlet straightened his back. Cub went up. His fingers closed over the coping. A heave, and he had a leg over. The rest was easy. Another moment and he was lying at full length on top.

"Okay," he whispered down to Gimlet. "Stand by."

The ventilator that was his objective was at the opposite end, but before moving towards it he thought he had better investigate what lay ahead. It was too dark for anything to be seen clearly, but one flash of his torch would be enough. He sent the beam across the flat roof, and to his great satisfaction saw something that not only made it unnecessary for him to proceed to the ventilator, but simplified the entire enterprise and promised immediate success. He passed the information down to Gimlet. "There's a skylight," he said softly.

Still lying flat, he worked his way to the sheet of framed glass, about two feet square, that was obviously intended to light the inside of the place in lieu of an ordinary window. He understood now why there were no windows. Knifey had had the place built for the very purpose for which he was now using it.

Reaching the skylight he tried to open it, but soon found this to be impossible. It fitted tightly and was apparently fastened on the inside. Perhaps it didn't matter. Deciding that he was in a position to make at least a preliminary reconnaissance, he put the bulb of his torch against the glass, and was about to switch on when he heard a stone strike against another. He lay absolutely flat instantly, for he knew that Gimlet had not been responsible; the sound was too far away, and seemed to come from the direction of the track below the house. Presently footsteps crunched. That someone was coming to the house was evident. Who it could be he neither knew, nor cared, nor even tried to guess. Nor did he allow his curiosity to raise his head, knowing that it might be silhouetted against the sky. He was merely anxious for the person to get out of the way so that he could get on with what he was doing. He assumed that Gimlet would have heard the visitor coming, and like himself, lie low. At any rate, he hoped so.

He experienced a moment of apprehension when all the sounds of movement stopped, as if the new arrival had noticed something to arrest his attention, and had halted. But he breathed freely again when the footsteps went on and ended at the door of the house. There was an unusual rap on the door that might have been a signal. It was opened, to emit a flash of yellow light, and closed again. Silence fell.

Cub's relief was short-lived. He was on the point of proceeding with his task when the door was again opened, and this time left open. Three men came out, talking in low tones. He recognised the voice of Knifey, who said: "Where was it?" Another voice replied: "Over here. I just got a glimpse of a dark thing moving."

"A dawg, maybe."

“Didn’t look like a dawg to me. Too big. Looked more like a man prowling about.” The beam of a torch sliced the darkness.

Cub could not see it, of course, for he was still prone and absolutely motionless; but he could see the reflection of the light as it moved slowly across the overgrown garden, and then round the precincts of the building on which he lay.

“Don’t see nothing,” said Knifey. “Some kid after the oranges, perhaps.”

“Or dem tourists we hoid about.”

“Yeah.”

The light went out, and to Cub’s relief the footsteps moved off a little way.

Knifey spoke again. “Okay Joe,” he said. “Bring her round to-morrow.”

“It’s okay wit Silas?”

“Sure it’s okay. He’s kinda scared o’ sompt’n.”

“Okay.”

Footsteps retreated. A stone rattled on the path. The door slammed. Once again silence reigned over the Casa Stefanita.

To be on the safe side Cub allowed five minutes to pass before he moved. Then, very slowly, he raised his head until he could see the house and its immediate surroundings. In that position he remained for another five minutes, eyes probing the gloom for a movement that would reveal that someone was watching. Where Gimlet was he did not know. He suspected that he was no longer in his original position against the wall. Hearing someone coming he must have moved to a less exposed spot, and in doing this the visitor had caught a glimpse of him. Still, it seemed that no harm had been done.

Rising to his knees and making a screen with his jacket, Cub put the bulb of his torch against the glass of the skylight and switched it on. The ray cut a wedge of light through the darkness.

Later, he felt that he should have been prepared for what he saw, and so, perhaps, to some extent, he was. But expectation is still a long way from realisation and his nerves and muscles stiffened with shock at the spectacle that met—or rather struck—his eyes.

Staring up at him from the floor below was a face, a face that had the awful whiteness and stillness of death. It was the face of a woman, a beautiful woman of early middle age. Only the face could be seen. The rest was covered with the cloth in which the body had been carried down the hill.

For an unknown period of time Cub could only stare, fascinated, horrified, incapable either of coherent thought or movement. He had looked upon death before, but not like this, and he found the experience unnerving. His heart began to thump and his hands to tremble, and it was in something near to panic that he switched off the torch. For a little while he lay still, striving for self-control. Then, with a gasp, he fled back to the coping at the point where he had mounted the roof, lowered himself to full length, and dropped.

Gimlet was there. He caught him and steadied him as he staggered on striking the ground. “What are you trying to do—break your neck?” queried Gimlet curtly.

“Er—no,” panted Cub.

“Then what’s the hurry?”

Cub got a grip on himself. “It’s a woman,” he said, in a tense voice.

“A woman? What woman? Where? What are you babbling about?”

Cub’s tongue flicked over his lips. “She’s dead. A dead woman.”

“Talk sense.”

“I am talking sense. There’s a dead woman in there, I tell you.”

Gimlet’s face expressed incredulity. “A dead woman? Are you sure?”

“Absolutely. She’s lying on her back on the floor. Her face was staring straight up at me. It was horrible.” Cub shuddered. “I wasn’t expecting anything like that. Let me sit down. I’m all steamed up.”

“Pull yourself together,” ordered Gimlet sharply.

With a hand that still trembled Cub wiped clammy perspiration from his forehead. “I suppose I ought to have been ready for it, after what we heard, but somehow I wasn’t thinking of anything quite so ghastly. She’s beautiful, too. That seemed to make it worse.”

Gimlet rubbed his chin. “This still doesn’t make sense to me. In fact, it’s preposterous. Are you sure you’re not imagining things?”

“I wish I could think I was,” said Cub bitterly. “I shall remember that face as long as I live. I can’t help it if it doesn’t make sense to you; I’m telling you what I saw. I know a woman when I see one. Remember what I told you the fellow said on the yacht. He liked his dames alive. That didn’t make sense either, then—but it does now. There must be kidnapping or something going on. But whatever it is, you can take it from me those thugs have killed a woman and put her inside there. If you don’t believe me, go and look for yourself,” concluded Cub, a note of exasperation creeping into his voice.

“All right. I believe you,” said Gimlet quietly. “But it is a bit of a bone-shaker, isn’t it?”

“Bone-shaker! Are you telling me? It shook my bones all right.”

Gimlet bit his lip pensively. “I was prepared for almost anything, but not for body-snatching. The whole thing’s getting fantastic.”

“Fantastic is the word,” agreed Cub moodily. “What are you going to do about it? Tell Major Charles that we’re dealing with a modern Dracula?”

Gimlet did not answer. He leaned against the wall. Cub remained seated, chin between his hands, slowly recovering his composure.

“We shall have to think about this,” decided Gimlet at last. “I’ll take your word for it that you saw—what you say you saw. I don’t think there’s any point in staying here any longer to-night. It’s unlikely the gang will go out again. Let’s go down to the village and see if the search party has come back. I should like to ask our policeman friend a few more questions.”

“Such as?”

“If there is a female institution of any sort on the mountain—a convent, for instance.”

Cub pulled himself up. “Okay. Let’s go. This place gives me the heeby-jeebies. I could do with a drink, anyway. My mouth’s all dried up.”

In the light of a rising moon they set off down the track at a brisk pace.

“By the way,” said Cub presently, as they walked on, “I suppose you heard that fellow come to the house?”

“Yes. He came quietly, and was rather close before I realised he was there. I thought I’d better get away from that white wall.”

“He saw you move.”

“Did he?”

“Didn’t you hear what was said when he fetched Knifey out?”

“No. I saw the torch moving about and I heard voices, but I didn’t catch the words. I was thinking more about you up on the roof. I was ready for trouble had anything started.”

“The man who saw you is named Joe—that’s what Knifey called him. He brought Knifey out to have a look round.” Cub went on to narrate what he had overheard. “Afterwards, the fellow went off down the path. He’s going to bring something round to-morrow. He called it ‘her,’ so it may be another female. Whatever it is, Knifey said it was all right with Silas, meaning Rocheter.”

They walked on.

They found the policeman and his helpers in the inn. Samodes said they had not found the body. It was hopeless to go on looking in the dark. They would try again to-morrow. But he said this in such a curious way, looking from one to the other, that Cub had a feeling that their story was doubted. Indeed, it struck him that Samodes was at last beginning to wonder seriously what they were doing there. A final remark tended to confirm this impression. "What are you doing here so late?" asked the policeman. He was no longer smiling.

"We had no reason to hurry," answered Gimlet smoothly. "We saw much to interest us on the mountain and the time passed quickly," he went on. "I thought I saw a building far above us, as if it might have been a monastery—or a convent. Is there one there?"

"There is a monastery on Mount Troodos, but you cannot see it from here," answered Samodes stiffly. "You know, it is strange. First old Socrates Paprapoulos disappears. Now his son goes to find him and he does not come back. What happens to them?"

"We saw Nestor fall," said Gimlet. "To-morrow, if you like, I will show you the exact place."

Samodes made an eloquent gesture. "The country is all broken up. The woods are thick and large. I need an army to search for one man who may have rolled down and down to the bottom of the valley."

Gimlet agreed.

"Perhaps Mr. Kniftos has seen something," murmured Samodes, as if speaking to himself. "To-morrow I will ask him. Did you see him to-day?"

"We saw some gentlemen, but we did not speak to them," returned Gimlet casually.

"That is right," nodded Samodes. "As I said, he has friends with him. They are here for their health. It is good air on the mountains."

"Wonderful air," agreed Gimlet, without enthusiasm. "That is why we're here, too. In England there is nothing but fog. But we must be getting along. I'll come back to-morrow to see if you have had any success. Goodnight."

As they went out to the car, Gimlet said to Cub: "If he's going to barge into this business by looking for Knifey and asking him questions, he'll be the next one to go over a precipice. Let's get back to Limassol for a good night's rest. To-morrow we'll climb higher and have a look at those eagles."

CHAPTER VIII

GIMLET GOES ALONE

“STILL not a word from Copper,” was Cub’s greeting to Gimlet when he came down the next morning.

“Which means that there’s nothing doing at his end,” answered Gimlet, pouring coffee from a pot which Cub had ordered. “The yacht must still be there. That, in turn, means that the gang isn’t ready to leave. Thinking the matter over during the night, it occurred to me that when Knifey told that fellow Joe to bring her round, he was referring to the yacht. Apparently that isn’t so. The yacht must still be at Famagusta, or we would have heard from Copper. What is Knifey waiting for? It’s very odd. I’ve worked it out that now they’ve got the thing they came to collect down as far as Knifey’s house, they’ll carry it to the beach to-morrow night and load it on the yacht. Apparently it isn’t going to work out like that.”

“Maybe they’re going to collect another body or two before they pull out,” suggested Cub, with mild sarcasm.

“It’s difficult to know what to do,” said Gimlet reflectively. “If we jump in too soon we may show our hand to no purpose. That might spoil everything. At present I don’t think Knifey has any suspicion that he’s being watched.”

“And if we wait too long, we may miss the boat—literally.”

“I don’t think there’s much risk of that while the yacht is at Famagusta. They’ll hardly try to get the body through Customs. When Knifey is ready to go, it’s more likely that he’ll slip away in the night.”

“Copper and Trapper must be sick of sitting there doing nothing.”

Gimlet smiled. “No doubt Copper will be doing a spot of grumbling; but they couldn’t have done anything had they been with us. The yacht is still the hinge on which the whole business hangs, otherwise Knifetos wouldn’t have brought it here.”

“If we’re going to the top of the mountain to-day, don’t you think it would be a good thing to let Copper know, in case anything went wrong?”

“Yes. You’re quite right, it would,” agreed Gimlet. “In any operation it’s a matter of simple prudence to have someone in reserve. We needn’t waste time going to Famagusta. I’ll drop him a line. I’ll give him the general position here, in case he comes over looking for us. He’ll get the letter by

first post to-morrow morning, at latest. That's the easiest way. Then we'll move off. While I'm writing, you might get a couple of packets of sandwiches from the little shop round the corner. We'd better be ready for emergencies."

In twenty minutes they were on their way to Myania, and in due course arrived to learn from the innkeeper that Samodes had already set out with some men to renew the search for Nestor Paprapoulos. The innkeeper spoke only a few words of English, so conversation was not easy; but Cub gathered that either Samodes had been to the Casa Stefanita, or Knifey had been down to the village. At all events, they had met. The word auto also occurred, although in what connection was not clear. Cub assumed vaguely that the man was making some reference to their car. Discussing the matter presently with Gimlet, as they walked up the track, it transpired that he had formed the same impression. The matter did not seem of particular importance, so the subject was not pursued.

It was recalled, however, when, nearing the Casa Stefanita, they heard the tinkle of metal on metal, and, advancing slowly, saw a man doing something to Knifey's car. He did not see them, for the car was well back under the trees and the man engrossed in his task. A detour kept them clear of him. Cub recognised the man of the garage at Famagusta, to whom apparently the car belonged. At any rate, Knifey had obtained the car there when he came ashore. Presumably it needed some repair or adjustment. Cub told Gimlet who the man was as they proceeded up the hill. It did not seem very important.

They walked on, always climbing, an occupation that Cub found pleasant enough, for the way was gay with rock roses in full bloom, and the air sweet with the perfume of wild myrtle and lavender. There was no sound to disturb the peace, except the occasional tinkle of a bell from the goats that grazed on the lower slopes.

The abandoned cottage came into sight. They halted, looking and listening for a little while; but all was quiet, so they went on, satisfied that conditions there were unchanged. They may have taken this too much for granted; but there was no reason to suppose otherwise, and it was with a jolt, therefore, that they were suddenly confronted by two men, who stepped from behind the cottage as they drew level with it. They were Knifey and Rocheter.

For perhaps five seconds each party regarded the other, not exactly with hostility, but with that alertness with which dogs, meeting for the first time, inspect each other. Cub felt that the chief element of surprise was on their side. Rocheter had been looking about on the ground, but Knifey might

actually have been waiting for them, and a remark he made presently tended to confirm this.

Cub was now able to consider the man closely for the first time, although he had, of course, seen him in passing and had studied his photograph. What he saw did not encourage a desire to know the man better. In general build, Knifey was shortish, with too much stomach and an inclination to flabbiness. His skin was sallow, with that sort of smoothness sometimes called oily. There was not much wrong with his features, but his ears were too close to his eyes, which were dark, shrewd, heavily-lidded, and moved in little darts. He was very well dressed—too well dressed. A large flamboyant necktie hung over a cream shirt of heavy silk. His jacket was taken in a bit too much at the waist, and the front of his hat snapped down sharply over his forehead. He was smoking a cigarette and appeared to inhale large quantities of smoke.

Gimlet made a move to pass on without speaking, as would have happened had things been normal; but Knifey, stepping in front of him, broke what had become a rather embarrassing silence; and his accent was so richly low-class American, and so in accord with all that Cub had learned from gangster films at the cinema, that a curious feeling came over him that this was not really happening, but that he was watching it on the screen.

“You guys looking for sompt’n?” was what Knifey said.

“No,” answered Gimlet “were you?”

The lids of Knifey’s eyes dropped a fraction. “You tinkin’ o’ buying duh scenery, mebbe?”

“Why no,” returned Gimlet. “Were you thinking of selling it?”

Knifey drew heavily at his cigarette, dropped the butt and ground it under his heel. “Wise guy, eh?” he murmured, an edge on his voice. “So wise dat someone’s going to bust yuh one on the snoot one day. Dat’s how wise *you* are.”

Gimlet looked at Rocheter with a puzzled expression, real or affected, Cub wasn’t sure which. “What’s the matter with your friend?” he enquired blandly. “Is he just naturally foul-tempered, or has he eaten something that disagreed with him?”

It seemed to Cub that Rocheter looked a little uncomfortable. “Aw, don’t pay too much attention to that,” he said awkwardly. “It’s just that he don’t like people wandering about his property.”

“Oh!” said Gimlet. “What gave him the idea that the island belonged to him?”

“He rents the shooting rights on this bit of a hill from the Government.”

“Is that so?” said Gimlet slowly. “What does he shoot, if I’m not being inquisitive?”

This was too much for Knifey, who broke in: “Watcha trying to hand me, watcha trying to do—kid me? You’ve bin hanging around this joint too long. Duh cop tells me. He’s seen you. Now I tells you sompt’n. Dis place ain’t healthy for strangers—see? A guy fell off duh rocks yesterday and gets all mussed up.”

“Aren’t you afraid of falling yourself when you’re out shooting?” asked Gimlet innocently.

Knifey weighed the words, his eyes glinting ominously. “Okay,” he said softly. “I’ll tell the cop I told you to keep off.”

“We’ll tell him ourselves,” promised Gimlet. “We’re only hanging about to see if they find the man who fell yesterday.”

“Yeah? Dat’s what you say,” sneered Knifey.

“Don’t worry. We shan’t fall,” asserted Gimlet. “We’re experienced climbers.”

“So what? Mebbe I go shooting. I don’t see you. I see sompt’n—a boid mebbe. I shoot. Youse in der way and gets plugged. Whose fault’s dat, huh? Yours, I reckon. Dat’s why I tell you go some place else.”

“Hm!” murmured Gimlet, as if turning the matter over in his mind.

It was, Cub realised, a deliberate threat. He noticed that Rocheter was looking at him curiously. The reason was forthcoming. “You know, I’ve got an idea I’ve seen you before some place,” said Rocheter.

Cub half smiled. “I wouldn’t be surprised. I’ve seen you too.”

“Yeah? Where?”

“On the quay at Famagusta. I was there when you came ashore. I had been taking some snapshots round the harbour.”

“Oh, so that was it.”

“Must have been.”

“Which way you going after all that?” cut in Knifey, shortly.

“I’d hate to interfere with your shooting,” replied Gimlet evenly. “We’ll go back the way we came. It’s all the same to us.” With that, he turned away and strolled back down the hill.

Cub followed, surprised and indignant. But not until they were out of earshot did he give expression to his thoughts. “Are you going to let that rat run us off the hill?” he demanded angrily.

“It was no use forcing the issue,” replied Gimlet calmly. “We could have done no good had we gone on. Knifey wouldn’t have taken his eyes off us. Samodes has told him that we’ve been on the hill. That’s got him a bit worried, if not actually suspicious, although I don’t think he could possibly guess why we are really here. He just doesn’t want people about, and it’s easy to understand that. In the circumstances it seemed better to let him think he’s scared us off, rather than invite open hostility which would have got us nowhere. We’re not ready for that, although it will come to it at the finish, no doubt. From now on, though, we shall have to be more careful. If Knifey sees us on the hill again he’ll know we have a more definite purpose than taking snapshots of the scenery. Tough though he may be, he wouldn’t be likely to forget that the body of the man he murdered was lying a few yards from where we were standing.”

