

DOWN RIVER

UNIVERSITY OF ST. MICHAEL'S COLLEGE



3 1761 01905967 4



Handwritten text at the top of the page, possibly a title or header, which is mostly illegible due to blurring and fading.

12



Rhoda Fallock

1941

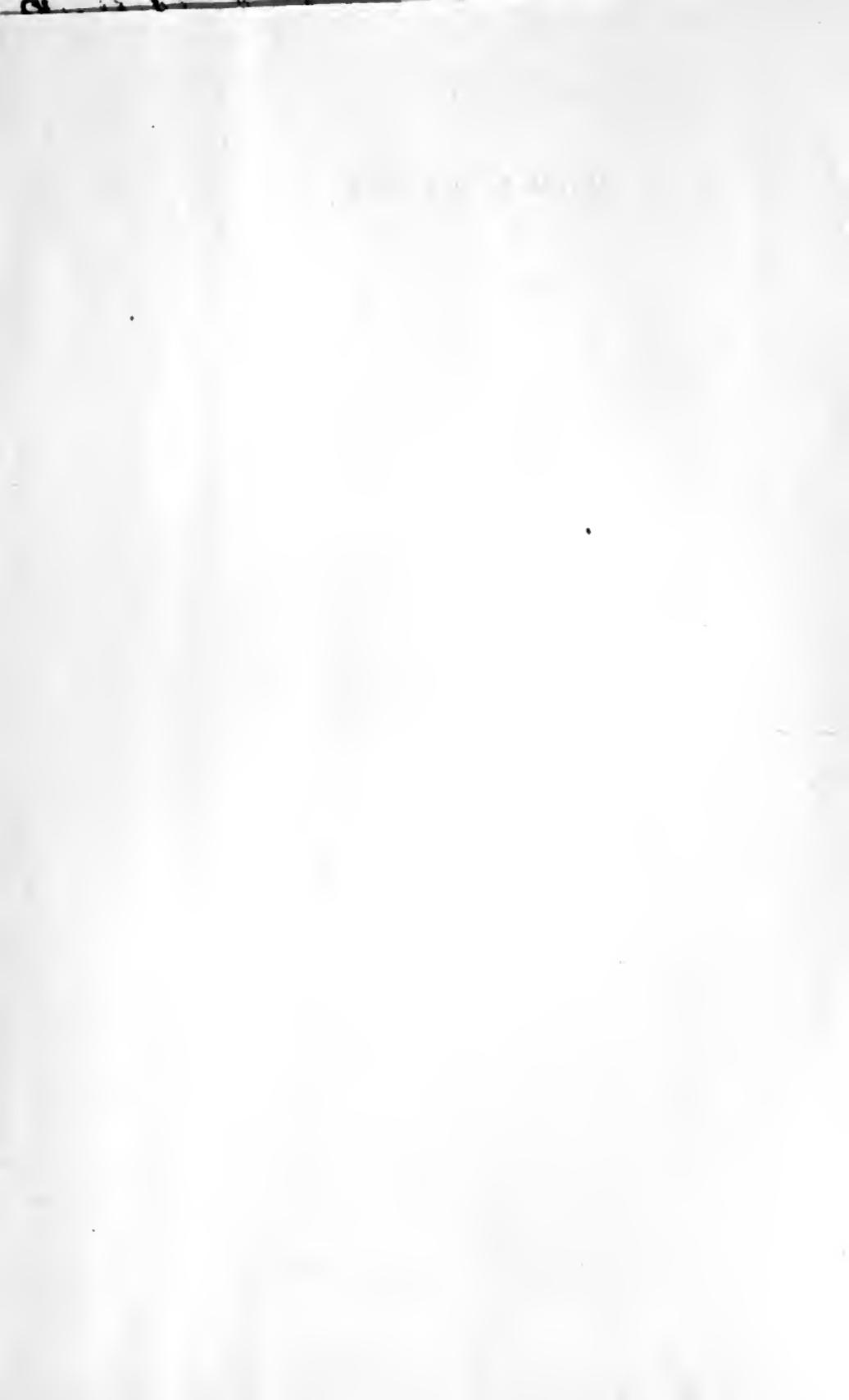
August 1 - 21190

12

200 72 105

Sept 20 - A





DOWN RIVER

NOVELS BY
SEAMARK

Down River
The Mystery Maker
The Master Mystery
The Web of Destiny
The Man They Couldn't Arrest
Peggy: A Love Romance
The Silent Six
Love's Enemy
Master Vorst



HODDER AND
STOUGHTON
LTD., LONDON

DOWN RIVER

By

SEAMARK



HODDER AND STOUGHTON LTD.

MADE AND PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY
BILLING AND SONS, LTD., GUILDFORD AND ESHER

CHAPTER I

GREY dawn was breaking gently over the long reaches below the Pool of London. Dank river smells, cold and clammy, and as transient as the dawn itself, hung faintly on the air and fused into the sharp tang of the mist wraiths that swirled about like wisps of torn gossamer above the fast-running tide. Ahead of the chugging police motor-boat the Tower Bridge reared up out of the mist; and beyond it, massive in its noble setting on the hill, the mighty bulk of St. Paul's arose in majesty.

All night long that police boat had been panting steadily up and down the tideway, and a discerning eye would have seen that the drag-lines were out. Murky and muddy, but as old as history itself, the water sucked softly by her bows as she headed for a lower reach.

Half a mile below them, heading upstream to her moorings by the Houses of Parliament, the *Spin-drift* came, with her slim nose shearing through the water like a knife.

She was a beauty, that long splinter of a boat, the fastest thing that marine ingenuity had yet devised. Thirty feet of her, thirty feet of aluminium and oak that could snore through the water at a shade over sixty miles an hour when her engines were screaming at their peak—and twenty feet of her lifting sheer out of the water once the fifty-mile mark was quivering on the gauges.

But just then she was throttled down to a bare crawl. Toby Essex, her owner, was one of those unusual characters, a man who had some consideration for the small craft cluttering the banks—the *Spindrift*, travelling at speed, sent up a young hill of water that would have made even a fully laden barge cock up on her heels and sock her old nose down till half her rudder showed clear.

Standing behind Essex at the wheel, clad in a soaking wet beret and glistening black oilskins, was as trim a looking little piece of femininity as the boat herself. Hillary Kittredge had wearied of horses for a season and had fallen under the lure of speed-boat racing. The bewildering rush of it, the exhilarating smash of salt air across her face, the sting of the spume, whizzing at her from the streaming forefoot, the breath-taking, sprawling skids round the cornering buoys, and the general mad excitement of a trophy race vibrated to a similar singing note in her body. For two hours she and Essex had been putting their speed queen through her paces out on the flat level deeps beyond the Nore. Wet, weary, and as hungry as lumber-jacks, they nosed along past Limehouse Pier and the Shadwell Basin and on through Wapping Station into the Pool.

Essex noted the stolid little ten knotter ahead.

“Care for horrors?” he asked, nodding towards the river police. “The drags are out. Suicide, I suppose.”

“I have a firmer leaning towards eggs and bacon,” decided the girl. “If you could find it in your heart to let this decrepit tub of yours spraddle her old legs a little faster we might be able to get in before the

breakfast menus are snatched off the restaurant tables. If you ask me——”

The rest of her sentence was cut off short, for the police sergeant at the tiller had suddenly reversed his engines and the other two officers with him were clambering hurriedly aft.

Essex brought his boat round to a rolling halt less than a hundred yards from them. They saw the drag-lines tauten and watched them hauled in. They saw the officers lean over the stern to get a grip on something that rose with a slow heave to the surface.

At that distance it was an indistinct, an inanimate, waterlogged something breaking the ripples there, and they could only just distinguish the helpless roll of lifeless limbs as four strong arms hauled it aboard.

Essex slid a silent eye round at the girl. She was white faced, and her gaze was fixed rigidly on the scene of tragedy, her mouth half open and her fingers drumming unconsciously on the narrow beading of the gunwale.

“Good heavens—look—Toby—a body!” she gasped.

Essex let the clutch in and the boat moved forward slowly. “Shouldn’t let it upset you,” he said. “Happens quite a lot up and down this old river. They scarcely even report that sort of thing in the papers nowadays.”

The *Spindrift* was crawling along under the counter of a great ugly old hulk of a tramp steamer berthed up by Wapping Old Stairs. Simply to take his eyes off the unpleasant scene ahead, Essex glanced up at her rusted bridge, smoke grimed and salt

crusted from voyages in far seas. And his right foot stole out and pressed the girl's toe.

She looked round hurriedly, caught his eye, and then she, too, followed his gaze up to the loom of the bridge. In that same split second she realised there was more than a mere suicide in the recovery of the last remains of yet another of the tragedies of old London River.

Leaning over the side of the bridge was one of the most evil faces she had ever seen in her life. It was Oriental, in a fat, obese way. There was a thickness and a slant-eyed placidity about it that bespoke its eastern progenitors, but the inhuman malignity that glared from every line of it was positively frightening. It seemed utterly incongruous that such a fat, reposeful-looking face could suddenly distil such a torrent of devilish hatred. The eyes seemed to glitter like white-hot coals, and the features were contorted with a spasm of demoniac rage.

He seemed to be oblivious of the long, shining speed monster right underneath him—his eyes were glued on the police boat, and he was glaring at the officers with all the burning virulence of a stream of boiling acid. If ever murder shone, stark and red, out of human eyes, it was literally blazing out of his. Then, slowly and with terrible deliberation, he raised his fist and shook it at the three men labouring in the boat.

The girl caught her breath and gazed up at him, fascinated. The savagery of it, the malevolence of it, appalled her.

“What—what on earth did he do that for?” she asked at last, with a long exhalation of breath.

Essex made a little gesture of ignorance. "These young bucks of the river police are not what you might call popular—that is, not with gentry of his calibre. All sorts and conditions of humans make their home on this tideway in the course of a year—and some of them are not too savoury. He's probably got a grudge against the police—possibly they scotched him on some lively little game or other and he's sending them a valentine about it."

"But—but, Toby, he's Chinese, surely. I thought his race was notorious for not showing emotion."

"'M—well—might be a half-caste. He certainly knows how to register disapproval, anyway."

Hillary Kittredge stepped across and took the wheel out of his hands. There was a determined look in her eye, not untinged with a dash of defiance and her underlip was thrust up into a red bow of a pout.

"What's wrong?" asked Essex.

"I'm going over to tell those policemen what I saw," she said with the utmost decision. Essex had heard that tone before, and he surrendered the wheel without a murmur. He rather liked it. There was something delightful in being bossed about by a woman with a mouth like that—one, moreover, who could handle the throbbing beauty under him like a goddess.

As they went creaming along to the police boat he turned for a brief moment to get a glance at the tramp steamer's name. It was bold on both her bows, in letters that had been battered out of alignment by swinging seas—YANGTSE.

With a neat turn and a sudden rush of reversing

water she brought the *Spindrift* alongside. The sergeant leaned over and tried to prevent her from seeing the dripping huddle in the well of the boat, but the girl waved an unconcerned hand.

"Please don't worry about us, sergeant," she said; "we saw what was happening down river and are not out hunting for sensations over some unfortunate's death. What I want to ask you is, 'Do you happen to know the man who was on the bridge of that big cargo steamer we just passed?' No, don't look round or he will know we have come over to talk to you about him."

The sergeant stared grimly into the little glass panel of the engine housing and tried to get the man's reflection, but the range was too great.

"The ship is the *Yangtse*," said the girl, "and I'm sure he is Chinese—or a mixture of Chinese."

"You can bet your life he's Chinese, Miss, if he's on the *Yangtse*. They're all Chinks on that hooker. She's a Chinese boat, registered at Hankow, and I never have liked the slab-sided old scow since she first came to the river. Gets in here about twice a year—general cargo out of Hankow, takes back cotton and machinery. That's all I know about her, Miss. Why—is there anything wrong?"

"I'm certain there is. As we were passing under her side just now a man with a fat Chinese face was leaning over the side of the bridge, shaking his fist at you and glaring as though he would have liked to see you as dead as that body there. His face and his gestures were positively awful."

"Fat feller? Rather on the short side? Pasty cheeks, and wears a little black skull cap with a red

button on the top?" The sergeant did not seem to be particularly interested.

"Yes—that's him," said Hillary.

"Grosman. Half Chink—half Dutcher. Hell of a combination. Shouldn't worry about him. He's captain of the ship. And we are—how shall we say—a little strict with him when he comes in to be searched. He's always trying on some little dodge to slip something past the Customs. Get what I mean, Miss? There's an eternal call for opium down past Limehouse way, and prices run high for those who can get it through. None of 'em like us. Call us Water Rats; and they'd do a two-step all over the river if we were to be done away with to-morrow."

The girl drew away from the rail. "Well, you can make light of it if you like," she said flatly. "But if I were you I would keep my eye on that gentleman. He wasn't merely venting a general spleen against the river police—he was doing his best to wish *you* off the earth. Not the river police—but *you*. He has a grudge against you for something you were doing right here and now; not for having given him a stiff time some time last week. He saw you haul that body out of the water. And that was when it happened. You watch him, sergeant. Maybe—Oh, never mind. I know what a man means when he smiles at me from behind his eyes."

The sergeant winked at Essex, who wasn't even smiling from behind his eyes. "Thank you, Miss," he said cheerfully. "My name's Manning, and I'm very much obliged for your warning. But I think we know how to look after ourselves in the water force."

Essex winked back at him as he resumed the wheel, and Manning stood and watched the glistening hull slide away through the seethe of yellow water.

"Nice kid, that," he remarked to his second in command. He was rubbing the tips of his fingers together, an odd trick he had subconsciously acquired in moments of hard concentration. "Grosman," he muttered. "Grosman. H'm. Now what the devil's *his* game?"

"Well—that's your second warning," said a quiet voice at his elbow. Procter, his second, was eyeing him curiously.

"I know it's the second," said Manning viciously. "But I'm not telling everyone who comes up in a swell speedster. We shall have half the toffs of London messing about round here if we once let 'em get their noses in. Head her back for the station. Take the tiller and run her under the *Yangtse*. I'll have a look at the brute myself. There's something on the move again on this darn river—and Grosman isn't far off the centre of it."

The slow-going boat chugged its way back to the river station, Procter bringing her to within a few feet of the gaunt old cargo steamer. Grosman was still up on the bridge, but he scarcely seemed to notice the plugging little boat below him. He was looking out serenely across the smooth water, now lit by the purest vestal light of the morning, and his face was as peaceful as the image of a Buddha cast in bronze.

Something of an almost babylike benignity had masked across it. It was not that it had suddenly

become kindly or even friendly—it was just that a complete absence of expression had set in upon it. It was a vacuum so far as emotion was concerned.

“The old rat!” muttered Manning under his breath. He watched him out of the corner of his eyes and then waved an airy hand in greeting as befits a salute to the captain of a ship.

Grosman waved in return, and Manning watched him draw back from the bridge rail and go down the companion-way to the upper deck. His right foot dragged badly with an obvious limp. On that right foot he wore a thick surgical boot in an effort to correct his natural disability. As he made his way aft to the state-room he passed a huge pile of old junk—rope, cable, cordage, canvas, worn-out scrubbers, tins of old ship’s biscuit battered and water-soaked from the stores, coils of rusted wire, tins of caked paint, and all the general paraphernalia of old lumber that is thrown out from various parts of the ship after a long voyage.

He ordered the bos’n to get the stuff cleared off the deck and sold ashore. And the last Manning saw of him was his limping back view as he went through the bulkhead for his breakfast.

“I’d give a year’s pension to know what graft he’s trying this time,” growled the sergeant as Procter brought the boat in to the landing stage. He climbed out of the boat and indicated the huddled mass under the tarpaulin.

“Get that round to the mortuary,” he said. “And phone the surgeon.”

He went through to his little office. On his desk was a neat pile of the morning’s mail. Over by the

wall another officer was correcting the pointer hand of the high-tide indicator in accordance with the printed tide-table alongside it.

Manning reached out for a portfolio and took a blue document from it. It concerned the case on which he had been engaged that morning. Against the only blank line left he made the simple entry—"Body recovered 7.50 a.m."

The other officer looked at him with a mute inquiry and Manning shrugged. And the tips of his fingers began rubbing softly together again.

For a solid half-hour he sat and stared at the wall, and printed up under his eyelids was the picture of the fat, ponderous face of the captain of the *Yangtse*. He hunted through the files and rang up headquarters, but there was nothing known against him, not a thing that could possibly be construed as an attempt at an evasion of the laws of the country. His record was as clean as any other captain's along the waterway.

He gave it up as a bad job and turned his attention to his morning's mail. The second one made him knit his brows—and it also gave him an uncomfortable sensation of heat under the collar.

It was a note from Headquarters, short, but as pointed as the ends of forked lightning. Cocaine smuggling was again on the increase in London. Increasing quantities were coming into the market and the menace had assumed grave proportions. All the known sources had been investigated, and it was now known that the river was the point of arrival. Headquarters stated very definitely that the menace would be stamped out, and speedily, or there would

be an unpleasant tightening up of things in general down the river stations.

Manning sat back and the finger-tips were jamming so hard against each other that the tips of them were white.

And then Procter came in, Procter with a look on his face that told of yet more trouble. Manning stowed the letter in his pocket.

“Get that?” he said sourly. “Headquarters are raising another howl. And it’s at our end of the river.”

Procter deliberately stuck out his tongue. “What is it this time?” he asked; “slovenly bearing in the boats?”

Manning shook his head. “Dope,” he growled.

“Opium?”

“No. Snow. The real and only genuine cocaine. They’ve got it hot up topsides that we’re letting it through.”

“Well—you can’t patrol seventy odd miles of river banks and wharves with a force of two hundred—including reliefs,” snapped Procter.

“Headquarters says we can,” said Manning bluntly. “And if Headquarters says we can—then we can, and to spare.”

“But we couldn’t search all the barges, let alone all the big ’uns.” Procter raised his voice to impolite heights.

“Nevertheless and notwithstanding. The blokes sitting at mahogany desks say ‘Yes.’ They say the dealers are flooded with stuff and that it’s coming in in barrels, hogsheads, and tuns. And, what’s more, it’s coming in along our section. The Man Up Top

informs us that we shall forthwith eradicate every tabloid from the metropolis. Failing which—and the rest is the mixture as before.”

“Pity the Man Up Top can’t have a night out in the boats with us now and then. Last night for preference.”

“Why last night? It was warm, wasn’t it? And calm?” Manning’s voice was withering.

“Yes. But he might be able to get his teeth into something else. I’ve just got back from the mortuary.”

“Well—is that a thrill to me?”

“Where did we get the first intimation of that suicide last night?”

“Deck hand on one of the boats bawled across to the station that he had seen a big splash from over on the other side.”

“Where did the splash come from?”

“Dunno. He couldn’t see. It was getting dark and he had only just got in, anyway—didn’t know the shipping around there any too well.”

“From somewhere by the Wapping entrance of the Western Dock?”

“Somewhere out that way. He was over on the other side by the East Lane Stairs.”

“H’m. Well, we’re going to hear a piece more about that suicide—a considerable piece.” Procter took from his pocket a long piece of steel and put it on the table in front of Manning.

It was the blade of a dagger, about eight inches long, and it had been broken off short at the hilt. Manning picked it up and examined it. There was blood on it. And the breaking was curious, the break

making an almost perfect V. Graven into the steel were some deeply etched marks which ran perpendicularly down the blade.

"That figuring—that's Chinese stuff," said Manning suddenly. "Was this——"

"You've got it, sergeant. That was no suicide we took from the river this morning. The surgeon has just taken *that* from his heart. Murder. That's what it is. Just plain murder."

Manning put the blade back on the table and eyed it dispassionately.

He was thoughtful for a moment and then said: "Procter, taking a line direct across-river from East Lane Stairs to the Wapping entrance to the Western Dock, what are the names of the ships berthed up there? I mean the ones you can remember offhand."

"There's only room for three along that bit," replied Procter. "And I know 'em all. There's the *Stornoway*; she's been in there a fortnight, held up by a delayed cargo from the north; at the other end is the *Beaudelaire*, the French wine carrier in from Bordeaux last week; and in between the two is the *Yangtse*, mostly rice and cotton—the Chinese hooker that picked up her berth last Monday."

"And that's all, is it?"

"If you can find any more along that wharf you can have 'em."

Manning rubbed his chin and turned a gloomy eye on the tide indicator. "This deck hand," he said. "What time did you say he saw the splash?"

"Latish. Half-past nine, or thereabouts. It was getting dark, anyway."

"That would be when the tide was at full ebb,

running its fastest. And that means that the man who murdered that poor devil thought that the body would be rolling about outside Sheerness by now. Well, a deep-sea man isn't to know that the bend of the river there sets up an eddy that would hold on to a body for days. The man who pushed that body over the side has as much knowledge of the river currents around here as a milk roundsman in Hackney."

"Now put the other two and two together and you've got your man," said Procter. Procter seemed slightly wearied at his senior's disinclination to jump at a transparent conclusion.

"Yes, I know. But the job is to prove it," growled Manning. "I've been sniffing at his heels every time he's berthed on this stretch. And I've had the searchers over him with microscopes. But I've been bull-dozing him for opium."

"And now it seems he has taken the jump into the big-league stuff," commented Procter.

"Yes. And we've got to get a line on his middlemen before we can nail him. Can't take him and leave the West End organisation to carry on under another head. We've got to get him for the whole boiling, West End dope running and all. Procter, we have got to make a complete clean up on this—then, maybe, we can pass our compliments back to the mahogany deskers."

"And please to remember little Procter when they hand out the stripes," said the second under his breath. "And if you want to know anything more about that knife, here's the surgeon himself. He said he wanted to see you."

The surgeon came in and tossed his hat on the table.

“Bad business this,” he said shortly.

Manning nodded resentful acquiescence. “About as determined an effort as I’ve seen,” he admitted. “Stabbing *and* drowning.”

“Yes, and something more, too. I’ve just come in to give you a warning. You haven’t been messing about with that dagger any more than you can help, have you?”

“Just picked it up and took a peek at it, that’s all. The writing on it is Chinese.”

“Yes—and so is the poison,” said the surgeon grimly.

“The what?”

“That murder was a three-hander. Stabbing, drowning—and poisoning. I suspected it as soon as I raised the eyelids. The pupils were contracted almost to vanishing point. They were no bigger than little black pinheads. And yet the eyes themselves were dilated almost to double their size. Nothing but sheer inconceivable agony did that, the agony that comes from a toxin coursing through the blood stream. It was obvious that the man was dead long before his body hit the river. There wasn’t a drop of water in the lungs. I looked for the other cause—and found the knife blade in his heart. It had pierced both walls. A terrible blow.”

“Sufficient to account for the breaking of the blade?”

“Yes. It was a downward blow and the steel had gone right through the breastbone. In a violent effort to withdraw it I should say the blade snapped

off as you see it there. But even a wound like that did not account for the eye dilation. There was no other puncture on the skin; and yet it was all too plain that that poison had not been taken by the mouth. It was then that I examined the wound again. And there it was. The dagger had been impregnated with a deadly poison before it was thrust into that man's heart. It is being analysed now. And until I get the report through from the pathologist, I should advise you to handle that dagger blade as often and as carelessly as you'd touch a live rail."

Manning's reply was active. He picked the lethal thing up with his handkerchief and dropped it in a drawer, which he locked.

"Has the body been identified yet?" he asked.

"His brother is round there now. You'd better see him."

"Does he know anything about it?"

"Yes and no. He says his brother was expecting bad trouble yesterday evening. I think there must be something fishy about the dead man's connections hereabouts, for the brother won't answer plain questions. However, that's your job, not mine. Perhaps you will be able to make him talk. He has definitely identified the body as that of his brother Gilan Maxick. Hungarian, I think. And that is about all I could get out of him."

"But he admitted there was trouble brewing for him?"

"Yes—in a sort of desultory way. You know the type. Can't open his mouth for fear of incriminating himself in an equally unsavoury connection else-

where. Either that or he is frightened of the gang that has already put his brother out."

"Which is far more likely," said Manning slowly. "To me the whole thing reeks of gang-work—and a big, influential gang at that, with miles of real money behind them."

"Smuggling?" queried the surgeon.

"That's the line, sir. Had a scream from Headquarters about it only this morning. And we seem to have fallen right into the whole nest of it, without moving off the tideway. How the blazes he gets his stuff ashore I'm blest if I know. Our boys went over him with a small-tooth comb. And the man doesn't live who can run stuff through once the boys are on his scent. I've known those lads go through a ship with hammer tappers from forefoot to rudder-post and from keel to wireless gaff and come out of her at the end of the eighth day with thirty packets of saccharin, each one weighing an ounce. They collared each packet in a different part of the ship. One was buried in the flour tub in the cook's galley, three were behind panelling in the state-rooms, one was sewn into the lining of an old dungaree coat hung up in the boiler-room, two were submerged in a tin of wet sand—the string was tied to the anchor cable eight feet below water; three were hidden away in a heap of ashes at the back of a cold furnace—they had to crawl in on their bellies to get *that* lot; one was stitched into the corner of the house-flag flying at the masthead. Another was tucked away behind an iron cleat. They had unscrewed the cleat, taken it out of the deck, chiselled the hole a bit bigger, put the packet in, and then

rescrewed the cleat back in position. They actually got two from the top of the piston-head in the engine-room—stowed away there between the piston-head and the cylinder-top!

“But the point is that the boys got them—every packet. Every one that was aboard that boat came out. The mate, who was the culprit, confessed, with something like tears of incredulity in his eyes, that there wasn’t a milligram of the stuff left fore or aft the ship. Our boys had found the lot. What with X-ray photographs and the new electrical devices for discovering the presence of other substances behind metal and wood, the plain, sneak-thief smuggler doesn’t stand a chance.”

“And yet this man is getting through?”

“Yes—and with bags of it, too, judging from the shriek we got from the Yard. And I’ll say it isn’t possible—knowing what I know. Either he is getting rid of it before he makes the estuary or he has thought out a scheme so darned ingenious that nothing short of a miracle will expose it.”

“Or luck,” suggested the doctor.

“M—yes. Maybe we might stumble on it by luck. But there’s a notable shortage of that commodity down in this neck of the woods. You’re reporting this to the coroner I suppose?”

“Of course. Ought to be an interesting inquest. When I get the statement through from the analyst I’ll send you on a copy. Might help.”

“You can bet your sweet life it will. What is the name of this brother, and where can I get at him?”

“His name is Ulrich and he left his address at the mortuary. He says he will keep any appoint-

ment you like to make—so long as you don't expect him to blab too much. Know what that means, don't you?"

"Yeh," grunted Manning. "Up to his eyes in graft himself. Still, I'll get something out of him if I have to put him on the grill all night. Many thanks, doctor—I'll be seeing you later."

The surgeon took his departure, humming a snatch of the latest musical comedy song-hit to himself. He was a prosaic individual, one who had lived perhaps a little too long at the sordid end of the river. To him the life that surrounded him was just one seething fight for existence and, along the water-line, a pound earned by a trick was sweeter than two taken out of a hard trade. Over and above which that polyglot population had developed a queasy habit of hauling him out of bed at two in the morning to come round to the police station and perjure his soul by declaring it sober while it was apparent to even the most indulgent charge-sergeant that it experienced a mean difficulty in keeping its legs. One more or less was merely in the run of the common task.

CHAPTER II

THE marine store-yard of Chinky the Junk stands just away back from the river. It clutters its startling wilderness of old ship's lumber in that murky section that lies between Wapping Wall and Silk Yard. A high board fence encloses it on two sides; on the other two the dismal back yards of rows of tenements come down to mask it in.

It is an oddity of riverside Chinese that they are either wholly crook or wholly straight. And when they are straight no old-established city merchant could rank higher in his principles. Chinky the Junk was one of the straight ones. He dealt fairly and legitimately, and the prices he paid and the charges he made were just. Manning had known him for many years. On occasion he acted as interpreter in the local police courts and on innumerable cases his knowledge of ships and shipping had been of genuine worth to the police.

And yet, such is the perverse rigidity of the eastern code, had he known of the most villainous plot ever brewed along the waterway he would have breathed no word of it to a living soul. Not in a thousand years. That was the other fellow's business—no concern of his whatever. But if the police *asked* him—well, that put the case on a different footing altogether. His assistance had been requested. That, *ipso facto*, made it his business, and any information he might have on the subject was forthwith at the disposal of the authorities.

He was an odd little creature. An inch under five

feet in height and as thin as a withy, he cut a queer figure surrounded by his enormous piles of rotted rope, cordage, and general old junk. His face was as wrinkled and brown as an old potato and, for some reason best known to themselves, his parents had heaped the final enormity of all insults upon him—they had bound his feet in infancy like those of a girl-child's.

His yard was an unbelievable riot of disorder. A stranger would have thought that ultimate chaos had descended upon the place. Enormous heaps of old iron and bent cans stood cheek by jowl with mounds of old brass and copper that had turned green in the acid rains of the years. Old car wheels and foothills of perished rubber slumped against them. There was a rough half acre of rotted timber, and on beyond that a ship's anchor which, but for a damaged fluke, would have held the Mauretania in a typhoon. Two score other anchors were there and a litter of little ones, mudhooks. Steel cables and wire guys were massed there in tons. At one end a heap of old ship's biscuit boxes stood, some of them still full of biscuit, pulped and rotted from the stores where they had been burst and damaged in the perpetual jostle of long voyages. Miles of old rope and oakum reared up against a garden fence and scores of skiff and dinghy oars were piled against it.

Chinky the Junk—the derivation of his name is obvious—waddled out into the midst of his anarchy of odoriferous confusion. Somewhere in his tumble-down office a little bell had rung—a note that was barely audible three yards away. It told him, very

distinctly, that someone had come in through his gate. The weight of a man had passed over a six-foot patch just inside his domain. Furthermore, that man had not presented himself at the office door to state the nature of his requirements. Although Chinky the Junk himself was as straight as a ramrod, he had personal evidence of the fact that others were not so particular.

Chinky left his dinner and toddled out into the bright sunshine to see Manning of the river police standing there casting a masterful eye over the gaudy litter.

"Can I do something, please?" he asked, and his face was as expressionless as it would have been if a lawyer had just informed him that he had inherited a million pounds, or if his doctor had just broken the news to him that all his six male children were unaccountably dead.

Manning eyed him steadily. "Yes," he said. "You can do a good deal for me—*but*——"

"I no speak—please." The reply was as placid as a woodland pool in a summer haze.

"Not even if someone comes up and offers you banky-note?"

"No—please."

"Swear on old Confucy?"

"I break a plate upon it—please. I blow out a candle if I may die."

Manning took him over to a secluded corner and sat down on an up-ended barrel. He took from his pocket-book a thin strip of paper. On it was painted a replica of the Chinese characters cut in the dagger blade. He handed it over.

"Know anything about that?" he demanded.

Chinky the Junk gazed at it; and the incredible happened. A further layer of wrinkles crimped into his withered face. He handed it back after a minute's hard concentration.

"It is not complete," he said in his queer, high-pitched sing-song. "It is not finish."

"Well, what does it say—what there is of it?"

"It is old proverb—old Chinese saying. It mean—DEATH COMES WITH THE DAWN. Very true proverb out there. Plenty fever. Plenty malaria. When the dawn comes—then comes the cold winds. Plenty die when the dawn comes. They die—they go out like the thousand candles at the Feast of the Rains. Also—please—much too many girl babies born in China. When the dawn comes they float down the Yangtse Kiang—plenty—and down the Hwang-ho, too, and down the Hung Shui Kiang. Please."

"And how much of it is missing, Chinky?"

"The las' word not there. The word Dawn, he not there."

Manning lit a cigarette. "Exactly what I thought myself," he said without a blush. It didn't do to show a complete hand of ignorance, even to Chinky the Junk. He blew a cloud of tobacco smoke at his finger nails and inspected his manicure minutely.

Chinky waited. He had the double advantage of a working knowledge of manners both East and West. He found they varied but little, fundamentally; mostly in the approach and the pauses.

Manning looked up through a smoke haze. "Do you happen to know a man named Grosman?" he asked. There was no need to disguise the curiosity

out of his voice. Chinky the Junk's knowledge of the ways of the West would have corroded through any such veneer.

"Captain Grosman? Of the *Yangtse*?"

"Yes, that one. Ever sell him anything?"

Chinky pondered the idea. "No," he said. "I no sell him any. I buy from him, sometime."

"Junk?"

"Shuar. All his ole rope. His bad biscuit. His ole paint. All the wire he no want. And sim'lar."

"Known him long?"

"Fi'—ten year."

"Tell me, Chink. Which is he most of—Chinese or Dutch?"

"Chinese most, I think. He spik the best Chinese I hear for long time. Mandarin. Little red button on the cap—button of the mandarin."

At that moment another figure entered the yard, pushing a hand-truck in front of him. He came trundling up to where they sat and stood there, beaming.

Flat on the face of him he franked himself, a jolly old Hamburger. His face was a round, doughy blodge of fat, prosperous benignity, and he smiled on the entire universe through a pair of enormous and heavily pebbled glasses. The tortoise-shell rims were a quarter of an inch thick and the lenses seemed even thicker. They magnified his eyes to great blobs of pale blue blanc-mange, washed out and dim; but even that did not disguise the utter good nature that fairly oozed out of them. He radiated bulky benevolence. He silently informed all and sundry that, short of a direct attack on his pocket, you could have

the earth and everything therein—and his unstinted benedicite went with it, yours for a makeweight.

“All right?” he asked in a rich, full-gutturalled bass.

“How many you want?” replied Chinky the Junk.

“To-day thirty. To-morrow some more.” He held out a soiled ten shilling note.

Chinky took it and waved him on. The Hamburger’s face bunched itself into another beatific expanse of smiling geniality, and he waddled over to a mound of broken biscuit tins.

The old junk dealer watched him, with almost a hint of a smile in his own eyes. The Hamburger’s cheerfulness was infectious.

Manning glanced round at him as he began piling the tins on his truck. He was too fat to bend with ease, so he contented himself with taking those about halfway up the mound. Chinky was carefully counting as the tins went bumping on to the truck.

“Who is the old boy?” said the sergeant.

“Him? Engelberg. Holland man. He buy all my ole biscuit. He keep plenty chicken. Ole biscuit very good for chicken. Big tin like that—fourpence. Plenty cheap.”

Manning waved the matter aside.

“About this man Grosman,” he said. “Do you know anything about him?”

Chinky lit up a foul little black pipe with studious care.

“Him no good,” he said decidedly, between puffs.

“Know anything definite?”

The junk dealer shook his head. “No,” he

admitted. "I don't know. But he is the only one who come in here and don't try to swindle my prices."

"Is he liked around here?"

Chinky shrugged. "He no come ashore much," he said. "Stay aboard mos' the time. Nobody know him."

Manning played the approach direct.

"Do you know what his graft is?" he demanded.

"No—please. Me know nothing."

"Opium?"

"Maybe. Maybe not. All he do with me is sell me old junk."

Manning got up off the barrel. "Thank you, Chink," he said. "That's all I want to know. There's no need to blab what I said all down the riverside. I'm just making a few inquiries, that's all. See you later."

He nodded affably and walked off. The store dealer, with a face as vacuous as a dinner plate, noted that the end of the cigarette between his lips was squashed flat and that the tips of his fingers were rubbing together in a queer little jerky rythm.

In a minute or two Engelberg had finished loading his truck. The topmost of his tins wobbled precariously as he trundled them out of the yard. Chinky the Junk waved him a casual good-bye as he went, shrugged, and went back to his dinner.

Manning walked slowly back to the river station. His report on the case had gone through to headquarters, and he was expecting a visit from one of the heads—if not from the Chief himself. The Chief often took a personal hand in a case that presented

unusual aspects; and this one certainly did. The deadly determination of the murderer was unique. The three different and distinct methods employed to ensure death were unprecedented.

He was not greatly perturbed at the prospect of having to meet the higher command. The Chief was amenable; and though he stinted his bouquets he was equally parsimonious with his censure. It was a comforting knowledge in the force that the Chief only condemned when the culprit was seriously deserving of blame—and then the culprit got it, hot and strong. A reprimand from the Chief was tantamount to a career cut short, but a pat on the back was as good as promotion. Manning had no qualms. He had done sound work in the few hours since the body was recovered and he had definitely established his line of inquiry. But he wished he had had something concrete to show his overlord.

Procter met him as he turned the corner.

“Been looking for you,” he said. “The Chief’s down at the office. Going to put a C.I.D. man on the job, I think.”

“Just my damn luck,” growled Manning. “We only get a decent case down here about once in five years—and when it does come he shoves one of the nobs on it. They get bits of fat all the year round up at the Yard; why can’t he let us have our whack when it comes our way? Is he still howling about the smuggling?”

“Never even mentioned it. I think he’s too keen on this case. He hasn’t issued it to the Press yet.”

“H’m. That looks as though he regards it as serious. Who is he putting on it; did he say?”

"No. He wouldn't tell me, anyway. Minnows don't count among the mackerel. He's waiting for you. Better get along in."

Manning went straight through to the little office. The Chief was sitting there, a tall, well built, but rather slim man, with hair freely dusted with grey at the temples. He had the cold, aloof eyes of all of his craft, the eyes of a man who had dealt with crime and criminals so long that part of his nature was to suspect everyone and to keep on suspecting them until they proved their rectitude.

"Well?" he said, as soon as Manning pushed in through the door. And a whole ream could not have said more plainly: "Please proceed immediately with your report."

Manning coughed. The mere presence of that flint-eyed figure had an extraordinary capacity for unsettling a man.

"You know all the facts up to ten o'clock this morning, sir," he said. "If you will come to the window here I can give you the lie of the land."

He pointed out across the crinkled, dirty-brown water.

"The deck hand who first notified us was on the upper deck of the *Windflower*—that red-and-black funneller over there. It was dark and he did not know the names of the other shipping along here as his ship had only just come in to her moorings. But he states very definitely that the splash came from over there, in almost a direct line with him. He was so eager to see if the man broke surface again that he did not take his eyes off the water again—and so he

could not sight the falling point properly. A very excusable thing to do, if I might say so, sir."

"From across there, eh?" said the Chief. "Well that thins the field down to one of those three ships, does it not?"

"Yes, sir. The *Stornoway*, the *Yangtse*, and the *Beaudelaire*. There is nothing whatever against either the *Stornoway* or the *Beaudelaire*. They're dead straight—in the river here every other week or so and their crews have been aboard them for years. Most of them I know personally, and the officers tell me that no members of the crews are missing, and that to their very definite knowledge there is no feud or bad feeling among any of them. That thins the field down to the *Yangtse*."

"Well—and what have we about the *Yangtse*?" The Chief was shading his eyes with his hand against the sun-glare off the water.

"She's an all-Chinese hooker, sir, from the captain to the cook, and that's a bad combination. He is the only Chinese captain, in my knowledge, who has ever come into the river, and I've been treading on his heels for years. He's a half-caste. Speaks English well. And I've had him under my eye for opium-running. He is playing some game or other, anyway; and playing it pretty big, too. The characters cut in the dagger are Chinese. I've had them deciphered."

"Yes?" The Chief wheeled.

"One of my friends down the river translated them for me. Apparently it's an old Chinese proverb and means 'Death comes with the dawn.' But the word 'dawn' is missing. The blade broke off short

there. If we can get hold of that broken hilt with the rest of the writing on it we ought to have a real piece of evidence."

"His name?"

"Grosman."

"That is rather thick Chinese?"

"Takes his name from his hybrid half, I suppose, sir."

"And taking the line of the splash and the evidence of this dagger into account, you suspect him, do you?"

Manning looked uncertain. It seemed early to admit a definite suspicion with so little real evidence to back it up.

The Chief waited. "Don't worry about me," he said quietly. "If you think so, say so. You men down here live so continuously with the river population that you get intuitions and instincts that generally line up in the right direction. That's part of your job. And you know a good deal more than you care to put into words. Go on—tell me all you know."

"Well, sir, usually he isn't seen about on deck until the sun is high. He is not a cold-blooded mortal; what I mean is, he doesn't like the chilly winds of the morning, coming from where he does. But this morning I find that he was up half the night, scrutinising us through night glasses while we were dragging for the body. I noticed him myself up on the bridge staring at us. And that was long before seven o'clock this morning. And then, again, someone else came over and said they saw him shaking his fist at us. That was when we had

got the body in the drags and trying to get it aboard."

"Must have been a fairly noticeable gesture if a third party came over and told you about it," commented the Chief.

"That's what I thought, sir. I didn't say so at the time, but it was right then that I began connecting him with the circular letter you sent out this morning."

"About the cocaine? You can leave that for the time being. There are other stations that can take that matter in hand. For the present I want you to concentrate on this case. There are certain very serious features connected with it that make a conviction an urgent necessity. The history of Gilan Maxick has been traced. He is a drug middleman. And no one in his group can be persuaded to talk. They won't say a word against anybody. And that, to me, is iniquitous. It means that they are afraid. They all know who the murderer is, but they are scared out of their lives. They know that if they squeak the same death that happened to Gilan Maxick will overtake them. And such a state of affairs is intolerable. Gang-work—that's what it is. A gang has arisen that holds the fear of death over the river. Its shadow extends to the West End, where even the dope-runners wince and shut up like steel traps when you mention the murder of Maxick. And they commit murder as calmly as they sell their drugs. And I'm not standing for it. I won't have it. I don't mind them working in their own little coteries and having their own little feuds and internal fights—it helps considerably. When a big

job is pulled we know just where to go for our man, and if one faction doesn't squeak the other will. But when it comes to downright deliberate murder like this, murder committed with an insolently contemptuous disregard for law and order, then I say we've got to stamp out the whole gang as ruthlessly as they themselves work. This land is ruled by law; and so long as I hold office it is not going to be ruled by gangs of thugs. An organisation of this magnitude, that holds the rest of the underworld in a reign of terror, is a direct challenge. It is the beginning of the Chicago gun-gangs here in London. And it has got to be stamped out—right here at its very inception. If this gang gets away with it, others will inevitably follow, and life will be rendered impossible for decent law-abiding citizens. If this one is broken up, stamped out, smashed, and abolished, then the others will have had their lesson rammed down their necks. But it *is* a menace—and a savage one. And it is going to be annihilated, once and for all. Have you seen the analyst's report of that dagger yet?"

"No, sir; it hadn't come through when I went out."

"Snake poison! That's what it was. The virus of the bushmaster, one of the most terrible vipers known. It contracts the muscles of the heart until the agony is horrible. Cases have been known where the eyeballs have burst. And they are bringing that sort of warfare to London. Well, Manning, we are going to kick it sky-high. You have as big a chance here as you have ever had in your life. See to it that you take it with both hands."

"I understood that you were sending down a chief inspector to take charge, sir?"

"So I am. But he will take one end and you the other. You will take the river. And if this case turns out as I see it shaping, you will be in for as tough a time as you have ever had in your life."

"That will suit me, Chief. Who are you sending down?"

"Sterling. He's the man for this job. And you two won't clash. There's enough for the pair of you to do. He won't interfere with you on the river. You know that end as well as any man breathing. Report to me each night at eight. By the way, you took the name of the informant who came over and told you about Grosman? Who was it—a waterman?"

"No, sir. As a matter of fact, it was two of them. Man and a girl. I've seen them up and down here for some weeks. Every other day they come down from the moorings up at the House of Commons and go out to sea in their speed boat. That's theirs, the *Spindrift*. Maybe you've noticed her up there."

"The *Spindrift*? Why, that's young Toby Essex's boat, the long sixty knotter."

"That's the one, sir. And the girl who goes with him is Miss Kittredge. I should think they're engaged."

"Hardly that—yet. But no doubt they are headed that way. The rumour in the City is that her father, Sir John Kittredge, will be the new Police Commissioner." He smiled quizzically. "There's an entry for your notebook. Keep in the little lady's good graces and you will land one of the big jobs yet."

He reached for his hat and went to the door. As he turned the handle he looked back at Manning and said: "If you want an illustration of how tough your job is going to be, I can tell you that Sterling raided Wallack's to-day. Biggest cocaine man in the West End. Collared him with over three hundred ounces of the stuff in his possession—and he wouldn't tell. That stuff was landed here within the last five days; snow has been at a premium until this cargo landed. He knows we know it. And still he won't tell. It was known at ten o'clock last night up in Soho that Maxick had gone west. Wallack can take either three years or eight. Three years if he comes clean—eight if he keeps silent. Wallack is taking the eight! So now you know."

He nodded and went out.

Sterling arrived an hour later, a solid enough looking officer, but again dowered with that unmistakable eye.

"I'm Sterling," he said. "You're Manning? Got an edge of the table I can have, and a chair? That's all I'll want. You fire ahead on your own. I'll be seeing you every now and then and we can swap notes. No use fixing anything definite till we see how the case begins to form." In two minutes he was in, installed and at work, going closely over a mass of typewritten pages.

Once he looked up and remarked: "Maxick's brother is due here at any minute to see me. You can stay on and hear him if you wish. I want him first; you can tackle him after."

Without further word he was back at his notes, and he worked on steadily for three-quarters of an

hour until a knock came at the door and a constable looked in to say that Ulrich Maxick was outside.

"Send him in," said Manning. Maxick slid in through the door, looking back over his shoulder until the door closed behind him. He was spinning a big-peaked cap nervously in his fingers, and his furtive eyes never rested on one spot for more than a few seconds—and never on the eyes of the man he was talking to.

"Mornin', gents," he said hurriedly. "Wisht to Gawd you hadn't ast me to come 'ere. Makes it bad for me. The boys know already that you've been at me about Gilan. If they finds out I've been down here—and you nabs the murderer—they'll make 'oly 'ell for me. I'll get done in for it, sure as breathin'."

Sterling swung round casually in his chair.

"And who is going to do you in?" he inquired.

"Who? Who do you think?" snarled the wharf-rat, wheeling on him. "The Lord Mayor? What is it you want to know? Come on. Out with it. I want to get out of 'ere."

Sterling eyed him. Already he knew he was on bad hunting. The man was an unlovely specimen, little more than a youth; a slink-eyed, collarless, thin wristed throw-out from the factory of life. He had an exasperating habit of talking out of the acute corner of his mouth, apparently under the impression that this subterfuge effectively disguised the fact, from anyone but the person spoken to, that he was speaking at all.

He carried on his emaciated figure all the symptoms of the cocaine addict. But the real sign

manual was in his eyes. They seemed to swim in a bath of atrophied mercury. The fishy glitter that came from them was the spurious flash of a recent "shot" of his enslaving narcotic. That alone had braced him to face the Yard man. He stood there a symbol of the strata he occupied in life, one of a murderous gang, more afraid of his gang than of the police themselves.

"You knew Gilan was coming down here last night?" Sterling's tone was friendly and conversational.

"Yes. He had a job to do down here."

"With whom?"

"I don't know. He never told me."

"But you must have had some idea? You are all in the same game. There are not so many people down here mixed up in your business that you wouldn't have some shrewd idea of who he was setting out to see."

"I tell you I don't know," declared Ulrich in his plaintive whine. "He don't tell me what he's doin' every damn minute of the day."

"But he left you to come down here?"

"Yes—and what of it?"

"Do you mean to tell me he didn't say to you, when he left you, 'Well, so long, old man, I'm just off to see So-and-so'—or whoever it might happen to be?"

"Yeah! That's what I mean to say. And what about it?"

"What's wrong, Ulrich? Do you think we can't handle this job? What are you frightened of?"

"I'm frightened of getting what Gilan got! And

he *did* get it, didn't he? You can't laugh that one off the minutes. And I got no private desire to go underground. An inquest may be all in the day's work to you. But to me, up on the slab, it's a great big pain in the stummick."

"Don't get rattled, son. We're out to help you as much as anyone else."

"Yes. And a few dead bodies scattered about the river don't matter a tinker's cuss to you so long as you get the main job cleaned up."

"Was it a steamer captain he came down here to see?"

The wreck flared up. "I don't know. And what's more, I ain't *going* to know! And that's all there is to it."

"Why won't you tell?"

"You know as well as I do. You are hintin' that you can stop the gang from gettin' me. Well, why didn't you stop 'em gettin' Gilan? Eh? Because you couldn't. Any more than you could stop 'em gettin' me. But you want me to squeal just the same, don't you? Well, I ain't going to. And you can't make me. And you ain't going to get *me* picked up somewhere out by Shoeburyness this time to-morrow."

"But you have already told the surgeon that your brother was coming down here on risky business."

"You're a liar!"

"You said he was expecting trouble?"

"That's different. You can't put something into my mouth I never said. You always *can* expect a bit of trouble down at this end of the river, can't you?"

"Maxick, you can find trouble anywhere—if you are out looking for it."

"I dunno nothing about it. Gilan wasn't out looking for trouble. He wasn't that sort. He was no fool. He knew the strength of what he was up against. Trouble just came to him. See?"

"You mean that you won't help us—not even to get the man who murdered your brother?"

"That's it, mate. Better to have one dead 'un in the family than two. He knew he was runnin' into trouble. But he wouldn't stay out of it. Tried to square it up—and got it in the neck. And now you want me to follow suit."

Sterling sat back and twiddled a pencil in his mouth. It was uphill work, trying to glean something definite from a man in the grip of such mental terror as was Maxick. But there are other methods than the approach direct—and patience brings its own rewards in the Force.

"Tell me one thing," he said at last. "How 'do you know Gilan was running into trouble?"

"How 'do you think I know?" The wharf-rat was almost snarling with hatred of the men in front of him. "I know because he told me."

"When was this?"

"Las' Monday."

"Morning or evening?"

"Night time. What the hell does it matter?"

"Thank you, Ulrich. That will be all to-day. It was on Monday the *Yangtse* came in. I just wanted the definite point of contact, that's all. Mark you—you told me nothing. I shall tell the boys so. I kicked you out of here because you wouldn't squeal. You can go now."

The degenerate did not even stop to nod his

thanks to the detective. His cap was upon his head, the peak pulled far down over his eyes, and his feet were slithering towards the door. He did not walk, his leg action was more like that of a snake, except that it was perpendicular. He seemed to move without actually moving any particular part of his body, and he was as silent as a painted shadow. He opened the door just wide enough to slip through, and when the door closed there was not even the click of the falling latch.

Sterling grunted to himself. "There seems to be a grand wind-up around here," he said. "I think we can leave Maxick alone after this. They will be slugging him next. Still, we've got the line. If it was anyone else, that rat would have shot all our suspicion on to Grosman. That's why I gave him the chance. But no. He fought off like a wasp the moment I mentioned a steamer captain. That, and the incidence of the times, is enough for me, coming from a piece of ullage like Ulrich Maxick. You didn't want him, did you?"

"Not for a minute. He's no use to me. Pity I can't go and have a mop-up over on the *Yangtse*, though."

"I know. But you can't do it. Might get a little piece here and there. But you would wreck the big scheme. We have got to get those brutes cold. We should never get another chance, once we started nosing round there. Well—I'm going up West. Got two more raids ready to explode on dope handlers."

"Going to get them?"

"Sure to. But they're only small compared with

this new one that has just arisen. Can't get on the track of him yet. Someone is covering up a trail mighty well. But there isn't a doubt they are all getting their supplies from him. And he is getting his from the *Yangtse* Chinks. London last week was a desert so far as cocaine was concerned. Dope loonies were paying up to five pounds a packet for it. And it was as scarce as Great Auk's eggs even at that. Now the channels are flooded with it. Last week they were selling twelve packets to the ounce—and over fifty per cent. of it was alum adulteration. To-day it is eight packets to the ounce and as pure as the stuff sold under Government licence."

"Wish you luck," returned Manning. "If you want me at any time to-night call in at the Outward Bound little tavern, round the corner from the Stairs. Those Chinks use it a good deal at night. Got an idea something may turn up there in the way of a lead."

Sterling nodded and pushed out through the door.

CHAPTER III

HILLARY KITTREDGE yawned inelegantly and relaxed against an uncomfortable piece of canvas that was painted to resemble granite. Except for its gross roughness on the skin the camouflage failed notably.

At the far end of the dance floor an orchestra of

seven, decked out as buccaneers of the Spanish Main, succeeded in creating enough blaring discord for twice their number, and the floor itself was far too crowded for anything more than a halting one-step to be danced. What had once been a chain of dilapidated old mews at the smelliest end of Soho had burst forth, under the name of La Caverne Diamantée, as the very latest thing in fashionable night clubs.

The whole place represented a long, dank cavern, with lesser caves branching off at the sides, where little tables were set amid the glow of lamps that burned dimly from the depths of conch shells, and where, in place of chairs, one sat on grog barrels. Here and there fountains of real sea water played. This, in the opinion of the management, gave the place the authentic tang of the sea, and the bunches of kelp weed that clung in festoons from the walls and the cavern roof provided just that subtle atmosphere that was supposed to be redolent of caves long buried in the hidden deeps of tidal oceans. The waiters wore thick gold rings in their ears, grisly looking cutlasses hung at their sides, their half bare chests were richly tanned with Number Four grease-paint, and their striped shirts and loose sailcloth trunks were fiercely piratical.