“Was he waiting there for us, do you think?” queried Cub.

“I’d say yes. He wanted to have a look at us, if we came. Rocheter stayed with him, and was passing the time, I fancy, by looking for the little hand we found.”

They went on down to the village. Several men were standing about, talking, and the reason for this they learned from the innkeeper. The body of Nestor Paprapoulos had been found. He was dead. The body had been taken to Limassol. Samodes had gone to report to his headquarters.

“What are we going to do next?” asked Cub, as they stirred cups of the local thick black coffee.

“We’ll spend the afternoon down here,” decided Gimlet. “That will induce Knifey, who may hang about for a bit, to suppose we’ve taken his advice. We’ll move the car, too, so that Samodes will think we’ve gone. Knifey may make enquiries. Later, towards dark, we’ll work our way back to the Casa Stefanita and watch what happens. When the gang is in the house, we’ll go on past and carry on to the top of the mountain.”

“D’you mean you’re going to spend the night up there?”

“Yes. It won’t be the first time we’ve slept rough. It would be difficult to get up there in daylight without being seen. The idea is for us to be already on the top in the morning when the gang arrives. They’ll hardly be expecting that.”

For the next few hours this plan proceeded smoothly. The car was moved into some trees below the village. A leisurely detour brought them to within sight of Knifey’s house just as dusk was falling. From a safe spot they watched the gang repeat exactly the performance of the previous evening. A shrouded figure was carried down the hill and put in the outbuilding. Their

day's work over, the gang retired into the house. Gimlet made another detour that brought them to the track at a point well above it. After that they simply carried on up the mountain side while there was enough light to enable them to see what they were doing. When it failed, they sat down and waited for the moon. This did not help them much, once they were inside the heavy pine forest, and after a while, rather than risk injury, Gimlet decided that it would be better to wait for dawn. This, he opined, should still give them plenty of time to reach the summit first. So finding a comfortable spot in a little bracken-filled dell, they settled down to wait.

Cub was soon asleep: and he slept soundly all night, for he knew no more until he was awakened by Gimlet with the information that the sun was just coming up, so they had better be on their way. They drank at a spring and continued the ascent.

As they went higher, the hillside becoming more and more stony, Cub again found himself wishing that they were really the tourists they pretended to be, for the views presented were indescribably grand, the blue sea to the south, and in all other directions the hillsides sloping down to it. Away to the right, and still slightly above them, was a ridge, or a saddle of rock, from which the man who had come to find his father had fallen to his death. From the closer view it all looked even more wild and rugged than it had from below. The crumbling walls of an ancient building could be seen rising from the rocks.

Near the summit the trees became more dwarf in habit, and presently ended altogether, leaving exposed the rocks, from which sprang clumps of tight, prickly shrubs. With a whirr of wings and raucous cries, two eagles swooped from a crevasse where presumably they had an eyrie. For a moment they soared uncomfortably close to the visitors, but then disappeared behind a neighbouring peak. Hands as well as feet became necessary towards the finish of the ascent, for there were places where the greatest care was called for to prevent a serious fall.

Gimlet went right on to the ruins, which turned out to be less spectacular than they had imagined. In fact, it was a gloomy place. A tumbledown archway, surrounded by piles of stones that had once been walls, gave access to a courtyard, the paving of which appeared to have been cracked and distorted by an earthquake. This was a dangerous place, for there were several large, sinister-looking holes of some size, that must at one time have been storage vaults or dungeons, or possibly reservoirs. One of these was at least fifty feet deep, with steep stone steps spiralling down into it. What this place had been Cub could not imagine. One thing was obvious. The ruins were of great age. The spirit of the past seemed to brood over the lichen-

covered stones and broken columns, where only an occasional lizard kept vigil.

Bearing in mind what Samodes had said about the old charcoal-burner's secret excavations, Cub kept a look-out for signs of them, but saw none. Actually, this was not surprising, for the stones often lay in such a jumble that any interference with them might easily escape detection. He found it increasingly hard to associate the place with American gangsters, and he expressed this opinion to Gimlet.

"It was somewhere along this ridge that young Paprapoulos was shot," reminded Gimlet. "He expected to find his father here. It follows, therefore, that the old man used to come up here. Whatever it is that Knifey is doing, it must be in some way associated with this place—with this particular mountain, if not these ruins. Let's get over there behind those piles of rubble and wait."

"All I can say is this," said Cub emphatically. "If this is where the gang is coming every day, there must be a ton of gold waiting to be picked up."

"There's certainly something," answered Gimlet vaguely. "With any luck, before the day is out, we shall know exactly what it is."

"I don't notice any dames about, dead or alive," averred Cub sarcastically.

"We don't know what may lie under these old stones," replied Gimlet. "The Egyptians once held Cyprus, don't forget, and they mummified their dead."

"The lady I saw didn't look as dead as that. Her face was white."

"One could think of reasons for that. What you saw may have been a death mask over the face. But we'd better not talk."

They settled down to wait.

Time went on. The sun climbed higher into a turquoise sky. The eagles floated back on rigid pinions to their eyrie. Crickets chirped. Little green lizards appeared from cracks in the masonry to bask in the warmth. Otherwise, nothing happened. Gimlet worked his way to the ridge and surveyed the hillside. He returned, looking worried, to report that he could see no signs of anyone coming up. The sun climbed yet higher, and still all remained silent.

"It begins to look as if we've boobed," said Gimlet at last. "They're not coming up here to-day, or they'd have been here by now. We shall look silly if, while we were sitting here on top of the world, they've slipped away with the loot."

“I suppose that could happen,” said Cub morosely.

“It could, but I don’t think it will. For one thing, I’m certain they’ll bring the yacht round here rather than return to Famagusta. For another, I’d bet that when they go it will be under cover of darkness. They’d hardly try to carry the bodies—or whatever it is they’ve got—through the village in broad daylight. If they don’t soon show up, we’ll go down and see what they’re doing.”

More time passed. Cub looked at his watch and saw that it was noon. He opened the haversack he carried and ate a sandwich without enthusiasm.

It was shortly after this that he heard the sound for the first time. It was a queer sound, faint, rising and falling like a distant air raid siren, only the note was deeper, and had a strange hollow quality. His eyes scanned the sea, thinking it might have been caused by a ship; but there was not a vessel of any sort in sight. Presently he heard it again. Paradoxically, it gave the impression of being near, yet at the same time, as long way off. He looked enquiringly at Gimlet. “What’s that noise?”

“I’ve no idea,” answered Gimlet. “It sounded as if it might have been caused by wind blowing through a hole in the rock; but there isn’t any wind.”

When, presently, the sound was repeated, to linger on like a distant echo before dying away, Gimlet got up and looked around in an attempt to locate it. “Extraordinary!” he said.

Yet again came the sound, although this time with a difference. It had a sort of scrape with it, as of a wave receding on a shingle beach. It ended in a hollow boom.

Gimlet walked forward, slowly, gazing about, and Cub went with him. The sound, when next it came, appeared to be all around them, and Cub had a curious impression that it arose from the ground. “They have earthquakes here, don’t they?” he said.

“They used to have bad ones, but I don’t think they’ve had any lately.”

“That rumble seemed to come up from the ground. I thought it might be one starting.”

Gimlet walked forward until he stood on the rim of the large circular cavity they had noticed. He stared down into it. So did Cub. The bottom could only be seen dimly. It appeared to be littered with rubbish.

“This is where that noise is coming from,” asserted Gimlet. “The opening acts as an amplifier.”

Hardly had the words left his lips when, from deep down in the earth, it seemed, there floated up the sound that had aroused their curiosity. At the shorter distance the effect was even more weird than before, appearing to go round and round, repeating itself until it became a whisper before finally dying away.

Cub realised suddenly what it was. “That’s somebody talking, a long way off,” he exclaimed breathlessly.

Gimlet nodded. “That’s it. The sound is coming through a cave, or a tunnel. This round opening distorts it. It must be the gang. No one else would be likely to come here.”

“But they couldn’t get here without us seeing them.”

“They didn’t come as far as this. There’s another opening somewhere. This hole must connect with it. It’s the only explanation.”

Cub stared down into the cavity. The idea of men being somewhere in the heart of the mountain, under his feet, produced a queer feeling of unreality.

“We can soon settle the matter,” went on Gimlet, advancing towards the steps that followed the wall into the depths.

Cub looked startled. “Are you going down?”

“I am. You stay where you are. One will make less noise than two. I’d rather you stayed on top, anyway, in case I should have difficulty in getting out. You will at least know where I am.”

“Your torch is all right?”

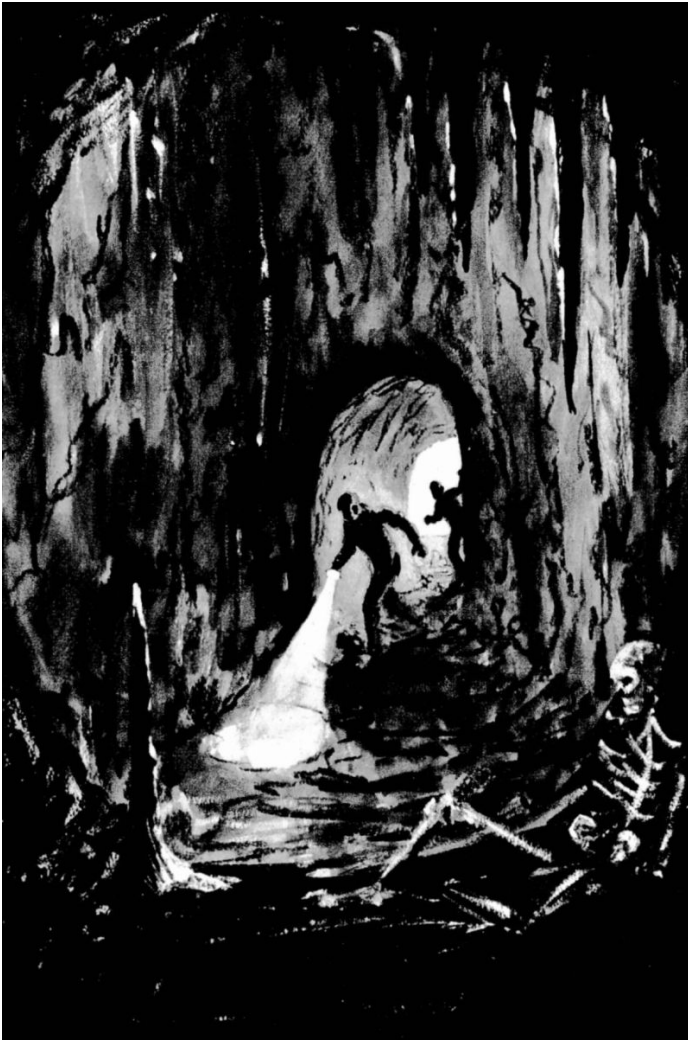
“Yes. Keep your eyes open, and don’t show yourself over the ridge, in case anyone down below happens to be looking this way.”

“I’ll watch it.”

As Gimlet started down the steps, testing each one before putting his weight on it, once more the sound came floating up, like the last long lingering sigh of a dying monster. Apparently Gimlet was thinking on those lines, for he looked up with a smile and said: “If you see any dragons about you’d better not wait for me.”

As it happened, this was the last time that particular sound was heard.

Cub stood on the lip of the hole and watched Gimlet merge into the gloom that filled the bottom. He saw the beam of his torch cut wedges of light as it explored the walls. And then it disappeared. It did not come back. He waited. Nothing happened. No sound came. He stared for a long time, but Gimlet did not reappear.



([See page 96](#))

As it happened, this was the last time that particular sound was heard

After a while he retired to a rock and sat down. But he started to his feet as, from somewhere deep in the earth, there came a long, ominous rumble. He ran to the edge of the cavity, and lying flat, tried to probe the mysterious depths. In vain. All was silent again. What had produced such a noise? Could it have been a gun-shot? He drew a deep breath. His orders were to remain on top, so he stayed, a prey to gnawing anxiety, and fears that were none the less real because they were intangible.

As time wore on and Gimlet did not return, he knew for certain that all was not well below. But what had happened was beyond his imagination to guess.

CHAPTER IX

ALARUMS AND EXCURSIONS

THE sun began all too quickly to close the gap between it and the blue mountains to the west, and still Gimlet did not reappear. Cub remained seated on his rock, brooding, sure now that something serious had happened but not knowing what to do about it.

Far to the east, on a tranquil sea shining under the oblique rays of the sun, a white speck appeared off the coast. At first he hardly noticed it, so concerned was he with his problem; but as it slowly became larger, he made it out to be a small vessel of some sort. Even then it was a little while before it occurred to him to wonder if by any chance it could be the *Sandra*, working round to a fresh anchorage nearer to the Casa Stefanita. Famagusta lay to the east, and the vessel looked like a small yacht.

Thinking the matter over, Cub decided that it could not be the *Sandra*, or Copper would have come over to report that it had left the harbour.

Twilight began to dim the scene. Cub munched a biscuit in a desultory fashion. He was too worried to feel hungry. There was nothing to drink. More for something to do than for any other reason, he advanced to the edge of the escarpment, and, lying flat, gazed down the flanks of the mountain into what was now a vast bowl of blue and purple shadows. Lying thus, he was startled to see a light on the hillside, a light that moved and sometimes disappeared, in a manner that suggested that it was being carried by someone. It was certainly not a vehicle. It was too high up for that. He reckoned it to be on the goat-track above the charcoal-burner's cottage. He watched it moving slowly downhill until it grew dim and finally disappeared. Who could it be? Gimlet? No. Gimlet wouldn't carry a light. The gang? He could think of no one else. But how did they get there?

Out to sea, a spark of light marked the position of the little vessel he had seen. It appeared to be stationary now, and fairly close in. Could it be the *Sandra* after all? Cub recalled the conversation he had heard the night before. Knifey had told Joe to "bring her round". Was he referring to the *Sandra*? He thought it possible.

As darkness deepened he fell into a state of indecision, bordering on dismay. Apart from any other consideration he did not feel at all happy at the idea of spending the night on his lonely peak, surrounded by ruins, and no

doubt the bones, of a civilisation long departed. Heaven alone knew what grizzly secrets the place held. It had been a creepy, depressing sort of spot, even in the broad light of day. By night, he felt, looking around uneasily, it would take on an atmosphere even more disturbing to his peace of mind. Yet he dare not leave. It would be no easy matter to get down to the village in the dark, anyway. The problem was, really, whether he should stay where he was, or follow Gimlet into the pit to find out what had happened to him. Unable to make up his mind, he temporised, telling himself that he would wait a little longer.

The moon came out, a silver sickle hanging low in the sky. He was thankful for the light it provided, but regarded with suspicious glances the grotesque shadows it threw among the misshapen piles of masonry near at hand. The dwellings on the plain below, now marked by minute points of light, looked as far away as if they belonged to another world. He went to the edge of the pit and gazed down. If it had looked uninviting before, it now looked horrible. All was silent as the grave. He went so far as to whistle softly, and went dry-lipped at the ghastly drawn-out echo that came back up to him. Turning away, he went back to his original seat, and buttoning his jacket, for the air was getting chilly, sat down with his chin in his hands to ponder the mystery of Gimlet's disappearance.

And thus he sat while the moon climbed higher into the heavens and one by one the distant lights upon the plain went out, leaving it in utter darkness. Deep night came with a silence that was profound. The air was still. The bees no longer hummed. The grasshoppers no longer chirped. They, like all sensible people, were in their beds, asleep, soliloquised Cub disconsolately.

How long he sat there he did not know, but suddenly he had a feeling that in spite of his fears he had been dozing. The position of the moon confirmed this. He cast a furtive glance around, and ceased to breath when he saw a shadow move. Or did he? He wasn't sure. He told himself that it must have been a trick of the moonlight, but in his heart he knew that he was trying to deceive himself. There was something there, in the darkness, watching him. His eyes remained on the spot, while the muscles of his face grew taut and his heart began to thump uncomfortably. Very slowly he took out his automatic and held it ready, deriving some comfort from the cold butt in his hand.

He sprang up with a gasp as a piece of the shadow he was watching seemed to break away and float on silent wings towards him. Then, seeing what it was, he sank down weakly, furious with himself for such an exhibition of childish fear. An owl. What, he asked himself bitterly, could be more natural in such a place? The bird pitched on a nearby broken column

and hooted derisively. He eyed it malevolently, mentally calling it names that were entirely undeserved, for of the two, he was the intruder, as he presently realised.

The incident served as a warning of the state his nerves were in. He walked up and down for a while, to pull them together, as he told himself. It was doing nothing that was giving him the jitters, he pondered morosely. Anything was better than just sitting there. If Gimlet didn't soon show up, orders or no orders, he would go and look for him. The circumstances justified it, he decided. Clearly, Gimlet had met with an accident, or he would not have left him alone for so long.

He waited for an hour. It was now getting on towards the morning. Taking out his torch he advanced purposefully towards the hole. Reaching it, he nearly changed his mind, for nothing in his experience had looked as sinister as this inky pit, dug by hands long turned to dust, for what purpose no man knew.

Mustering all his courage, for he needed it, he started the descent. The fact that it was night, he reassured himself, made no difference. Below it must always be night.

Step by step, his torch guiding him, he made his way to the bottom. There he stopped to survey the scene. The floor was littered with rubbish—stones mostly, as far as he could make out. A little way on, a low tunnel-like entrance told him which way Gimlet must have gone, for there was only one. Entering, his torch explored again, to reveal a dusty sloping floor with no end in sight. It was evident from the regular sides that the tunnel was man-made. It was not a natural cave. There was some rough carving that looked as if it might be writing on the walls, but of course it conveyed nothing to him. Presently, as he went on, a roughly-hewn crucifix suggested that early Christians had used the place as a refuge from persecution, although that did not mean that they had built it. Feeling better now that he was committed to his task, he went on, counting his paces to check how far he had travelled from the entrance.

The floor continued to slope downwards, creating an uncomfortable impression of depth. It was quite dry. What he did not like were the places where there had been falls of rock. There were places where it looked as if the walls had collapsed, and had been built up again. Cracks, in the floor as well as the wall, showed where, in the past, the whole hill had been moved and the passage warped, by earthquakes. But then, as he knew, the whole island had been subject to them, which was why so many of the old buildings were in ruins. He tried not to think about that. The idea of being caught by one, deep in the ground, was too terrifying for contemplation.

Watching the walls, and walking gently past the dangerous places, he went on.

The air was still quite fresh, making it apparent that there was another exit somewhere, which would create a through draught. This was only to be expected, he thought. The ancient builders were not fools. They knew, they had to know, all about underground passages and bolt-holes; for this particular tunnel was, he did not doubt, a secret exit from the building above. A besieged garrison would need water. He had seen none on top. An occasional bat, hanging upside-down on the wall, practically confirmed another exit at no great distance. He derived comfort from the thought. In such a place, the more exits there were the better.

Passing a nasty-looking fall of rock he saw, leaning against it, an object which, on picking it up, turned out to be a smallish iron bar. A small crowbar, in fact. From the position in which it lay he took it to be a modern tool. At all events, it had been put there since the rock had fallen. By whom? The answer came automatically. By old Paprapoulos, the charcoal-burner. It was to this place, then, that he came in search of relics, which he sold illegally to tourists and others. His son had known where to look for him. What Nestor had seen, or done, to cause the gangsters to murder him, was a matter for surmise; but the obvious inference was, the gangsters knew about this place too. Leaving the tool where he had found it, for he had no use for it, he went on, stopping sometimes to listen. He had no reason to expect a visit from the gangsters at such an hour, but he thought there was a chance that he might hear something of Gimlet, who was his main concern. When he stopped, the absence of sound was so utter and complete that he found it frightening.

His next discovery proved what he had suspected. Here, it was, beyond all doubt, that old Paprapoulos had come in search of treasure. The cave opened out into a chamber that had the appearance of a rough chapel. At the far end there was a great square stone that was obviously intended as an altar, for above it had been roughly carved the emblem of Christianity—a Cross. But it was not this that brought him to a wide-eyed halt. Into the wall had been cut niches that were obviously tombs. But the bodies that they had contained were no longer in them. They had been ravaged, broken up. Bones and skulls, and pieces of material that had evidently been shrouds, lay scattered about in horrible confusion. They were all far too old to cause Cub any serious feeling of revulsion; and his chief sensation, as he stood regarding the scene, was one of disgust at the ghoulish old charcoal-burner whom he felt sure was responsible for the desecration. A wild animal might

have done it, but he did not think so. As far as he knew, there were no wild animals on the island. The iron bar told its own story.

Another idea struck him. Was it in this catacomb that the gangsters were interested? Was it from here, or from a similar place, that they were removing whatever it was they had come to fetch? It seemed unlikely. These bodies had been broken up in the search for objects of value that might have accompanied them to the grave. The picture, Cub pondered, was not a rare one. There was nothing unique about it. In Egypt, in Persia, in fact, throughout the Ancient World, the burial grounds of civilisations long dead had through the centuries been rifled of their little treasures. It still went on. Everywhere museums had been enriched with articles taken from such places as this. Even kings were not allowed to rest in peace. Perhaps it didn't matter. The dead had no use for the things they had prized in life. Thus mused Cub, gazing thoughtfully at the melancholy spectacle before him. The point was, where was Gimlet? Obviously he had come this way, for there was no other.

A narrow, arched doorway at the far end of the chamber provided the answer. He took it and went on, the floor still descending gently. The cave was much more narrow now, and was clearly one of those natural fissures in the limestone so common in all Mediterranean islands. Crete, Majorca and Minorca are honeycombed with them.

His next find was probably the original purpose of the tunnel. It was a fairly extensive pool of water, fed from some hidden source. Like all underground sheets of water it had a cold, dead look, as if, denied the life-giving sunlight, it had lost its essential qualities. He couldn't locate the actual place where the water came in, but he could hear a gentle trickle. It suggested that he was not far from the outer air. He took the opportunity to have a drink, which he needed. The water was sweet enough.

The passage, which skirted the pool, continued; but after a short distance it split. The right-hand one being the largest, he took it, but after going fewer than a hundred paces, he was brought to a halt by a fall of rock that entirely blocked it. There was no rubble; just clean rock, and what looked like masonry, as if an archway had collapsed. Clearly, Gimlet had not come this way. Retracing his steps he took the other route. Very soon cool, sweet air told him that he was nearing his journey's end. Then, there it was. Through a delicate tracery of overhanging ferns was a narrow slip of sky, softly grey with the dawn of another day. He advanced to the end of the cave and looked out. Farther he could not easily go, for the ground dropped nearly sheer at his feet into a narrow gorge, some fifty or sixty feet deep, filled with bracken, slender juniper bushes and trailing clematis.

His sensations now were, first of disappointment that he had not found Gimlet, and second, amazement that he had not done so. Where could he have gone? Could he have fallen out of the end of the cave in the dark? He looked down but could see no sign. With puckered brows he examined the restricted view before him, restricted because it was almost entirely occupied by the opposite side of the gorge, which was quite close, and in all respects like the side on which he stood. Looking at the place, he formed the impression that the split in the mountain that formed the narrow ravine had been caused by a convulsion of the earth in the remote past. Presently he felt sure of this. He could make out places where, if the two sides of the gorge were brought together again, they would fit into each other like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. But that did not provide the answer to his problem. There seemed to be a sort of track on the far side, running transversely through the bracken, as if goats or the rare moufflon used the place; but looking below where he stood, on his own side, there was not a mark of any sort. Bracken, clematis and delicate ferns sprang unbroken or uncrushed from the crannies, even creeping a little way inside the cave. It would, he perceived, be possible to climb down into the gorge; but it certainly would not be possible for anyone to do that without leaving a trail visible from where he stood. Some of the leaves or fronds would inevitably be crushed or forced aside. In a word, Gimlet could not have gone that way. Where, then, was he?

In his bewilderment, Cub's eyes explored the far side of the chasm, seeking inspiration rather than any material object. But he did see something, something that gave him fresh food for thought. The track of trampled herbage on the other side seemed to end abruptly, almost exactly opposite to him. Why should it end? Why did not the track continue to the top? What possible purpose could it serve by stopping suddenly in the steepest place? Looking hard, he made out some dead and withered bracken piled, so it seemed, against the face of the rock. At one place, where it had slipped slightly, there was a black, irregular mark. Then the truth hit him. Of course, he thought swiftly, his first impression had been right. There had been a time when the ravine was not there. Then the cave he was in had continued on. But at some period of time the rock had split, forming the gorge, and breaking the continuity of the cave which now began again on the other side. Someone had used it recently, and had tried, rather carelessly, to conceal the opening after leaving. Who more likely than the gangsters?

This, Cub felt, was a discovery of first importance; but it still did not answer his prime question. Where was Gimlet? If he was over the other side he must have reached it by some other route, for he had certainly not climbed down the ravine, for that would have been quite impossible without

leaving marks of his passage. The thing remained a mystery. For a time he toyed with the idea of going across, a somewhat risky, but possible project; but in the end he decided against it. It would be better, he thought, to go back to his starting point to see if Gimlet had returned. The exploration of the opposite cave, if, in fact, there was one there, could wait. And before many minutes had elapsed, he was to be thankful that he had followed his intuition.

He had turned away to begin his return journey when, for the first time in hours, he heard the sound of human voices. This brought him to a standstill. Apart from the direction, the clarity of the voices told him that the speakers were outside. Had they been in the cave they would have had that muffled, echoing quality, usual in such places. Advancing cautiously to a position from which he could see but not be seen, he looked out. It was now broad daylight, but for the moment, although the voices were coming nearer, he could see nothing. Waiting, on the tiptoe of expectation, presently he saw the thing for which he was now quite prepared. From round a shoulder of rock on the opposite side, some distance below the cave, appeared, one after the other, five men, walking in single file, as was demanded by the width of the path. They were no longer talking, apparently saving their breath for the final stiff pull to their objective, which was no longer in doubt. Puffing and blowing from exertion, they dragged themselves up to the dead bracken, pulled it aside, and disappeared into the narrow mouth of a cave this action had revealed. The whole thing had been done, Cub noted, in a way that made it clear that this was not the first time the men had been there. The ridiculous thought struck Cub that he was watching the enactment of the "Open Sesame" scene in *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*. A feeling of grim satisfaction swept through him as he realised that he was in possession of the gangsters' secret.

For a minute or two he lingered, keyed up for sounds that would tell him that Gimlet was inside the cave and had been discovered. He did not think this would happen. Nor did it. But there had been a remote chance of it, for he still felt that Gimlet must be somewhere near.

He waited for no more, but making the best time possible, returned to the pit, and so up the steps to the ruins. An instant later, he nearly went over backwards as a well-known voice exclaimed: "Blimey! Where did you spring from?"

"Copper!" gasped Cub. "My gosh! You gave me a fright. Phew! Am I glad to see you? How did you get here?"

"What d'you mean, how did I get here? I walked. How else?"

“But what brought you here?”

“I came lookin’ for yer. What d’yer think? The yacht’s pulled out of the harbour.” Copper pointed to the vessel Cub had already noted. “That looks like her, over there. I went to your lodgings. You wasn’t there. Trapper was with me. We found your car, so we knew you were still up ’ere. I left Trapper in charge down below and came along to see what you was up to. The Skipper sent me a note to say what was cooking, with a little map to show where you was bound fer. The letter came just as me and Trapper was getting on our bikes to come over an tell you that the yacht was pulling out.”

“Did you bring any food with you?”

“Never travel without me iron rations, chum.”

“Let me have some. I’m starving.”

“How long have yer bin ’ere?”

“All night.”

“Struth! What a dump to doss down in.”

“I didn’t do much dossing, believe you me,” Cub told Copper grimly.

“Where’s the Skipper?”

“I’ve lost him. That’s why I’m still here.”

“Whatcha mean—lost him?”

“Come over here,” invited Cub. He took Copper to the edge of the pit and pointed. “That’s the way he went. That was yesterday afternoon. He told me to wait. He hasn’t come back. I’ve been waiting ever since, completely cheesed, wondering what to do for the best.”

Copper considered the yawning cavity without emotion. “What is it?—a coal-mine or something?”

“No. It’s part of these old ruins. There’s a tunnel at the bottom.”

“You been down?”

“Yes. I waited until this morning, and then thought I’d better try and find out what had happened to Gimlet.”

“You didn’t see anything of him?”

“Not a sign. But I saw the gang. Did you see them as you came up?”

“No. I found a new fag end, though, so I knew they was about. Something must ’ave ’appened to the Skipper. Are you sure he ain’t down there?”

“I’m quite certain. After a distance, the cave forks. One way leads to an open ravine. He didn’t go that way. The other is blocked by a fall of . . .”

Cub's voice trailed away. An expression of horror dawned in his eyes. He clutched Copper's arm.

"What's the matter, mate?" asked Copper with concern.

For a moment Cub could hardly speak. "Kick me for the biggest fool in creation," he muttered hoarsely. "Of course! that's the only possible answer."

"What are you yammering about?" demanded Copper.

"Listen! The caves. One leads to an open ravine. I know he didn't go that way."

"Well?"

"He must have gone the other way. There's no other explanation."

"But you said it was blocked by a . . ." It was Copper's turn to leave the sentence unfinished. "S'welp me," he breathed. "You reckon he's under _____?"

"Either that, or he's the other side of the obstruction. The whole place is rotten down there—falls of rock everywhere—shaken down by earthquakes. I remember now. I heard a rumble. At the time, I thought it might be a gunshot. Naturally, I wasn't thinking of anything like the tunnel caving in. In fact, I didn't even know it was there."

"Come on," said Copper crisply. "It's time we had a look at this."

Without another word they set off down the steps.

CHAPTER X

HARD LABOUR

IN a quarter of an hour, for now that Cub had explored the route, the short journey was comparatively easy, they were at the barrier of fallen rock that blocked the passage. Cub had picked up the iron bar in passing. He did not know exactly what he was going to do with it, but he thought it might be useful, as in fact it was.

Copper, as might have been expected, had some trenchant remarks to make about the desecrated tombs. "Well! Strike old Riley!" he exclaimed, in a voice of wonder and disgust. "What a boneyard! It's a bit tough, ain't it, when people come along like a lot of dogs and pull yer to bits after yer've been planted nice and tidy by yer folks."

Cub agreed. "Some people should have been born hyenas," he averred.

However, they did not stop to dwell on the unpleasant spectacle; their errand was too urgent.

Neither mentioned it in so many words, but it must have been as obvious to Copper as it was to Cub, that if Gimlet was actually under the fall—how far it extended they had no idea—they would never again see him alive. His only chance of survival lay in the possibility that the rock had fallen after he had gone past that particular spot. Either way, the walls, or the roof, must have been in such a precarious state that it needed only the slightest vibration to bring them crashing down. That Gimlet had in some way been responsible for the fall Cub did not for a moment doubt. The only question that remained to be answered was, had he been caught by the collapsing rock or had he been given enough warning to jump clear, on the far side? Even if he had escaped instant death, there was still the question of fresh air. The passage was completely blocked. How much air was available on the far side would of course depend on the capacity of the cave beyond. If the space was small, then Gimlet would probably have been suffocated by now. Cub was furious with himself for not grasping the truth earlier. Not that he could have done much about it single-handed, he thought woefully.

"We shall have to be careful how we handle this, mate," said Copper, surveying with a calculating eye the immediate surroundings of the fall. "We don't want to bring another packet down on our own nuts. It wouldn't take much. Steady does it."

“Just a minute,” said Cub. “If he’s on the other side, he may be able to hear us, provided the stuff isn’t too thick.” He whistled.

There was no answer.

Copper let out a hail. They listened, but could detect no response, although this would in any case have been difficult on account of the long-sustained echoes of the sounds they themselves had made.

“Okay. Let’s make a start,” muttered Copper, spitting on his hands, although what useful purpose this was to serve was not apparent.

They went to work, picking up the pieces of rock one at a time and carrying them to a safe distance behind them, propped against the walls. They worked unceasingly, without speaking, probably because there was nothing to say. It seemed to be a long time before they made any impression on the pile; but the heaps behind them grew steadily, so Cub knew they must be making a fair amount of progress. He lost all count of time. With sweat pouring down his face, for the air here seemed stagnant and oppressive, he persisted, leaving the larger pieces to Copper. Sometimes a combined effort was needed to move an extra large piece. The bar came in useful for prising pieces clear of the main bulk. No doubt old Paprapoulos had used it for the same purpose, thought Cub, remembering where he had found it.

“Struth! This perishing stuff goes on for ever,” remarked Copper, after a long time, looking at the quantity of rock they had shifted.

“That’s the trouble,” answered Cub wearily, wiping sweat from his brow with a shirt sleeve. “We don’t know how far it goes. There might be twenty or thirty yards of it. It must go some way, or Gimlet would have heard us by now—if he’s still on his feet.”

“Well, we ain’t found ’im yet, and that’s something, any old how,” returned Copper.

Cub knew that what he really meant was, they hadn’t found his crushed body. That, as Copper had observed, was something, for they had cleared quite a lot of ground. There were times when they had to exercise great care, for some of the higher lumps of rock were dangerously poised, and there was a risk of these pieces falling on them.

They were about to tackle such a mass when Cub thought he heard it move. At least, there was a harsh, grating sound, followed by a bump. “Look out!” he cried, and sprang back. Copper also stepped back hastily. “I thought I heard it move,” explained Cub, having decided that it was a false alarm, for the rock was still in the same position.

“I ’eard something,” declared Copper. “I’ve got ears, too.”

“I wonder!” cried Cub excitedly.

“Wonder what?”

Cub did not answer. He snatched up the iron bar and struck the barricade three sharp blows.

A few seconds later there came back three taps.

“Echo,” said Copper.

“I don’t think so.”

“Every sound in ’ere echoes.”

“I know. But I’d swear those taps came from the other side.”

“Try agin.”

Cub repeated the blows. *Tap—tap—tap*, came the answer. “There you are,” shouted Cub.

“I reckon you’re right,” agreed Copper.

“That noise we heard, when we thought the rock was moving, was Gimlet working on the other side.” The words poured from Cub’s lips.

“Come on!” said Copper, and resumed the task with vigorous energy, using all his tremendous strength, dragging the rocks down regardless and rolling them aside.

In a quarter of an hour, there was no longer any doubt. In brief pauses they could hear someone working on the opposite face. Then, at last, a small hole appeared, high up, for as the lower pieces of rock were removed, the upper pieces rolled down.

“That you, Skipper?” called Copper.

Gimlet’s voice answered.

“Are you all right?” asked Cub.

“Perfectly all right. I can’t do much this side; my torch has given out.”

“Stand fast, sir, we’ll soon be through to you,” promised Copper.

The rest was comparatively easy. The hole was quickly enlarged, and Gimlet made his way through, to stand smiling and blinking in the light of the torch. “Thanks,” he said. “That was very nasty. I was beginning to get worried.”

“I’ll bet you was and not ’alf,” agreed Copper warmly.

“Let’s get out in the fresh air,” suggested Gimlet. “I’ve had enough of being cooped up.”

They made their way back to the top of the pit, and there, Gimlet, white from head to foot with dust, told them what had happened. It was as Cub had supposed. Gimlet had, he explained, stumbled on a piece of rock, and he could only suppose that the vibration of this had caused the collapse. The

movement had started slowly, and so he had had a chance to run clear. Instinctively, he had run forward. Had he tried to go back, as was now evident, he would have been caught under the fall, which was of greater extent than he had reason to expect. When he realised that he was trapped, he had gone on, seeking another exit, but had failed to find one. It had been an unnerving experience, for the inside of the hill was a labyrinth of natural caves, large and small, one leading to another, as commonly happens in limestone formations all over the world, including Britain. Once he had lost his way. It was then, in trying to make his way back to the fall, that he had exhausted the battery of his torch. Without it, it would have been futile to try to find another way out, so he had set to work to dig through the barrier, not having the least idea of how far he had to go. But he had always reckoned on Cub coming to look for him sooner or later, although whether he would find the fall and realise that he, Gimlet, was on the wrong side of it, was another matter. In exploring, he had taken the right-hand turn first, so he knew nothing about the exit in the ravine.

Cub narrated his own adventures, concluding with the discovery of the caves, on the far side of the ravine, being used by the gangsters.

Gimlet was not particularly surprised. "I thought it would turn out to be something of the sort," he said. "We heard them talking. That was the weird noise we heard when we were sitting up on the ridge. That particular cave of yours may be broken at the ravine, but there must be another connection between here and the far side, otherwise we shouldn't have heard them. No doubt old Paprapoulos, having lived here all his life, knew his way about. He must have shown Knifey the place, glad to have a companion, no doubt."

"And got bumped off for his trouble," put in Cub.

"The old man had no reason to suppose that he was dealing with a thug," observed Gimlet. "By the way, how do we go for food? Has anybody got any? If not, we shall have to do something about it."

Copper produced one bar of chocolate, two biscuits and a small orange.

"That's not much use," said Gimlet. "We shall have to go down to the village. Incidentally, Copper, with all this talking, you haven't told me what brought you here."

Cub explained. "The yacht has left Famagusta." He pointed. "We think that's her. Copper and Trapper came over to report. They found the car but not us. Trapper stayed below, and Copper came up to find out what was happening. He found me still squatting in the ruins."

"Good thing I let him know where we were going," said Gimlet. "That's the advantage of keeping in touch. But I'm thinking about the yacht. If it has

been brought round here, it rather looks as if the gang will soon be ready to move off.”