The head waiter could be distinguished by his skull-and-crossbones jerkin and the livid slash that coursed down his face and distorted one eye—quite the best thing in the show. Instead of glasses he set hollowed bones before you, glared at you out of his one good eye, and growled to himself a gory string of blue water oaths. Then he poured out drinks

from a grinning human skull, fervently hoped that your eyeballs would burst the next time you went over the Line, and added a depressing sum to your bill which he carried in a leather bottle at his belt.

"Feeling tired?" Hillary was out for the evening with her brother. And her brother seemed quite willing to go home to bed, with or without notice.

She shook her head. "I am and I'm not," she said. "At any other time I would get quite a kick out of a hole like this. But to-night all I can see is the canvas behind the paint, the silliness of that orchestra, who would probably go into screaming hysterics if someone down here pulled a real gun and started letting fly. I can see the wives of those brigand waiters waiting up for them to give them a good, sound nagging for not getting home earlier, and I positively can *not* see why one should have to get into evening dress to come down here."

"Neither can I. Blame yourself, Hillary. It was your idea. Not mine. You didn't think *I* wanted to come out toe-tapping in a shanty like this, did you?"

She laughed. "No, I know. But I'm all loose-endy and you're a dear to have dragged yourself out with me."

Her brother snorted. "I didn't drag myself out," he protested. "I was coming out anyway. But not with you! I had a date myself. But it seems that every time Toby Essex is not available you hitch your waggon to my star. What's he doing to-night? Why can't he attend to his own women? Hey? me gal, answer me that."

She laughed outright and called for a black coffee. "He couldn't," she said. "He and the mechanic

are tinkering up the boat. He will be working pretty well all night on her."

"Well—who is he going to marry? You or Miss *Spindrift*?"

"Don't be an ass. We are going to lift the International Cup with *Spindrift*."

"That will give me an enormous kick! Meanwhile, this evening has cost me the best end of three fivers. You'll have two more dances and then you will go home to bed."

She leaned back on her arm. "I couldn't sleep to-night for all the fivers in the world," she declared a little wearily. "It's past two now, and we go down river again at five. I shall stick it out here till then. I saw a dead body taken out of the water this morning and—and somehow I seem to have been living with it all day." She shivered and turned to the filibuster who appeared with her coffee.

Her brother glanced sideways at her. She was gazing at the waiter and her face was chalky white. The grinning pirate was pouring the coffee out of the eye socket of a skull.

"Oh! Johnny," she whispered. "I couldn't drink that—now!"

"What did you expect in a place like this?" retorted Johnny. "A bunch of counter-jumpers serving it out of monastic chalices? Get on with it. Drink it. Do you good."

He turned to the waiter. "The crowd seem a bit merry to-night?" he remarked. He had been down there before and had generally found it rather a gloomy affair. The dancers forced their laughter and their gaiety was painfully assumed.

But that night there seemed to be a genuine sparkle about the place. The jollity was real and the greetings and cross banter had the ring of complete enjoyment.

The look he got from the cut-throat astonished him. The greasepaint faded and the theatrical habiliments misted out against the look of bitter contempt and disgust that glittered out of the dolled-up servitor's eyes. He was no longer a hireling, paid to make a fool of himself for the presumed merriment of others. He became the privileged critic, the watching eye that saw the same scenes night after night and attended the same painful rites through dawn after dawn: and had formed an opinion on them.

"This 'ere lot, sir?" he said in a deep rumble. "Bah! You ought to have seen 'em last night—and the night before! Eyes like dead cods. Skin like old paper. Snapped and snarled at each other all night. I got swore at, reg'ler, once every three minutes. Couldn't do nothing right for 'em. And the young 'uns was worse than the old 'uns. That's the crowd I mean, over in the corner there. Can't mistake 'em, can you? There's some excuse for the old 'uns. I'm gettin' on a bit that way myself; and I can understand how they feel. Tryin' to get back to the old days, sir; and the poor old fools don't realise they ain't got the youth in their bones no more. Them little gels they hire—you ought to hear what they say about 'em—after. Pitiful, ain't it? Look at that old josser there. Rich as a Crusoe, waddlin' round with that Gaiety kid. Wonder if he knows what he looks like? Terrible, ain't it, to see sixty kissin' six-

teen like that? Oh yes. They are merry enough to-night."

Johnny looked at him oddly.

"Well? Why the sudden change?" he demanded.

The swashbuckler seemed surprised at the question. He inspected the patron before him for a minute as though speculating on the genuineness of the inquiry. He appeared to come to the conclusion that he was dealing with real innocence, for he made the most cryptically illuminating reply Johnny Kitredge had ever heard in his life. The freebooter slowly closed one eye tight, placed a long forefinger down his nose, and said: "It—has—snowed!" And that was Hillary's first conscious contact with the cocaine set.

A page-boy entered, dressed up as a ragged powder-monkey. Folded over his arm was a bundle of the first editions of the morning papers.

She nudged him. "Get me a couple of papers, Johnny. And then you can go home to bed. I'm so sorry I kept you away from her to-night. Why didn't you say? I didn't realise."

"Better come home, kid. You want a good night's rest. Let the boat go for a day. Toby can manage it all right without you."

"You've never been on her, Johnny, or you wouldn't say that. Like most young ladies, she needs two to handle her."

"All right—have it your own way. Here's your papers. Johnny thinks too much of Johnny's health to mess about like this in the first bloom of his youth. Night, night. See you at breakfast—perhaps."

Later on in the day he thought considerably about

that last remark of his to her. It was odd that he should have added that 'perhaps' in just that doubtful nuance of tone.

She watched him disappear through the yawning portals of the Caverne Diamentée, where diamonds and rubies and emeralds glittered thick in the surface of the granite. The manager declared, not without a hint of pride in his own restrained erudition, that he had got the notion from a poem—a *real* poem:

"Full many a gem of purest ray serene,
In deep unfathomed caves of ocean lie."

And if a real poet thought that way about it, then it must be a good taste to have them in his cavern. *And* appropriate.

She turned to her papers and listlessly turned the pages. There did not seem to be a great deal happening in the news just then. It was summerish. News always seemed to lack a thrill in the dog days. People all appeared to be as loose-endy as she was herself.

Then she leaned forward with something of real interest showing on her face. Here was something that gave her a little crawling thrill down the spine, a nasty little thrill. It was only a short piece, but it contained all the facts; and the powers that be, scenting greater interest to follow, had given it a precious top of a column.

"Mysterious Thames Murder," the heading took her eye in a flash. "Man poisoned, stabbed, and drowned. Dagger Clue."

Her eyes raced over the subject-matter:

“A mysterious murder was committed late last night apparently on one of the ships moored at Wapping. Dusk was falling when a deck hand on the opposite bank saw a great splash in the water, and hailed the river police. The river at that point creates a long, slow eddy, and Sergeant Manning, of the Wapping Station, determined to drag there instead of proceeding down river with the fast ebbing tide. Dragging operations proceeded all night, and at dawn their patience was rewarded when the body of a man, since identified as that of Gilan Maxick, Dean Street, Soho, was recovered from the water.

“At the mortuary the police surgeon made the extraordinary discovery that though the body had been in the water all night, there was not a drop of water in the lungs. Further examination revealed the fact that the man had been stabbed through the heart before being thrust into the river. The dagger blade had broken off short, and was still embedded in the body. On analysis it was discovered that the dagger itself had been heavily impregnated with a virulent poison, the exact nature of which has not been disclosed by the police. Further investigations are proceeding, and an early arrest is expected. It is stated that some Oriental writing, cut into the blade of the knife, is part of a Chinese inscription, the English translation of which is known.

“It is thought that the murder, one of the most brutally premeditated and pitilessly determined Scotland Yard has ever been called upon to handle, is the outcome of gang feudalism, for Gilan Maxick is known to have been a member of a group of individuals who levy toll on the underworld of London.

“ He has a criminal record, and has served a term of penal servitude for illegally trafficking in drugs. Scotland Yard regards the case as serious, evincing as it does the first hint of what may happen in gang lawlessness unless the threat is nipped in the bud.”

Hillary put the paper down, and all the lassitude had gone from her. She was tingling with a new and strange excitement, a stimulation of anticipation that even the prospect of a fifty-mile race in the *Spindrift* could not give. Here was something personal, something intimate to herself, something with which she herself had had direct contact. And it had blossomed forth as an important item in the news of the day. She had actually seen the recovery of the body. She had seen that other far more portentous gesture high up on the bridge above the policemen—and she had had the blessed intuition to go over and warn the officers of possible impending danger.

And here, definitely stated in as many words, in an important daily paper was a complete justification of all her instinctive fears. The thing had happened. It was murder! And gang-work at that. What had happened once would happen again. That evil Chinese figure, lonely and grim on the bridge, *was* definitely concerned in the presence of that shapeless thing in the water.

Here was something with a real live thrill in it, a ready-made road leading down to the docks, away from three hours of utter boredom. Somewhere on that forbidding-looking boat there were surely clues in plenty, hard and fast evidence of the captain's complicity in that terrible crime. The waiter's last sentence buzzed in her brain like a prisoned bee.

“It—has—snowed!” And the sergeant had bluntly said that he had long suspected Grosman of drug smuggling. What a grin she would have on Toby if she could get aboard that boat and find something solid for the police to work on—Toby with his smug tolerance and his air of superior intelligence in the speedster that morning.

The car would get her down to the wharves in less than half an hour. There wasn't a scrap of traffic on the streets at that hour in the morning. Gosh! what a thrill it would be to get aboard the *Yangtse* in that dead hour before the dawn, when even the river slept!

Hillary herself was only vaguely surprised when she found herself, a few minutes later, gliding out of the garage, heading for the river and adventure, heading for the first real thrill of her life, away from La Caverne Diamantée with all its tinsel glitter, its silly make-believe, its old roués aping juvenility, and its young men struggling manfully to appear blasé.

The car swung away through Dean Street and the cluttering side turnings, where, during the day, the kosher markets spread their garish turmoil of confusion. Then across Leicester Square and up the Strand, down through the City, bearing east through silent deserts of streets where tall warehouses loomed black into the night and the only humans abroad were the occasional beat constables trying the handles of the doors as they passed; on past the Mint and East Smithfield, skirting the landward edge of St. Katherine Docks and finally she was creeping down Nightingale Lane into Wapping High Street.

She left the car there in a tiny cul-de-sac, locked the gears, and switched off the lights. Then she stole away to the river front, her small, stubborn chin stuck out, the tips of her fingers clenched hard into the palms of her hands and a blissful unconsciousness of the fact that she was walking on tiptoe.

The days of teeming river activity, when loading and unloading went on all through the night, were gone. No gangs of stevedores worked under hissing, fizzling flares, while steam cranes whined and whinnied above them, and bull throated foremen bawled for more and yet more labour to get boats warped out on the tides as they rose. The whole sweep of the water front was wrapped in a pall of gloomy blackness. Except for the intangible smell of ships and the occasional glint of starlight on the inky water she might have been far away from the river.

The loom of a ship reared up above her, gigantic and enormous, into the nave of the night. She stepped over huge grasslines that creaked round the bollards, skinned a sliver of skin off her shin against a taut wire guy that was startlingly invisible in the darkness and crawled along the edge of the wharf to the bows where, straining her eyes upwards into the blackness, she read out the name, faintly luminous in gilt lettering along her blunt nose, *Beaudelaire*.

Nose to nose with that great bulk was another; and her heart dropped a beat or two as she deciphered the name *Yangtse*. She drew back into the stark shadows of a great store-shed that flanked the wharf. For some minutes she did not dare to move. In one overwhelming moment she realised that she had

made a grandiloquent fool of herself. The huge lowering mass of that darkened ship looked portentous; it *looked* as though murder, cold and calculated, lurked aboard there. There was something sinister about the very atmosphere of her, black, immobile, a plague spot of the East come to anchor in the West. And for the first time she felt a horrible misgiving in the pit of her stomach. It was one thing, in the lights and glitter of the Caverne Diamantée to make up her mind to go adventuring among murderers in Dockland—she found it a totally different thing to see it through once Dockland closed round about her in all its naked rawness, its grim silence and with the soft lap-lap of the dark water gurgling about under the piles and licking along the squatting keels. Up river a streak of lights strung out athwart the river where Tower Bridge stood sentinel as the first bridge at the seaward end of the great waterway. Far down stream a lone kittiwake screamed, circling high up between the cop-pice of masts and the tiny pinpoints of the stars. The sound of it made her shiver. It was like the cry of a restless soul endlessly seeking a sanctuary that did not exist. It brought to her again a vision of that cold thing being dragged out of the water. Every atom of her was calling upon her to end the stupid escapade; to cut her own pride and dignity in half; to scuttle back to the safety and seclusion of the big sedan; to creep away home, hide her blushes, and say nothing to anybody.

And she knew she couldn't do it. And what is more, she wasn't going to. The Kittredge spirit did not countenance a quitter. It had taken the bearers

of the name through generations of storm and stress, through wars in far lands and through hairbreadth political crises at home—and it had taken her, with courage high, through dare-devil risks on the flying *Spindrift*. She would have that laugh on Toby though the stars burst and the heavens fell, though all the wide water front vented its spleen on her and though the entire crew of the *Yangtse* ranged up with the odds against her. She was mortally afraid, but she went through with it.

A dim light shone from one of the small port-holes at the stern of the ship. She didn't know whether it had just come on or whether her eyes, accommodating themselves to the intense darkness, had only just picked it out of the encompassing walls of the night. At a long guess it might have been in the ship's state-room. She was moving forward to investigate when there came the barest suspicion of a sound from higher up the wharf. She strained her ears to hear it, a faint tap-tapping that might almost have been the mocking chuckle of the water alongside the *Yangtse*, except that it was harder, more definite and far more regular. It came nearer, tap-tapping along down the wharf, growing slowly and steadily in clarity, very subdued yet oddly distinct.

Then the long shadow of a man crept between her and the winking streamer of lights across the Tower, a tall man dressed in a long thin coat that came down well below his knees and accentuated his unusual height. A battered old felt hat was slung on his head as though its wearer did not care whether it stayed on or fell off.

He was carrying something in front of him. In

the darkness she could not see what it was, and she could not account for the persistent tapping that preceded his deliberate, slow approach. He seemed to be advancing over dangerous ground, for he was feeling his way with extraordinary care, as though fearful of putting his foot on a live bomb.

He came amidships and halted by an electric warping capstan. There he seemed to be back on ground he knew, for he sat down on the capstan and the tapping ceased.

Suddenly a low piping whistle sounded musically on the silence. After a second or two it was repeated, this time from the upper deck of the steamer. Soon a light appeared, a hurricane lamp, carried by a pig-tailed seaman. By its light she saw he was dressed in blue jeans, the jacket very short and the trousers very tight at the ankles; and his shoes were of black felt with thick, white soles.

He balanced the lamp on the guardrail and peered over on to the wharf below. A sibilant whisper passed, and the seaman, satisfied, began to lower a gangway with a hand-winch.

Anyhow, she thought, she had discovered something. If the police ever wanted to get aboard her, all they had to do was to give a musical whistle, something like the fluting pipe of the nightjar. And she had discovered that the gangway was kept up at night. The tall man passed up the gangway, and again the odd tapping preceded him.

As he came into the aura of the lamp she saw what it was. The man was blind; he was feeling his way along with the aid of a long ash stick, and the thing he carried ahead of him was a hawker's tray

of wares—studs, matches, bootlaces, pipe-cleaners, and the general run of the street trader's merchandise.

As soon as the man was aboard the gangway went grinding back up against the ship's side. In a minute the deep silence had descended again and the stillness of the grave settled down over the ship.

Hillary felt her heart pounding. Something was going forward aboard that forbidding boat. The whole thing reeked of suspicion. If everything was honest and above-board, why should they haul the gangway up at night; why should they have secret whistle signs and have to identify themselves with a password before they were allowed to go aboard? And why should a blind hawker come crawling down to her at half-past two in the morning? Could anything be more obviously innocent than a blind beggar? The more she thought of it, the more suspicious it looked. And the more determined she was to get aboard and find out what it was all about.

In any case, she reflected with a feminine flash back to sanity, if the worst came to the worst and she was discovered, she could always fall back on the natural cupidity of the male where the female was concerned. She could giggle and be shockingly abashed and say she had got tired of the high-lights up in Town and had come down there for a lark. One of the Bright Young People, possibly, out on a lone escapade; she just wanted to see what the inside of one of those great old cargo steamers was like. And then she would confess that she had been thrilled to the marrow and assure the captain that she had gone one better than any of her girl friends had ever done yet. Looked at in that light, it all

seemed simple enough. And yet somehow she could not quite shake off the memory of that foul face gazing down from the bridge, could not quite abolish from her mind the probability that that was the callous devil responsible for the death of the man being hauled into the boat.

The seaman had disappeared off the upper deck. She had watched him accompany the blind man aft through a steel bulkhead door, and she heard the soft thuds of the clamping dogs as they were thrust home behind him.

Cautiously she crept across the wharf and hurried again into the shadow of the ship. Great mooring lines fell away from the bows to the fat bollards on the jetty top, and astern she could faintly make out more, coming off her rounded quarter.

She decided for the forward ones. The light in the port was aft, and the two men had gone aft too, so it was natural to suppose that such life as existed in the ship was all down there. Therefore it would be safer to climb aboard from the fo'c'sle and then make her way astern.

She inspected the grasslines and found they were too big to get her hands round. They were over four inches in diameter. But fast round the same bollard was a one-inch wire hawser. She leaned out and gripped it, then gently lowered herself out over the chattering water.

It was a twenty-foot climb, hand over hand, out to the high-flung bows, and upward all the way. Before she was halfway she thanked her gods for the steel wrists that made it possible for her to hang on to the fiercely bucking wheel of the *Spindrift*

when the boat was shrilling all out in a kicking sea.

Slowly and carefully she swung along. The tiny creak of the wire on the fo'c'sle head sounded in her ears like the clanging of a dozen empty biscuit tins, and it seemed impossible that the sleeping crew would not hear it in the pulsing soundlessness of the night. She imagined a circle of scowling cut-throats waiting for her with grisly scimitars a couple of yards beyond the fo'c'sle rails.

But when she reached there and hauled herself up there was not a soul to be seen and not a sound to be heard. She swung a knee over the hawser and rested for a minute and then gently reached up for the first rail. She grasped it, took her weight on it, and slowly climbed aboard.

Away down aft the bulkhead door opened again, emitting a faint haze of light. She saw the seaman mincing forward again with his hurricane lamp, and she heard him cross the length of the deck and disappear into the mysterious depths of the fo'c'sle. She could actually hear him moving about under the deck she was standing on.

That wouldn't help her much, she decided. She took off her satin slippers and stuffed them down the breast of her evening gown. They stuck out by the heels and they were horribly uncomfortable, but in her stockinged feet she could move about as soundlessly as a ghost.

She crept to the companion-way past the bridge and went down. In a few seconds she had hurried across the upper deck and was prospecting the possibilities of entering the stern housing.

There were two great doors of iron, one on either side of the ship. The seaman had come out of the one on the port side, the side that was outboard to the river. With her heart in her mouth she decided to use the same one. She did not know how long it took her to get the great steel clamps off and to push the door open, but she managed it at last, and, moreover, she did it without making a scratch of sound.

It was neck or nothing once that door was open. She slipped through and gently pressed the door shut behind her. And in her ears she could hear the dull pumping of her heart; it seemed to be forcing the blood in her head up to an unbearable pressure.

Still farther aft and below her she could distinguish the faint drone of a voice, but up there where she was the place was deserted. The light came from an electric bracket let into the side casing. Farther along was a polished wooden stairway leading down, and there were other lights on the baluster heads.

She went forward and turned down the stairs. A wide red carpet ran down the length of it, and the whole place was unexpectedly well appointed. Grosman, sailor though he was, appeared to have a full appreciation of Western comforts. At the bottom of the stairs was a deep divan, built up of many cushions, and a line of old Chinese marine prints hung down each side of the stairway. Down below, too, were censers full of a sweetly aromatic scent, and a dumb waiter, pushed outside a door and apparently left by the steward till the morning, contained the remains of a rich meal. There was

cut glass and silver cutlery on the trays and finger-bowls with rose-leaves afloat on the top.

Two passages went round behind the stairs at the bottom, and it was from the left hand one to her that the soft hum of voices seemed to proceed. She cautiously glided forward.

At the end of the passage a cabin door barred the way, but to her right another door stood open. It was marked "Service," and she knew that the gods of luck were with her. Her own knowledge of ships told her that that was the steward's service-room and that inside it there was every possibility of a little service grill opening into the dining-room beyond. She listened intently. Not a sound came from the steward's room. And the odds were all in her favour that the steward was long since turned in. Grosman was not the type to risk being overheard even by one of his own race. His affairs were too obscurely his own for that.

She heard an unmistakably Oriental voice say, in its queer clipped staccato: "Please to wait a moment. Sit down here, please. I will fetch him."

The voice had undoubtedly come from the dining saloon beyond the closed door. She slipped into the service-room and waited.

Nobody came out, and she reasoned that the captain's quarters must lie in a part of the ship still farther astern than the saloon. Not daring to strike a match, she felt along the nearside wall, fumbling in the darkness until her fingers encountered the expected grill. It was only about eighteen inches square, secured at the bottom by a small brass

bolt. But it was more than large enough for her purpose.

She slid the bolt back and cautiously raised the panel a quarter of an inch. Glueing her eye to the crevice, she could just see into the room beyond. The blind hawker was sitting in an armchair, his tray of wares supported on the table in front of him. He was half turned away from her, and his sightless eyes were raised to the ceiling in an attitude of listening and waiting.

The saloon itself was ornate. It was panelled round completely with an exquisitely aromatic sandal-wood. The dining-table was large and of solid mahogany, and across its length was a silk runner of deep Chinese blue, hand-embroidered with truly wonderful workmanship. A humidior of ebony and cut crystal stood beside a great silver bowl of cut flowers, and to one side was a silver opium tray containing the little black pellets, the tiny burner, and the thin, slender pipe with a golden bowl no bigger than the cup of an acorn. The chairs, too, were massive, built to stand voyaging in wild seas, and they were secured to the deck. Perched on a wall bracket was a gold image of the obesely contemplative Buddha, its hands gently linked across its round belly, gazing down on the scene below with placid satisfaction. The lamps were glowing pomegranate fruits, with the dark leaves clustering up the supporting stems. There were many of them scattered about through the room, along the cornices, round the great mahogany sideboard; a tall bunch of them stood at the end of the table itself. The only other lighting was on the

yellow idol, and that, she noticed, was flood-lit from below.

A door which she could not see opened and Grosman came into her line of vision. He was dressed in the gorgeous silk robes of a mandarin, the black skull-cap with its little red button drawn closely over his head. He walked soundlessly to the middle of the room and sat down in a chair opposite the blind man. The blind eyes turned and followed his every movement as though he derived some visual satisfaction from knowing exactly where the man was.

"That you, captain?" asked the beggar in that monotonous, querulous voice peculiar to the blind.

"I am here, Rudley. You have been long gone," the Chinese replied, and Hillary was surprised at the smoothness of his English. There was the barest trace of the Eastern in it.

"I've had trouble in getting through." There was anxiety in the voice, anxiety and not a little misgiving. "Lingard would not see me until I had sent him the final sign."

"Lingard is developing nerves. Something has gone wrong. What is it? Lingard must know."

"Warnings have gone down river. The police know that snow is flooding the markets. An official statement was issued this morning. Lingard has a copy of it. Things will not be easy after to-night, captain."

"Things can be made easy, Rudley. They have been made easy before."

The blind man shifted uneasily on his seat. "There's ways—and there's ways," he intoned

stolidly. "What passes for normal in the treaty ports doesn't get by on the Thames. Lingard is worried. He wants to close down until you have cleared your papers and gone. The Water Rats suspect the *Yangtse*."

"The Water Rats always have suspected the *Yangtse*. It is Lingard's fault if he floods the markets while I am still in port. Rest assured I shall always get the stuff through to him though the river police *live* aboard this ship as long as I am in dock."

"He says he would feel safer if he knew how you did it. He would know how to fence back against the police when they get on his heels."

"Does he expect the police to get on his heels? That again is his own fault if they do. None stands more readily convicted than he who convicts himself. You will be seeing him to-morrow?"

"He says he won't see me again till you have spoken Aden."

"Till I am through the Suez, eh? You will see him to-morrow, Rudley. And you will tell him that no one on earth knows how I get my stuff ashore. And that he would be the last to whom I would impart that secret. He lacks the final ten per cent. of courage."

"He says there must be someone else in your secret; the man who gets it to the warehouse after you have got it ashore."

"Rudley, there *is* no one else. I do it all. Which is why I shall continue to beat the police for as long as I care to deal in cocaine. There is no one to fool my plans. I alone get it ashore. I alone get it to the warehouse."

“He says he won’t take any more from you this trip.”

“He says that, does he?” Grosman’s voice had sunk away to a soft purr. It sounded as gentle as the note of a cooing dove. But it turned Hillary’s blood cold. For behind it was not the contented purr of the house tabby, but the first warning mutter of the king of cats—the snarl of the tiger.

“He says he is not satisfied with the arrangements. He is taking all the risks and only getting a fifth of the profits.”

“He wants more money?”

“No. He says he wants less risk.”

“The arrangements cannot be altered this trip. And he will take all the cocaine I give him.”

“He says he won’t take another gram.”

“Lingard grows obstinate. Does Lingard, too, need a lesson?”

“I can only carry his message, captain.”

“I appreciate that. He knows that I have come to England this time with the greatest cargo ever landed. And I am cutting out the opposition. You best know how! In a year the monopoly will be established. Then shall these fools pay for their pleasure. Thirty-eight pounds have already been landed. Before I sail for Hankow another hundred thousand pounds’ worth will be safely in his warehouse.”

“He told me to tell you he will have nothing to do with it.”

“As coolly as that? Lingard needs reminding. But what has happened, Rudley? Am I so simple that I cannot see there is something more behind

Lingard's attitude than this? Am I so much a stranger that you refrain from telling me?"

"He doesn't like the way things have been happening down here, captain."

"Maxick?"

The blind hawker nodded deliberately with shut lips. There was a silence. The mandarin poured himself out a thimbleful of emerald-green *crème-de-menthe* and took a tiny sip.

"So!" he said. "I am to be chided by my servants? He knew that Maxick was being shadowed by the police and was likely to turn informer?"

"Lingard's argument is that that was very doubtful. Maxick was never given a chance. Lingard knew the police had been after him for weeks. Maxick hadn't squealed up to then. And he says there was no reason to suppose he would squeal when you came up river. He takes the opposite view; he thinks your presence here would have been a firmer muzzle than ever, were one needed at all."

"In this business one takes no risks. Whenever a danger arises, that danger is automatically eliminated. That way alone lies immunity. It has been a proven axiom in China for more centuries than this country has known."