“Unless they went home earlier than usual, they must still be in their cave,” Cub pointed out. “Judging from the time we’ve seen them arrive home, they must spend most of the day there. Goodness knows what they find to do. One would have thought that if they’d found a treasure they would by now have hauled it down.”

“They may have had to do some digging,” surmised Gimlet. “They looked pretty grimy when we saw them, you remember. But the sooner we have a look inside that cave, the sooner we shall know the facts. It must hold the key of the whole business. But we can’t carry on without eating. We shall have to go down and get some food.”

“I’ll tell you what, Skipper,” said Copper, “I can’t see no sense in us all going down if it’s only grub we want. You look pretty well all in after spending last night wandering about in the bowels of the earth, as yer might say. Cub ain’t no new pack of cards neither. You two stay here. I’ll slog along down and fetch up a load of rations. How’s that?”

“I think it’s a very good idea,” granted Gimlet. “As you say, there’s really no point in us all going down, only to have to climb up again. Now we’re here, we might as well stay.”

“Fair enough!” declared Copper. “You have a stand-easy till I get back. I shan’t be long.” He made ready to depart. “What shall I tell Trapper?”

Gimlet considered the question. “I can’t see that there’s any need for him to come up here. Tell him to take up a position from which he can keep an eye on Knifey’s house.”

“I had a dekko at it on the way up, but there didn’t seem to be no one at home.”

“Tell him to watch the place, and make a note of any comings and goings between the house and the yacht. That’s all.”

“Right you are, Skipper. That ought to be easy enough.”

“Take care you don’t bump into the gang. If you see them, keep clear.”

“Every time,” promised Copper. “What are you going to do?”

“We may go and have a look at this ravine Cub has told us about. Or rather, we may go and watch for the gang to leave. If you don’t find us here when you get back, that will be the most likely place to look.”

“Plain as a pikestaff,” acknowledged Copper, and set off on his mission.

“We’d better not sit here in the open, in case any of the gang should come along,” Gimlet told Cub. “I can do with a rest, if only to sit and look at

the sky. I don't mind telling you that there was a time when I wondered if I should ever see it again." He led the way to a flower-strewn courtyard and stretched himself out on the shady side of a crumbling stone wall. Cub did the same. He felt in need of relaxation to recover from the shocks and exertions of the past few hours.

It would, he thought, have been hard to find a more pleasant spot for the purpose. Dramatically perched on the top of a mountain, he was surrounded by complete solitude. Spread out below was a glorious view with the Mediterranean beyond. The air was filled with the drowsy drone of countless insects collecting honey in the sunshine from marigolds and marguerites. In its heyday, he contemplated, it must have been a wonderful place. It still was for that matter—when the sun was shining. But not by night. Then it was a different picture altogether.

An hour or so passed pleasantly. Nothing happened. No sounds came from the pit to suggest that they were not alone on the mountain.

After a while Gimlet stirred and looked at his watch. "This is all very nice, but it isn't getting us anywhere," he remarked. "It will be another hour before Copper can get back, so I suggest we take a stroll back along the passage, have a drink at the pool, and see if our friends are showing any signs of activity. Even if we don't learn anything, we shall do no harm." He got up, stretched, shook the worst of the dust from his jacket, and returned to the pit.

They spent a few minutes in the underground cemetery. Gimlet was interested, and agreed with Cub that this was probably the place where old Papapoulos did the relic-collecting which at the end was to cost him his life. Apart from that, Gimlet did not think that the place had any bearing on their own mission. The old bones, he opined, were no use to anyone.

Passing the entrance to the cave in which he had nearly lost his life, he paused. "I still think it was queer, the way that rock collapsed," he murmured. "I've thought a lot about it. The floor seemed solid enough. I can't think that a mere stumble on my part would have brought the whole thing down. Looking back, I have a vague recollection of some vibration a moment before I stubbed my toe and tripped. It was as if someone not far away had dropped a heavy stone."

"It might have been the gangsters doing something," suggested Cub. "After all, they were fairly close, and, as you say, many of these caves seem to be connected."

They had a drink at the pool. The water was so still that it looked more like a sheet of black, polished marble, thought Cub, as he knelt; but even as

the thought crossed his mind, a sort of shiver ruffled its mirror like calm. It was only a small thing, and at the time merely struck him as odd in a detached sort of way. If he gave the matter any consideration at all, it was to assume that they had somehow caused the disturbance. But he was to remember it later on.

They went on to the terminus of the cave, approaching the daylight warily, but there was no sign of anyone moving. The entrance to the cave opposite had not been camouflaged, which, as Gimlet remarked, made it almost certain that the gang was still inside. Having nothing else to do for a little while, they sat down in deep shadow to watch.

Presently Gimlet remarked, softly, on something Cub had already worked out; that the best way of reaching the far side of the ravine was by going through the crags over the top of the mountain; but unless one knew the way it might take some time. No other comment was made. Later, just as Cub was thinking that they ought to be getting back in case Copper had arrived with the food, two men appeared suddenly at the mouth of the opposite cave. It soon appeared from their conversation that they had no purpose in being there other than a desire to talk freely, smoke, and breathe some fresh air. Indeed, it emerged from the way they spoke, that they were bored with what they were doing, and with Rocheter, who, it seemed, was spending too much time doing something that was, in their opinion, quite unnecessary.

Said one: "All dis photo and measuring stuff, picking up duh bits and talking about tings no one ever hoid of. Duh trouble is, duh guy's no use."

"Sure, dat's duh troot, I guess," replied the other moodily. "When I say let's pick up duh bits and go home, all he can say is, what's duh hurry? Whatcha going to do with a guy as dumb as that? No use tryin' to tell him notin'. I gotter make a map, he sez. I tought he was kidding. But no. He's tellin' duh troot. Starts to get duh place all marked out and put duh whole lay-out on duh map. Duh guy's crazy."

"All dis talk of things no one ever hoid of," snorted the first speaker. This obviously annoyed him.

"And maps! Whatcha know about that? Who wants to buy maps? Duh guy's nuts."

"Yeah."

This fascinating but futile conversation was continued for some time, the men, apparently, finding satisfaction in giving vent to their annoyance. In effect, it simply boiled down to the fact that Rocheter was wasting time. Eventually, the argument was brought to an abrupt conclusion by the arrival

of another man, not from the cave, but up the path. He came panting, and had obviously travelled in haste.

“Dere’s a guy coming up the path,” he announced breathlessly.

“You mean duh same two guys?”

“Nah. I’m waiting like duh boss says and I see a big guy wit a bag, walking straight and fast, like he’s going some place.”

Gimlet caught Cub’s eye and made a grimace.

CHAPTER XI

TONI GETS A JOB

A BRIEF conference was held by the three men at the mouth of the cave, at the end of which it was resolved to convey the information to the boss, presumably meaning Knifey.

The man who had brought the news sat down to recover the breath he had lost coming up the hill, while the others disappeared inside. In a couple of minutes they were back, with Knifey, who looked anything but pleased by the interruption. Addressing himself to the newcomer, he demanded particulars. On receiving them he lost no time in acting on them. Calling "Toni!", he gave orders briskly and briefly. There was nothing complicated about them. Toni was to go to the top of the hill, watch for the arrival of the "big guy", note what he did and where he went. If his purpose appeared innocent, nothing need be done; but if he approached the cave, or did anything to suggest that he was spying on them, then he was to be dealt with in the usual manner without fuss or loss of time. The procedure was not actually specified, but Toni was obviously familiar with it. He accepted the instructions with the casual nod of one who is asked to dispose of a wasp in the jam.

Cub, of course, knew perfectly well who the big guy was. It could be no one but Copper. Returning with the bag of food he had been seen by a scout posted somewhere below—this, presumably was a result of his and Gimlet's encounter with Knifey and Rocheter at the charcoal-burner's cottage. Clearly, Knifey was taking no chances; but then, thought Cub, he wouldn't last long as the leader of a gang if he did.

He turned startled eyes to Gimlet's face, his expression asking a question. But Gimlet was already moving, backing slowly to a safe distance before turning and then walking quickly along the tunnel.

As they hurried on, Gimlet said: "This is going to be awkward."

"But they'll never dare to commit murder on such a flimsy pretext," argued Cub.

Gimlet thought otherwise. "You never made a bigger mistake in your life. These thugs are so accustomed to murder in their own country that they've ceased to regard it as a major crime. You can judge to what extent they consider it commonplace from the way Knifey spoke to Toni. If Toni

suspects for one moment that Copper is here to spy on the gang, he'll shoot him as a matter of course. I don't want to start anything; we're not ready for that; but I'm afraid this is where we may have to come into the open. Copper won't be prepared for the reception he's likely to get. He'll expect to find *us* waiting—not a poisonous reptile with its fangs bared ready to bite. Well, we have teeth, too.”

“What will you do?”

“That will depend on Toni. If he starts throwing lead about he'll meet some coming the other way.” Gimlet went on in a hard voice. “You could see from his manner that he's quite prepared to commit murder and think nothing of it. Indeed, I suspect he's one of those sadistic little weasels who gets pleasure out of killing. I wonder how many men he has killed. Shooting is too good for his sort, I'd rather see him hanged. But we'd better stop talking. Sound carries through these caves.”

They reached the pit, Cub with a certain amount of apprehension. This was not because he doubted the outcome of the coming encounter, which appeared to be inevitable, but because there appeared to be every prospect of it ending in a pitched gun battle with the entire gang. Short of shooting Toni out of hand, and Gimlet was hardly likely to do that, however much he loathed men of his type, a show-down seemed unavoidable. For if, alternatively, Toni was driven away by threats, he would simply hasten back to Knifey, who would then bring his followers along to deal with the opposition.

Pistol in hand, Gimlet went first to the top of the steps. Watched with anxiety by Cub, he peeped over the stone lip and looked around. Then, glancing over his shoulder, he said softly: “They're not here yet,” obviously referring to Copper as well as Toni. “Come on!” he added, and, followed closely by Cub, strode quickly to the nearest wall, some three or four feet of which remained standing.

“What about going to meet Copper?” suggested Cub in an undertone, for he had supposed that Gimlet would do this.

“The trouble about that is, we're not sure of the exact spot where he'll arrive. If we go along the ridge to look for him, we're just as likely to run into Toni coming the other way. Toni would probably see us, anyhow. That would make things more difficult. He can't be far away. From here we can watch most of the ridge.” Gimlet took up a position behind the wall from which it was possible to watch without being seen.

Within two minutes the clatter of a stone not far away told them that the next actor in this strange drama was about to step on the stage. It turned out

to be Toni. He walked with the smooth, cat-like confidence of one who is sure of his ability to deal with any situation that might arise. His hands were in his pockets, and he drew heavily on a cigar held between his teeth in the corner of his mouth. Disdaining cover, which apparently he thought he would not need, he took a large pull at his cigar, put his foot on the stub, and arranged himself in a nonchalant pose against a large boulder. All this gave the impression of a man who was prepared to enjoy an entertainment of his own choice.

It seemed to Cub at this juncture that he was not acting strictly in accordance with his orders, which were to watch Copper, but do nothing unless his actions threatened danger to the gang. By standing in the open it looked more as if he had already decided what he was going to do—an impression that was confirmed by subsequent events.

From somewhere just below the ridge came Copper's familiar whistle. It could not, of course, be answered. Toni smiled, but did not move. A minute later Copper's head and shoulders came into view as he made a traverse to top the ridge. The rest of his body came into sight. In his hand he carried a large brown paper bag. Still Toni did not move. Nor did Gimlet, whose eyes never left him for an instant. Cub moistened his lips, for the atmosphere was now brittle with suspense.

Reaching the top, Copper stopped within a yard of the edge, put down his bag and with his handkerchief mopped his face, down which perspiration was streaming as a result of his steep climb in the sun. So far he had not noticed Toni, which was understandable, for the gangster had remained motionless, a cynical smile curling his thin lips. Copper whistled again, and at the same time explored the ruins with his eyes. The whistle broke off short as his eyes fell on Toni.

It was at this critical moment that Cub first saw the dog. He recognised it at once as the one that had belonged to the charcoal-burner and his son. It came trotting through the ruins, ears pricked expectantly, as if in answer to Copper's whistle; but on seeing Toni its ears went back and it dropped flat on its belly. It was behind Toni, so the gangster did not see it. Cub paid no further attention to it, having matters of greater weight to watch. In fact, he forgot all about it.

Toni spoke first. "Stay right there, pal," he said in an oily sort of voice. "Have you lost something?" Oddly enough, it did not seem to occur to Toni that Copper was whistling somebody.

Copper had not moved from his original position. He took time to consider the gangster's question. "That's right, chum," he said slowly.

“Whatcha lost?” enquired Toni.

Cub could not understand the purpose of this question. The feeling grew on him that the gangster was not really interested and did not expect the question to be answered. Like a cat playing with a mouse, conscious of his power, he was merely amusing himself.

Copper may have sensed this too, for when he spoke again his voice had hardened and a glint of resentment appeared in his eyes. “Suppose I ’ave lost something, what’s that got to do with you?”

“Whatcha got in the bag, huh?”

“That’s no business o’ yourn.”

“You reckon you’re goin’ to stay up here, huh?”

“I reckon to stay just as long as I feel like it—and I ain’t asking you.” It was clear that Copper was getting angry, although he tried not to show it.

“Smart guy, eh?” sneered Toni.

“I’m as smart as a dirty little sewer-rat like you any day of the week,” rasped Copper.

That took the smile off Toni’s face. He scowled. He began to walk forward, very slowly; and as he walked he seemed to thrust his hands a little harder into his pockets. “You come to da’ wrong place to be as smart as dat,” he said in a thin, dry voice. “Now you starta to walk, walk backwards and keepa going.”

Copper, who was standing within two yards of the precipice, did not move. His face was expressionless, but Cub knew that his shrewd cockney brain was working fast.

“You hearda me,” said Toni, in an even softer, thinner voice.

Gimlet now stepped out, pistol covering Toni, and began to walk forward, noiselessly. Being behind Toni, the gangster did not see him. But Copper did, and a broad smile spread over his face.

“You—you thinka I’m kiddin’ huh?” grated Toni.

“ ’Ave you got a gun in yer pocket?” asked Copper seriously.

“Sure I’ve gotta gun.”

Copper replied with great deliberation. “Take my tip, mate, don’t you try to pull it. If you do, you’ve ’ad it, and that ain’t no lie, s’welp me. Take a dekko at what’s behind yer.”

Toni smiled knowingly, as much as to say that he was too old a bird to be caught in such an outworn trap.

“Okay, mate. ’Ave it your own way,” said Copper sadly. “I’m tellin’ yer straight, you ain’t got no more chance o’ gettin’ that gun out of yer pocket than a fly ’as o’ gettin’ out of a treacle jar.”

“Is dat so?” breathed Toni, still smiling, and his hand began to move.

He stopped abruptly, rigid, as the muzzle of Gimlet’s gun was pressed firmly between his shoulder-blades. “That’s far enough,” said Gimlet softly.

“I told yer,” said Copper, picking up his bag.

Cub was still staring at the changed expression on Toni’s face, for it seemed to fascinate him, when the dog stepped into the picture—or rather, rushed in. Without a sound, crouching low, it ran up behind the gangster and buried its teeth in his calf. And having got a grip, it hung on, growling deep in its throat as if it could no longer contain its hate in silence.

The stream of blasphemy that broke from the gangster’s lips made Cub wince. Taken completely by surprise, when he was already suffering from shock, he behaved as anyone would in such circumstances. First he struck at the animal with a hand that now held an automatic, which was natural in a way, for obviously he dare not shoot without a risk of shooting himself in the leg; but that it was a tactical error was made plain by the dog, which released his leg and grabbed him by the wrist, which caused him, yelling with pain, to drop the gun. In the general confusion that followed, he fell. The dog, still snarling like a mad thing, made a rush at his face. Toni scrambled to his feet. Copper promptly knocked him down again with a smart clip on the nose. Cursing fire and brimstone, the gangster made a lunge to get his gun. Copper kicked it ten yards away. Neither Gimlet nor Cub moved. There was really nothing they could do, except look, without some risk of being bitten themselves. A dog, fighting mad, is not an easy thing to handle. As for Copper, he was thoroughly enjoying himself. Far from trying to stop the dog, he urged it on.

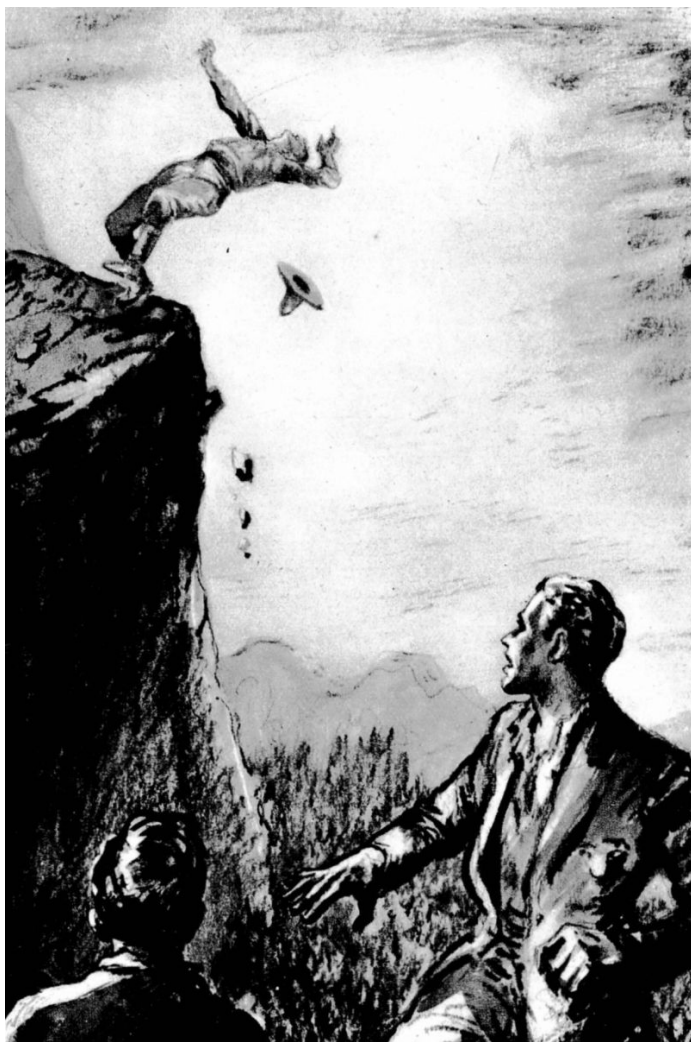
The end came suddenly, in a manner that none of the spectators had foreseen. Toni, still trying to fight the dog off, and imploring somebody to shoot it, apparently forgot where he was. Already dangerously near the brink of the precipice, a backward step took him even closer to it. Gimlet shouted a warning, but either Toni did not hear, or was too taken up with his assailant to heed it. The dog leapt forward. Toni jumped back to avoid the bared fangs, and too late to see his danger. Then it was too late. For a moment he stood on the brink, arms waving as he strove to regain his balance. It was no use. He was too far over. A wild scream broke from his lips and he disappeared from sight. Everyone else stood still, while the gangster, taking a quantity of stones with him, went crashing down into the

tree-tops far below. Even at that dreadful moment it struck Cub as remarkable that the man should have met death at the same spot, and in much the same way, as the man he had killed so short a while before—Nestor Paprapoulos. He looked around for the dog, which had been responsible for the tragedy, but it was nowhere in sight. From the time it had made its attack to the dramatic conclusion had not been more than two minutes.