"Lingard says that is all very well in China. Shanghai allows a lot that London won't tolerate for an hour. Maxick is dead and the police have the body. The London police will not stand for murder. You have seen the papers?"

"They amused me."

"Lingard says that all the avenues of investigation must eventually lead to him."

“In short, Lingard is frightened?”

“He protests that too much force is used in the wrong direction and at the wrong time. The result of the Maxick murder is to put the police hot on the scent. By to-morrow we will be fighting a running battle to keep clear.”

Grosman took another sip from the minute silver cup. “There are other ways and means,” he murmured. “In China we do not fight rearguard actions with the police. Lingard will discover that in time. To-morrow you will see him——”

“He says definitely he will not see me till the *Yangtse* has cleared for the East.”

“Unless Lingard is very careful Lingard will find himself—supplanted,” purred the quiet voice, and there was a shiver in the way he said ‘supplanted.’ “You will see him to-morrow——”

The hawker cut in with a gesture of exasperation. “What is the use of giving me orders I cannot obey?” he said plaintively. “Without eyes I cannot find him. Without eyes I cannot find the traces to follow up.”

“Nevertheless,” the cold voice went on, “Lingard will see *you*. A blank post card sent to his address will suffice. Do you understand?”

“No, captain, I don’t,” replied the hawker bluntly.

“It is a secret signal we use between ourselves. Just a plain post card with nothing on it except the address.” There was almost a chuckle from the depths of the bulky chest. “Some of those post cards have arrived two days late. The police must have had many thankless nights submitting those cards to

acids and irons and alkalies in an effort to decode the secret message written there. There is no message at all, Rudley. Just a verbal understanding, that is all. When one of those cards arrives it orders him to appear at the warehouse within twelve hours of the hour of its receipt. Simplicity is always more efficacious than intricacy. I will send the card myself. Lingard will be there."

"Then you have no further need of me?"

"On the contrary." The silky voice went down a note. "I want to know on whose side you stand!"

The forehead above the sightless eyes wrinkled and the head turned sideways as though to catch a hidden meaning.

"It is obvious that a faction exists," went on Grosman. "Lingard is feeling his feet just a little too well. Just a little too well. He forgets that the source of supply is the fountain-head of strength. If there is to be internecine strife, Rudley, I need to know my forces."

The blind man stirred in his chair. "Why ask me?" he said simply. "For five years I have known comfort—when for fifteen I had known nothing but misery, I who have travelled the East and held the whip to a thousand slaves. Five years of comfort I owe you. My affliction is your safeguard. For twenty years now the police have known me, living on a pittance. They would laugh if anyone told them I was an emissary of yours. They have known me too long. I can go where I will, hear what I will. None bars my way; none denies me. I am Blind Rudley. I cannot hurt a fly. Neither, captain, can I live unless the stream of snow comes in with your ship.

What can Lingard offer me? What can Lingard offer himself—without you? Why ask me on whose side I stand?”

“Tell me the truth, Rudley. Lingard *is* definitely antagonistic?”

“As regards the Maxick business—yes. He says it was a fatal thing to do and it is not counter-balanced by a possible benefit.”

“Lingard does not even appreciate the intelligence of the West. What, do you think, is the effect of Maxick’s death on the rest of them? Will anyone dare to turn his coat? A little judicious murder has a tonic effect where a dissatisfied mob is concerned. You will be seeing the others in the morning?”

“At ten o’clock in the coffee-house.”

“I shall be in the *Outward Bound* at nine in the evening. Report to me there. You will get a message. Pass it to me in the usual way. It is possible that a *Water Rat* may be present. Do not hesitate. Just carry on in your usual way. I can attend to the rest.”

There was a silence for some seconds. The mandarin rose, intimating that the session was at an end. Still Blind Rudley sat on, looking straight up at the captain out of the depths of his blindness.

At last Grosman jerked out: “Well?”

“What’s wrong, captain?” asked the blind man quietly. “You have never done this before.”

“Never done what before? I don’t understand you,” said Grosman with a puzzled frown.

“You’ve never had a third party listening in on me. Don’t you trust me?”

“Trust you? Third party? I don’t know what you are talking about. There is no third party here.

There never has been. I am capable of handling all emergencies—myself.”

Rudley laughed; and the laugh was not nice to hear. “You don’t bluff me like that, captain,” he said bitterly. “You might be able to bluff my eyes—but you can’t play tricks with my ears. Twenty years of this blackness has taught me to recognise the voice of a friend in a chorus of a hundred enemies, to distinguish the step of a man I know from among a dozen of those who are strangers to me.”

Grosman was eyeing his henchman intently.

“Would you mind explaining what you mean?” he said, and his voice was like a saw cutting into steel.

“Captain, there are three people breathing in this room!”

“*What?*”

“There have been, ever since you began to talk.”

“You are mad. There is not a soul here except ourselves. There is nowhere a cat could hide, except in the sideboard.”

“The third party is not there. The sideboard is behind me on my left. This person is behind me on my right. The breathing began one minute before you came in. That is, two minutes after the mate left to fetch you.”

Grosman had not heard the last sentences. As soon as Rudley had indicated the direction of the breathing his super-sensitive ears had detected, Grosman’s eyes had flashed across to the service grill from his still-room. He saw the panel raised a fraction of an inch. And he himself had closed it and bolted it a minute after his steward had turned in.

In spite of his bulk, he was out through the saloon door with the slippery agility of a cat. Blind Rudley sensed the position. He called to Grosman. "Steady, captain—it was a woman."

Grosman wheeled in his stride. "So!" he said. His great bulk was planted outside the service door. His clawlike hand went out behind him and found the handle. The door was shut to with a slam and the lock clicked home.

He stepped away from the door and crossed over to Rudley. "Come this way," he said. "I shall not need to see you again till to-morrow night." He piloted him out to the stairs and clapped his hands for the seaman.

Caught in a trap, Hillary, white-faced and frightened, hunted round in the darkness for the electric light switch. She had a horror of being caught in that narrow place with such a ferocious brute, in the dark. She couldn't find it. In a panic she fumbled in her bag. She found there a little book of cardboard matches, a souvenir from the Caverne Diamentée—and never did she wish so soulfully that she was back in its futile gaudiness.

A tiny wisp of flame seared into the blackness, and she saw the switch tucked away behind the door. She pushed it down and gazed around in the flood of light that blazed out. To a woman's eye there were weapons of defence all about her. Pewter mugs, teapots, vegetable dishes, entrée covers, soup tureens—every single one of them a possible missile, but not a thing that could hold Grosman off for more than a few moments.

She heard a faint chuckle from beyond the door.

Grosman had seen the lights appear through the transom overhead. A few seconds later the lights went out with a startling black-out; Grosman had pulled out the master switch in the passage-way. Hillary Kittredge began to realise something of the animal nature of the man into whose power she had thrust herself.

"Ying, take Mr. Rudley on deck. When he has gone see that the gangway is raised again. Lower it for no one. And you yourself—keep for'ard. Don't come abaft the funnel. If I want you I will ring."

She heard Grosman's calm voice giving his orders and, straining her ears into the silence, she heard the soft padding of the seaman's shoes as he took Rudley tap-tapping up the companion-way.

Then for a few moments she waited, tense as an overstrung violin string. For her, crouched in the corner, it was like that horrific interval that comes between the flash and the crash in a thunderstorm, except that the interval was drawn out till it became unbearable. She knew that her knees had gone as weak as unset jelly with sheer livid fright, and the back of her throat was as dry and rough as though it was coated with coarse sand. The docks were deserted. A few out-of-works might be lounging about the all-night coffee-stall in Wapping High Street, but Wapping High Street was a long, long way away—and between her and it stretched acres of gloomily deserted store sheds and silent wharves. All the hysterical screaming on earth would not help her at that time of night.

Slowly the door began to open. A hard lump shot into her throat when she heard the ominous

click of the latch. It opened a foot, and a faint blur of light crept in from outside. She saw the bulk of the Chinese, grown suddenly bigger in her frantic imagination by the black cast of his shadow against the wall, loom silently into the room. He paused inside the door, and a long pencil of light stabbed out from his hand full into her face.

For long seconds he kept it there. She was too sick with fright even to shut her eyes against the piercing glare. He looked her over as calmly and yet as critically as a prospective buyer inspects an animal in the market-place, appraising the offering point by point, saying nothing, but retaining his own opinion.

“So!” he said at last, and in the utter silence the single syllable came like an explosion on her eardrums. It seemed to put the onus of speaking on her. And for the life of her she couldn't open her mouth. That grim beast was capable of infecting steel with poison and thrusting it into the heart of an enemy—and she was as much at his mercy as though they were out on the broad, tenantless wilderness of the Pacific.

And yet in spite of it, at the back of her brain there functioned a little burning spark of the Kittedge spirit. She was aware of a wild surge of recklessness in the knowledge that her feminine intuitions had been right. If only she had had the sense to have come down there with Toby, or have bribed one of the river police officers to sneak aboard with her, she would have been at the pinnacle of her own self-esteem. And she would have wiped that tolerant smile off Toby's face for as long as he lived. No matter what happened, she had won her point—and

proved it. It was not her fault that there was no one else there to see.

"So!" said the mandarin again, and he limped a few steps nearer, like an excessively fat perpendicular frog. "What are you doing aboard this ship?" he asked politely. In that horrible minute of scrutiny she felt as though he had dug into her mind and turned her every thought over, examining each one and tossing it back after picking out its secret.

"I—I—I'm sorry. I think I have got aboard the wrong ship." The words bubbled out of her mouth almost incoherently.

"What ship do you want, little lady?"

"The—the *Beaudelaire*." She thanked her gods for the chance they gave her of reading that name out there on the jetty.

The thin eyebrows went up half an inch. "The French boat lying ahead of me?"

"Y-yes. That one."

"And who did you wish to see aboard the *Beaudelaire*?"

"The captain."

"The captain's name is——?"

"I—I don't know," she stammered. "It's a French name and I—I forget it."

"You have met him?"

She nodded, feeling more and more desperate. "I saw him one night this week—in a restaurant—and he asked me to come down and see him."

"Do you often do that sort of thing?"

The slimy inference was obvious. There was something of a clammy caress in the very tone of it. Hillary, with her cheeks flaming scarlet, threw her

character to the winds that floated down the broad bosom of the Thames. She nodded again and tried to look away. But the slant eyes held her as though on the end of a lance. She wanted to get rid of the sight of them but she couldn't—for she knew she was far more eager to pierce their unemotional depths and prise a hint of his intentions from them. But to her they were like little ovals of agate coloured ice, without a shade of feeling in them.

“The captain of the *Beaudelaire* is Kidson,” he said in a level singsong. “John William Kidson. He is English. As are the three other officers aboard her. His wife travels with him. She has her state-room next to his. He does not make chance acquaintances with little ladies of the restaurant lounges. Kidson is deeply religious. He is known along the river as Holy Bill. Rivermen take humour from the fact that he is rabidly teetotal, yet gets a comfortable living by bringing over most of the wine that comes to this country from France. Yes? You are going to tell me something?”

“It—it was someone who said he was the captain of the *Beaudelaire*.” She was horribly conscious of the lameness of the get-out.

“Are you sure it was not a stoker, a fireman—or maybe a common deck hand?” That was a fierce one. Little ladies of the persuasion to which she had allied herself begin in a blaze of glamour up among the bright lights of the West End, but they finish up across the bridges. There are grades, even in the oldest of the professions, and once they get down among the common lodging-houses on the Surrey side they reckon to have got down to bedrock.

“What do you mean?” she gasped. Grosman had seen the sudden glare that spat from her eyes. Deep in his own imperturbable soul his quiet chuckle sounded.

“If the officers are all English—you must be looking for someone with a French name. Therefore he is not an officer. The captain does not allow what you English call ‘That sort of thing’ on board his ship. You are looking for one of the crew. You need to do it surreptitiously. Therefore you take off your pretty shoes and tuck them down your equally pretty bosom. So. You can get aboard and into the fo’c’sle without being heard.”

He crossed his hands over his middle and regarded her.

“That is not true. It’s a disgusting lie!” she burst out.

“What is chaste in the officers’ room is crime in the fo’c’sle head,” he said gently. “You English have such quaint distinctions. Tell me, little lady, if you wanted to see this officer with the French name aboard the *Beaudelaire*, why did you come aboard the *Yangtse*, creep down into this room without arousing the suspicion of my very light-eared Ying on the upper deck and—having discovered your mistake several times over—elect to remain here?”

“I—I was too frightened to move until you had all gone to bed.”

“And is that why you so carefully and silently raised the grill of the service hatch?”

“I just—just tried to peep in. I wanted to see who was there.”

“So?” He regarded her again with amused

interest. And yet there was no more humour in his expression than snow on the face of the Sahara.

"You were the girl who was out in the reach here this morning," he said suddenly. "The girl in the long motor-boat, the *Spindrift*?"

Hillary's quick look of startled surprise would have given her away anywhere. The sharpness of Grosman's eyes was as unexpected as Rudley's abnormally perceptive ears.

"Why, yes," he went on, as though temporising with himself. "But you were wearing a helmet then. And leather breeches. You look very well in breeches. Perhaps your friend on the *Beaudelaire* has already told you so? There was a man in the boat with you?"

She took a grip on herself and tried to bluff it out on the oldest bluff of all, that of sheer frankness.

"Yes," she admitted. "I was out on the river this morning. I'm often out. We go out through the Swins to the Black Deeps—we are tuning the boat up for the International."

"And do you know the river police so well that you slow down and go over to talk to them—when they are recovering dead bodies from the water?"

"We—we just wanted to see if there was anything we could do," she lied valiantly.

"Who is the other half of the 'we'?"

"Mr. Essex. With me, he is the owner of the boat."

"So? And do little ladies who are rich enough to own boats like the *Spindrift* and go to expensive night clubs pay visits at this hour of the morning to unknown sailors on ships like the *Beaudelaire*?"

“It—it was just a silly adventure,” she managed to get out at last. Grosman was slowly but surely driving her into a corner, and he was doing it with all the wicked delight of a cat playing with a lamed mouse. Under the beady glitter of his mesmeric eyes she felt more and more like a trapped animal every minute. There were centuries of cruelty and callousness in those soulless eyes. They held in them countless generations of the brutality that has, in the Oriental mind, regarded woman as nothing more than a vehicle for the appeasement of desire and a genitive machine for the production of heirs male.

“A very silly adventure,” he concurred. “So silly that, even yet, you do not realise the full silliness of it. Or, perhaps one ought to say, the full gravity of it. A great deal has happened since you came up with the dawn this morning. Things have become rather more involved. The dawn winds blew. And, as you probably know, little lady, death comes with the dawn. Intricacies have arisen. Manning has called in Scotland Yard. Sterling is in charge of the case. My ship, to my great surprise and sad regret, is under suspicion. To-morrow it will be under surveillance. But to-morrow will find little to survey. For the intricacies will be removed. The police will have been just those few hours too late. In five hours’ time the dawn winds will blow again.”

He spoke with the smoothest gentleness, as though trying to placate a somewhat restive customer, assuring him of his own personal attention in all future dealings with him; but behind his purring suavity she read the deeper menace, the horrifying threat that underlined every word.

“There are places on this ship,” he went on, “that even the Water Rats cannot find. They take the ship’s plans with them when they search for contraband; but the plans they carry are not the plans from which this ship was built. There are places here, little lady, where even Sterling and his men cannot find you. For the *Yangtse* was built on the Yangtse Kiang, where ship inspectors weary not and Boards of Trade do not operate. You will find that it is unwise to meddle with things that do not concern you.”

She cowered back against the wall. Grosman did not attempt to molest her. Instead, his eyebrows puckered at her fright.

“Why so frightened?” he murmured. “I shall not harm you. To be sure, it would be a simple matter to be rid of you, for you are a danger, and it is unwise to harbour dangers. It is like suckling a viper to the breast. But there are other ways. The ocean is wide and the soundings are deep. Many have gone out in the holds of ships, stowed deep among the cargo. Two thousand miles out a body is thrown overboard, in the warm seas, where the horse-mackerel shoal. Have you seen the horse-mackerel? Their action is swift and eminently sure. They do their work well. I have seen a body picked clean in less than five minutes—just a perfect human skeleton, white as new ivory, left turning over and over on the surface of the water where the thousands of little mouths still champ hungrily at the bones and the density of the seething fish beneath still keeps it afloat.”

He chuckled again, silently, inhumanly. “But

such ways are for those with a purse to fill," he said. "You are just a dilettante—a little fool seeking a thrill. You shall have it. There would be awkward inquiries made were you to vanish. The police would be informed. Possibly some of your friends know where you have come to-night. It would not be pleasant. So you shall go back to your people, little lady. But not quite as you are now. There will be a little subtle difference in you when next you sit with your people. Do not shiver so. No one will notice it. Only you yourself will know what has happened. And you will not tell; for secrecy is only one of the virtues of the pleasant spell that I shall cast upon you. You shall not be disfigured; and, after a little while, you will feel no revulsion. Only a great kindness towards me. You will look forward to my visits with a great yearning, as a maiden in love longs for her swain. You will study the shipping for news of the *Yangtse* and you will pray for the safe coming of my ship to the river. *Increasingly*, little lady, you will sigh for my return from far Hankow."

He broke off and the pencil of light suddenly snapped into darkness. She screamed, loudly, piercingly; a shrill peal of horror that pulsed out into the night. The sudden darkness again had overwhelmed her. Her nerves, taut as overstressed metal, broke; she literally *felt* him drawing nearer.

"Don't squeal," she heard him softly chiding her. "There is nothing to fear. Just a little unpleasantness, that is all, until you get used to it. You see I must safeguard myself. You have been listening at that grill. And you know what happened to Gilan

Maxick. Your tongue must be sealed. Maxick could die and not much would be said. He was of the gutter. You are different. But——”

She felt herself taken in a pair of enormous arms, arms that in spite of their seeming flabbiness were hard as teak wood and as fiercely strong as an athlete's. She struggled like a maniac, kicking, biting, scratching, and screaming like a virago. His grip seemed to encompass her. He had taken her round the arms and was squeezing her till the breath was being crushed from her lungs. His great muscles flexed to steel, and he had locked his hands. Slowly the pressure increased. A numbness was creeping over her, and her head began to sing madly with the violent pressure of blood to the brain. A distant drum was throbbing in her ears. It shifted and began to beat behind her eyes. She knew that her screaming was no longer audible—it had sunk away down the scale to a hoarse croaking.

The crushweight of his bear-hug was all on the muscles of her arms and shoulders. He did not increase it. She could feel his breath on her face, breathing smoothly and evenly. Her feet were clear of the deck, but she no longer had strength to kick. It was as though lead weights bound her limbs and held them stretched. Then the palms of hands went cold and the wrists hung useless, numb. They were insensible, except to the pain of millions of pins and needles that were shooting through them. It was as though a savage tourniquet had been applied to both her arms. She gave a little gasp and relaxed in his embrace.

He bent his head nearer, listening for the sound

of her breathing. Then with a heave of his body he swung her on to the broad top of the surface dresser, limped down to the door, and switched on the lights.

She lay there inert. She was perfectly conscious and fully aware of all that was going on around her, but to save her soul she could not have moved a finger. The life seemed to have gone out of her muscles, her limbs were inanimate, and a dull lethargy was on her body, a listlessness that was heavy as the aftermath of alcohol.

Grosman came back to her. "Just one little puncture," he said, with an oily smile, "and you will feel better."

Her eyes followed him, half hysterical with dread. There was something in his hand, something that glittered and was bright with glass and nickel under the strong lights. It was a gleaming hypodermic syringe, its attenuated needle as fine drawn as a piece of wire. From his robes he produced a slim phial of colourless liquid and placed it on the dresser beside her.

The stopper was a tightly stretched piece of elastic. He took the syringe, pierced the needle through the elastic, and carefully filled the cylinder with liquid.

"Just one little puncture," he reflected malignantly, "one little puncture repeated at intervals. Gradually you will come to like it. You will look forward to it. And in the end you will need it with every fibre of that trim body of yours. It will be some days before the *Yangtse* weighs out for the East. And in that time you shall be my own charm-

ing guest aboard here. You shall live in the Temple with the God of All Knowledge and All Wisdom. With Buddha himself you shall live, in the House of the Hundred Prayer Wheels, where none but a mandarin has trod before you. Just a little at a time you shall have, gradually increasing the strength until, like the other little fools who have tampered with foolishness too often, you burn with the secret fires that cannot be quenched except by more of the fires that consume them, until you only find ease in the sharp kiss of the needle.

“You will go back to your people outwardly as sound and as well as when you embarked on a misguided urge for a night’s adventuring down river. But inwardly you will be one of the rest of them, a confirmed addict, hiding your desires from the world with all the cunning that comes to the votary of the coca-leaf, yet satisfying your craving as often as the old fires begin to smoulder.

“And you will not dare to tell. Your only horror will be that you should be discovered and that your supplies will be cut off, that the avenues of supply shall be barred to you. You will fight and pay stupidly to get what you need. Your daily problem will be to get more of the narcotic that has poisoned you, for cocaine alone is its own anodyne. Aha! you will long for the return of the *Yangtse* and you will pray for her safe passage.”

He picked up her unresisting arm, slid the evening cloak away, revealing the clear whiteness of the perfect skin, white and smooth as porcelain save where a sullen band of red showed where his powerful arms had been. Deftly as a surgeon he stretched

the skin, searched for, and found, the vein and pressed the needle in.

Coldly, analytically, like a chemist measuring out a prescription, he injected the dose, a thin squirt of the exhilarating drug that coursed into her veins like liquid fire and yet, in some queer way, was as cool as a press of menthol on the skin.

Hillary's eyes were opened wide with horror. A flood-light of understanding was drenching through her. By continual doses of the vile drug, added to day by day and strengthened dose by dose, he intended creating in her a cocaine fiend, a dope addict, with all power of mind and body sapped away and corroded until nothing but a drug-ridden husk of a body was left, a body that hungered and burned for more of the drug that destroyed it, a dull, torpid thing that was gradually voided of every scrap of will-power, with only one aim left in life—the acquisition of more of the deadly opiate.

The very beastliness, the inhumanity of it, swept her into a fierce rebellion. Life came back in a flood to her benumbed limbs, and she tried to fight back at him. But her muscles were lethargic; it was as though a long sleepiness had come over them. They did not move quickly; her nerves were seconds late in obeying the urgent dictates of her brain.

The devilishness of it appalled her. Such a monstrous malevolence could only have germinated in the brain of a ghoul. She saw her perfect young body cankered and rotted, lost to all sense of decency, a pod of loathsome desires and dehumanised appetites. And fighting availed her nothing.

He leered above her, all the hate of the East for

the West alight in his bitter eyes. He was holding her hands with ease, smiling humourlessly at her maddened efforts to shake him off. In a few seconds he knew the drug would begin to take effect.

"Little interfering lady," he said silkily, "you have a proverb—that a burnt child dreads the fire. So shall you dread ever again to interfere in those things that do not concern you."

She tried to tear her thoughts from him, tried to concentrate on hopes of later escape; surely, on a river teeming with life during the daytime, it was not possible to hold a woman against her will. If she could only keep calm, keep her senses, and watch for the opportunity, that opportunity was bound to come.

The captain might be master of life and death aboard the *Yangtse*, but his power did not extend up and down the length of the great waterway. There were the river police, constantly patrolling the water; there were lighters, slowly passing up and down day and night, strings of barges, dinghys, skiffs, grimy little tugs fussing and snorting about all day long, all the whole ruck and gamut of riverwise shipping passing up and down in continual pageant. Opportunities for escape must surely present themselves every hour. He could not keep her cooped up and hidden away there through the long days of lading and weighing out without *someone* noticing her presence there.

And then again, perhaps Grosman was only frightening her; perhaps he was only putting the fear of death into her, so that when he came to let

her go she would have had such a fright that never again would she open her mouth as to what had happened to her aboard his ship in the silent hours before the dawn.

Yes, that was it. He was bluffing her. Really, at heart he was not such a bad old sort. No one with such a fat, placid old face as that could possibly be such a human devil as he was trying to make her believe. And, after all, she deserved to be frightened. She was trespassing on his ship. She had broken into his own domain and had played eavesdropper, had dared to listen to his own private conversations. Some sort of a punishment was only right. She had asked for it. And in giving her a scare like this he was surely letting her off with as light, but as horrifying, an experience as his Oriental brain could conceive.

At that point she surprised her own thoughts. Another self, another, more intimate, self inside her seemed to draw apart and point out to her the extraordinary course her thoughts were taking. She drew back with a start of horror. These stupid, easy, happy ideas, these fulsome, reassuring prospects for the future—they were all the brain-children of the drug, the first soothing effects of the filthy stuff he had pumped into her. Already it was working. She was aware of a feeling of languorous somnolence; a care-free outlook was sliding into her brain, and even the sinister presence of Grosman, leering down above her, did not seem so noxious to her.

It was his ship, anyway. He had more right there than she had. She had no right there at all, come to

think of it. And in any case, what did it matter? What did anything matter? Everything would be all right to-morrow. And maybe it was only a dream after all. A foolish dream, born of old inhibitions and long-repressed desires. Silly how these dreams came about. But that was the way they happened. If you wanted a thing, like riches, or lovers, or fame, or, say, adventures, and you repressed the thoughts about them with sufficient firmness, they stayed deep down in the half-dead chambers of the brain and then threw up again in dreams, when the brain was no longer fully master of itself. Or something like that. She couldn't quite remember. She had read it somewhere. Freud? Was it Freud? The German chap. Someone, anyway. A foreigner. Certainly not Chinese. That was Grosman. Fat old Grosman. Trying like the very devil to frighten her.

But he didn't know her secret. She *knew!* It was bluff. In the morning he would let her go. He might probably make a few dark hints as to what would happen to her if ever she came near his ship again. But that would be about the extent of it. And she could go back, have a good long sleep—and that would be the end of it. That is, if it wasn't all a dream. Which, of course, it was. Such things as this never happened to people in their wakeful hours.

Her inner self was slowly fading. Her present self seemed to be drawing it back again. Its panic-stricken warnings were muting. She heard them only faintly. And she disbelieved them. Her faculties were functioning as she wanted them to, along

the easy, pleasant lines that were strewn by the coca-leaf. The inner self, the very mainspring of her will-power, grew vaguer, more misty with each passing moment. She scarce heard it at all. The solace of its going filled her.

It was gone. The last jarring note had dimmed and died away to nothing. Her arms hung limp in the mandarin's grasp. He leaned over and spoke to her softly. She turned her head with the slow, soft languor of utter contentment, and looked up at him. She smiled and her hand squeezed his, ever so gently. In any other circumstance it would have been the soft caress of invitation. . . .

But the smile was at an odd hallucination which she had been harbouring but a few short minutes before. How on earth had she ever conceived the notion that Grosman was fat—or ugly? Queer how the brain warps conceptions at times. Grosman? He was positively a decent-looking old chap. Wouldn't hurt a fly. And certainly not fat. There was nothing obese about him. How she had first got the notion she couldn't think. And, what was more, she didn't want to. So far as she was concerned, she had amended her ideas. Grosman was all right. Friendly old soul. Wonder what his Christian name was. Heigho! she'd be asleep in a minute if she didn't look out. Well, the bed was certainly very soft and nice. A big, double feather bed probably. Generally she didn't approve of feather beds. But to-night she did. She'd tell the world she did. Why she hadn't liked them before passed her comprehension. Quite a lot of her preconceived ideas were being knocked cock-eyed to-night. And a very good

thing too—if they were all as nice as these. Ee-yah! She stretched her arms in a bliss of comfort. Time must be getting on. No wonder she was tired.

But was she? The secondary symptoms were beginning to manifest themselves. Somehow she didn't particularly want to go to sleep. At least, she didn't think so. She wasn't quite sure. In a little while she would make up her mind. Meanwhile there was nothing whatever to worry about. Everything was slowly coming just right and splendid. The world was very rosy, very desirable, a wholly delightful place to be in.

And old Grosman, too. There he was, bless his old heart, as friendly and as affectionate as anyone could wish. Nice old chap. Faithful old chap. Trust old Grosman to stick around.

There was a brightness in her eyes, a glisten that seemed to be born of perfect health and of youthful spirits running up to the pinnacles of the heights. A feeling of warmth and bodily well-being was sweeping her, a gentle tingle of exhilaration, that most perfect of all emotional sensations, was spinning about in her.

Grosman waited on with a high-souled patience. Soon she was smiling intermittently as though a free but disjointed stream of jokes were running through her mind.

The mandarin spoke to her then.

“How did you come down here?” he asked.
“By car?”

The girl nodded, too serenely lazy to talk.

“Were you alone?”

Again she gave a tiny little nod of her head.

Grosman stroked her arm. "And you left the car handy here somewhere?" he inquired gently.

"Yes," she whispered, and tucked her head down against her shoulder.

Grosman bared her arm again, picked up the syringe, and carefully sought a second vein. He chose one in the firm flesh of the forearm. The needle went in, and with studied calculation he administered a bolstering dose.

In five minutes the bright glisten of her eyes turned to a dull leaden glaze. The springy tingle slipped away from her veins; and slowly, with many flickerings, her eyelids closed.

He watched her critically for a moment to make sure she slept. And when her breathing began to come in short, steady exhalations he picked her up in his great arms and carried her out into the saloon.

He settled her on a deep mound of cushions and rang for the upper deck watch. In a little while Ying arrived on softly padding feet. Grosman was busy with Hillary's little gold-meshed handbag, ferreting about among its contents for one of her visiting cards. He found one and read thereon the bald announcement—Miss Hillary Kittredge, Cawdor House, Finchley.

Grosman turned to the seaman.

"Go out into the neighbouring streets," he said. "You will find a car, probably a saloon. It will not be in a garage, but most likely in a side street or small alleyway leading off one of the dock approaches. Very likely its lights will be out. Find it and take it to Cawdor House, Finchley. That is

on the road out of London to the north, through Regent's Park and Barnet. The name of the road I do not know, but you will find it in the telephone directory under the name Kittredge. If there is a garage attached to the house—and most probably there will be—look carefully over the ground and run the car in as quietly as you can. You should not have much trouble, for it is obvious that the family there are quite used to the owner of the car arriving home at any hour of the morning. If there is no garage leave the car outside the house and return as quickly as possible. I will be waiting up for you. Leave entries in the log in your own writing covering the next two hours.”

Ying bobbed his head without showing the least concern at the oddity of the order, and went padding away up the companion-way.

Grosman crossed over to the massive sideboard. A cluster of pomegranate fruits glowed at one end. He switched them out, felt in one of the side cupboards for a hidden knob, and turned it till there came a faint ‘click.’

Then he turned the lights on again. And as the soft glow flooded out the high panel in the centre of the board swung open, revealing a narrow, pitch black opening beyond. Grosman turned off the flood of light on the Buddha, picked the girl up, and passed through the opening. As he disappeared with his burden the lamps went out and the panel closed silently behind him. The locks clicked tight as the panel closed in and the lights came on again from under the golden Buddha, who sat serenely on his bracket and gazed down in placid contemplation at

the ominous silence and emptiness that descended upon the room.

From far away over the massed clattering of store-sheds and dormant cranes Big Ben boomed out the hour; four brassy strokes, enormous and mighty, that quivered on the walls of the night long after the hammerhead was still. From on beyond Wapping Wall the protesting drone of the first of the early workmen's trams snored along, and a red light, bright in the black blocks of shadows along the Surrey side, crept gently along, where a police boat chugged slowly up river.

CHAPTER IV

JOHNNY KITTREDGE awoke next morning and bleated his regret to the ceiling that he had not kept earlier hours overnight. It was a hundred per cent. penance, he declared, to be afflicted with a sister like Hillary. She had more personal will power than a yearling colt, and she took about as kindly to the bit. All told, he informed his razor as he viciously jammed the alum stick into the second snick on his chin, it would be thoroughly satisfactory to all concerned if she found herself one of these days in an undeniably sticky mess, a mess from which it would take more than the machinations of her more influential friends to extricate her. Meanwhile, he hoped she was

having a completely filthy time with a busted rudder somewhere out past the Swin, in the back yard of the estuary, where she wouldn't be picked up for hours and hours and hours.

He was late for breakfast, and the coffee was nothing to raise a thrill about. Among his mail was a letter that cheerfully cancelled him out of a round of golf that afternoon; another, delivered by hand and written in a mixture of gall and prussic acid, thanked him with feminine fervour for having been kept waiting in a restaurant foyer till the whole evening was well and truly sunk.

His father, Sir John, knew the portents. He had a knack of smiling with a dead straight face and an eye that never even lit. Johnny described it as a very slight diaphragmatic tremor—just that and no more. He cocked a knowledgeable eye at his son.

“Out late last night, old man?” he asked.

“Yes,” grunted Johnny. “But it wasn't with malice aforethought. Like a dutiful ass I was hanging on to a completely casual and exasperating piece of skirt—an unnecessary and uninteresting piece of skirt, mark you—keeping her out of the hands of murderers, body snatchers, evangelists, white slavers, and God knows who-what—and in doing so I everlastingly annihilated my own date.”

“You had a date?”

“I'll inform the slant-eyed universe I had a date! With one of the most—sorry, *the* most wonderful, most adorable, divine, goddessy, *délice*, soul burnishing, faith renewing, eye soothing, loveliest, darlingest, most highly inflammable piece of dame you could meet in a fortnight of Ash Wednesdays. Looks

well, talks well, rides well, shoots well, got a peach of a drive off the tee, smacks a hell of a dirty back-hand volley, and actually understands cricket! Yes, sir. Slit my throat if I tell a lie! A bit uncontrolled with the pen, though. And if you want to see a pair of legs do the 'Varsity Drag——”

A ringing squeal on the telephone bell cut him short.

Father and son eyed each other across the table. Johnny carefully put down his knife and fork. The elder never batted an eye, but the son had a fairly shrewd suspicion that the diaphragm was publishing a tremor.

“D’ye hear that?” Johnny demanded, jerking a belligerent thumb over his shoulder. “That’s it! That’s her! Stranded somewhere out on the Hevnelpus Shoal. And she’s vamped the lighthouse keeper into a swoon—and he’s let her use the Trinity House phone. ‘Hello, Johnny, darling, is that you?’ With her mouth all screwed up pretty like a piece of sugar-coated sugar. ‘What *do* you think has happened? Here’s your poor little sister all wrecked on the Whatsernames. All wet’—I’ll tell the world she’s wet—‘and so cold and *so* hungry. And you will be a perfect angel and come out and rescue her, won’t you? The best way is to take a taxi as far as Shoeburyness, tell him to wait so that we can all go back in it, and then hire a yawl. Any of the boatmen there will know where the Blastemall Shoals are—just sixty-six short little miles Nor’-nor’-east-two-east of the Gorblimies. ‘And unless you get your poor little sister home and tucked into bed *toute suite* she’s going to catch a lungful of that

horrid pneumonia and won't be able to win that case of silver thimbles in the International.' Yeaaaaaaaaaah!"

The maid entered and said: "A telephone message for you, Mr. John. Mr. Essex is on the line, waiting."

"Is he!" said John with a glare that would have gone through Harveyised steel. "She's passed the buck on to Toby, has she, the hussy? Got her poor tame ant to do the 'darling-Johnny' stuff, eh? Whoops, dearie, wait till I get at him."

He went out and stuck the receiver against his ear. "Well?" he barked.

"Is that you, Johnny?" asked an anxious voice.

"Oh yes, this is Johnny. Spill the bad news. You can leave me the preliminaries in your will. I'm busy and want to get it over. Where are you? And what's the alibi? Magneto? Spark plugs? Steering gear? General debility of the motor—or just darn lousy seamanship?"

"Easy, Johnny, easy. This isn't a call for the life-boat. Where's Hillary?" There was an undeniably worried note in the tone of Toby's voice.

"Where? How the fiery Hades do I know where she is? Where did you decant her last? Did you skid her over the tailboard, park her on the mark buoy, or just slide her over side on a twin? And while we're at it, why not look after your own *femmes* in the evening? Hey? Why dump 'em on me—and at the tail end of the month, too? D'ye think I've got diamond mines working overtime for me, or a row of chain stores hitting me with dividends every Friday night? Or do you take me

for the long, curly lizard that passes the cakes at *thés dansant*? Hey? What's the natty notion?"

"Listen, Johnny. I want to know where she is. I couldn't be with her last night. There was a six-hour job to do on the *Spindrift* and I didn't want her here. She couldn't help—it was all heavy lifting and overhauling, no work for a girl at all. And I sent her home. I thought she was going to have a good, long night's rest——"

"Well, you can put your left hand right down your throat and say she didn't. She went out on a skite. And what's more, she planted me on the pillion. I was running around behind her half the night—clawing for my wallet every ten minutes or so. She said she was meeting you at five, and she kept me up singeing the hours with her till two o'clock this morning."

"Then why didn't she turn up at the moorings to-day?"

"Because Jupiter wasn't in conjunction with Jehovah or some such damn rot. How the bombinating blazes do I know why she didn't turn up? Why don't you look after the wench properly? Keep a firm hold on her. Boss her. Be master. Knock her about a bit. But for gawssake don't use me for her private halter."

"Johnny, be serious. Hillary has never failed to turn up before when we have an important test-run scheduled. If she can't get here she has always phoned the pier. That is a fixed understanding between us. I'm sorry to trouble you, but I asked to be put through to her and the maid informed me that Hillary had not been home all night."

“Eh?” said Johnny blankly.

“I wondered if you knew where she had gone?”

“Not been home all night? What new game’s this? And not out with you this morning? Then where is she?”

“That’s what I’m asking you. Where did you leave her last night?”

“At the Caverne Diamantée. She said she had gone beyond sleeping and was going to burn out the hours there till it was time to go down to the boat. I bunged off home and left the car for her—— Here, half a mo’, I’ll go round to the back and see if the car’s in. Hang on, will you?”

He hurried out through the back way to the garden. The garage, big enough for three cars, was closed, but not locked. Johnny flung the door open wide. All three cars stood there. Two had been washed and polished overnight; the third, the big blue saloon, stood just as it had come in.

He looked in at the window and stared around with a puzzled frown at its emptiness. He felt the water-jacket of the radiator and it was stone cold. That meant that the car had been standing there for some hours, for the car was fitted with the thermostat valve cooling system which kept the water warm long after the engine was shut off.

Then he glanced at the dash-board. “That’s darn funny,” he muttered. “She must have done twenty odd miles at the wheel after I left her last night. That speedometer was set back to zero when I took her out—and I’ll swear I didn’t do more than ten miles in her.”

He went back into the house and called into the

servants' quarters: "Did anybody hear the saloon come in last night?"

Hopkins, the butler, appeared. "Yes, sir," he said. "I heard it come in. At least, it must have been the saloon because the other cars were in before dinner. I saw the chauffeur washing them. I was only half awake. I think it was the gears squeaking that woke me, because I remember thinking that Miss Hillary must be having trouble with the car; I had never heard Miss Hillary grind the gears before."

"Did you hear her come into the house?"

"No, sir, but it isn't very likely that I would. My room is right over here at the back. I wouldn't hear her unless the door was slammed. But I heard her close the garage door and so I thought everything was all right. I just sort of turned over and went to sleep again, sir, as the saying is."

"And what time was this?"

"Couldn't say to a minute, sir, but it was pretty late. I knew I had been asleep a long time before she came in. I'd say it must have been about four in the morning, sir—or maybe even a bit later than that."

Johnny clicked his teeth. "See that that car is not touched till I get back," he said.

He went back to the phone with a deep drawn frown on his forehead.

"That you, Toby?" he said. "I say, there's something fishy here. Hillary came home some time after four o'clock. The car is in the garage with about fifteen extra miles showing on the speedo. That is, if she went down to Westminster at all. Hopkins

says he heard her come in. And she seems to have bunged off somewhere. What's up—had a love-spat or something?"

"Good Lord, no! Haven't had a cross word for two solid months. And she was keen as mustard to make the test this morning. Where did you say you left her last night?"

"At the Caverne Diamentée. About two o'clock. She was all half-and halfy. Didn't want to go home and didn't want to go off on a binge. I left her at a table reading the early morning papers."

"Dashed odd, isn't it?"

"Ring off, Toby. I'll get on to her clubs and see if she went back to Town after leaving here. Maybe she thought out a new one and tried it last night hot off the griddle."

For twenty minutes Johnny rang up various clubs, hoping to hear that she had come crawling in at some unearthly hour in the morning and had been too tired to keep her appointment with Toby. But at each one he drew a blank. Hillary had not been seen or heard of in her clubs for some days.

He went gloomily back into the breakfast-room. Sir John was deeply immersed in his morning paper, but he had heard every word of Johnny's conversation on the phone. He was as worried and as perturbed as the boy himself, though it was in neither of their natures to show it to each other.

Johnny slumped down in his chair. "Sis has gone daffy," he moodily informed his finger-nails as he inspected them minutely. "Gone loco. Got skull bugs. The sap has riz in her veins and she's capering

about like a spring lamb. Brought the bus back at fourish this morning and then went off on a purely personal whizz. No one's seen her; no one knows where she is. All we know is that she isn't out on the Hevnelpus—Toby went out alone this morning."

Sir John glanced up over his paper. "She was telling me about an adventure she had on the river yesterday morning," he said.

"Yes, sir. She and Toby saw a body being dragged out of the water. Down by Wapping. And she got the idea she was playing heroine in a blood-curdler. The police gave her the 'ha, ha' and she went all chippy about it."

Sir John passed over his paper without comment. The front page contained a report of the case almost identical with the one Hillary had read earlier on that morning. Johnny read it through and got up without a word.

He went straight out to the telephone and got through to the Caverne Diamantée.

"Hello!" he said. "I want to speak to the manager or the secretary or somebody in authority. Eh? All gone home? Well, is the doorkeeper there? Right—put him on the line, please. Hello—is that the doorkeeper? This is Kittredge speaking. Yes—I was in last night with Miss Hillary. Do you happen to know what time she left? What? No, I went soon after two. She did? A few minutes after me? Did she take the car? Oh. And do you happen to remember which way she went? *Down* Dean Street? Thank you. Much obliged."

He picked up his hat and jammed it on his

head. "See you later, sir," he called to his father. In five minutes he was on his way in his car to the river station at Wapping.

Both Sterling and Manning were in when he got there and he introduced himself.

"My name's Kittredge," he said. "I'm the brother of Miss Hillary Kittredge, who saw you take the body of Gilan Maxick from the water yesterday. I believe she came over and spoke to you about it?"

"Yes, that is so," said Manning. "Miss Kittredge came over and spoke to me. My name is Manning. This is Chief Inspector Sterling of Scotland Yard."

Johnny nodded to them. "Well, what has happened," he told them soberly, "is that Hillary has gone."

"I don't think I quite understand," said Sterling.

"We were out together late last night. At the Caverne Diamantée. I left her at two this morning. She was going to wait on till five, when she was going out again on the *Spindrift*. I bought her some papers to read while she was burning time. Whether she read the report or not I don't know, but it's in this morning's papers as you are aware. She can't have been reading long because the door-keeper assures me she left a few minutes after me. It was a front-page story, and she would be bound to see it first thing. Her car came back to the garage at four this morning. The butler's room is at the back and he heard the car come in. He says he was awakened by the squeal of the gears chang-

ing down to low, getting into the garage. Now I've driven with Hillary some thousands of miles in that car and I've never heard her grind the gears yet. She knew when to slip those gears in better than the man who made them. I'll even say she could drive that particular car better than I can myself. Moreover, the butler didn't hear her come into the house. And when she comes in late she always gives my door a wallop to let me know she's O.K. I didn't hear her last night. Being dog-tired I may not have done, even if she had banged. But I feel pretty sure she didn't."

"Was she in the habit of bringing the car in and then going off again on foot?"

"Never done it in her life before. Why should she? Why should she walk when she has got the bus under her already?"

"What are you hinting at, Mr. Kittredge?"

"I'm hinting that I don't believe it was Hillary who brought the car back last night. It was a stranger who whinnied those gears. Hillary has brought that car hundreds of times up that drive. The gears went in automatically—she knew to an inch when to change them down. And there's another thing. When she left the Caverne she went *down* Dean Street; which is not heading up towards Finchley, is it? And there is a story in the mileage on the speedometer this morning. There are fifteen odd miles that I can't account for. The chauffeur puts all the readings back to zero every morning. He keeps a log on each car. And when I went out to look at the bus there were fifteen miles on the mileometer that never ought to be there, that is,

if she just went down to Westminster and back. That fifteen miles would just take her comfortably to Wapping—and back to Finchley.”

“And you say she hasn’t been home all night?”

“That’s so, sir. And it’s not like Hillary. At the very least she would have phoned. She wouldn’t let dad worry. To-day, for the first time for three years, he overshot his office time by half an hour—and didn’t know it.”

“Apart from the badly changed gears and her failure to telephone the house, have you any other cause for suspecting anything wrong?”

“No. But it’s enough, isn’t it?”

“In a great many cases, Mr. Kittredge, it wouldn’t be. Just because a normal rule is broken there is no need to suspect foul play. Most people break old-established rules now and then. That comes in the law of averages. But in this case I will freely admit there is cause for investigation. Where is the car now?”

“At home in the garage. It is exactly as it was when it came back last night. I gave orders that it was not to be touched.”

“That’s fine. All right, Mr. Kittredge. I’ll get a man up there immediately. It’s a twisty road up from the docks, and there ought to be plenty of finger-prints on the wheel. But if Miss Hillary should turn up give us a ring, won’t you? We’ve got quite enough on our hands in this case without side tracking on red herrings. Keep us posted with anything else that crops up. And don’t worry. We have a fairly tight grip on the job already. We shall have an even better one to-morrow. If your sister

has got herself all tangled up in this business no doubt we shall have her out of it in a brace of shakes."

Sterling shook his hand, nodded pleasantly, and watched him go out, more worried than he cared to admit, but relieved to the extent that the authorities were informed.

Manning looked over as the boy went out and their eyes met significantly. The tips of Manning's fingers were brushing together, half-abstractedly, and there were deep lines of heavy concentration on his face. Sterling's eyebrows went up half an inch in an eloquent gesture of inquiry. Manning nodded, very definitely, and frowned.

"Just the type who would do it," he muttered. "Headstrong and as self-opinionated as a man. She gave me the wire all right. And there are plenty of men who wouldn't have had the nerve to do that. No shyness about her. She just sailed in and spilled the beans. Knowing Grosman, I wouldn't be surprised if he didn't notice her."

"You think she went down there last night?"

"Sure of it. Her young gentleman friend was a bit indulgent towards her. You know the attitude? She bridled like the dickens. Yes, I'm pretty sure she took the bit between her teeth when she read that report in the paper."

Sterling looked serious. "Then in that case she is in the devil of a hole," he said. "And she has nicely queered our pitch, too. Why the blazes can't women keep their fingers out of hot pies!"

"Going to order a search of the *Yangtse*?"

"Not likely! Old Grosman would smell a whole

sewer full of rats. We've got to play blind. If he really collared her last night it was he who sent the car back. He would know she had a car there because she would be in evening dress. The Caverne Diamantée is a full-dress affair. If we raided him now he would know we suspect him of the whole boiling. No. Better lay off and work up as usual. Lull him to sleep. I've got a plateful getting ready for him that will give him indigestion for the rest of his life. Did anything happen round at the Outward Bound last night?"

"Nothing to notice. But I've an idea there will be plenty to-night. Grosman himself was in. He seemed to be waiting for someone. You know how these Chinks can disguise their feelings? Well, he was. But every time the door opened his slink eyes went sliding round into that long mirror that runs round the back of the bar. You can see the door through it. And he had his eyes glued on it all night. I wore my old lighterman's rig and was round in the public bar. He didn't see me—and I doubt if he would have known me even if he had. But on towards closing time I saw one of his Chinks passing him a signal, intimating that it was a wash-out for that night. If you could have seen Grosman's face you would have had an eye-opener. It was positively murderous. I knew then that it was no use waiting any longer—but I reckon his third party will turn up to-night or there will be another murder to investigate down the river."

Sterling acquiesced. "But this Kittredge business has complicated things badly," he growled. "If we don't get her off that boat her dad will raise merry

hell, and if we do we shall be laying our whole hand on the table for Grosman to see."

"I'm not so sure we shall find her on the *Yangtse*," replied Manning. "Grosman wouldn't be such a fool as to leave the girl where the searchers would find her inside an hour. I rather fancy he's got her stowed away ashore somewhere. He *must* have a place down there, some sort of a dive where he stores his dope once he's got it through the barriers. And she won't have a very enviable time with that animal either. Forty-eight hours with him should convince her that the handling of murder jobs is best left to a sex that is unattractive to the Chink."

Manning looked over at Procter with a grin. "Now's your chance, laddie, if you want those stripes," he said. "'Rescue of beautiful girl by young river policeman! Daughter of the prospective High Commissioner of Police. Daring rescue from a gang of desperate river pirates.' Can't you see the headlines? Gosh—you'd be able to pick and choose."

"One good mark will suit me," said Procter slowly. "I've a wife and two kiddies at home that I wouldn't swap for all the Commissioners' daughters on earth. One good mark—and the chance of a wee bit more on my pension. That'll suit little Procter."

"You had a night run last night, didn't you?"

"Yes. And a nice quiet night it was, too."

"What time were you passing the *Yangtse*?"

"I got in soon after four. I'd be alongside her berth round about when the clocks were striking."

"Anything doing on board?"

“Not a thing. Wasn’t a light burning anywhere. It was like a house where everyone had died.”

Manning got up and went out. “See you at the rendezvous to-night perhaps?” he said as he closed the door behind him.

He mooched slowly round to Chinky the Junk’s and spent an hour nosing round there. He had a rooted conviction in his own mind that a perfectly tangible link existed in that jungle of old junk. It was there, skulking about in the offing somewhere, but he was just failing to make contact with it.

While he was poking about among some old paint cans at the far end Engelberg came in wheeling his creaking old handcart. He waved a cheery greeting to Chinky and sat down on the end of his barrow, mopping his brow.

“It iss hot,” he declared, and went off into a long wail about the damage done to his coops overnight by a rogue dog.

“You want some biscuit?” asked the weazened little dealer.

“Yes, I want some biscuit. Not mooch—a leetle. But most I want some wire. I want some wire for mine coops. The dog he break ’em all down. Two—t’ree—four—he break ’em all.”

For once in a while Engelberg was missing on his usual smiling note. His kindly old face was seamed with wrinkles of worry. Cost of overhead was, to him, direct loss, and the bare idea of expenditure on renewals set up a ferment of horror in the financial compartment of his brain.

Manning edged over to him and watched him, laboriously and with many grunts, disentangling

various lengths of wire from an enormous mound of it by an overturned raft. He cursed a little, too, in a rich, well-rounded tongue, as protruding strands of broken wire scratched his podgy hands.

The Chinese gave him a helping hand. "How many biscuit you want?" he asked. "I pack them for you."

"Ten—dozen," replied the Hamburger perspirefully. "Not so many to-day. The dog—he kill lot of my chicken. Yah. He brrreak me!"

"Chicken for dinner all the week, eh?" laughed Manning.

The Hamburger growled an unhappy affirmative. "Mister Polissman," he demanded, looking up in righteous wrath, "if I put some poison down and I kill that dog—do I get some prison?"

"Not so far as I'm concerned," returned the sergeant. "But you don't want to tell me about it, Dutch. You want to keep that sort of thing under your hat. Yours isn't the first complaint I've heard about that dog. But don't advertise! It's people like you that get fellers like us into trouble when we wink an eye. How many chickens did he kill?"

"Sem'teen. Blitzen! It iss the third time he brrreak me. T'ree time he eat my chicken. To-night he eat my"—his brow grew dark—"somet'ing you know noddings about. Phew! I t'ink that enough wire for the coops. You put some biscuit on? Yaas? I t'ank you."

The little dealer threw him in three extra tins of old biscuit as a sympathetic offering towards his losses. Manning, too, was constrained to give him a lift.

“Have you any more room for customers on your list?” he inquired. “Room for a fresh-eggs customer?”

“Yaas, sir—plenty,” said Engelberg.

“Well, you can send me a dozen every week. Six on Monday and six on Thursday.”

“T’ank you—I t’ank you,” said Engelberg gratefully. He raised his hat to the river policeman and began to beam again. He paid for his goods and departed, waving a paternal hand to a bunch of little urchins playing in the road.

Manning stayed on and chatted to the junk dealer for an hour. He pumped him dry concerning the doings of the crew of the *Yangtse*, and when he had got through with it all he was not much wiser than when he began. Manning was trying to discover a possible address owned by Grosman along the water front, but nothing the little dealer could say offered him any enlightenment.

Chinky’s knowledge of the Chinese end of the river embraced the whole sweep of the northern water front from Wapping through Shadwell and Ratcliff to Limehouse and far back into the mazy warrens of Tower Hamlets. And Chinky made it his business to know most of the Chinese sailors and coolies who came up river. He knew their haunts, knew where they spent their off hours, and was a sort of mediator between them and the various welfare societies that catered for their needs in port.

But even he failed to establish a connection between the *Yangtse* sailors and any special resort ashore. He knew that some of them frequented the

Outward Bound, and there his knowledge ended. Manning found himself up against a brick wall.