It was Copper who broke the hush that had fallen. He looked at Gimlet and Cub in turn. “Well, whatcha know about that?” he enquired in an awed voice. “But I’ll tell yer one thing, and that ain’t two, as my old Ma used to say. If ever a bloke got what he asked for, he did, and that ain’t no lie. Am I right?”

“Every time,” agreed Cub, mimicking Trapper.

“Quite right,” said Gimlet.



([See page 131](#))

The gangster went crashing down into the tree-tops far below

Copper's eyes roved the ruins. "Where's the dog gone? Where did it come from? What's it a-doin' of up 'ere, any old how?"

Cub answered, pointing. "It came from over there. I saw it, but I didn't guess it was going to act as it did. It belonged to old Paprapoulos and his son. The son was murdered just about here. The dog came up with him. It must have been hanging about here ever since, waiting for him to come back—or waiting for something—I don't know."

Gimlet shook his head. "Take it from me, that animal knew, just as well as we know, that this bunch of crooks was in some way responsible for its

master's disappearance. Otherwise it wouldn't have behaved as it did."

"Toni hit it with a stone," reminded Cub.

"Yet there's folks who say that animals ain't got no sense," observed Copper heavily.

"There are also folks who say there's no such thing as justice," murmured Gimlet. He looked at Cub, half smiling. "Have you still got an appetite?"

"I could eat something."

"So could I."

"Okay," put in Copper. "Here's the grub and plenty of it. Now I've sweated to fetch it, we might as well wrap ourselves round some of it."

Gimlet agreed.

CHAPTER XII

COPPER COMES BACK

THE party retired to a comfortable spot not far away, out of sight of the ridge, and ate for a time in silence. After a while Gimlet gave a line to the way his thoughts were running.

“I’m wondering what effect the disappearance of Toni will have on the rest of them,” he remarked pensively. “I imagine they’ll wait for him to come back. When he doesn’t show up, they’re bound to wonder what has happened, and at the finish they’ll come to look for him.”

“Suits me,” said Copper belligerently. “Let ’em all come. Push me over the cliff, would they? Let ’em try that agin, and they’ll find me ready, my oath they will.”

“I’d rather not get involved with them,” resumed Gimlet. “That could only end in a shooting match in which some of us might get hurt. It would be a pity, after what we’ve been through to get in the way of a piece of lead fired by a Yankee crook. To tell the truth I’m rather worried about the whole position. I feel the time has come to put the matter before the Governor and leave him to deal with it. The snag about that is, we can’t say for certain just what it is these people are doing. I don’t like the idea of going to headquarters, so to speak, with half a tale. The Governor would want to know what these fellows are doing and what is in the cave. I should have to admit that I don’t know, which would make the whole thing sound silly.”

“They’ve got a body in that building of theirs,” declared Cub. “The body of a woman. There’s no argument about that. I know it’s there, because I saw it. Not all of it, I’ll admit. I only saw the face. The rest was covered up. Surely the finding of a body on their premises would be enough to queer their pitch.”

Gimlet shook his head. “We’ve no proof that the body is still there, even if, in fact, there ever was one.”

Cub stopped chewing. He frowned. “Do you still not believe what I saw with my own eyes?”

Gimlet half smiled, apologetically. “I’m sorry, Cub, but I find it hard to believe that these ruffians came all this way, and went to all the expense, and labour, for the sake of the dead body of a woman, however beautiful it might be. No, we’re off our course somewhere.”

“All right, I’ll give up,” returned Cub in a voice of resignation.

“Tell the Governor,” suggested Copper hopefully. “He’ll soon find out if these toughs ’ave really got a corpse in their back yard. All he’s got to do is tell ’em to open the door. If they won’t, I’ll soon ’ave it off its hinges.”

“The Governor may jib at taking such direct measures,” argued Gimlet. “Remember, these men are American citizens, and just now Americans are very touchy where their rights are concerned. The Governor may hesitate to issue a search-warrant, which would be needed, for fear of starting a row with the States, particularly at a time like this, when the international situation is all on the jump. Questions would be asked in Parliament, and if our guess turned out to be wrong, the Governor might well lose his job. That’s why I say I don’t think he would thank me for putting the onus on him.”

“But these coves are just a bunch of snakes,” cried Copper indignantly.

Gimlet smiled wanly. “They’re still American citizens. They may be gunmen and killers, gallows-fodder in their own country; but if anyone else lays a hand on them it might be a very different story. People are like that.”

“Major Charles said we needn’t worry if we had to have a crack at them,” Cub pointed out.

“In self-defence. He didn’t give us authority to shoot them out-of-hand. They haven’t actually attacked us yet.”

“What about Toni?”

“He didn’t shoot at Copper.”

“He was going to.”

“We know that, but a court would call it surmise. They might admit that it was a threat. But he didn’t actually shoot.”

“What about old Paprapoulos and his son? We know where the old man is buried.”

“We couldn’t prove that Knifey did the shooting. He might swear that we did it. After all, we do carry guns, and we should have to admit that.”

“Strike old Riley,” snorted Copper. “Do we ’ave to wait to be shot before we do anything? This is a new sort of a war to me.”

“I’m trying to think of a way of solving our problem without embarrassing the Governor or the Government,” said Gimlet simply.

“Okay, Skipper. You work it out,” said Copper, finishing his meal and brushing the crumbs off his jacket. “It’s all the same to me,” he concluded cheerfully.

“Did you see Trapper down below?”

“Yes. I told him to hang on.”

“Quite right. There’s nothing much he can do up here. In fact, there’s nothing any of us can do except wait for the gang to go back to the Casa Stefanita. When they’ve gone, we’ll have a look at what’s in their cave.”

“They’ll come here first looking for Toni,” said Cub.

“In that case I’ll keep out of the way in the hope of avoiding a clash.”

“What about me slipping along through the cave to see what they’re a-doin’ of?” suggested Copper. “I can do a little job like that on my own.”

“All right,” agreed Gimlet. “Be careful what you get up to. Don’t start anything.”

Copper looked hurt, “Me, Skipper? Start anything? As if I would!”

“I wouldn’t trust you too far.”

Copper looked at Cub. “Did yer ’ear that, chum? I call that a bit ’ard.” Shaking his head sorrowfully, he walked towards the pit.

He was away about half an hour, by which time the shadows were beginning to lengthen as the sun drew near the end of its daily round. “They’re all sitting on the bank waiting for Toni,” he reported. “Calling ’im some pretty names for being so long, and a-wonderin’ what he’s a-doin’ of. Blimey! They little know how long they’ll ’ave to wait.”

“Stick to the point,” requested Gimlet curtly.

“From the way they talk, I reckon they’ve got another body out o’ their rabbit-hole. It’s round the corner, waiting to be lugged down to the ’ouse. I didn’t see it, but I fancy it’s another dame. What they’re a-doin’ of with all these dead women——”

“I said stick to the point.”

Copper winked at Cub. “Some of ’em started talking about comin’ to look for Toni, so I thought I’d better let you know sir.”

“Is that all?”

“That’s all, except one of ’em seems to be worried. Kept on a-sayin’ he wouldn’t ’ave come, if he’d known there was goin’ to be all this bother.” Copper described the man.

“That’s Rocheter,” stated Cub. “He’s not a professional gangster.”

“And he’s a-wishin’ he ’adn’t got mixed up with ’em, if you ask me,” asserted Copper. “He’d wish it a jolly sight more if I ’ad my way. I could ’ave knocked them all off their perch like a lot o’ sparrers.”

“Your not going to have your way,” Gimlet told him shortly. “There is this about it,” he went on. “There isn’t much fear of them giving us the slip

by leaving the island until they know what has happened to Toni. These rogues who live by the gun get so cocksure of themselves that it may be some time before it occurs to them that Toni has at last got what was coming to him; and until they work that out, they won't dare to go, leaving him behind, for fear he gets peeved and squeals to the authorities. But as far as we're concerned it would be folly to try to get into their cave until they've gone. We shan't have long to wait. We should probably run into trouble if we tried to get down the hill, too. I mean we'd be just as likely to bump into them. Not that I want to get down until I've seen inside their cave."

"Which means that we stay where we are," said Cub. "Exactly. And we'd better keep quiet now in case they come along."

Gimlet was correct in his assumption. For some minutes they sat in silence. Copper produced a crumpled packet of cigarettes from his pocket, straightened one of the contents with some care, lit it, and inhaled the smoke in thoughtful contemplation. But he nipped it out quickly when, not far off, a voice was heard calling "Toni!"

"Knifey, looking for his lost lamb," murmured Gimlet.

Cub nodded. "His precious lamb has gone where the black sheep go, and a jolly good job too."

Presently voices, at least two voices, made it evident that Knifey was not alone. The men came nearer. Between frequent hails, there was muttered vituperation against the missing man. Knifey, in particular, seemed very displeased. Soon he appeared. With him was the associate whom Cub had reason to suppose was called Bandy. By this time it was clear from their conversation, every word of which came clearly through the evening silence, that they were getting more and more puzzled. But it was evident that they still did not suppose that anything serious had happened, for they made no attempt to modify their voices. Such, as Gimlet had said, was their supreme confidence in themselves, as if they alone of all men were allowed to use lethal weapons. But Cub noticed that as they drew nearer to the ruins, their movements became more alert. Their heads jerked from side to side in a manner that reminded Cub of a stoat tracking a rabbit. The brim of Knifey's hat was pulled well down over his eyes. Approaching the precipice, they walked on to the edge and looked over.

"He didn't go dat way," stated Knifey, speaking as one who is certain of what he says.

Copper nudged Cub.

"You're dead right boss," drawled Bandy. "He wouldn't go down dere."

“What about duh guy who was comin’ up here?” said Knifey, as if he had only just remembered him.

“Dat dope? What could he do?” Bandy laughed shortly and scornfully. “Toni could take care of him, I guess.”

For the first time doubt crept into Knifey’s tone. “Den where’s Toni? Tell me dat. What’s ’is idea staying away? Why don’t ’e answer?”

“I calculate he must have lost ’imself coming back,” opined Bandy.

“Yeah. I guess so,” replied Knifey, turning towards the ruins and considering the scene as if forced to accept this explanation in the absence of any other. “Still, it’s queer we don’t see nothin’ of ’im,” he went on. “Why don’t he hear us? And dis big guy, where did ’e go?”

Bandy showed his teeth in an unpleasant smile. “Toni knows the answer to that one, I guess.”

“Yeah, I guess so.”

Cub listened to this conversation, with its limited vocabulary, in a sort of mild astonishment. It provided a clue to their mental equipment, he thought. Deprived of the use of the words ‘yeah’ and ‘guess’, they would be almost speechless, although with them they seemed to be able to convey almost anything. Through a crack between two stones, he was able to watch every movement they made, at no risk of being seen. He experienced a moment of anxiety when Knifey began to walk slowly towards the ruins, as if he had resolved to continue his search amongst the fallen masonry; for if he did, he could hardly fail to see them, whether they moved or remained where they were. It so happened, however, that if this was in fact his purpose he did not proceed with it.

He stopped abruptly. His whole body seemed to stiffen, his eyes fixed on the ground just in front of him—or at something on the ground. In a flash an automatic appeared in his hand. His head began to move in little jerks, this way and that. Then, on his toes, knees slightly bent, he began to back away with short, furtive steps.

These actions, and the meaning of them, were not lost on Bandy. He may, or may not, have seen what his companion had seen; but automatically, gun-ready, he adopted a similar pose. For a moment neither spoke.

Again an extraordinary feeling came over Cub that this was not really happening. He had seen this precise behaviour enacted so many times in gangster films that it seemed to him that he was watching a screen play now. He guessed, of course, what Knifey had seen; what had caused his sudden change of manner. It was Toni’s pistol, still lying where Copper had kicked it.

Advancing upon it as if it had been a sleeping viper, Knifey stooped like lightning and snatched it up with his left hand, returning instantly to his alert position, gun half raised ready to shoot. His eyes moved restlessly. Without looking at Bandy, he hissed: “Toni’s gat.”

“Yeah.”

“How come?”

No answer.

Knifey’s roving eyes stopped again, focused. “You see what I see?” he whispered.

“Yeah.”

“Dat’s blood.”

“Yeah.”

This, Cub supposed, resulted from Toni being bitten on the wrist by the dog. He hadn’t noticed the blood.

“Someone’s got it,” declared Knifey.

“Sure. But we didn’t hear no shooting.”

“What youse make of it?”

“Couldn’t say, boss.”

“Toni?”

“Or duh big guy.”

“Then where’s Toni? Why don’t ’e come?”

Bandy offered no explanation.

“C’m on! Let’s get out of here,” said Knifey tersely.

“Yeah.”

Not for an instant did either man relax his vigilance. It was as if some animal instinct in them told them that they were in danger. Watching them move away, silent, their bodies bent like springs ready to snap into action, Cub had an insane desire to shout, to see what they would do. He restrained himself.

Five minutes passed, minutes as tense as any Cub could remember, as very slowly the two men withdrew, walking back to back, without speaking, their guns half raised like the heads of snakes about to strike. Every piece of cover was approached with the utmost caution. That they had been shaken by what they had seen was apparent. Finally they disappeared from sight among the crags. Cub conveyed this information to Gimlet and relaxed.

Gimlet allowed some little time to elapse before he spoke. Then it was in a whisper. “Pity about that,” he said. “It was careless of us to forget that gun

of Toni's. They know for certain now that they're not alone on the mountain."

"Give them something to think about," stated Copper, without emotion.

"The question is, what will they do about it?" murmured Gimlet. "Things can't go on like this much longer. Something's going to crack, and very soon. From now on we shall have to watch every step we take. Knifey and Co., will be on the alert. The finding of Toni's gun, without Toni, has given them a jolt. You saw how they behaved. That wasn't an act put on. They acted as they felt. Their nerves on the twitch. Killers, even the toughest, get that way. As far as the immediate future is concerned, will they give up Toni as a bad job and go home without him, or will they hang about?"

"We should be able to answer that by watching them from the far end of the tunnel," suggested Cub. "Knifey is bound to go back to the others and tell them what's happened. It may take them some time to decide what to do about it. I don't know about anyone else, but I could do with a drink. There's water in the tunnel."

"I think that's a sound proposition," answered Gimlet. "What we do will depend on what they do. The only thing is, I don't like the idea of us all being in the cave together. We've seen what can happen, and I don't want any more of that. I should feel happier if someone outside knew where we were. Copper, you mark time here. I'll go along with Cub. Keep your head down. It's quite on the boards that when Knifey gets over his shock, he'll come back here to have another look round. If he comes, he'll come like a stalking tiger, looking for you. You were seen coming here. That's why Toni was sent along. Unless Knifey is a complete fool it's bound to strike him that you must have been responsible for Toni's disappearance. Come on, Cub!"

The short journey to the top of the pit was made in silence, for, as Cub realised, there was quite a chance that Knifey might still be in the vicinity, watching. He was fully prepared for a gun shot. However, nothing happened, and he followed Gimlet into the depths. Progress was continued as noiselessly as possible in the expectation of the gang being outside their own cave on the opposite side of the ravine. Dusk was closing in. All was quiet, so any sound made could hardly fail to reach their ears.

They both had a drink at the pool, and then went on to find their expectations justified. There, on the track, on the far side of the gorge, was the gang, seated, apparently in earnest conference.

It took them some time to reach a decision; Cub and Gimlet, squatting the while, interested spectators, well within the cave on their own side. As far as the gangsters were concerned, their problem was being aggravated by the fact that the daylight was fast failing. None seemed to be in an amiable mood. That the incident of Toni's disappearance had disturbed their peace of mind was apparent, and the effect was to create an atmosphere of uncertainty and irritability. Knifey was worried, and made no secret of it. Something was going on and he didn't know what it was. Toni ought to have found out. That was the gist of his complaint. Toni was a sap, he asserted spitefully. He always had been a sap. If he hadn't been a sap, he wouldn't have lost his gun. He ought to have bumped somebody off. He did not, Cub noticed, say whom.

Rocheter was more than worried. He was upset. He was getting scared, and owned to it freely. It seemed that he had more respect for the British police than had the others—an admission that did nothing to ease a situation that had clearly become strained. He was all for pulling out and getting home with what they had—whatever that might be. The rest, he said, could be sealed up and left for a future occasion when things had quietened down. This did not suit the others, who, with the exception of Knifey, stated emphatically that as far as they were concerned there could be no future occasion. This one was enough. The job wasn't in their line. There was too much hard work attached to it. They hated ships. They hated climbing hills. They hated Cyprus and everything connected with it. In fact, they hated everything except New York. They had been misguided fools ever to leave. They hadn't realised that Cyprus was so far away. They had never been so far from home before and would take care never to go so far away again. They didn't like the feeling of not knowing their way around. In a word, they were fish out of water. Cub perceived that this, at least, was the truth. So the argument ran on, with mounting ill-feeling. His satisfaction mounted with it, for he recalled the old saying about thieves falling out. Here was a good example of it.

“Okay—okay—okay,” burst out Knifey at last. “Mebbe I ain't wise. Mebbe I ain't smart. Mebbe I don't know nothin'. Mebbe I don't know my way around. Mebbe I never loined good. But let me tell you guys somp'n. Duh boids ain't roostin' in my hair yet.”

“Duh boids are flying out of dat hole,” remarked one of the others, with seeming irrelevance.

“What hole?”

“Dat hole over dere.” To Cub's alarm the man appeared to point directly at him, although he was presumably pointing to the entrance of the cave.

Bats were, in fact, fluttering in and out.

“Dey ain’t boids; dey’s bats,” sneered Bandy, as if appalled by the other man’s ignorance.

“Bats is boids, ain’t dey?” argued the first speaker.

“Boids is boids and bats is bats,” pronounced Bandy, as one who knows.

“Okay—okay,” shouted Knifey, in a voice of exasperation. “Boids is bats—so what?”

“I tought there might be some more boys and girls over dat side, dat’s all, boss,” explained the man who had called attention to the cave.

“Ain’t we got enough over here?” enquired Knifey coldly. “Now listen, you guys. We got to do somp’n. I’m telling you what we do.”