Would Chinky give Manning any such information as happened to come his way in the next day or so?

Chinky would be pleased to give Manning all the information in his power at any time, provided Manning cared to invite it in the form of questions.

Would Chinky have a quiet little prowling round at night and see what he could pick up in the way of news?

Chinky would be pleased to have a little prowling round that very night, if Manning so ordered. But Chinky was apt to be afflicted with a temporary blindness once the sun was down. He could not guarantee to see anything that was in any way derogatory to one of his own race, and it might even be very difficult for him to remember anything that he did see.

Would Chinky put on his night glasses if a little present, say, of a five-pound note found its way unaccountably into his hand?

Chinky already had many five-pound notes. One more or less would not make any difference to his eyesight. Would it not be better to accept the dictum, once and for all, that while Chinky did not object to passing on such harmless small talk as came his way, that hardly entitled the police to regard him as an agent?

Was Chinky no longer loyal to the police?

Most decidedly he was. But how could Chinky be loyal to the police if he was not also loyal to his own people?

Manning presented him with a smouldery curse or two. In some things the Chinese could be dumber than a 'voice off' on the movies. Sometimes it had its uses. But . . .

Manning went moodily off out of the junk yard. The river station had little attraction for him; he judged there would be an acid hint from headquarters that the disappearance of Hillary Kittredge could have been prevented by the exercise of a little intelligence on the part of the river police.

He made his way home for lunch. On the way he called in at the little dairy shop to countermand his standing order for eggs. Not unnaturally the dairyman inquired the reason. Had he given any cause for complaint? Were his recent deliveries of eggs not up to the usual standard? Surely after ten years' steady service Manning might have voiced a complaint before cutting off an order like that.

Manning explained. The Dutchman had had a bad break. Lost a good many of his chickens and had his coops badly damaged. He was giving the old boy a leg over the stile for a week or two. In future Engelberg was sending him his dozen eggs per week. The dairyman scratched his head and looked at Manning in perplexity.

"Sure you haven't made a mistake?" he blurted suddenly.

"Why should I?" grunted Manning.

"Engelberg, the Dutcher? The fat old codger who comes around here with a handcart sometimes? Is that the Engelberg you mean?"

"Yes. That's the one. What about it?"

“Only that he was in here half an hour ago ordering eggs off me! A dozen each week, to be called for—Mondays and Thursdays.”

Manning blinked and wiped a sting of cigarette smoke out of his eye.

“M’m,” he muttered. “Maybe. Still—leave it as it is for a bit. I guess Engelberg knows his own business best. No need to tell him, though, what you just told me.”

Manning was walking out again, stolid, a bit phlegmatic. But his thoughts were spinning round like a ball-race. That single, rather fatuous piece of information had hit him with the force of a battering ram. In a blinding flash it had presented a possibility that was so extraordinary, so ingeniously intricate, and yet so smoothly simple, that he was almost frightened to believe it feasible. It seemed too clever, too brilliantly precocious to have sprung from the brain of a river bandit.

And yet it all linked up. It explained the failure of the ship searchers to discover contraband on the *Yangtse*; it explained how the drugs were smuggled ashore under the very eyes of the Customs; and it accounted for Grosman’s immunity from detection through the long years of his visits to the river. Continual practice had worn the scheme into a regularity that had come to be accepted by the police. The more he thought it out, the more plausible it seemed. And the more blatantly improbable it seemed, too. Things like that only happened in films that came out of the more sensational Hollywood studios. It did not smack of the hard, matter-of-fact atmosphere of Thames-side smuggling; there was a

garishness about it, a touch of the macabre that did not sit well on the shoulders of a drug-smuggling proposition.

He turned the whole thing over in his mind, picking it up piece by piece and examining it as closely as he could considering he was dealing with nothing more concrete than a sheaf of fantastic suppositions.

And he came to one very definite conclusion. He would have to sound the possibilities of his startling theory down to the very depths before he could lay it before the Chief. If it proved all wrong, just a fanciful freak of a high-flying imagination, he would be the laughing-stock of the force. And a stream of the Chief's choicest acid would be hose-piped his way under pressure.

No, he decided that where careers and pensions are concerned the inviolable law is to walk the safety line until proofs are established. And as yet Manning hadn't a single proof to offer. Just a wild idea—and a laugh at the end of it if he was wrong. Still, he reflected, it would be jam for him if it came off, about as brilliant a feat as had ever been performed down river.

And there was no time like the present. Already there was a chance to establish his first proof, before Engelberg came back, before even Chinky suspected him of getting on to the back end of the trail. Thoughts of lunch squeezed out of his head, and the next moment found him heading rapidly back to the junk yard.

The little dealer was not tremendously surprised to see him back so soon. The police had a way of

working in spasms at times. They rather liked being unexpected.

"Something you want?" he asked hopefully.

"Yes," said Manning, and took him gently by the arm. "I want you to turn right round and go back the way you came. And there is no need to take an occasional glance out of that filthy little window. Anything I pinch I'll pay for. Just keep right on with your own little job, and I will get on with mine. I will not be more than ten minutes."

"You wait for somebody?"

"Yes," said Manning deliberately. "Let it go at that. I'm waiting for somebody." He steered the little man back into his office and gently closed the door.

There was very little chance of being overlooked from that office. Chinky knew how to obey an order as well as how to deflect one.

Manning went right on up the yard and sat down on the other side of the great mound of old tins, out of sight of any casual customer. Then he critically inspected all the visible tins of damaged ship's biscuit. There seemed to be dozens of them scattered about in a riotous jumble with all sorts of other tinned goods.

He was hunting for particular markings, for a slight difference in the size of the containers, or even the faintest scratch that would distinguish one brand from another. But they all seemed depressingly similar. For the most part they were all of a single make and were put up in plain tins. A few bore the sign of the broad arrow and had come from the Government victualling yards—cast-off stuff from

the Navy. But among the others there was not a scrap of difference that could be detected. Some were burst and the contents had all gone to a mash, rotted with sea water.

He picked up a tin and put it firmly between his knees. With a jack-knife he cut away the top and pulled out a few of the biscuits. Some were broken, but the majority were undamaged. He cracked them all carefully into tiny fragments and critically examined each little piece.

There was nothing suspicious about any of them. They were all they purported to be—just plain ship's biscuit and nothing more. He delved farther into the tin and went over them all with the utmost care. But again he met with no reward.

He took another tin and tried that. Before he was finished he had examined a round score, taking one from every part of the mound. And in the end he admitted himself beaten. The chance to establish his first piece of concrete evidence had fizzled out.

He laughed shortly, in a half-ashamed way. Well, he wasn't too disappointed. The thing had been too preposterously impossible from the first. "A golden dream busted," he muttered, and scattered the biscuit wide for the waiting sparrows to eat.

For a little while he stood there, watching the birds with half-amused eyes. He had been hoping to find little tabloids of cocaine mixed in with the body of the biscuit, neat little cubes of the deadly drug covered with the thin veneer of the hardened paste.

There was just a chance that Grosman had been even cleverer than he had given him credit for. If that was so the sparrows would provide the proof.

If Grosman had found some method of mixing powdered cocaine with the biscuit meal and then extracting it later, it would not be long before the birds showed the effects of it.

Five minutes passed. The birds clustered thickly round the unexpected feast. Ten minutes ticked away and still they greedily pecked at the morsels. A little later he had definite proof that the stuff was harmless. One little fellow, a perky little chap with half his tail gone, came flying back for another meal. Manning had noticed him at the outset; he was one of the first to arrive when the biscuit was scattered. And he had wolfed as much as he could conveniently carry. And now, after nearly a quarter of an hour, he was back again, having a second course. To Manning it seemed reasonable to suppose that any bird, having been drugged with anything so potent as neat cocaine, would betray unmistakable signs of distress long before that. But there was the little bobtail dashing about as busily as any of the later comers.

Manning buried the empty tins down in the heart of the pile; and he interred with them yet another experiment in applied deduction.

He studiously avoided the station for the rest of the day, and after nightfall there emerged from his neat little house a lighterman fresh from his barge. At least, that is what he looked like, even to the deeply ingrained dirt in the corns of his hands, where years of toiling labour on the great sweeps had left their callouses. He wore a blue jersey that came high up to the neck, and a purple silk handkerchief was tied loosely above it. His coat was of

blue serge and the trousers were ever so slightly belled at the bottom. His hands were thrust into his trouser pockets, raising the hem of the jersey a little. Beneath that hem showed a curve of leather felt, marvellously adorned with brass insignia and regimental crests. A large-peaked cap that did not quite hide a wisp of the plastered quiff over his forehead, finished him off at the top end, while a pair of squeaky brown boots completed the picture below.

He strolled quietly into the public bar of the *Outward Bound* and ordered a glass of bitter. No one in there knew him. The proprietor nodded and carried on polishing glasses. He had seen him in there once or twice before, always a quiet, rather reserved sort of chap who never had much to say to the other river men who made his house their shore headquarters. He had long since put him down as a stranger from some other reach of the river, one who only came up that way occasionally and lodged in a room locally while waiting for a tide.

He took up his old position, right up in the corner angle where he could see the whole of his bar and look through the big wall mirrors at the back of the counter and keep an eye on the full sweep of the saloon bar. Behind him was a frosted glass partition that led through from the street to the saloon.

He put his foot on the brass rail and propped an elbow on the bar, lost in profound meditation of the foam on his beer.

"Busy?" asked the boss, polishing away industriously.

"So-so. Nothing grand. Bit quiet on the river these days."

“So they say. Things won't be much better till the harvests are in. What's your line—grain?”

“Cement.” Manning drained his glass and pushed it across the counter to be refilled. He had learned the safety of cement. All the big cement companies run their own barges and they carry nothing but cement from one year's end to another. Cement men know nothing else of river life except the steady transportation of cement from one point to another. Their job never varies. If they don't join in the more general conversations of diversified 'shop' it is excusable, for they have little to offer to the common fund of small talk. And cement men are known to be just a little clannish.

The proprietor nodded. It was good enough for him. And it accounted for the man's sporadic visits: cement men man the big sea-going barges and are often away round coast for weeks at a time.

“Cigar lights—pipe lights—cigar lights,” a thin voice came tentatively through the bar. Shuffling footsteps sounded and a monotonous tap-tapping crept up the partitioned passage from the street. Blind Rudley came, fumbling his way along with his sightless eyes upturned to the ceiling.

Manning watched him with the friendliness of old knowledge. The uncanny skill with which he avoided the chairs and tables was interesting, almost unbelievable, until one remembered that he had been coming into those bars at the same times for years and years past.

He knew the position of every obstruction in the place—and in dozens of others in the neighbourhood around. Blind Rudley had a free permit and a

roving commission. Nobody minded him; nobody objected to him. He had the entrée to every saloon and café for streets around. And he was the most popular man on the waterside when the black river fogs came crawling up, blotting out even the crackling loading-lights on the quays; he piloted the drunks home at threepence a time, for black fog and bright sunshine were all one to Blind Rudley.

He tapped his way along the floor to the corner seat in the saloon, and Manning saw the ash stick go prospecting along the horsehair-covered bench behind it, as though exploring for a possible customer. There was none there, and he tapped his way back into the public bar, carefully missing a new fern stand that had only been put in position a few hours before.

Manning tossed a coin on his tray as he passed through. A little while later Sterling and Procter entered. They had a glass of ale together, talked for a moment or two, and went out again. Manning was conscious of a grin of satisfaction in that Sterling had not recognised him, although for one full second he had stared straight at him.

Procter, of course, knew him. It was the only disguise he had ever known Manning adopt; for Manning was wily enough to know that one good disguise well carried off was better than a hundred that did not ring true. A second identity began to grow around the disguise if it was seen with some regularity, a second personality that had some real basis of old-standing existence and into which one could step almost at a moment's notice.

The evening drew on, and Manning began to

think he had picked on an empty spell when the street door swung open again and Grosman walked in. The bar was hazy with tobacco smoke, and Manning's end was crowded. Two women, with their husband's hats pinned in their straggly hair, were having a heated altercation about the clothes-line rights over a party fence, and two men on the other side of him were becoming equally aggressive over an argument that had arisen over a football betting transaction. It was the usual down-east public-house atmosphere that inexorably begins to blossom as closing time draws near.

Twice Manning managed to get his arm jogged while drinking, and twice he managed to get his beer spilled over his boots. Each accident was followed up by a surly "Sorry, mate" and a look that challenged any further remark on the subject. Manning took it all in apparent good part, but he eyed the proprietor severely, as though to ask if that was the usual treatment meted out to customers who did their best to keep themselves to themselves.

The boss took the hint and leaned over the counter to him. "Better get round to the saloon, old son," he said. "They ain't over friendly to strangers in their own bar. Kind of think they own the place, see? You get round to the saloon. I'll only charge you the public prices."

Manning went round. He wanted to get near Grosman, and it would have raised a querulous eyebrow on several faces if he had gone round without the invitation. There is an etiquette in riverside bars that is highly susceptible to slights, however much presumed.

Grosman sat over on the corner bench where Blind Rudley had gone questing an hour before. He was right in the corner and commanded the view of the entire bar, and nobody could approach him without coming directly in front of him. He ordered brandy and milk in a long glass and sat on, taking as little interest in the other habitués of the bar as the stuffed owl in the glass case over his head.

Manning called for another glass of bitter and pulled out the evening paper. He sat alone at a table and opened the paper wide in front of his face. But to his left he could see into the big bar mirror, and framed in the centre of his field of vision was the bulky, uncompromising figure of Grosman.

Procter mooned in again, saw Manning, and unconcernedly picked up a position away from him where he could follow his senior's signals. A quarter of an hour from closing time the tap-tapping of Blind Rudley's stick sounded along the passage-way.

"Cigar lights—pipe lights—cigar lights—buy a box of matches, sir?" the plaintive voice preceded him. A coin or two tinkled into his tin. He intoned his thanks and steadily tapped his way over to the corner seat.

Grosman ignored him for some time, and Rudley stood there, patiently waiting for the glass of beer that always came over the bar for him every night from the proprietor. Grosman glanced at him and seemed aware for the first time of the nature of the man's affliction. It was an unobtrusively perfect little piece of acting.

"A box of matches, please," he said, and expansively threw a sixpence on his tray.

Rudley acknowledged it with a muttered "Thank you" and a nod. His long, thin fingers fumbled over his tray, feeling for the match-boxes. He picked one up and his fingers slid along it. He dropped it back and held out another so quickly that Manning scarcely saw the movement.

Grosman did not speak again. He thrust the matches into his coat pocket and gently sipped his brandy and milk. Rudley went tap-tapping out of the bar again, wearily piping "Cigar lights—pipe lights—cigar lights—box of matches, sir?" as he went.

Manning sat back behind his paper and tried to think it out. He glanced over at Procter, and a suspicion of a question was gleaming out of his second's eye. Procter, too, had noticed it.

The sergeant pulled at his lip. There was a significance about that innocent little episode somewhere. Grosman was waiting there for a signal. Rudley had called before with it and Grosman had not been in.

He was dumbfounded. He had known Blind Rudley for years up and down those reaches and had never had cause to suspect him of even buying an ounce of uncustomed tobacco. And here he was a private messenger to the biggest menace that had ever landed in the river. It was a nasty shock to his pride in the grip he thought he had on things in general down the waterway. He wondered how much farther the Chinese tentacles stretched. If Grosman had roped in Blind Rudley, it wasn't safe to take even his own landlord for granted.

He felt he was getting out of his depth. The more

he dug into the case, the bigger Grosman loomed. He admitted, with professional appreciation, the astuteness of working through such an unsuspecting character as Blind Rudley, but even that did not soften the scorch of it.

Grosman took out a slim silver case and selected a long black cheroot. Manning watched him with proprietary interest in the mirror. He absent-mindedly bit the end off and felt for the matches. He took one out and lit up, puffing out clouds of pungent smoke around him. His eye slid cautiously round the bar to see if he was being watched. With the clock hands pointing to only a few minutes off closing time, the crowd at the counter was too busily occupied in catching the barman's eye to get a final charge into their glasses.

The only other occupant of the place was the lighterman, who couldn't possibly see him. An evening paper was spread out between his face and the seat in the corner.

Quickly the long-nailed fingers slipped into the box again and emerged with a small piece of paper screwed up into a wad. Grosman straightened it out and, under cover of the smoke clouds swirling round his head, read the message written there.

Manning saw his eyebrows draw down thunderously over his beady eyes, and the tip of his cheroot glowed to a fiery red. He read and re-read the scrap of paper; and when he looked up from it his lips were pressed up viciously. With a muttered oath he rammed the piece of paper back into his coat pocket.

Manning looked over again to his second in com-

mand, and Procter looked back at him without a blink.

The barman looked over the heads of a crowd of others and asked him if he wanted another before they shut up shop for the night.

"Yes—fill it up," he said cheerlessly, and folded up his paper. He leaned his chin on his hand and gazed moodily at the floor. The other hand, the one away from Grosman, was resting on the seat of his chair.

Slowly the thumb of that hand began to twitch, just a little tremor that was hardly noticeable, and even if it had been it would have occasioned no more comment than a slight nerve quiver would have done. But it was twitching in an odd way, and Procter's eyes were glued on it. It was an old method of communication between them, an almost invisible system of sending Morse messages to each other.

The thumb twitched on, erratically flicking out the dots and dashes, and Procter read it out of the corner of his eye.

"We must get that paper. Stub your toe on the mat as you go out. Cannon against him. He will ward you off. I will be behind him and get it from his pocket. Argue with him till I can read it and get it back to him again.

Procter turned and bawled over the bar for another glass of ale. He tapped his foot irritably at the delay. And the tappings spelled out "O. K."

The manœuvre went off smoothly and more rapidly than they had expected. Visibly disturbed by the contents of the note, Grosman got up to go. He passed down the bar, the big surgical boot

clumping along as he passed Procter. The police officer, too, angry that he could not attract the barman's attention, stepped back to go farther down the bar. And all his weight came down heavily on Grosman's deformed foot, and he stumbled against him, almost upsetting him.

Grosman swore and pushed him off. At the same second Manning was behind him and his hand had flashed into the open pocket. It was all over in the twinkling of an eye. The crumpled note was out and crushed into the palm of his hand. And his hands continued on their way to grasp Grosman's arms, who looked like falling after the collision.

"Steady, mate—steady," he growled. "No sense in falling about all over the floor." He solicitously settled the captain on his feet and turned away. The affair was no longer any concern of his.

"Clumsy brute!" snarled Grosman, wheeling on the wholly surprised Procter.

"Sorry, matey—sorry," said the officer soothingly. "I slipped. Can't help a little accident."

"Accident! Accident!" the captain rasped. "You stamped on my foot!"

"Couldn't help it, matey. Didn't know you was there. Never done it on purpose." The reply could not have been more blandly disarming, and the Chinese was turning away as though satisfied with having voiced his protest. That did not suit Procter at all, for he suddenly turned on him and said, in a fighting growl: "And what if I did? Can't you take an apology? What the hell are you slant-eyes doing in a saloon bar I'd like to know? Your place is round in the 'bottle and jug.' In quick and out

quick. That's your ticket. Why don't you stay in your own chop sueys? Hey?"

Manning had gone over to the corner. He had turned his back and was trying to light a recalcitrant cigarette. Under cover of the action he read the note.

"Have told you before it is impossible to see you to-night. You are mad to make contact with me. If Rudley comes again I shall leave Town till you are gone. It is senseless to take such unnecessary risks. The police are apprised. The warning has gone down river. Every station is on the *qui vive*. The G. M. affair was unforgivable. You have tied our hands and brought the whole pack of the police down on us. Why? What good has it served? Except to make every single one of us suspect—and to encourage one of the gang to squeal to the police to save his own skin. And now you have added the crowning imbecility of abducting H. K. Don't you know who her father is? In two or three days' time the papers may enlighten you. She must be released immediately. Please note I am no longer at the old address.

"(Signed) L."

Manning crushed the note into a ball again. A miniature uproar had started in the bar. Some were taking Procter's part and some were siding with Grosman. Those who knew the police officer were passing the word round to their friends to clear out as trouble seemed imminent. The proprietor, openly surprised that Procter should raise such a storm on

licensed premises, was hurrying round from behind the bar.

"I couldn't help it, could I?" demanded Procter of the crowd. "I'd been standing here for ten minutes yelpin' for a final and not a son of a gun behind the bar would take a mite of notice of me. If it was a Chink or a lascar calling, the drink would have been under his nose inside ten seconds. All I did was to step away to get farther down the bar where they were serving, and this yellow streak of skimmings off the *Yangtse* sticks his boot under me and darn nearly brings me down. And then he bawls me out!—the slab-sided lump of ullage!"

"Easy, boy—easy!" It was Manning's voice that came pacifyingly over the hubbub. "You don't want to start a row just at chuckin' out time. The Chink's apologised, ain't he? Heard him myself. Let it go at that. Come on, matey," he finished, taking the captain under the arm. "Come on outside and go home. It won't do to argue the point with *that* bloke—he's one of the Water Rats."

Almost before Grosman knew it he was heading for the door with the peacemaking lighterman stepping along in friendly fashion by his side. And as they passed out through the door the crumpled note slipped surreptitiously back into the unguarded pocket.

Outside Manning nodded to him with a cheerful grin and waved him on. Scowling, but acknowledging the service with a polite hand-wave, the captain went limping down the street.

Manning turned away in the opposite direction. He reached the corner and turned, waiting for Proc-

ter, who he knew would be along before many seconds had passed.

The minutes ticked slowly along and Procter did not appear. Manning waited on. A few stragglers came down the road, homing from the Outward Bound, where the last drinks had been served. The last one to appear, slightly tipsy, almost cannoned against him as he came round the corner.

He grunted an alcoholic "G'night, mate," and went slouching off. Manning recognised him—one of the old soaks of the neighbourhood, and one with something of a record in petty crime. He was certainly no friend of the police.

Manning hurried after him. It was obvious that Procter was not coming back that night, and he wanted to make an inquiry. He caught the man under the arm and affected a slight bibulousness himself.

"Seen anything of that Water Rat?" he asked thickly.

"Eh? Who?"

"That bloke Procter who was in the Outward Bound with you. Leaning up against the bar on your side."

The drunk turned and leered at him. "Why? Is he after you?" The question was couched in all friendliness, the query of one who had come off second best in the eternal feud with the common enemy in blue and was cheerfully willing to help anyone else who was experiencing trouble along that line himself.

"Yes." Manning nudged his arm meaningly. "He's had his eye on me all the week. He spotted

me to-night. And now I've lost him. I'm bringing a bit of baccy ashore to-night and I want to know where the blighter is."

"You needn't worry about *him*," the drunk assured him. "You land your baccy, mate. He won't interfere. He's gone off after that Chink. After you left another slant-eye came in in a hell of a hurry, lookin' for the captain. He went rushin' off when he heard he'd gone. And just after him went Procter—the swine. I hope he gets a knife in his blasted ribs. G'night."

Manning watched him go. As soon as he was out of sight he went hurrying back to the Outward Bound. But there was no sign of Procter there. A little group of men and women still lingered outside the locked doors, beerily chewing over the arguments of the evening. Lights were being turned out in the bars and from the big saloon came the clink of coin where the day's takings were being counted.

They were all old regulars in that gossiping group, and Manning knew he would get no assistance there. They neither recognised him nor would have given him any help if they had. He went back to the river station and waited there an hour. Still there was no word from Procter.

Manning got more and more worried. It was not like Procter to leave him in the dark when anything was moving. He was positive that his second had stumbled on something important, and he was equally positive that Procter was not keeping him in the dark purposely. The station was silent and deserted. The boat was away up river and would not be passing again for half an hour. One o'clock

sounded, and still there was no sign of his colleague. The telephone instrument stood silent and dead on the table.

By half-past one Manning decided to go exploring on his own. He gave a final touch to his make-up, and a few minutes later his rolling, semi-drunken figure was lurching away down towards the black line of wharves where the *Yangtse* swung nose to nose with the *Beaudelaire*.

CHAPTER V

PROCTER was on the point of going out to rejoin his senior when the Chinese seaman slipped in. He heard the hurried questions about his master and heard the barman tell him that the captain had gone. There was perturbation on the seaman's face, and it was apparent that he had news of the highest import for him. Procter detached himself from the end of the bar and crept out after him.

He crossed over to the other side of the road and shadowed him as he hurried along. Grosman was still in sight at the top end of the street. He could see his bulky figure limping along. He turned the corner and the seaman broke into a run. Procter was many yards behind when he got them in sight again. The seaman had overtaken the captain and the two were engaged in an urgent conversation,

the seaman making emphatic gestures to the captain. Grosman himself was equally demonstrative. For several minutes they stood jabbering at each other in Chinese. Procter stood in the shadow of a doorway, unable to approach any closer without being seen.

Then the two of them hurried off together. They turned away left and entered a maze of narrow side streets, doubling and twisting until Procter himself had lost all idea of his own direction. He knew he was still somewhere near the river, for the dank river smells eddied up from blind side turnings and welled coldly in his face from black alleys that sloped away down into the silent darkness.

They were in a neighbourhood of gloomy looking warehouses that towered up above them and merged into the night overhead. Here and there lone gas jets flickered yellowly, casting dim pools of murky light for a few yards around and making the surrounding blackness seem even blacker. There was not a sound save the distant padding of the two Chinese as they cat-footed along the empty streets. A wall of hush had descended upon the place. Here the slums with their thickly infested life had given way to the commercial areas of dockland. There were other smells in the air beside those of the river. The piney scent of pitch gave a pungency to the general mealy reek of grain that hung heavily in the air; soon it was the fresh smell of bacon that came drifting out of a great darkened curing factory and a little lower down a dozen different grades of cheese fought each other on the palate. Then high-scented toilet preparations warred with the rich aromas of

roast coffee, and through it all drifted the unmistakable, undefinable smell of ship's upper decks—rope and oakum, engine oil, and the thin tang of dead steam.

The two men ahead turned sharply away to the right and entered a long alley that was shrouded in impenetrable gloom. It was narrow and cobbled and so cramped that the buildings on either side almost leaned against one another.

Procter slowed down and prospected. The others had vanished into the darkness. It was a locality where night prowlers turned the street lamps out almost as soon as the lamplighter lit them—and the river man was completely out of his bearings. He wanted to be able to recognise that spot again in daylight, for he already had a shrewd suspicion that he had run Grosman down to his secret haunt. A feather in his cap for him, he reflected, as he stared around. This was the clue Manning and Sterling wanted. If he could get in there and unearth the mysteries that lay behind those gaunt walls they had the whole organisation of the dope runners in their grasp. It was worth the risk of playing a lone hand. Perhaps Mrs. Procter would be stitching those three stripes on his arm before so very long after all.