“Go ahead,” requested Rocheter, wearily. He seemed bored with this futile discussion.

“We go back to duh house and get a drink and t’ings sorted out. The odder boys’ll be round with the boat. To-morrow we’ll come back just once more to fetch the angel with the beautiful face Mr. Rocheter wants so bad. He’s only a little guy. Den we block up duh hole like it’s been blocked up for t’ousands of years like Mr. Rocheter says. Mebbe we come back some other day. Dat’s what I say.”

This proposition was not received with enthusiasm, but it was accepted. At all events, only one man raised any opposition to it, and he, it transpired, was a particular friend of Toni’s, having been a member of his gang in the palmy days of prohibition. He wanted to know what was going to be done about Toni. He might be hurt. It wasn’t right to leave him.

Knifey asserted definitely that he wasn’t going to do anything about Toni. Toni was old enough to take care of himself. If he wasn’t then it was just too bad. If anyone wanted to go and look for Toni, it was okay by him. As far as he, Knifey, was concerned, Toni could go to the devil. He had given him a simple little job to do, and he had made a mess of it.

This callous indifference to the fate of a comrade was to Cub a thing to wonder at; and, at the same time, an indication of the brutal character of the men on the opposite bank, now making ready to depart. Presently they filed away, to disappear from sight round a shoulder of the mountain. He watched them go with mixed feelings of relief and disgust.

“Nice lot, aren’t they?” murmured Gimlet, when it was safe to speak.

“Animals,” answered Cub. He corrected himself. “No, they’re lower than that. They’re just reptiles.”

CHAPTER XIII

THE SECRET OF THE CAVE

GIMLET got up from the position in which he had been sitting. "Let's get back to Copper," he said. "Then we'll have a look at this cave of theirs. We'll just be in time to get there before it gets pitch dark. It isn't worth while trying to get across the ravine."

They returned to the ruins, told Copper what they intended to do, and leaving him in reserve, in case anything should go wrong, set off along the top of the ridge on a route which they thought should take them round the point where the mountain face had cracked to form the ravine. In the end they found their way to it, but in the deepening darkness it took some time, and at the finish they had to use Cub's torch to find the entrance to the cave. Actually, of course, night made little difference to their project, as it would in any case be dark inside the cave. The bracken that had been used to conceal the entrance was pulled out, and the objective about which they had talked so much yawned before them.

Gimlet, with a brief: "Well, we shall soon know all about it," went in, and Cub, agog with curiosity, followed.

The cave, clearly a natural formation, ran back for a fair distance without a break. Then several galleries and side turnings appeared. This again was all quite natural, and there were the usual stalactites and stalagmites. The torch explored the various openings.

"We shall have to be careful," observed Gimlet. "The place is a regular rabbit-warren." He went on a few paces, examining several possible routes for signs that would guide them to the right one.

Cub turned his torch into a narrow opening by his left hand. This appeared to have been blocked at one time, for numerous large stones lay on the ground as if they had fallen or had been pulled out. It struck him that some of them looked as if they had been roughly shaped by hand. This induced him to explore farther. Seeing nothing at first, he climbed over the stones and threw a beam of light ahead. For a moment he remained motionless, staring. Then, with a strangled cry, he stumbled backwards.

Gimlet was quickly beside him. "What is it?" he asked sharply.

Cub laughed foolishly. "It's all right. Nothing much. The thing made me jump, that's all."

“What thing?”

“There’s a statue, or something. I’m not quite sure what it is.”

There was a brief pause. “Let’s have a look at it,” said Gimlet, in a curious voice.

They went forward, to find themselves in a rock chamber of some size, one that had clearly been natural in the first place, but had been roughly squared up by hand. And as, in silence, their torches made play round the interior, the secret that had cost the inquisitive charcoal-burner his life was revealed. It was not for this reason alone that there seemed to descend on Cub a sensation as strange as any he had ever known. He would have found it difficult to describe; but mostly it was awe; an awe so moving that he was almost overcome; for he realised that he was in the presence of something that was not of the modern world, but of the Past, a Past so remote that it made the Present seem unreal.

Here was no treasure of gold, or precious stones, such as he had imagined would have been necessary to lure a gang of professional gunmen from their underworld haunts in far-away New York. Here before him was the genius of men who had lived a thousand years, perhaps two or even three thousand, before a Roman general named Julius Caesar had landed his legions on the coast of a barbaric isle that was now called Britain. Here was art, graven in enduring marble, such as the world had not known since that dim period of history when the men who lived in Greece had worshipped at the field of Beauty. Here were some of the things they had made, the craftsmen of ancient Greece. There could be no other explanation. Statues. Men and women. Children, warriors and athletes. Gods and goddesses, perhaps, thought Cub, too amazed to speak.

Some of the figures stood erect, presumably just as the men who had put them there so long ago had placed them. Some were prone, as if there had not been time to arrange them. Some had fallen, presumably having been thrown down by the earthquakes that had rocked the island through the centuries. These had suffered mutilation, for arms and legs and other fragments lay beside them on the dusty floor.

Immediately in front of Cub was the figure that had given him a fright. It was the life-sized statue of a runner, bending forward, poised on the ball of one foot, an olive branch held aloft. Beside it, two wrestlers lay in a furious embrace that promised to be eternal. Another man, a warrior in a plumed helmet, lay dying. Another held a restive horse, the muscles of both strained to the utmost. A small winged figure of a boy appeared to be in flight. Was

this the boy with the angel-face to which Knifey had referred? Cub thought so.

Gimlet broke the spell. "Well, now we know," he said simply.

Cub smiled ruefully in the darkness. "I feel pretty silly, mistaking a statue for a corpse."

"The mistake was understandable, considering the circumstances," asserted Gimlet. "After all, seen from a distance and in a poor light, there isn't much difference between a dead face and a marble copy. We weren't thinking in terms of statues then." After a pause he went on. "I suppose I should have guessed the truth, although it's easy to say that in the light of what we know now."

"Why should you have guessed it?"

"That little white hand we found should have put me on the track. It came from here, of course. It must have been a very small statue. Old Paprapoulos brought it down and somehow the hand got knocked off. Samodes, you remember, told us that the old man had something of the sort. We may suppose that Knifey saw this statuette in the charcoal-burner's cottage. Realising the value of it better than the old man, he took it to America to find out how much it was worth. He may have bought it off the old man, or he may have stolen it. It's unlikely we shall ever know the truth about that. One can guess the rest. Knifey showed the statuette to Rocheter, whom he knew to be a collector.

"Rocheter would naturally ask where it came from. The upshot of the whole thing was, Knifey came back here, got the secret out of the old man, and finding him likely to be a nuisance, put him out of the way. We had already worked out the motive for the murder, but I wouldn't have guessed in a hundred years what was actually at stake. Now we know."

"Incredible!" breathed Cub.

"Incredible is the word," agreed Gimlet. "D'you realise that there's nothing like this in the world? I doubt if all the treasures of all the museums put together could produce such an exhibition as we have here."

"Which means that these things must be pretty valuable."

"The question of monetary value hardly arises," declared Gimlet. "These treasures are beyond price. They represent a brief period of human attainment such as the world is never likely to see again. You can't make things like this by machinery."

"Some of these statues have been taken down to Knifey's house," recalled Cub.

“Of course. Not many. They must be very heavy, even the small ones. People get a shock when they try to lift a lump of marble. That’s why Knifey had to bring his gang over. He couldn’t have handled this stuff alone. No wonder they looked hot and tired when they came down the hill. The statue they carried may have been Aphrodite herself.”

“Who was Aphrodite?”

“Aphrodite was the goddess of love and beauty. Which reminds me, she was supposed to have been born from the foam of a wave at Paphos, which is a little way along the coast from here. There was a temple there dedicated to her. You may have noticed some of the columns still standing, although the building has been shaken down by earthquakes. These statues may have come from there.”

“It’s queer to think that a Greek goddess nearly fell into the hands of an American gangster,” observed Cub. “The idea was to sell these statues in America, I suppose?”

“No doubt that was the intention. That would explain how Knifey obtained his sudden affluence.”

“I imagine this will be a big story when it gets out.”

“It will be the biggest sensation in archaeological discovery since Tutankhamen’s tomb was discovered in Egypt. To some people a treasure of gold may sound more romantic than works of art; but there’s plenty of gold in the world, and plenty still in the ground to be won; but there has never been anything like this. Odd pieces of statuary have been found, mostly damaged, on the various Greek islands, such as the famous Venus of Milo, which is now in Paris. Some of these pieces have been damaged, too, but the broken parts are here and the statues can be restored. What makes this find so important is the fact that some of the figures seem to be as perfect as the day they were carved.”

“Why were they put here, I wonder?” murmured Cub.

“They must have been put here for safety during one of the several wars in which Greece was involved. We can only surmise that when Greece finally fell they were forgotten, or were deliberately left here to prevent them from falling into the hands of the conquerors. The same thing happened in the last war when most of the art treasures were hidden away in all sorts of queer places. The things we see here remained undisturbed, apart from earthquakes, until the old charcoal-burner, hunting for antiques, stumbled on them. He sent for his son to share in the fame that the discovery would bring. It was bad luck for him that he had an unscrupulous rogue for a neighbour. But we’d better not stand here talking. There’s only one thing to

do now. The discovery must be reported to the Governor right away. He'll have to be told the whole story, and at last we're in a position to tell it. Come on! We'll pick up Copper on the way."

Thinking over what he had seen, and feeling slightly dazed by it all, Cub followed Gimlet to the exit.

The first thing he noticed on reaching it was an impending change in the weather. It was comparatively light after the absolute darkness inside, but a film of mist robbed the moon of much of its brightness. There was also a chill in the air that had not previously been perceptible. Gimlet remarked: "If we were at home, I'd say there was rain on the way."

They had spent a few minutes throwing the dead bracken over the mouth of the cave, to leave it as they had found it, and were making their way to the top of the hill in order to reach the ruins, when the silence was shattered by a pistol shot. Before the reverberations had died away, there was another. Gimlet came to a dead stop. And there they stood while the echoes of the report, muffled by mist, rolled round and round the mountains, growing ever fainter until they died away in the distance.

"That's Copper!" exclaimed Gimlet.

"But the shots didn't strike me as coming from that direction," said Cub.

"What direction did they come from?"

"It's hard to say, exactly."

"No matter. Copper must be involved. Let's get back to him. It's going to be a bit tricky in this light. We'd better not use a torch. If Copper didn't actually fire the shots, he must have heard them and will be on his toes. We shall have to be careful we don't shoot each other. Keep close."

The business of getting back to Copper turned out to be even more difficult than they had anticipated. To start with, they were not familiar with the way—not that there was any actual path through the crags and boulders that formed the peak of the mountain. Again, the mist, presumably the result of a change in temperature, grew swiftly more opaque until the moon, after fading to a faintly luminous blur, disappeared entirely. Visibility was reduced to a few yards, and objects that could be seen were vague and distorted. They dare not risk a hail, which would be heard by enemies as well as by Copper. Progress, therefore, was painfully slow, for apart from the hazards of collision with the wrong man, there was a real danger of losing direction and falling over the cliff. To move without making a sound of any sort was impossible, and it was only by taking a step at a time that noise was reduced to a minimum. Stones seemed to clatter of their own accord.

The fog became worse. Indeed, things reached a state where Cub thought it madness to continue. He couldn't see how they were going to make contact with Copper even if they succeeded in locating the ruins. What he mentally called the weather, for letting them down at such a crucial moment, had better remain undescribed.

How long they wandered about on the mountain top, cold and damp, scratched by unsuspected prickles and knocking shins on unseen rocks, Cub did not know. He gave up trying to see where they were going and left everything to Gimlet. The thing became a nightmare, one of those that go on and on from one misery to another. More than once stones rattled. On one occasion, a regular landslide clattered down the hill. Each time Gimlet put a hand on Cub's arm for silence. And there they would stand, ears straining for sounds which might reveal a direction to be avoided. The only certain thing was, they were not alone on the mountain.

At last Cub could contain his disgust no longer. "This is hopeless," he said.

His nerves twitched, as from somewhere in the gloom a voice said: "Say! Is that you, Toni?"

Cub, it need hardly be stated, did not reply. He stood still. Gimlet stood still. Stones rattled. Silence.

Cub would have remained where he was. It seemed futile to go on like this. Actually, he was less afraid of pistol shots than of stepping into one of the several holes that occurred near the ruins. There was the pit itself. They would only know of their proximity to it, he thought grimly, when one of them fell in. But after a time Gimlet moved forward again. Another period of tension followed.

After what seemed an eternity Gimlet stopped, groping at something in front of him. Then he reached out to Cub and drew him close. Into his ear he whispered: "We're at the ruins. This is a wall just in front of us. Copper can't be far away. If he hears us moving, he may shoot. It's safer to risk a hail. He will at least know we're about. Keep low in case we get the wrong sort of answer." Then, into the darkness, he called one word. "Copper!"

The answer came instantly, from a surprisingly short distance away. "Okay, Skipper, I'm here."

Cub fairly gasped relief as his braced muscles relaxed.

Even then it was by no means easy to make contact. It was eventually achieved, at some risk, by a succession of low whistles that brought the parties nearer to each other. Cub expected every instant to hear a pistol

crack. But nothing of the sort happened, and finally Copper's big figure loomed up.

"Thought you was never comin', sir," he said. "Reckon the fog held you up."

"It did," answered Gimlet. "Let's sit down. It's safer than standing. What was that shooting we heard?"

"A cove came along shouting for Toni," explained Copper. "That was early on, before the fog got so thick. Not looking for trouble myself, as you ordered, I lay doggo; but the blighter barged up and down, bleating for Toni, until at the finish he thunderin' near fell on top of me. Seein' as I wasn't Toni, he bolted, which suited me. But at the last minute he whips round sort o' sudden and has a crack at me. I let him 'ave one back to show there was no 'ard feelings. I scored a miss, but I put the breeze up him, I reckon, for I 'eard 'im makin' off, rattling the stones as he went down the hill, and cursing like a pal o' mine, old Harry Tomkins, that day he fell off the roundabouts on Hampstead Heath. Cor! 'Ow I laughed," Copper chuckled at the recollection.

"It must have been very funny," said Gimlet coldly. "But we're not on Hampstead Heath now, and there's nothing funny about this."

"That man didn't go down the hill," said Cub. "He's still up here somewhere."

"But I heard the bricks rolling," declared Copper. "Sounded like a coal-cart being tipped."

"He may have changed his mind and come back," said Cub.

"It might have been the rest of the bunch, come to that," suggested Copper.

"The thing is," put in Gimlet, "it look as if we're stuck here for the night. There's no hope of getting down to the village while this fog lasts. I wanted to get to the car, in order to get to Nicosia and see the Governor."

"Does that mean you found out what was in the cave?"

"Yes."

"What was it, sir, if I may make bold to ask?"

"Statues."

"Statues!" Copper's voice cracked with incredulity. "Well, strike old Riley," he went on, in a voice heavy with disgust. "What a fuss about a few perishing waxworks! If it's waxworks they want, why don't they go to old Madam Toosords——?"

“These aren’t exactly waxworks,” interposed Gimlet. “They’re works of art worth a lot of money.”

“So that’s all they was after, statues, eh? Well! Strike me pink!” Copper was obviously disappointed.

“Never mind about that now,” returned Gimlet. “We’re in for a miserable night, but as there’s nothing we can do about it, we shall have to make the best of it. This place is as good as anywhere.” He turned up the collar of his jacket and found a rock on which to sit. The others did the same.

“Statues, eh!” breathed Copper, as if he couldn’t get over it. “When I tell my old pal Trapper that I’ve been traipsing up and down a mountain looking for works of art, he’ll die o’ laughing.”

“You’re likely to die of something more serious than laughing if you don’t pipe down,” Gimlet told him grimly.

Copper sighed. “Aye, aye, sir.”

CHAPTER XIV

TRAPPER TAKES A TURN

AFTER a miserable night, dawn came slowly, cold, grey and cheerless, for the first time since their arrival on the island. The mist, an intangible veil of humidity that reduced visibility to a few yards, still clung to the mountain. Sometimes it seemed to drift past, leaving semi-clear patches, as if it were trying to tear itself away from the grip of the rocks that held it; but for the most part it persisted, although from his meteorological experience Cub knew that another change of temperature could wipe it from the hills as a damp sponge removes writing from a slate. He had a feeling, promoted perhaps by what had occurred on the previous evening, that the day now dawning was going to be their last on the mountain. He also had a suspicion that it might be a day to remember. He was right, although to what extent the day was to be a memorable one exceeded by far the limits of his expectations.

Gimlet got up, worked his limbs to restore his circulation, brushed his jacket and tried to shake the worst of the creases out of it. "Now look, you fellows," he said. "I'm going to Nicosia to tell the Governor what has happened here. It's such a fantastic story that only a personal visit will meet the case. I shall use the car and get back as quickly as I can. I hope to see Trapper, in which case I'll give him the gen. There's no point in us all going, so you two stay here and keep an eye on things till I get back. When I say stay here, I don't necessarily mean this particular spot. It might be a good idea if you went through the tunnel to the ravine to watch the cave on the other side. Unless Knifey has changed his mind he intends to make a final sortie to get that piece of statuary that Rocheter wants particularly. Be careful. The gang will be watching for you. After yesterday's shooting they may come gunning for you. I don't need to tell you that they're a desperate bunch. I'll give the usual signal when I get back, so that you won't plug me by mistake should the gang start anything. So long!" With that he turned away and disappeared like a wraith into the mist.

"You know why he's left us up here?" said Copper presently.

Cub looked up. "Why?"

"Because he knows thunderin' well that going down that hill will be just about as safe as strolling through a wood full of wild beasts. I'll bet Knifey has a man watching that path, a bloke with his finger on a trigger."

“There’s nothing we can do about that,” replied Cub. “When Gimlet makes up his mind, it’s no good talking.”

“O’ course it ain’t. I’m just tellin’ you why he went on his own. That’s like ’im. When it comes to the rough stuff, he’s out in front.”

“He seems to be making a lot of noise about it,” remarked Cub, frowning, as somewhere below stones clattered down a slope. “I don’t remember the rocks rattling like this when we first came here,” he added.

“That may not’ve been him,” answered Copper, standing up and peering into the murk.

“Instead of sitting here like a couple of wet hens, what about going to have a look at the ravine, as the Skipper suggested?”

“Suits me, chum. Anythin’s better than doin’ nothin’.”

Advancing slowly and with great care they made their way to the pit, went down the steps and along the now well-known tunnel to the ravine exit. They made a rather futile effort to wash when passing the pool, using their handkerchiefs for towels. The cold water refreshed them, nothing more. On reaching their objective they found the ravine filled with vapour that had drifted into it; but they could still see the far side, and as the entrance of the cave opposite had not been cleared, they knew that the gang had not yet arrived.

They sat down to wait. They waited for perhaps an hour before approaching voices told them that their vigil was about to end. Four men emerged from the mist. They were Knifey, Rocheter, Bandy and one other. Cub thought this last man was one of those whom he had heard talking on the yacht. If he was right, he reasoned quickly, then it looked as if the men who had been on the yacht had now come ashore, to reinforce Knifey’s party, or perhaps help to get the statues on board. Originally, there had been seven in the gang, counting Rocheter. Toni had gone. That still left two to be accounted for. Where were they? What were they doing? Cub had an uneasy feeling that they had been left to guard the path, in which case Copper’s prediction about Gimlet walking into trouble was likely to be fulfilled.

From the conversation that presently floated across the ravine, however, it seemed that this was not the case. Rocheter, in a grumbling voice, said something about the job being done faster had they all got down to it. To which Knifey replied that the boys who had gone up to the top were doing a better job where they were. He, for one, didn’t want to be plugged in the back while he was going down the hill: nor did he want strangers poking their noses in, and perhaps calling the cops. Still arguing, the four men passed into the cave.

Cub turned anxious eyes to Copper's face. "I don't like that talk about boys being on top," he whispered. "It can only mean that they're prowling about the ruins, looking for us."

"Couldn't mean nothin' else," agreed Copper. "I wish 'em joy. They won't find nobody there," He sucked a tooth thoughtfully, somewhat noisily.

"There'll be trouble if they're still there when Gimlet comes back," reminded Cub.

Copper continued to suck his tooth.

"I wish you wouldn't do that," said Cub irritably.

"Do what?"

"Suck that tooth."

"Who was sucking a tooth?" demanded Copper indignantly.

"You were."

"Was I?"

"You were, and it's a beastly noise, like a cow pulling its foot out of the mud."

"What's wrong with that? What's a cow goin' to do if it gets its foot stuck in the mud—leave it there?"

"If it had any sense it wouldn't get stuck in the mud. I've told you about it before."

Copper looked surprised. "You 'ave? When?"

"Scores of times. You know it, so don't quibble. One day you'll suck that tooth clean out and bite your tonsils."

"Fair enough. They're me own tonsils, any old how."

"I can't think why you do it."

"It helps me to think," said Copper simply.

"If it'll help you to think of a way out of this jam, go ahead and have another suck," invited Cub grimly. "Only tell me when you're going to start, and I'll plug my ears."

Copper grinned. "That's a good un. I must remember to tell my old ma that one when I get 'ome. I'll bet she'll laugh, fit to bust."

"What with her bursting and you sucking your teeth, you should have a jolly little party," observed Cub moodily. "But let's forget that for the moment. What are we going to do?"

"When yer don't know what to do, don't do nothin'," advised Copper. "That's always bin my motto. Not a bad un, neither. I remember that day when me and Trapper were on the beach at Dieppe——"

“For heaven’s sake don’t let us go over that again.”

“Okay, mate. You asked me.”

“I’m worried about Gimlet.”

“He won’t be back for some time yet.”

“He’ll come eventually,” persisted Cub. “If those gangsters are still there he’ll run into trouble.”

“Let’s stay ’ere for a bit and watch what ’appens,” suggested Copper.

There was another long wait. Cub hoped to see the two gangsters appear, for this would have allayed his anxiety on Gimlet’s account. However, they did not show up, so he could only assume that their orders were to remain on the top all day. He thought it was getting a little lighter, which meant that the mist was beginning to disperse, although it still lay like a grey blanket where it had collected in the bottom of the ravine.

Some scuffling and bad language opposite told him that the men who had gone in were now returning; and presently they came into sight, carrying in slings, two on each side, the marble figure they had come to fetch. It was wrapped in a cloth so it could not be seen. This, Cub supposed, was a precaution on Rocheter’s part to preserve it from damage. Breathing heavily from their exertions, the gang deposited their load at the mouth of the cave and sat down to rest.

It became more and more apparent to Cub why Knifey had had to bring in so many assistants. The statue now being moved was nothing like as large as some of the others, yet it took four men, all well built, to carry it. Never having tried to lift a marble object, he had no idea how much that particular form of stone weighed; but what Gimlet had said on the subject was obviously true.

Another argument started. Cub wondered how these men, with their eternal arguments, ever achieved anything. Again it concerned the “boys on top.” Knifey was for leaving them to make their own way down. Rocheter was for fetching them to help in the laborious task of carrying the statue down the hill. The matter was still being debated when somewhere above a shot rang out. It was followed by two more.

The effect on the men was electrical. They sprang up.

“That’s it,” snapped Knifey. “I told you them guys were still around. Let’s go get ’em.”

Rocheter demurred. He didn’t like shooting, he said. Whereupon Knifey demanded to be told how they were going to get the statue down the hill with people shooting at them. He was going to clean the place up, he

declared, and nothing was going to stop him, or else the next thing would be cops asking questions. The muffled crash of a new shot lent emphasis to his argument.

But still Rocheter protested. Whether his scruples sprang from decency, from fear of the law, or from nervousness about the possibility of being shot, only he knew; but that he lacked the cold-blooded ruthlessness of the others, and possessed some of the intelligence they lacked, was made manifest by his reasons for not indulging in wholesale murder. They were not at home, he declared. They were a long way from home. The British cops were not dumb, and they couldn't be bought. The British also had ships. If these ships started to look for his yacht, they hadn't a hope of getting out of the Mediterranean, much less across the Atlantic. He was all for getting aboard, slipping his cable, and making a get-away while the going was good. But Knifey would not listen. The instinct to kill, that had made him leader of a gang of desperadoes, was roused. Nothing was going to stand in his way. Faced by opposition, his method had always been to clean up. He fairly spat his words. That was what he intended to do. By the time he had finished, there would be no one left to squeal. With that he started off.

Cub could have shot him. Indeed, he and Copper could have shot all of them, exposed as they were on the track at close range, without much risk to themselves. But he could not bring himself to shoot in cold blood. While he hesitated the opportunity was lost.

"We ought to 'ave knocked 'em off," growled Copper. "We must be daft to wait for 'em to give us a rattle first."

Cub had started to walk away. It is not to be supposed that the shooting had left him unperturbed. He was, in fact, in a state of agitation. "It must be Gimlet up there," he said, in a worried voice.

"I don't think he could've got back in the time."

"You think it may be Trapper?"

"I reckon so."

"If he came up here he'd walk straight into trouble."

"He wouldn't come up here unless the Skipper told him to, in which case he'd know what to expect."

"We'd better go and see."

"Fair enough," agreed Copper.

They ran, as far as running was possible, back along the tunnel to the pit. As they approached it more shots came from above. "I'll go first," said Copper, making for the bottom step.

A man standing on the top step must have heard him. Cub, looking up, saw only the silhouette of his head and shoulders against the sky, for he was dazzled by the glare after the darkness inside. But he saw the man turn and shouted: "Look out!"

Copper jumped sideways off the step, at the same time sending out their rallying whistle. It was answered promptly by a pistol shot, the bullet buzzing round the circular shaft like an angry hornet. In the confined space the report was deafening. Copper and Cub both returned the fire, presumably without effect, for the man vaulted over the lip of the pit and disappeared from sight. Another shot cracked somewhere above.

Gun in hand, Copper started up the steps. To Cub this seemed suicidal, and he implored him to come back, pointing out that even if he reached the top, the man whom they had seen there would be waiting. But Copper shouted something about not leaving Trapper up there on his own and carried on up the steps.

Cub, his eyes becoming more accustomed to the light, stood ready, gun raised. The top of a man's head appeared over the coping. He snapped a shot at it. The head disappeared. Then Copper was at the top. He peeped over, and ducked back, as a shot cracked. He bobbed up again, flung an arm over the rim and fired twice. Then he yelled down to Cub: "Come on! If we don't get out o' 'ere before the whole mob rolls up we've 'ad it." Again he whistled their old rallying signal. It was answered from somewhere not far away. By that time, panting with excitement, Cub was half-way up the steps. When he reached Copper's heels he could of course get no farther. "If you try to get out of here they'll shoot you," he said breathlessly.

Copper, keeping his head below the rim, answered: "It's Trapper. He's shooting it out with the two that were sent here by Knifey. When the mob arrives we won't have a hope. We've got to get to 'im now."

"If you show yourself, they'll plug you," declared Cub.

"What's the use of staying here?"

"It's as good a place as any."

"Good for what?" enquired Copper belligerently. "I never was much for skulking in fox-'oles."

"We can give Trapper support from here." Cub still could not see how they were to get out without exposing themselves, perhaps with fatal results, to the enemy's fire.

"We might be 'ere all day," argued Copper. "That ain't no use."

"All right," returned Cub. "What d'you suggest?"

Copper thought for a moment. "I'll tell you what. You take over on the top step here. It ain't a bad pitch as long as yer keep yer 'ead down. I'll double back through the drain pipe, get across the ravine, and tackle 'em from the rear. That ought to get 'em foxed."

Cub received this suggestion without enthusiasm. "I've got an idea that when Knifey finds out that there are several of us here, he'll pack up. What's he got to gain by staying here all day, fighting? There's nothing to stop him going."

"Nothin' to stop 'im!" cried Copper. "Ain't there, though? I'll stop 'im. They ain't gettin' away with nothin', not if I know it. Leave it to me, chum. You stay here and let Trapper know you're still around."

"All right," assented Cub reluctantly. The fact of the matter was, he couldn't think of an alternative plan. What Copper had said made sense. When the rest of the gang arrived on the scene one of two things would happen. Either Knifey would press home the attack, or he would retire. If he persisted in his intention of cleaning up, he had only to send one or two men to the far side of the pit to make his present position untenable. It would be some time yet before they could expect any help from Gimlet.

There was a lull in the shooting, and Cub thought he could guess why. The two men on top would know their shots must have been heard by Knifey, and they were now waiting for him to arrive.

Copper managed to get past Cub on the step. "You stand fast," he said tersely. "You ought to be all right here as long as yer keep yer napper down. I'll go and tackle 'em through the back door. Cheerio! See yer later." He went swiftly down the steps.

The sound of his retreating footsteps left Cub with a feeling of loneliness. Ignoring Copper's advice, he raised his eyes to the level of the rim, took in the scene at a glance and bobbed down again. Not a soul was in sight. The mist had cleared considerably and the sun was trying to break through. A bird twittered. An eagle that may have been disturbed by the shots came gliding back to its eyrie. Where was Trapper? Cub felt that if he could join forces with him the outlook would not appear so grim. He knew the value of the moral support of a comrade in any sort of conflict. The first thing to do was to locate him, he decided, or at least get an idea of his position. Without showing himself, he whistled the usual signal. The answer came at once, and he marked the direction as far as this was possible. Trapper was not far away. He was, in fact, among the ruins a little farther along the escarpment, to the right. Where was the enemy? That was an even more important question. Trapper probably knew where they were. The

problem was to get the information without the question being overheard, for the gangsters would know what it implied and be ready for him to show himself.

Cub hesitated. Every minute was important. At any moment the rest of the gang would arrive on the scene. Once they were there it would be impossible to get to Trapper. It would also be foolish to suppose that he would be allowed to remain in his present position. If only he knew where the two men were. Without that knowledge he might run straight into them. How could he get the information without telling the enemy what he intended to do? At first it seemed impossible. Then, in a flash of inspiration, he saw a way. It seemed improbable that the gangsters, who were men of little or no education, could speak any language but their own. It would be remarkable, therefore, if they could speak French, a tongue with which both he and Trapper were familiar. On the spur of the moment he shouted, in that language: "It's me, Cub. I want to come over to you. Where is the enemy?"

"Behind the wall to the left of the big hole," came the answer.

"Stand by to cover me when I come."

"Okay."

"Are you ready?"

"All set! Come fast."

Cub needed no invitation to travel fast. He knew he was going to take a desperate chance, but the result, if successful, would be worth it. Pistol in hand he crouched, bracing his muscles for the dash across the open. The distance he had to cover was not, he thought, more than forty yards. With a flying start, he should be able to get at least half-way before he was seen. "I'm coming!" he shouted, and springing up ran for his life.

Bang! Bang! Bang! blazed Trapper's gun. A bullet screamed as it ricocheted off the rock.

There was only one answering shot. Cub heard the whistle of the lead just as he flung himself behind the heap of fallen masonry where he reckoned Trapper to be. He sat up, grimacing with pain, for in his dive for cover he had taken the skin off his knuckles and given his knee a nasty crack. He dropped his gun and with teeth set rubbed the place vigorously. As the pain subsided, he looked down to see Trapper, lying flat, grinning at him.

"*Bon ça,*" said Trapper, applying his eye to a crack in the rocks. It was, apparently, his spy-hole.

"I'm here, anyway," announced Cub, still rubbing his knee.

Trapper smiled. "*Zut!* You certainly came fast."

“It was no time to pick flowers!” asserted Cub. “Have you seen Gimlet?”

“Sure I saw him,” answered Trapper. “He sent me up here.”

“Sent you here? Why?”

“To tell you to get off the mountain.”

“Get off the mountain!” Cub stared. “He said we were to stay here.”

“Sure he did. But he didn’t know about it, then.”

“Know about what?”

“The earthquake.”

“Earthquake?” echoed Cub, in an incredulous voice.

“Sure,” said Trapper calmly. “Everyone down below is waiting for it to split the island wide open.”

Cub continued to stare.

“The Skipper didn’t know about it when he saw me,” explained Trapper. “But he heard all about it in Limassol, and sent a boy out with a message that I was to tell you and Copper to leave everything and come down the hill.”

“But wait a minute,” requested Cub. “Who says there’s going to be an earthquake?”

“Haven’t you felt the ground shaking? All day yesterday there were tremors. The instruments at Nicosia have rocked themselves to bits. People say a big shock is coming. Everywhere there is panic. People have run out into the fields. Haven’t you heard the stones rolling down the hill? Already there’ve been bad landslides along the north side of the island.”

Cub continued to stare at Trapper in a sort of stunned silence as enlightenment dawned upon him. The constant clatter of stones rolling down the mountain side. The fall of rock that had trapped Gimlet in the cave. The mysterious ruffling of the water in the underground pool. So this was the explanation.

“An earthquake,” he breathed. “We only needed that,” he added bitterly.

CHAPTER XV

NATURE INTERVENES

“GIMLET said I was to come up and tell you,” resumed Trapper. “So up I came. Just as I was getting over the top here, shouting for you, a dirty dog takes a shot at me. We had a little affair and I dodged in here.”

“I was with Copper and we heard the shooting,” returned Cub. “We thought it must be you. But about this earthquake. Are people sure there’s going to be one?”

“Certain. They know the signs. I don’t know anything about earthquakes, but we’d better see about getting down the hill before this one starts. Where’s my old pal Copper?”

Cub started. Alarm saucered his eyes. “He’s in the cave. He may stay there. We shall have to get him out.” The idea of being trapped in the cave by an earthquake was too horrible.

“Sure,” agreed Trapper.

Speaking quickly, Cub told him what Copper had planned to do. “I’m going to tell him to get out,” he concluded.

“If you stick your head out of here you’re liable to get something through it.”

“I can’t help that.”

“Isn’t there some other way of getting to this ravine without going through the cave?”

“Yes. But it means going along the ridge. If we do that we’re liable to run into the rest of the gang.”

Trapper shrugged. “That’s too bad. You work it out.”

Cub got on his hands and knees to survey through a crack the ground in front of them. And as he paused in that position he felt, or thought he felt, the ground quiver. It was a most unpleasant sensation. “Did you feel that?” he asked Trapper in a curious voice.

“Sure I felt it.”

“We’ve got to get to Copper.”

“You show yourself and you’ll get plugged,” asserted Trapper. “Those guys are watching. And they’ll stay where they are, I reckon, seeing that there’s no need for them to move.”

“They might change their minds about that when we tell them what we know,” declared Cub. “I’m going to tell them.” Without waiting for Trapper to answer, he shouted. “Hi! You! Over there! Lay off shooting and make for the plain. There’s an earthquake warning. We’ve just had the news.”

The answer was a derisive sneer. “Quit squawkin’,” said a voice. “We’ve got plenty of time.”

“Okay, smart guy!” called Cub through his teeth. “Don’t say I didn’t tell you. A bigger bang than you can make is on the way.” He turned to Trapper. “I’m going to find Copper.”

“You’re crazy.”

“But he may still be in the tunnel. Imagine it! If we can get to him, we’ll make a dash for the lower ground. I shall go through the tunnel. That’s the only chance.”

“Fair enough,” assented Trapper, “I’ll come with you. You know the way. Listen! What’s all that talking?”

“Sounds like Knifey and the rest of the gang arriving.”

“What wouldn’t I give for a couple of hand grenades,” sighed Trapper.

“Wishing won’t produce them. Come on! It’s now or never. You saw that big pit? That’s the way we go. You stay here and shoot fast when I start running, to stop them getting a fair chance at me. As soon as I’m under cover I’ll do the same for you. Right?”

“Right!”

Cub sprang to his feet and raced for the pit. When he was half-way there was a shout. Several shots rang out. Something snatched at his sleeve, but he tore on, and arrived at the pit travelling so fast that he nearly went over the top. Skidding to a stop he scrambled over the lip, and, whirling round on the top step, opened rapid fire on the place where he knew the enemy to be.

In the brisk exchange of shots that followed, Trapper ran the gauntlet, without, as far as Cub could see, casualties on either side. This was not really surprising, for each party had only a fleeting or fast-moving target at which to shoot. At the last second, just as he ducked below the coping to make way for Trapper, Cub saw Knifey break cover, and with his men behind him come charging towards the spot. Whatever else the man lacked it was not the courage of his conviction, thought Cub, as he started off down the steps.

“Keep going, or they’ll get us from the top,” he panted. Taking the last three steps at a bound, he spun round, snapped a couple of shots at a face that was looking over, and dived for the tunnel.

“Let’s wait and knock ’em off the steps as they come down,” suggested Trapper, as he joined him.

“No. Let’s find Copper,” retorted Cub, and started off.

He had not taken a dozen steps when the ground seemed to lift gently under his feet, like a gentle swell at sea. It threw him off his balance so that he collided with the wall with some force. For an instant he hesitated. A tremendous crash decided him. Realising that they could not in any case go back, with Knifey in control of the pit, he stumbled on.

“*Mon Dieu!* Here she comes,” gasped Trapper.

“Keep going. It isn’t far,” cried Cub in a strangled sort of voice.

They ran along the passage. Or at least Cub tried to run. It was not easy. The tunnel seemed to swing. It was only a slight movement, but the effect was to make him feel sick as he collided first with one wall and then with the other. He did not speak. Such terror as he had never known tied his tongue. To make progress more difficult the battery of his torch was nearly finished and gave only a small light. But it was better than nothing, and stark panic urged him on at a speed which in normal circumstances he would have thought impossible. He could hear Trapper blundering along behind him.