A solitary gas lamp stood at the top end, dismal and unlit. There was just a hope that the name of the alley would be printed there. He silently climbed the standard and peered at the glass panels. His heart gave a jump. There were some letters on the pane. He puzzled them out with painstaking care in the darkness—Gunn Lane.

“Well,” he muttered to himself as he slid back,

“Grosman will have to step lively now if he is going to get away with it.” He went cautiously down the alley, listening intently for any sounds that might tell him of traps ahead. But the pall of silence was unbroken. The alley was about fifty yards long, and the two Chinese had gone right along to the end of it.

He crept down and stared up at the bleak walls. Not a glimmer of light showed; and there was not a sound from within. He tried to look in at the windows, but lengths of sacking were hung against the sashes from behind. There was a door but it looked as though it had not been used for years. The dust was grimed thickly into the crevices and the letter-box was boarded up.

At one side was a high gate, big enough to admit a railway lorry. Procter knew there must be some secret way into the place, but he judged that that was neither the hour nor the opportunity to ferret out such details. He took his chances in both hands and went over the top. It was a high gate, and there were spikes along the top of it. But in five minutes he was on the other side creeping across the stone yard. The whole place in the rear was in a ruinous state of dilapidation. Procter realised in five minutes that it was a derelict warehouse he was dealing with. Great doors hung on their hinges above tumble-down platforms that had once been used as loading quays for drays. The entrances had been barricaded up, but even the barricades were falling to pieces. Windows gaped open, and broken panes were stuffed with rags. It was a mournful picture of desolation.

He climbed in through a rotted door and listened.

Rats, unseen in the Stygian blackness, went scurrying past him squeaking shrilly. A dusty smell of rot and decay filled the place; the whole building seemed to be creaking with age. Procter took off his boots, tied them by the laces, and hung them round his neck.

He went forward further into the recesses of the place, feeling his way along foot by foot. He stuck cigarette papers over the lens of his torch and used the light when he got into difficulties. The building was a veritable warren. Cross passages seemed to lead off at every other yard, and now and then he emerged on a vast room whose deserts of space echoed emptily back at him.

He began to perspire. There was a feeling of foreboding about the place that was getting on his nerves. It was as though there was a sense of waiting in the air. There were eyes up there among the dust-laden rafters, eyes that followed him about from room to room and peered down at him silently from the yawning holes in the ceilings where the plaster had fallen.

He had lost himself in the labyrinthine ways of the rambling building. The maze of rooms and criss-crossing passages bewildered him. They led nowhere, and they were all as tenantless as the rest. And the position was too full of dynamite to permit too free a use of the torch. Heavily shaded and held in his cupped hands, it spread but a pitiful aura of light, but in that vast tomb of blackness it stabbed out like the glare of a searchlight.

Those brutes from the *Yangtse* might be within two yards of him for all he knew, malignantly watch-

ing his every step. They might be leading him on to a sudden swift stab in the dark, and a burial that would never be known.

He took out his handkerchief and mopped his face. He was admitting to a sneaking private regret that he had not phoned the river station or got into touch with Manning before setting out on the heels of the dope runners. Manning at least would have known where Grosman went to earth. He seemed to be heading into culs-de-sac and brick walls whichever way he went.

He waited in the darkness, trying to think out his next move. Things were not turning out quite as he had expected. There was a nebulousness about it all that was in no sense helpful. He couldn't get on to a line that promised results. Grosman and his man had vanished, and he was left floundering about in the depths of a building that seemed to have neither beginning nor end.

There was nothing else for it but to try and find some sort of a connection along at the back of the building, if he could find the back—and if it *had* a back. He stepped along with his nerves on edge. And then all in a second it happened. He put out his foot and stepped into space. Sheer and plumb he fell, with his body still upright and his right foot still out in the act of walking.

With the natural nerve reaction of a sudden crisis his muscles flexed. He tensed in every tissue and his hands gripped up at nothing. Nothing, that is, save the torch. His fingers gripped on it madly as he went hurtling down. His thumb touched the button and the soft glow of light flooded out. The next

moment he had hit the bottom with a body-shaking smash.

For some seconds he lay where he fell, wondering what on earth had happened to him. So far as he could discern, there was no violent change taking place in him; if he was dead, then death was the quickest and most painless accident that had ever afflicted him. He opened his eyes and looked around. His leg was doubled up under him and half the wind was knocked out of him, but otherwise he felt pretty much the same as he had done before he stepped over the brink. In a semi-daze he rolled over on to his side and came to the conclusion that he was not dead—not yet, anyway.

No, he had just come a terrific flop down a dis-used well-shaft, and he had landed on a huge mound of cotton waste at the bottom. The soft glow showed the sides of the shaft going up into the blackness above. He shuddered. They seemed to streak up there into infinity. His leg felt cold and numb and he shifted about on the cotton waste, trying to ease it.

The daze began to clear. From somewhere close at hand he could hear voices, gabbling away in the singsong monody of a Chinese dialect. He switched off the light as though it had suddenly stung him.

He lay flat on his back, scarce daring to breathe. Among the excited babble of voices he had recognised the fuller, deeper tones of Grosman. He realised then why he had been stumbling about so long up there on the upper floor without getting on to a clue. Their hide-out was buried deep down in the basements under the road-level.

He had come a fearful cropper down that shaft,

but he blessed it. But for it he might have gone bimboring about all night up there in the emptiness without getting back into touch with his quarry.

In front of him was the lift entrance, the woodwork all broken to pieces and the struts all fallen away. It was through that opening that the voices were coming. He stood up and tried his weight on the crooked leg. Sharp, stabbing pains went searing through the back of his thigh, and he knew he had strained the great major thigh muscle. With an effort it stood the strain, but he knew that if it came to a race for it the Chinese had got things all their own way. Procter could not have run ten yards without cracking up.

He hobbled out of the shaft and took his bearings. A dim glow of light came from farther along. A door stood partly open. He waited till his wind came back and then carefully approached. There seemed to be a bad-tempered conference going on inside, though he couldn't understand a word of it. Then a bell tinkled softly inside the room and the voices suddenly stilled.

Procter took a sudden premonition of warning. Without waiting a second, he crawled painfully into another room that opened at right angles to the one that was lit. No sooner had he got inside than Ying, the Chinese quartermaster, came gliding out. He disappeared through a long corridor, leaving the door wide open. From the black darkness of his own retreat Procter could see into the opposite room, with not one chance in a hundred of being observed himself.

Grosman was in there, together with three other

Chinese, and, sitting in a corner, white-faced and frightened, was Gilan Maxick's brother.

Procter crawled away out of the light. Grosman was looking at the door and the whole assembly seemed to be waiting. The river man hazarded a long guess that the meeting was not yet complete and that Ying had just gone up to admit the missing member. He explored around silently in the room. It was a big stock-room with wooden shelves running round all four sides. There were lanes of shelves, too, traversing the room, and they were stocked full with tins.

Procter examined them, and his forehead puckered to a frown. They were tins of ship's biscuit. He fumbled around with them, trying to elucidate the puzzle. Then he found one that was broken. He took out a biscuit and twisted it about in his fingers. It seemed perfectly all right, just such a biscuit as are sold in thousands to ships that make long journeys and are ill-equipped with baking facilities.

He broke it. The outer crust of baked flour crumbled away in his hands, and he found himself holding a thin, oblong case of soft tin, as thin and narrow as a cigarette-case. He tried to open it, but the thing seemed solid. He could find neither catch nor lid. He thrust it into his pocket, together with a couple of the biscuits. They could be examined where he could get more light to bear on the subject. It was a mere waste of time fumbling about there in the darkness. But his heart was pumping. He knew that he was getting at the heart of the mystery. The whole place down there was nothing but a vast cocaine store. And he had got the address.

Footsteps were coming back along the long corridor. He drew back into the deeper shadows at the far end of the room. Ying was coming back, stepping silently along a yard or two ahead of a man dressed in a huge fur coat. The collar of it came up round his neck and almost hid his face. He was wearing a shiny silk hat, and his build, without the added bulkiness of the fur coat, was big and powerful.

Ying went on in through the door and announced: "Mr. Lingard iss here."

Lingard stood in the doorway and surveyed the group inside. His face was like a thundercloud. The light was streaming full on it, showing up its deep, hard lines and accentuating the bull curve at the back of his neck. He stared hard at Grosman and nodded, once, in that short, abrupt way that just acknowledges a man's presence on earth and no more. There was the beginning of a war in that nod; it was the gesture of a man who has his sword out and is hinting to the other man that he had better get his own out too.

"Well?" he said, and it was the voice of a man who was neither asking nor giving quarter.

"I am glad you have come." The mandarin was gazing back eye to eye, and he was actually smiling. But Procter felt the hair at the nape of his neck crawl with horripilic anticipation. The sentence was as calm and as placid as a summer pool, but an undercurrent at the back of it was quivering with wicked threats. There was something Sadistic about it, a gloat in it that regarded its victim with the satisfaction and erotic pleasure of watching it die

slowly and horribly. It almost added as an after-thought: "Because if you hadn't I should have been under the painful necessity of fetching you."

Procter felt a prickling shiver running through him. There was murder, grim and vicious, crackling about in the air between those two. Each knew it in his own bitter way and each faced it without a quiver. Procter felt for the wall behind him and leaned against it. His knees had gone shaky. He realised that, unless a miracle happened, he was going to be an eyewitness of about as fierce a riot of sheer gang-murder as any police officer ever saw. It was pregnant in the air. The very tension was alive with it.

They were good rivals, those two. The one with all the craft and venomous subtleties of the Orient running liquid in his veins, with all the inborn cunning and ferocity of his race vitally alive in his brain. The other, the man who organised the minions of a vast system and kept them out of the clutches of the law, the man who knew he could depend on the backing of the thugs he ruled and fed; each deadly sure of his own power.

Lingard stood his ground. He had advanced as far as the door, and it seemed that he was anchored there for good. He unbuttoned his coat and let it fall back on his shoulders. His face was as full as Grosman's; it was overfed and flabby with years of indulgence, but there was a courage and determination printed there as firmly as on the face of a gladiator. And they had met in a fit setting, deep down in the bowels of their own headquarters, within sound of the lapping tides of the river.

Maxick looked up and breathed with quick relief when he saw the frame of Lingard loom into the doorway. Something of the hunted expression went out of his face, and a gleam, almost of hope, took its place.

Lingard tipped his hat back and regarded the group. He was in full evening dress, and, in spite of its utter incongruity in that scene of desolation, somehow it seemed entirely in keeping. It was East meeting West—and the West was clothed in the garb of the aristocrat, the right attire for one who came direct from the night life of the capital of all the West.

“I came,” said Lingard in a voice that was corked up to the last ounce of doggedness, “because I think it is time one of us realised there cannot be two generals in command of this business. I came, not because of your order or because of the insulting messages you have sent me through Blind Rudley, but because my limit has been reached. Either you are to run this group or I am. If it is to be you, then you will have to spend all your time here in the city keeping the gates open to ourselves and closed to the police. You cannot make it a part-time job. You cannot do it on an occasional trip to the river. It will tax all your ingenuity, all your patience, for eighteen hours of every day.

“And you will be much more human in your methods with the lesser members. They take the majority of the risks and only a handful of the money we make. They are getting restive. They won't stand for being murdered in cold blood simply, as a critical French satirist put it, to en-

courage the others. And what is more, you will do it without the assistance of Graham Lingard."

He took out a cigar and carefully lit it. Grosman looked at him in a calm, level scrutiny. All the venom, all the ultimatum of it was wrapped up in that last challenging sentence. He had never dreamed that Lingard would threaten to leave him flat.

"This is no time to make angry speeches," he said smoothly. "These matters can be adjusted. As assuredly they will be." And in his own last utterance there was a devilish whisper of evil.

"I am not making angry speeches," retorted Lingard. "This is a blunt speech, and I have no intention of decorating my words with a lot of polite flapdoodle and fal-de-lal. Let us make an issue. Let us take a point and fight it out. For instance, what are you doing with Maxick there?"

Grosman's thick hands made a smooth, deprecatory gesture. "What I am doing with Maxick is an affair entirely between myself and Maxick," he said. "He has come to discuss a little matter with me."

"He has come because he knew that if he didn't you would send one of your yellow-skinned scum along to squirt him full of bushmaster virus or some such horror. Take a look at him. He is a jelly. And can you wonder at it? You slugged his brother as mercilessly as one would step on a beetle. And now you have hauled him along to administer the same dose. And I want to know what it is for. I am a better judge of Western concepts of right and wrong than you—and I will arbitrate on this matter."

"*You* will!" The words were like chilled daggers.

"Yes, I will. What is the nature of the charge against him?"

"He has been to the Water Rats."

"It's a lie! It's a lie!" Maxick, little more than a rat himself, was squeaking with fright.

"Have you any proof of this?" asked Lingard coldly.

"He was seen to enter the river station at Wapping. And he was seen to leave. He was over twenty minutes inside with Manning. It is serious, for Sterling was in there too. Sterling, who has just been put in charge of the case."

"And why was Sterling put in charge of the case? There would never have been a case for him to have been put in charge of but for your damnable brutality." He turned to Maxick. "Did you go to the station?" he snapped.

"Yes, sir. That's right, sir. The sergeant, he sent for me. Couldn't help meself, sir. That was after Gilan got his. I told 'em I didn't know nothink about it and that I hadn't got nothink at all to say. But the sarge he says if I don't go down and identify the body he'd supeena me. So along I has to go. And then Sterling says if I don't go along to the station he would rope me in for half a dozen jobs he's got framed up against me. I never told 'em nothing. He just asked me the old rigmarole, and I answered him. Wanted to know if Gilan had any enemies and all that bunk. I could have shopped the captain then if I'd wanted to, couldn't I? And I told 'em I wasn't even in Gilan's gang. And that was the truth, wasn't

it? I don't work his end of the city at all. What the hell was I to do? If I went down there the captain would stick a knife in me liver, and if I didn't then I goes up to the beak for a stretch on the moors. I get it either way. And it ain't right to stick a knife in me liver for that."

"The idea in the captain's mind," said Lingard patiently, "is that you squealed. You understand that, don't you? If you did, then I would be the first to consent to your elimination. But if you didn't, then there is no need to get agitated. I will see that the captain does not stick a knife in your liver—or anyone else's. Not even mine; which will be rather an extraordinary accomplishment. *Did you squeal?*"

"No, sir. So help me God! I never said a word."

"You can't prove it, Maxick, that's your trouble. The two of you are on a par there. You neither have proof. Except that you, Maxick, have the finest proof of all. To any normally sensible human being the fact that the police are not here to-night is proof enough that you were loyal. Still, without that, your word is good enough for me." He puffed at his cigar for a moment and let his fishy eye roam over the group.

Then Graham Lingard declared himself a man. "Ulrich Maxick," he said, "get up."

The shivering man reared slowly to his feet. He stood leaning against the table, looking fearfully from Grosman to Lingard. The storm had brewed around his helpless head and he was as innocent of its cause as of its effect. But it was on him, never-

theless, that it had centred. But Lingard was out for a fight right from the first word 'Go.'

"Maxick," he said quietly, "put on your hat and go. Go right up and out of it. Don't hurry. Just walk up and out into the street. And you, Ying, you stay where you are. If you move an inch to follow him I'll splash your brains all over that wall." Lingard suddenly declared himself as a man with a gun—a great shining automatic spinning about in his fingers.

Not a soul moved. It was as though the whole group were leg-ironed where they sat, unable or unwilling to stir a finger. The Chinese sat as unemotional as a set of carven images. Not a sign of their thoughts was reflected on their faces. Except Grosman's—and his eyes were glittering like red-hot agates. Right at the back of them were two central cores of gleaming fire.

Lingard nodded to Maxick. The wharf-rat, with livid fear crawling alive all over his twitching body, began edging round the table.

Procter waited with bated breath, knowing that at any moment the bomb would burst. Almost from the first he had known it was to be a duel to the death, a duel, not for the life of Ulrich Maxick, but for the leadership and mastery of the whole organisation.

If Grosman surrendered that first challenge without striking a blow then he had surrendered all he had. His fall would be as full and complete as though he had resigned; for in gang leadership the master is either undisputed king or one of the rabble with the rest. And Grosman seemed to be going

down to defeat without stirring a finger, placidly watching his crown topple with all the monumental calm of the East.

Lingard moved to let Maxick pass. And then Grosman raised his hand with the slightest wave of command. Maxick stopped as though he had collided with a wall. He looked as though he expected to be murdered out of hand, and his glance shot over to Lingard in fresh affright.

Grosman turned his attention complacently to Lingard.

"Could this domestic brawl not have happened privately?" he inquired.

"That was entirely up to you. I have received messages from you and I have replied with discretion and restraint. You have deliberately gone against my urgent appeals for greater care at your end of the line, and all I have had in reply are *actions* that flout all the laws of decency and common sense. Then you invite me to come along here at this hour of the night—this, after my third point-blank refusal. And what do I find? You alone? You in any condition to be approached privately? Any of the privacy which, in your opinion, you say the situation required? No! You—surrounded by a court, two of whom don't understand the English tongue. Five of them. And every single one of them a member of your own race. And, I doubt not, with a brace of poisoned knives hidden away somewhere where they can be flashed out before a snake could blink. Sitting in judgment on a shivering wretch who is not even articulate enough to plead his own defence. The crowd of you, setting out deliberately

to murder a poor devil who hasn't a ghost of a chance of getting even common justice."

His voice changed. It took on a newer, more savage timbre. There was a note of bottled up anger, of sullen passion beginning to quiver in it. Lingard was rapidly shedding even a pretence at restraint.

"And do you think I don't know the reason?" he demanded, turning on the whole crowd of them. "Do you think I don't understand the inner meaning of this meeting—or realise why this scene was staged for me? It was your first foul attempt to send me scuttling back with my tail between my legs. I am to be brought to heel, knowing there is war between us. I am to be shown murder—stark and naked. A man deliberately done to death—a death presumably with a lot of appalling agony attached to it. It is to be a lesson to me, the same as Gilan's death was to be a lesson to the others, a lesson—that I must not question the rectitude of the powers that be. Having seen what you proposed to do to Maxick, I should naturally crawl away with my belly turned to water. I should turn craven and never, from that moment, would your ascendancy be questioned. It was your way of winning your war as quickly and as expeditiously as possible. And with another terrible lesson to the others bound up in it. The London Boss would have had his claws cut and his sovereignty would have been broken for ever. Men neither honour nor obey cowards. And your drama here was staged with no other reason than to blazon me up in the light of a coward for all the rest of the gang to see. I was to stand quietly by and see Maxick done to death under my own

eyes. The fact that that entails the death of another poor brute, who is as innocent of traitorous intent as any one of us, does not even enter into your vile head. It will be good for the gang—that is your excuse. And when you say the gang, you mean that it will be good for *you*. Well, Graham Lingard was never a coward from the time he was pupped. If you want an example, take a good long look at this one.”

He suddenly turned and sent his enormous fist crashing into the face of Ying. The whole force of it impacted squarely on the smug face with all the weight of sixteen stone behind it. Spang! The quartermaster went sideways across the room like a catapulted stone. For one miraculous moment his face showed a moiety of emotion. It was that of sheer astonishment that so much physical force could be generated in the human biceps. With his nose as flat as a piece of putty that has been stamped on, he fell sprawling over the stomach of his master, arms waving and legs kicking. The collision knocked the chair flying, and the pair of them went over backward together in a welter of tangled limbs and staccato expletives.

One of the Chinese seamen half made a move to rise, but his eyes encountered the centre of the bore of the glittering automatic, in a dead line on the spot where the nose joins the forehead. Straight into its uncompromising eye he looked, a tiny black circle of death surrounded by a thin rim of polished nickel. And he read death there, sharp and abrupt. Lingard's forefinger was crooked round the trigger—and his horrified eyes saw the top joint whiten as the

blood was squeezed back to the pressure. The seaman relaxed in his chair, and he turned his eyes away from the sight of that bullet waiting there in the cold breech to leap at him.

Lingard knocked the ash off his cigar.

"That is my message to you," he grated. "You should be able to read it, captain. It's written in your language. If you can't—no doubt Ying will interpret."

Grosman was slowly climbing back to his feet. He was gasping. Ying's hurtling body had taken him flat in the stomach. He kicked the seaman's legs savagely away from him as he rose.

Procter saw his hand twitch a signal at one of the seamen on the opposite side of the table. Lingard was unsighted to it, but the river man saw it unmistakably, and he saw the answering signal, fleeting as it was. Maxick leaned against the table, his whole body shaking. His fingers were beating a nervous tattoo on the table top, and he was licking at his dry lips. That sudden flailing gesture had spelt his end. He knew that Grosman would never forgive that insult. Lingard had spelled out his own doom, and in doing so had made sure of the end of Maxick. Neither could expect a grain of mercy after that.

But Lingard did not look as though he was experiencing any qualms. He stood his ground and drew steadily at his cigar.

"If you have anything more to say on this matter you had better say it now," he said, "because I have a few things to say myself."

The mandarin brushed his finger-tips gently and

calmly resumed his seat. He pushed Ying away behind him as though the quartermaster was no longer a creature of any moment.

"I understand your message," he said with an ominous calm. "A reply will be sent in due course. Believe me it will not fail to reach you and you will not fail to receive it. In China we do not resort to violence. Quieter methods are more discreet and less exhausting. You wish for complete leadership in this matter. Exactly what does that entail on my part?"

"A very definite subservience to me in all matters of policy. That, first and foremost. I alone will say what will be done and what will not be done. In matters of life and death a meeting of the section leaders will decide. You will be ruled out of it. And in *no* consideration whatever will you act alone. Your job is to bring the stuff in from overseas and to see that it is landed. There your authority ends. What goes on here in the matter of sale and distribution is our affair entirely, and we shall brook no interference.

"We want no more stuff to be landed. That is very definite. We already have more than we can handle for the next six months. Any more will only congest the market and defeat its own ends. No matter how much more you have back there on the *Yangtse* it must stay there and go back with you. You have kept your method of landing such a profound secret that we are completely in the dark. In the event of a police raid we are powerless. A man of Sterling's craft could bowl us out in half an hour—simply on our own ignorance.

“The cellars here are full of the stuff. We stated our requirements weeks before you left the East, and you have grossly exceeded your orders. Lying here it is as dangerous as dynamite. For all your alleged cunningness you have bungled this affair from beginning to end. You thought it marvellously adroit to buy this ramshackle great barn and leave it to moulder in rot and decay. But do you realise that it is the only warehouse on the water front that is owned outright by a Chinese merchant and has been left derelict? In China it might pass—but not in London. The authorities here know the Chinese for businesslike, painstaking men of commerce. They have no eccentricities. This place is suspect on that account alone. And now that you have been maniac enough to shanghai Hillary Kittredge you can look for a police raid here at any moment.

“Scotland Yard are not the fools that you care to think them. They have an astonishing knack of ferreting out details and of putting one and one together. Is it possible to get that girl back to her people without her knowing where she has been? Or did your idiocy extend to letting her know that she was aboard the *Yangtse*?”

“You mistake yourself. I did not shanghai the little lady. She came aboard the *Yangtse* of her own free will. I caught her myself, eavesdropping on a conversation that was going forward in my own state-room between Blind Rudley and myself. She had broken into my ship. She got aboard without the knowledge of Ying—a very clever performance and one that goes to prove that she had come aboard with an ulterior motive so far as I was concerned.

She crawled in across the hawser. She was in evening dress, and her car was parked round the corner in a cul-de-sac, unlit and unattended. Her shoes were stuffed down the breast of her frock. Under those suspicious circumstances you will perhaps agree that the little lady had seriously compromised herself. And as the nature of the conversation between Blind Rudley and myself was not unconnected with the secret matters that lie between ourselves—it was urgently necessary to proceed without delay. Fortunately Blind Rudley heard her breathing. And we found her there, crouching in the service pantry. Perhaps, in your monumental western wisdom you will inform me what I should have done? Kiss the little lady and send her home with my kindest regards to her parents? Supply her with a little more information than she already had? Perhaps you will enlighten me—bearing in mind that she was not entirely unaware of your own august connection with this organisation.”

Grosman folded his arms comfortably across his middle and waited for a solution to his riddle.

Lingard stared at him. “She came there?” he gasped. “She knew about the *Yangtse* before? She came scouting there of her own accord, and she listened in to you two talking?” Lingard’s voice was high with incredulity.

“Undoubtedly.”

“Good heavens—do you know what this means?”

Grosman very casually informed him that he did not.

“It means that, thanks to your foul murder of Gilan Maxick, the police already know about us.

Sir John Kittredge has been talking to his daughter—and she went down there on her own account for a little thrill.” He thrust his hand into his coat pocket and shook out a copy of the *London Gazette*. “Do you see this?” he demanded. “An early copy—fresh off the presses. Sir John Kittredge was appointed High Commissioner of Police this evening.”

“Is that surprising to you?” Grosman’s voice was aggressive with contempt. “It was known to me many days ago that the appointment would be made. For that reason alone it was necessary for me to act as I did. No other way was open to me. Had the same situation confronted you how would you have acted? It would be amusing to know.”

Lingard was visibly perturbed. His brows were knit deep in thought.

“Is she on board there now?” he asked suddenly.

Grosman inclined his head. “Yes,” he said. “And she stays there. I am dealing with her myself. Do not be alarmed. There will be no murder committed. On occasion we have other methods; as you will discover for yourself. Let this suffice; when the little lady gets back to her home she will remain mute on the subject of her temporary absence. She will return to them perfectly safe and sound—but she will be unwilling to talk about it.” He smiled. “More,” he added, “she will be fiercely determined never to open her mouth on the matter. She will guard our secrets as jealously as do we ourselves. You will agree it was the only way.”

Lingard was biting his lips. “We are in the devil of a hole,” he growled. “What with the murder of

Maxick, the raids on the dope houses, and now this, the *Yangtse* will be a marked boat."

"I would welcome a police search," said the mandarin affably. "I assure you they would find nothing more than they have found on previous occasions. She is there—but far beyond the noses of such inquisitive fools as they."

Lingard was muttering to himself. He seemed to be thinking aloud. Deep lines were creased down his forehead, and he glared evilly at the Chinese from under his bush of brows.

"Kittredge won't stand for it," he muttered. "Not for a minute. He knows what has happened. Right on the first day of his taking office! It will score his vanity to the quick. He will move heaven and earth to wipe us out."

"And also, for the sake of his vanity, he will remain silent," purred the captain.

"Of course he won't. He knows where the girl is as sure as we're here. He will be the laughing-stock of the kingdom—and do you think he will stand for it? Not in a million years. He will make a clean sweep of the whole water front. Grosman, you're a fool—a lunatic to have landed us into this mess."