Then came a crack, followed by a rumble, which in a vague sort of way he took to be the walls or the roof caving in, although whether in front or behind he did not know. He prayed fervently that it might be behind. He did not stop. The air was full of dust. He thought it was dust. Then he caught the reek of sulphur and thought it was smoke. It didn’t matter. The only thing that mattered was to get in sight of the sky.

He cried out as a wave of water poured round his legs, causing him to stumble and fall; but he was up again in a moment, plunging on. It occurred to him that this must be the water from the pool. It had been tipped out of its bed by the upheaval. A crack opened at his feet. The water poured into it with a tremendous hiss. Steam swirled. He jumped the crack and ran on. Two or three times he fell heavily, but he felt no pain. He was conscious only of a frenzy to get out of the cave and die in the open. Gasping he staggered on, clawing his way through clouds of choking dust. Everywhere there was noise. A patch of grey light appeared ahead. Like a blind man he groped for it, and then sank down on the edge of the ravine, fighting for breath, his brain in a whirl.

“Trapper!” he croaked. “Trapper! Where are you?”

Trapper, wild-eyed and dishevelled, bleeding from a cut on the cheek, fell out of the cave.

“Oh, here you are,” said Cub, in a voice that he did not recognise as his own. “This is frightful.”

“Are you telling me?”

Cub’s eyes went to the opposite wall. To his amazement he saw Rocheter on his hands and knees on the narrow track, clinging to a bush. The man looked dazed. Anyway, he seemed not to have noticed him. Or if he had, he ignored him. This was understandable, for it was no time or place for hostilities. The noises were terrifying. Everywhere rocks were slipping, sliding and falling. A boulder that must have weighed nearly a ton came crashing down from above, and, missing Cub’s head by inches, went thundering down the ravine.

Cub looked about wildly. To go on was to invite being smashed to pulp by the crumbling rock. To remain was to risk being buried alive. Anything was better than that, he decided. Open ground was what he sought. A hollow rumbling in the cave behind him acted as a spur. “Let’s keep going!” he shouted, and with that started down the steep slope of the ravine, clutching at anything that offered a handhold. Bushes came away in his hands. Rocks accompanied him in his wild descent. Dust and dirt filled his eyes and his nostrils. Sliding the last few yards, he landed at the bottom in a heap. He was up in a moment, hands on his head to protect it from the stones that were still bouncing down, and started fighting his way out of the place through the jungle of leaves and ferns that filled it.

With a mighty crash something landed beside him. He thought it was Trapper. It was not. It was the winged statue that had been brought out of the cave ready for transportation down the hill. The wrapping had been ripped off in the fall; the head was broken off at the neck, yet, curiously enough, an arm remained intact to point stiffly at the sky. To Cub it was no longer of interest. He went on, vaguely aware that Trapper was close behind him.

Reaching a spot where it was possible to climb the opposite bank, he pulled himself up, hand over hand. At the top he met Rocheter. The American looked completely distraught, which gave Cub an idea of what he himself must look like. Rocheter opened his mouth as if to speak, but before he could get the words out the ground seemed to slide sideways like the platform of a vehicle in motion. To Cub it felt as if a carpet on which he had been standing had been snatched away. He and Rocheter, clutching at each other, fell together. Cub, coughing in a wave of nausea, remained on his hands and knees. This, he thought wildly, is the end. This is the end of the world. Nothing mattered any more.

He winced as a mighty hammer began thumping in the earth below him, the blows coming at intervals of a few seconds. At each blow he was thrown bodily an inch into the air, while the ground shook like a jelly. With a roar like thunder a hundred tons of rock poured into the ravine from above. The noise was beyond description. He felt an urge to get farther away from the place. He did not actually think that, for he was no longer capable of thought. Any movements that he made were dictated by the instinct of self-preservation, the only faculty that remained to him. A little way in front of him was an area of rock more or less flat. He made a run for it, swaying like a man the worse for drink. Reaching it he lay flat, arms outspread, fingers groping for something to hang on to in a world that seemed to be falling to pieces.

After a little while the hammering ceased and he dared to raise his eyes to the panorama below. He saw at once that something had happened to it. At first he could not make out what it was. Then it hit him. The sea was not where it had been. There was now a broad beach of sand and rock nearly half a mile wide. Even while he blinked at this phenomenon, realising dimly what had happened, he saw the water coming back in an immense wave that stretched across the horizon. On its crest it carried several small craft. One of them was the yacht. The wave carried it far inland, rolling it over and over like a toy ship. When the water receded the yacht was no longer with it. All that was left of it was a litter of wreckage in what had been a field of rice.

The plain lay under a pall of haze, slowly rising. Clouds of dust showed where houses had collapsed. There was smoke, too, from fires. Now that the awful hammering had stopped, and the earth felt solid again, he was able to think more coherently and understood more clearly what had happened. As far as the island was concerned, such a calamity was, he knew, no new experience. These dreadful visitations had been going on periodically ever since history had been written.

For some time rocks and stones continued to clatter down the slopes, no longer sun-drenched, but half-hidden in a brownish haze, through which the sun itself showed as a monstrous reddish balloon. Slowly all noise subsided, and a silence, nearly as terrifying as the din, took possession.

Cub drew a deep breath, raised his head and looked about him. A few yards away lay Rocheter, his face ashen, his expression blank. Just beyond him Trapper was lying on his stomach, chin cupped in his hands, his face set in a stare of incredulity as he surveyed the scene. He must have seen Cub move, for he looked across at him, and with a queer sort of smile remarked: "I reckon that's about the lot."

Rocheter, in an awe-stricken voice, muttered: “Do you really think it’s all over?”

“I wouldn’t know,” Cub told him.

Then the hammering began again. But this time it was comparatively slight and did not last very long. Silence returned. In a detached sort of way Cub saw two eagles soaring in the murk. Seaward, great waves were hurling themselves on the stricken land.

“Reckon it’s time we moved,” said Trapper, getting up and testing his limbs.

The overwhelming danger past, or at any rate suspended, normal thought returned and Cub remembered Copper. It shocked him to realise that since the terror-stricken rush through the caves he had thought no more about him. Not that he had thought of anything else. He looked at Trapper. “What about Copper?”

“Sure,” answered Trapper. “We’d better start looking for him.”

“Where in all this mess are we going to start looking?”

Trapper clicked his tongue. “*Tiens!* You’ve said it!”

It occurred to Cub that as Rocheter showed no signs of animosity he might be willing to help, if in fact he knew anything. It seemed unlikely that he would know any more than they did about the position of his companions—probably less; but he might have seen Copper. He put the question to him.

Rocheter appeared to see nothing odd in this change of face. Indeed, he seemed to be relieved by Cub’s not unfriendly overture. He answered that he had seen no one. When his own party had set off for the ruins he had gone a little way with them; but, disagreeing with what they intended to do, he had turned back. He did not hold with all this shooting, he stated. There had never been any suggestion of it at first. This Cub found easy to believe from the conversations he had overheard. Rocheter was quite frank. All he knew about his companions was that they had gone to the ruins to join two men already there. He, as he had said, had come back. Looking at Cub curiously he asked who he was, and what he was doing on the mountain.

Cub told him that they were British Government agents sent out to see what Kniftos was doing.

Rocheter nodded. “That’s how I figured it. D’you know what we were after?”

“Yes, we know,” replied Cub.

Rocheter shook his head sadly. “Pity. What a find! What wonderful stuff. Now——” He shrugged his shoulders helplessly. “All gone. My yacht

smashed up too.”

“I saw it go,” murmured Cub.

“Well, I guess I’ll have to put myself at your disposal, gentlemen,” went on Rocheter. “I’m no gunman. Never was. I was only interested in those statues. What Kniftos told me in New York sounded like a fairy tale. I came to see. I own to trying to get the stuff for my collection. Collectors are like that—no scruples at all. It wasn’t a matter of money. I’ve got all I want. But these marbles were *something*, and I was going to get them if I could.”

Cub rose, rather shakily, as if he no longer trusted the ground to remain steady. His interest in statuary, at that moment, was not of a very high order. “We’ll talk more about that later,” he said. “There’ll be plenty of time, if I know anything. The island must be in such a state after what has happened that nobody is likely to bother with anything except relief work for a long time. I’m more worried about my colleague. I’m going to try to find him.”

“I’ll come with you,” said Trapper.

Cub looked at Rocheter. “What are you going to do?”

“I don’t know,” was the disconsolate answer. “I’d like to see if there’s anything left of the statues, but I don’t fancy going underground in case the island starts to boil up again.”

“That work of art you put outside the cave crashed down into the ravine and was broken,” said Cub.

“I know. I saw it go. I nearly went with it, trying to save it. I’m afraid those inside must have got smashed, or buried. But there is this about it. I’ve got a complete photographic record of the whole collection, just as it stood. I made it both as a matter of archaeological interest, and in case of accidents, before I would allow anything to be touched. It was through that I fell out with Kniftos. He thought it was a waste of time.”

“With those photographs, experts should be able to put the pieces together again, even if they’re smashed,” opined Cub. “They may be all right. After all, they must have survived a good many earthquakes.”

“I doubt if any previous earthquake could have struck the mountain as hard as this one or all the figures would have been thrown down. Have you seen them?” enquired Rocheter.

“Yes, I went into the cave with my chief.”

“Where is he now?”

“Gone to Nicosia to report direct to the Governor.”

“Oh!” said Rocheter, in a woebegone voice. “I guess that will mean the police.”

“I’d say you’d guessed right,” answered Cub bluntly. “But if you’d take my advice, you’ll tell the truth about the whole business, in which case you may come off better than the others. If we bump into your party, you’d better tell them to cut out the rough stuff. That won’t help them now. With the yacht gone they can’t get off the island.”

While this conversation was taking place, they were picking their way cautiously towards the ruins. Caution was necessary, for the ground was cracked in many places, and there were rocks so precariously poised that it would obviously need only a touch to bring them down. In one place the rocks were hot. A spring was steaming. Yet, on the whole, things were not so bad as from the noise Cub expected them to be. He would not have been surprised to see the mountain torn apart.

Trapper wanted to whistle the rallying signal, but Cub was opposed to this for fear it brought Kniftos and his men along. Rocheter said it didn’t matter; he would put things right. But Cub was taking no chances. And so they wandered about for some time, still making their way slowly towards the ruins.

As they drew near, suddenly they saw one of Knifey’s men coming towards them, holding his hands away from his sides in a manner that was not natural. For this, it was soon revealed, Copper was responsible. He appeared behind the man, a gun in his hand. He grinned his relief when he saw the others and let out a hail of greeting. “Strike old Riley! What a beano!” he exclaimed, as the two parties met.

Cub looked at the prisoner dubiously, and then back at Copper.

“He’s all right. He can’t bite. I’ve drawn his teeth,” said Copper. “I don’t mind tellin’ you I thought you’d had it,” he added seriously. “This chap told me you went down the drainpipe.”

“We did, looking for you,” confirmed Cub. “We got out at the other end.”

“I reckon the others weren’t so lucky.”

“D’you mean they followed us into the tunnel?”

“Accordin’ to this bloke, that’s what they did. They saw you go down, and Knifey went after you.”

The prisoner spoke. “Dat’s der troot,” he said wearily.

Cub was aghast. “If they went down there, I wouldn’t give much for their chance. We only just managed to scramble through.”

“I shan’t cry me eyes out over that,” averred Copper. “ ’Ave you seen the pit?”

“No.”

“There ain’t much left of it. Come and ’ave a dekko. Were you lucky? I’d say you were, and not ’alf.”

They walked on and looked at the pit. It presented a spectacle that made Cub go cold when he realised how narrow had been their escape. One side had fallen in, half-filling the hole with rubble. Through the stones and boulders a wisp of smoke coiled into the air.

“If Knifey’s under that little lot, it ain’t much good a-diggin’, I reckon,” was Copper’s view.

“You’re right,” said Cub slowly. He looked around. “We might as well start down the hill. There’s nothing we can do up here.”

“Suits me,” agreed Copper. “If there’s anyone left alive up ’ere, he’ll come down, too, if he’s got any sense. This ain’t no place for a picnic any longer. What say you, Trapper, old pal? Am I right?”

Trapper clicked his tongue. “Every time.”

Cub put himself at the head of a silent, shaken procession. He chose a route that took them past the head of the ravine. The place was unrecognisable. The sides had come together. Great masses of rock had fallen, so that the ravine, as such, no longer existed. Water gushed between the rocks.

Cub looked at Rocheter. “Good thing you took the photos—for people who are interested in that sort of thing. It’ll be a long time before anyone sees the originals. It would cost a mint of money to shift all that rock.”

“I’d help to pay for the work,” said Rocheter, surprisingly, Cub thought.

“Struth! You must love statues,” said Copper.

“I do,” answered the American simply.

The prisoner appeared to have lost all interest. He took a cigarette carton from his pocket, lit a cigarette and flicked the dead match away.

“Got a fag to spare, mate?” asked Copper. “I’m out.”

“Sure.”

They went on down the hill. Everywhere fresh scars showed where there had been landslides. Lower, these had cut great swathes through the trees, piling them in fantastic tangles.

“Earthquakes, eh?” soliloquised Copper. “You can have all your perishin’ islands. Give me the Old Kent Road, every time.”

Rather more than half-way down the mountain side, they met Gimlet coming up. He was alone, the reason, as he presently explained, being that every available man was required for relief work. There was a rough

bandage round his forehead and another on his left hand, the result of his being thrown out of his car by the first shock of the earthquake. He had been to Nicosia and told his story to the Governor, who was interested, of course, but not to the extent that he would have been had things been normal. As things were, he was more concerned with making plans to meet the impending disaster, of which there had been ample warning. Earth tremors, more severe on the plain than on the mountain, had set pictures swinging on walls and thrown down articles that were not secure.

Racing back, Gimlet said he had just passed through Limassol when the first real shock had sent him swerving off the road. He had covered the rest of the journey on foot. He was, he said, not a little relieved to see them. From the lower ground he had seen landslides tumbling down the mountain. Looking at Rocheter and the gangster, he asked Cub how things stood with them.

As briefly as possible Cub told him what had happened, as far as he knew.

Gimlet considered the matter for a minute or two. "I don't think there's anything we can do if we go back up there," he decided. "If Kniftos or any of his party are still alive they'll come down. If they were caught in the pit, or in the caves, they must have been killed. It would be a waste of time trying to reach them. Let's go down to the village. We shan't get farther than that. There's no transport. The roads are cracked and most of the bridges are down. Things were not too bad in the village when I came through."

"What about the prisoners?" asked Copper.

"I don't want them," answered Gimlet. "Neither, I imagine, does the Governor. He's got plenty on his plate without bothering about us."

"What about the Casa Stefanita?" asked Rocheter. "Is it still standing?"

"It was when I came past, although the walls are cracked. The building outside seemed to be all right," he added meaningly.

"That's good news," said Rocheter. "We've some antiques there, you know." The statues, it seemed, were still his first consideration.

"You can stay at the house and take care of them if you like," said Gimlet. "There's not much chance of you leaving the island for a little while."

"I reckon we'd better go down to the village, with you, first, to see if we can help any," answered Rocheter.

They went on down the hill into the gathering shades of twilight.

They found the village in a fever of excitement, the old inhabitants comparing the earthquake with others they had known; but there was less damage to property than Cub expected, due probably to the fact that most of the houses were small and compact and the earthquake was local in its effect. Samodes, the policeman, was not there. Not that Gimlet particularly wanted to see him. Naturally, nobody was interested in anything but the earthquake. By comparison everything else seemed trivial. Gimlet found temporary accommodation for them in the local tavern.

The gangster disappeared in the night and was never seen again. Nobody bothered much about him. With things as they were it seemed unlikely that he could get into mischief, observed Gimlet, who, Cub suspected, was really glad to be rid of him.

Rocheter stayed, and behaved very well, giving a willing hand with the others in general relief work. When there was nothing more to do, on Gimlet's suggestion he submitted himself to the Governor, who, being a busy man and worried by more urgent problems, accepted his apologies and allowed him to leave on the understanding that he never returned to the island. Rocheter promised to return the statuette he had bought from Kniftos. The photographs he had taken—the film was found undamaged in the Casa Stefanita—he was allowed to keep, provided copies were sent to the Cyprus museum.

It was, Cub thought, a curious ending to a curious adventure.

Gimlet's party stayed for a week in the village, for transport was practically at a standstill, and there was no guarantee of their finding accommodation elsewhere. All available buildings had been requisitioned for the homeless. One day they took a walk up the hill; but they did not reach the top; Gimlet decided that it was too dangerous. Rocks, loosened by the shaking they had received, were still breaking away and crashing down the slopes. From time to time the rumble of landslides could be heard.

The fate of Kniftos and his associates was never ascertained. Watch was kept for them for some time, Gimlet taking the view that if Kniftos had survived, he would sooner or later return to his property to see what had happened there. But he never appeared, so he was presumed killed. Whether he had been crushed to death by falling rocks, or entombed in the cave, became a matter for conjecture. Either way, it was a miserable end to an ill-fated expedition, for the yacht was a complete wreck and the crew had perished with it. Strangely enough, the dog that had played such a vital part in the affair, survived. Cub saw it one day in the village, but it was wild and he could not get near it.

As far as the works of ancient art, that had been the cause of all the trouble, were concerned, nothing had been done when Gimlet and his friends finally left the island on one of the relief planes that came pouring into Nicosia with medical supplies and food.

Sometime later, the statues that had been hidden at the Casa Stefanita were removed to the Cyprus museum. The little white hand is now back on the wrist from which it was broken. The others remain deep in the heart of the mountain in which they were secreted in another age. A photographic record of them exists, for Rocheter, true to his word, handed over the pictures that he had made. Reproductions have often been published in magazines. But there is one upon which Cub can never look without a qualm, remembering where he first saw the face—the face of the beautiful woman now known as Aphrodite of Myania.

The last news he heard of Rocheter was, the collector was trying to get permission to organise an official expedition for the recovery of the treasures still in the caves, an enterprise to which he was prepared to devote his entire fortune. As Gimlet remarked, when he was told of this, there was at least one man in Knifey's party who was actuated by motives higher than personal gain. That the treasures will one day be disinterred is almost certain, but it would be a tremendous undertaking so it may be some time yet before the world sees what only four living men have seen.

As Major Charles had said at the beginning, it was a strange business. Not the least strange part of it was its dramatic conclusion. When the story leaked out there was, of course, a sensation in archaeological circles. As for the Cypriots of the poorer class, descendants perhaps of those who had helped to carry the marbles from their temple to the cave, nothing will unconvince them that the earthquake was anything but the wrath of their ancient gods at having their peace disturbed by vandals from another world.

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 Gets the Answer* by Capt. W. E. (William Earl) Johns]