There was a silence for many seconds, a silence that prickled. Procter knew that the moment for battle had drawn terribly near. He was writing hurriedly in the darkness, writing with a stub of pencil on the back of an old letter. He could not see the words he made. Lines ran into each other and wandered all over the paper, but he knew that such as it was Manning would be able to puzzle it out.

He was aiming to get up and out of the place into

the open air. Somewhere along those mazy streets he knew he could find someone who, for a consideration, would carry the message to the river station at Wapping. That would leave him free to carry on observations on the gang from the street and keep in touch with them.

"Am in disused warehouse at bottom end of Gunn Lane," he wrote. "Grosman is here, also man called Lingard, and five Chinese crew of *Yangtse*. Lingard is head of distribution end and they are having fierce quarrel. Think there will be murder done. Have established that the snow comes ashore in tins of ship's biscuit. Have specimens with me. The girl is hidden on the *Yangtse*, apparently in some secret compartment not yet found by searchers. Suggest rush reinforcements and can capture them all. Entrance is over big gate on right. Gang located down in basement. All are armed. Quarrel is over Ulrich Maxick. Grosman aims to kill him for squealing. Lingard is challenging him. Situation critical."

He finished the note and crept towards the door. He peeped out. Lingard and Grosman were glaring at each other, and so far as the captain was concerned the mask was off. The atmosphere was electrical. The Chinese were only being kept off by the grim threat of the automatic. Lingard kept it waving about slowly from one to the other, and the promise of death was burning morosely in his eyes.

"Maxick," he repeated, "get out of here."

The wharf-rat edged nervously towards the door. He crept round by the wall as though expecting a knife in his ribs from every one of the cut-throats

he passed. Procter saw him appear in the doorway, his feet shuffling and his cap tugged down over his eyes. He hurried through and almost ran away from the door. Lingard watched him go and he held his ground. He knew that Maxick would lose no time in getting into touch with the rest of the gang. There would be a hectic meeting. Maxick would tell his story and the gang's loyalty to Lingard would be assured. There could be no other outcome. Lingard had faced death to go down there and save Maxick's life. And he had proved himself a match for even the dreaded Grosman. With all his Chinese minions there, Grosman had not been able to shake his courage. The gang would know—and it would be told them in Maxick's own highly coloured language that in Lingard they had a champion who would not countenance any repetition of the Gilan Maxick affair. And if it came to a down and out war between the two factions then Lingard held the whip hand of numbers.

Procter attained to a sudden brain wave. Why not rope in Maxick? The man was petrified with fear. He had just escaped from the very maw of a horrible death, and he knew that his immunity would not last. Grosman would wipe him out of existence with no more compunction than he had killed his brother. So far as the dope gang was concerned Maxick was already a doomed man. If he came in on the police side he would be under their protection until the whole gang was rounded up. And Lingard could not hold Grosman's devils off for ever.

He cautiously left the harbour of the stock-room and crept after the hurrying figure. Maxick seemed

to know the way blindfold. He doubled and twisted about among piles of packing-cases that had long since fallen to pieces, finding his way in the darkness without making a sound. Procter followed him as well as he could, and finally traced him to the bottom of a long spiral staircase that went circling away up into the gloom overhead. He could hear Maxick's feet clamping up the iron treads, hurrying as though the imps of the pit were flying on his heels.

Procter went up after him silently in his stockinged feet. He took the stairs two at a time, and in a little while he could hear Maxick's laboured breathing. Drug excesses had weakened the man badly, and he was gasping when he reached the top.

There was a trap-door of some sort at the head of the stairs, and Maxick was manipulating the locks when Procter came up behind him.

Procter, too, was thankful when the landing was reached. His leg was aching as though it had been wrenched in a vice, and there were streams of hot razor blades running through his thigh. He staggered up the last step and lurched forward. Without a sound he put his arm round Maxick's shoulder and clamped a great hand firmly over his mouth.

Maxick tried to squeal. A mouthing yammer rose in his throat. It was muffled and stifled back into his chest and Procter felt it rather than heard it. So great was the man's fright that he all but collapsed on the little platform.

"Quiet, you fool," Procter hissed in his ear. "I'm Procter—you know me, don't you?" He shook the

man, trying to pull him to his senses and whispered "Procter—of the river police. If you open your mouth or make a sound I'll brain you. Understand?"

Maxick nodded and his teeth chattered. The knowledge that it was not one of Grosman's men who had cornered him up there ran through him in a welter of relief. Even the shock of knowing the police had got their hands on him did not outweigh the dread of the suddenly expected death thrust. Procter stuck his face close up against the gangster's ear.

"Listen to me," he rasped. "You're in a bad way, Maxick, and I reckon no one knows it better than you. We've got the whole crowd of you in a trap. Within an hour we will have the lot of you in cells. And it's up to you whether you save yourself or not. I've been listening outside that door ever since Lingard came in, and I've got the drop on every mother's son of you. You get that, don't you?"

Maxick nodded again hopelessly. His spirit had been broken down there with the Chinese.

Procter released him and jammed him against the wall.

"What it amounts to," he went on, "is that you get it either way, don't you? Either you get ten years from us or you get a nice quick trip to Paradise from Grosman. That's about the strength of it. Because you know as well as I do that Grosman is going to get you after what happened in that room. You haven't one chance in a thousand, have you?"

Maxick tried to speak. But his tongue had gone as dry as an old pack saddle, and when he tried to

get the words out the root of his tongue rose up against the back of his throat and stuck there.

Procter regarded him, and there was not a scrap of compassion in his attitude. He was fighting for his rights as he saw them, and his job was to carry the fight into the other man's camp. And his fight was not unconnected with the three silver stripes. He had got his man on the run, and he was not letting go. That message had got to get through. Manning had got to get it—or the chance of a lifetime would fritter away.

“Well,” he said in a breathy whisper, “you can take that one chance and get away with it. I'm offering it to you. You can take it or leave it.”

“Lemme get out of here,” croaked the dope runner. “I'll talk to you outside. Lemme get out. One of them swine will be up here before you can say knife—and they'll get me. You don't know what they are—you don't know what they've got lined up for Lingard. Soon's they have got him fixed they will be racing up here for me. For God's sake lemme get out.”

“Open that trap-door,” grunted Procter.

Maxick wheeled, and the river man watched the dim white of his hands operating the combination locks. As the door slid open Procter gripped him by the arm.

“What is that combination?” he demanded.

“G.E.L.,” whined Maxick.

“Is there any special significance?”

“Yes, mate. It's the initials of the Big Three.”

“Who?”

“Grosman, Engelberg, and Lingard.”

"Well—that's information. So the Hollander is in it, too, is he? We live and learn. I'll say the gods have been good to little Procter to-night. And what part does he play?"

"What's the use of asking me? I ain't one of the Big Three. I only peddles the stuff. I'm only a bit of dirt in this crowd. I never knew he was in it till the other day."

He swung the panel wide and turned to crawl through. But Procter hauled him back with a jerk.

"Not so fast, my cocker," he growled. "I want to know where you stand first. I'm making you the offer and I want to know if you are taking it or not."

"Lemme get out," whinnied the gangster. "I want to get to hell out of here."

"So you shall, Maxick. But you have got to side in with us."

Maxick wheeled on him in startled fright. "I ain't squealin'," he protested. "You heard what they were goin' to do to me down there. And that was all because they thought I was going to squeal on 'em. They'd tear me throat out if they caught me. It ain't fair to ask me like this. For Gawd's sake let up on me."

"Listen," said Procter. "They are going to get you, anyway. Grosman has got it in for you, right up to the neck. If you get out you will be dead in a few hours—and not a nice death either. Why consider Grosman? He is going to do you in—whether you squeal or not. You have a chance to save your skin, and it isn't every officer would give it you. One chance you've got, and only one. If

you shout and raise hell now they will only suspect you of having let me in. They know you were down at the station yesterday with Sterling. They would strangle you for it. You'd better think quickly, Maxick."

"What can I do?" protested the shivering man. "I get it in the neck either way."

"Not if you side in with us. We can keep you clear. We can hide you away where all the gang men in London won't find you. You have more chance with us than with a thousand Grosmans. It's up to you. I'm not going to stand here all night arguing with you. I'll give you a minute to think it over. After that, if you don't like the idea, I'll hand you over to one of the men we've got waiting down below—and you'll be inside a cell within twenty minutes."

"What do you want me to do?" asked Maxick in a frightened whisper.

"Spill the beans. Come clean on the whole game. Give us the names and addresses. Tell us how the job is worked. In short, squeal—and squeal like hell. You'd better. Squeal and live—close your mouth and die. That's how it works out, my cocker."

Maxick was staring, bright-eyed, at the river man. Here was hope, here was a straw of salvation held out to him. He clutched at it. He knew that the police had ways and means of their own of keeping their men out of harm's way. He licked his lips and his eyes flung round at the vague blue oblong beyond the trap-door where the night hung peaceful and still over the dark river.

"I'll do anythink in reason," he stammered.

Procter grasped him tightly. "Do you mean that?" he snapped.

"Crorst me throat if I tell a lie, matey. But you gotter promise to see me through. I'll tell you all I know. It ain't much, because I ain't in the know like some of 'em. But I'll tell you all I've got. You can round up the West End gang on it, anyway. That'll pay 'em back for the way they have treated me. The sons!"

"That's the spirit," breathed Procter in his ear. "Why not fight back at them! They have got you marked down for a rotten end. Have a go at 'em. You can see the whole lot off if you side right in with us. I'll see that no harm comes to you. You will be kept in along with us in one of the stations till we have rounded the whole bunch up. After we have got 'em all slammed into gaol you can do as you like. There is such a thing as an assisted passage for those who help the police and want to clear out of the country. You'll be all right—but, by crikey, you've got to play square."

Maxick capitulated without reservation. He was holding both hands out avidly for the lifebelt that Procter was offering.

"I'll go right round to Scotland Yard and give myself up," he declared. "I'm fed up with it. I'll come clean. And glad to."

"Well—that will do for me," assented Procter. "Only there is no need to go to Scotland Yard. The river station at Wapping will do. Sergeant Manning will look after you and see that you come to no harm."

“Righto, mate. I won’t let you down. I’ve had enough of it. I’ll do anythink you say. I’ll get right round there now.”

“Just a moment, I’ll scribble you a note to take round to the sergeant. That will make things easier for you.”

He wrote on the back of the letter.

“Ulrich Maxick brings this note. He is ready to squeal. Get all you can from him. Have promised him that he is kept clear. He can tell you all that is missing from the letter overleaf. Hurry assistance. Am going back down below to watch events.”

He tipped some cigarettes out of a cardboard packet and slipped the note in. Then he stuck a postage stamp over each end of the packet.

“Here,” he said. “Take this. That will see you through. But you will hand it to Manning with those seals unbroken! If either of those postage stamps is torn you can look out for squalls.”

Maxick grabbed the box and slid out through the trap-door. He muttered a fervent whisper of thanks to the river man and was gone, climbing silently down the fire escape outside.

Proctor watched him go. They had emerged on the roof-top and there was a long climb to the bottom. Proctor lost sight of him among the shadows beneath. He never saw what happened below there in the darkness, and it was as well for his peace of mind that he did not. For neither that letter, nor the messenger who carried it, ever reached the river station. Grosman had laid his plans too well for any squeaker, any informer against the organisation he ruled, to have a chance of success.

Maxick slithered soundlessly up Gunn Lane. And as he went a black, silent shadow detached itself from the wall of shadows by the warehouse gate and crept along on his trail. Fifteen yards in the rear the trailer went; and twice, when Maxick turned to throw a frightened glance back, the lane was empty.

But Ulrich Maxick never made to the end of Gunn Lane. When there were still three houses between him and the cross-road a silent figure came up with the speed of an arrow. There was the blue glint of a knife in the night and a shrill scream, and the sinister figure passed on, rapid and as noiseless as the passage of an owl across a cloud—and was gone.

Maxick fell where he stood, and another awful scream shrilled out on the air. He was writhing in agony, turning over and over in the gutter like an animal that had been mortally wounded. The hilt of the dagger stuck out between his shoulder blades and the knife was right through his backbone.

A window shot up overhead and a woman looked out, her eyes dilated wide with fright. She saw the coiling thing below her, half on, half off the pavement, and her own shrieks went searing out on the silence. Screaming was a custom of the country in her part of the river. It drew attention to the fact that something was wrong and it kept the screamer out of any possible entanglement. The instinct of self-preservation was the root cause of it, for the denizens of that locality wanted the police round as urgently as possible when the killers were out. Other windows went up. Old caretakers who lived in the attics above the glooming warehouses added

their babel, and soon their menfolk added their hoarse calls of "Police—police" to the din.

But no one went near the writhing man in the gutter. That was no concern of theirs. And if they were found near it, or trying to render first-aid, the police automatically required their names and addresses for such objectionable procedures as inquests and magisterial hearings. And anything to do with the law is anathema along that section of the river. It does not always end in the courts. Gangsters are apt to take revenge at a later date.

Thus, when running footsteps sounded along the road and two constables appeared, flashing their lamps ahead of them, the yelling died as if by magic and the windows silently closed. The faces disappeared and the silence of the night settled back over Gunn Lane.

Maxick had long since ceased to scream. His throat had closed up and a constriction had set in on his limbs. There was froth on his lips when the constables got to him. His back was bent nearly double, with his head thrown back in a ghastly rigor.

One of the officers pulled out the knife with an effort. A fluttering tremor ran through the body, and Ulrich Maxick coughed and was dead.

"That's the end of him, Martin," muttered the one with the knife. "Got him right through the back."

The other nodded grimly. "Dead as a doornail, Tom," he said. "Looks to me like Chink work. I saw one killed like that down in Rotherhithe—that was a Chink job, too."

Tom shone his flash-lamp on the knife, and he uttered a sharp ejaculation. "That's darn queer," he said. "Look—that figuring on the blade! It's the same as the one they took from the body in that Maxick murder the other day. Remember? There was some Chinese writing on that one, too."

"Knew it was Chink," replied Martin. They stood up and looked up and down the street. There was not a sound from anywhere. The tragedy was done and finished with. In sixty seconds it was begun and ended. Tragedies like that, grim little high-lights that flickered in and out of the dull picture of East End life, happened without witnesses. The dead body had been thrown up out of the night, without clue or pointer, and the night closed down dumbly upon it.

"What do we do about it?" grunted Tom.

"Better run through his pockets. Might be something there to identify him. Looks to me like a gang job."

Tom opened the coat and felt in the inside pocket. He pulled out a handful of paper oddments, book-makers' circulars, newspaper cuttings referring to arrests in connection with cocaine traffic, a list of probable runners in a classic race—and a post card addressed to Ulrich Maxick at an address in Newington Causeway.

The constable whistled. "Here's a go!" he muttered. "His name's Maxick, too! This is a gang job all right. We had better get a report through in a hurry. Headquarters is working on this job."

The other pulled out a notebook and made a few ponderous entries. "I'll get round and find some-

where where I can telephone," he said. "You'd better stay around and look after the body. The Chief is handling this case—he will want to know about this."

He crossed over to a darkened warehouse and thundered on the door. The silence grew deeper and he pounded again. He knew there was a night watchman on the building, and he hammered away until it was obvious even to the watchman's stolid brain that he intended staying there until he got an answer.

The man appeared, grudgingly. In answer to the constable's questions he swore he had not heard a sound in the lane for the last hour. The officer knew he was lying, but it was not possible to force witness against the gangs down there.

He ordered him to open the office, and in a few minutes he was through to his station.

"Got a murder job here, sergeant," he said. "Looks serious to me. I think it connects up with that Maxick murder on the river the other day. A post card on the body is addressed to Ulrich Maxick—maybe a relative of the other chap. Found him dying in the gutter at the top end of Gunn Lane. He died before we could do anything for him. There was a knife in his back—and the blade had gone clean through the bone. I pulled it out, and there are some Chinese markings cut into the blade the same as in that other case."

"Right; I'll get through to headquarters at once. Have you got help there?"

"Yes—Three Eight One is with me. He's with the body now."

"Where are you phoning from?"

"A warehouse in Gunn Lane."

"Any witnesses?"

"Not a soul. The whole place here is as dead as a grave. Not a sound anywhere. The watchman here was awake, but he swears he never heard a sound. And we heard the screaming two streets away. But you know what it is. They'd cut out their tongues sooner than run foul of the gangs."

"Hang on there and I'll send an ambulance. Probably someone will be coming out from the Yard."

The ambulance came, and with it came Sterling. By that time the constables had gone right through the dead man's pockets. It was Martin who came across the cigarette box. He was about to toss it into the heap with the rest when the oddity of the sealed ends caught his eye. He held it closer to the light and saw that the seals were postage stamps.

The two policemen eyed each other dubiously. That was a new one on them. They didn't run up against sealed packets of cigarettes every day of the week.

"Going to open it?" asked Tom.

"Not me," answered Martin shortly. "I once did a clever thing like that on a job three years ago. We were looking for stolen jewellery, and I opened a camera to see if there was anything hidden inside—and I fogged a set of plates that would have got us a conviction. Got bawled at for a fortnight and a year's seniority went west. Since then I've left off being a detective. I'm a plain, ordinary copper and know it. Leave it to the Yard man. That may be

the gang's secret way of passing snow. I'm steering clear."

And as simply as that the chance was lost. They waited and the precious minutes ticked away. And when, half-an-hour later, the ambulance arrived the opportunity had gone.

Sterling hurried out of the car and took immediate charge. He called for the senior constable, and in two minutes was in full possession of the facts.

He examined the knife, looking grave. "It's the same type of knife and the same inscription," he said. Then he dived on the cigarette packet. The message fell out, and he seized it. He bent over it, trying to puzzle out the almost illegible scrawl. It was nearly unreadable. Some of the lines were written over each other.

"Quick! Bring those lights here," he called. The constables switched on their lamps and they pored over the paper, trying to decipher the message.

CHAPTER VI

PROCTER crept back down the stairs and felt his way back through the darkness. Long before he reached them he knew that things were rapidly coming to a head in the lighted room. Voices were raised in high altercation, and the language was heated. The

river man tried to get back to his old retreat, but his passage was barred. Lingard had flung the door wide and he was outside it. His position was such that he could have seen the officer as he came into the aura of light streaming from the room.

Grosman was reiterating his intention of landing every ounce of the stuff he had brought over.

"There is no sense in taking it back," he declared. "It is here and it is going to be landed. You can just as well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb. If you can give me one single reason why it should not be brought ashore it shall stay on the *Yangtse*. But there *is* no reason. It is no greater risk to store two hundred thousand pounds worth of cocaine here than it is one."

"And I tell you it's not safe," stormed Lingard. "What we have here I can handle. In a few days I can spread it out over other storing points. But all that takes time, and other places will have to be found. Not one of the old dumps is safe. The middlemen won't take an ounce more than they can handle themselves. They know the stuff is here in plenty, and they are diffident about buying. The price has already gone rocketting down. They know we've got to sell—and the onus is on us. With the police raiding them one after the other they will only take just enough for current consumption."

"Then it is up to you to find new dumps. That is your job."

"But you can't do things like that in ten minutes. This place will be discovered by the police before long. It's bound to be. We can't stave them off for ever. And I'm working like a maniac to get it

cleared. If the police raided us now we should be ruined. Don't you realise there is pretty well every cent of capital we possess locked up in those rooms over there? A raid would be calamity. It would take us years to get started on anything like a big scale again. And here are you insisting in forcing another fifty thousand pounds' worth on me. I can't take it. And I won't! Land it if you wish—it won't come into this warehouse."

"You think not?"

"I know it!"

The signal came again, the merest flick of the hand. Lingard half turned, but before he could get round with his gun the seaman on his left had made a lightning movement. For ten minutes he had been preparing for it. Slowly, unnoticeably, so gradual was the movement, his hand had gone round into his pocket and back again. Then, when the signal came, that hand had flashed backward and forward in a split second. Something impacted with a soft thud against Lingard's temple, and the dope runner was down.

It was a neat silken bag of small shot, little bigger than an egg. But the bag was loose and that looseness made it a deadly weapon, for it stunned instantly, without killing and without leaving a bruise. The bag was limp in the air and cushioned slightly on impact, the shot spreading out with the force of the throw.

As the bag crashed into his temple Lingard half spun round. A fierce burst of white light flashed across his eyes, and then a great blackness overwhelmed him. He sagged slowly to his knees.

Grosman had laid his plans well. Intentionally he had got his man's temper frayed. And as Lingard became hotter and hotter in his arguments his attention began slowly to focus on the captain. Grosman knew that there would come a moment when Lingard would be so intent on his duel that it would be safe to risk a movement on the part of one of his men. Ten minutes before that ruse would never have worked. Lingard would have been round on him with the gun before the man could have even shifted the weight of his body in the chair. But he had deliberately played on Lingard's indignation.

As soon as the drug runner crumpled, all the apparent choler seeped out of him. The angry lights faded from his eyes, and he rose from his chair, quiet, calm, as coldly imperturbable as ever.

He indicated the prostrate form. "Tie him up," he said.

Then came interruption, abrupt and sudden. From outside in the great hall of the warehouse there came the sound of the creaking collapse of wood and then a muffled fall. Procter, in trying to get round to see what was happening in the inside room, had stumbled in the darkness. His knee knocked against an unseen obstruction, and the injured leg gave out. There was the searing scorch of burning acid running up the very marrow of the bone as he toppled against an old rotted packing-case. The case broke with his weight, and he fell headlong.

For one jolting second there was a tense silence in the inner room. The Chinese stood staring at their master; Grosman, with a startled frown corrugating

his brows, was peering out through the door as though he expected a spectre to appear. Then with a ponderous jab of his great arm he swept his hand down a row of electric light switches. He had a courage of his own. Whatever peril it was that threatened out there he was facing it foursquare. The warehouse leapt into a flood of light, and the burst of brilliance showed Procter, half buried in the débris of the smashed case, kicking about helplessly among the timbers trying to get up.

But the leg would not help. It let him down badly. He struggled madly and reared up halfway while the Chinese raced at him, and sank back with a groan.

"Here goes Mrs. Procter on the pension list," he muttered as the ferocious figures closed on him. Grosman barked something at them in Chinese, and naked steel flashed under the blare of light.

Procter died fighting. As the leader came at him he rolled over on his back and kicked out valiantly with his uninjured foot. The flat of his boot came into violent contact with the man's face. There was a sharp crack, and the man was staggering round, screaming, his hands clawing up at his powdered jaw.

Grosman hissed again, viciously, and another seaman, obeying the order without a glimmer of resentment, swung the butt of a pistol on his skull. The steel sank in an inch, and the screaming ceased with a high-pitched squeal. Grosman was muttering savagely under his breath. The din the seaman had made was piercing, and he was fearful that it might have been heard outside. His mind was in a daze. How the position stood he had not the faintest idea.

Procter might be in there alone or he might be one of a platoon creating an ambush for them. There might be dozens of others guarding the exits outside. At the very least it seemed beyond hope to suppose that Procter was in there on a lone raid. Grosman purchased silence at the cost of a life.

Three others had flailed themselves on the helpless river man. He was pressed back by sheer weight of numbers. Two gripped his arms and hauled him over. He felt the sharp sting of steel piercing up behind his shoulder blade, and with a shock of horror he realised that his end had come. That quick stab had killed him as surely as though they had severed his head. A shuddering weakness ran over him. It was just beginning to dawn on him that he would never see the little wife at home stitching those three stripes on his sleeve. It was the end. Life had been lived, with all its hopes and efforts and high ideals, life with all its trials and troubles and little victories—and the end had come, as shockingly swift as that.

Dying like a rat, gasping out life under a heap of silent Chinese who clung to him, mute and determined, while the arterial blood ran out. His back was warmly wet, as though a slow, creeping humidity was spreading over it. The realisation of it horrified him. It was all damnably unfair. They hadn't given him a chance in a thousand of making a fight for it. Procter, with wide eyes and blanching face, was staring into infinity.

A hot rebellion whelmed him, a fierce resentment that Fate should cut him off in such inhuman fashion. He cursed the Chinese with all the virulence

of his river vocabulary. His fury centred on Grosman. At that moment, if he could have got Grosman's throat between his hands, he would have gone to his Maker with murder on his soul; the two of them would have gone out together, with Procter's fingers fast locked on the captain's thorax.

And in the midst of his passion there burned a hot spark of joy in the knowledge that, even in death, he had bested his murderers. Ulrich Maxick was already on his way to the river station. Manning had been notified, and it would not be long before a swamping rush of uniformed men would knock them off their feet. He had won his fight even in death. He had made a turncoat of Maxick. The wharf-rat's evidence would send the crowd of them to the moors and Grosman to the gallows.

He fought savagely to get at the man. But his strength was fast running out. Grosman looked down at him with a bitter smile of hatred.

"You are making your last run down river, Procter," he said in a slow, almost caressing undertone. "All the mysteries of life and death and the Great Beyond, all the secrets that have tormented the sages since time began, will soon be yours for the solving. I hope the knowledge comforts you. Interfering pig! You would not take a warning."

He regarded the weakly struggling man from under half-closed eyes. "He who plays with fire needs asbestos hands," he said. "You were warned—you and Manning and the rest. You were told to keep your fingers out of matters that did not concern you. Maxick was given you as a warning. But you would not take it. Perhaps your death will be a

warning to the others. For as surely as they interfere in my business they will die."

Procter spat at him. His face was shaking with fury.

"Son of a sow," he yelled, "you haven't beaten me yet! I've got the drop on the crowd of you! I'll have you all in cells inside an hour." His voice rose to a scream. In the access of his blind rage caution went flying to the winds. The knowledge that he had beaten them and that they were in a trap overmastered him. It was the fighting instinct of a dying man. Outnumbered though he was, he knew that he had outgeneralled them, and the surging knowledge of it sent a vengeful pæan of exultation through him. And in his wild frenzy he lost his fight—threw away his victory at the very moment of its success. He was not going out without letting the Chinese know that he had beaten them and that from that hour the greatest illicit drug organisation that had ever existed was toppling to its fall.

Grosman sensed the atmosphere and snapped on it like a dog on a rat.

"Oh yes," he murmured, "you will have to move very quickly, my friend, if you are going to oblige us with the inside of a cell. I fear you have not more than two minutes to live. Ying is very adept with the point of a knife. It is not often he fails to puncture the heart with the first prick."

"I don't need to move at all," barked the prostrate man. "I've got you pinned where you stand! I know where the stuff is and I know how you get it through. And, you banana-skinned bladder of sin, I've sent the message through. Wrote it all down—

and it's on its way to the station now! You can't shift all that stuff before the boys get here. You'd want a lorry to cart all that biscuit away—and three journeys at that. The boys will get you—and they'll give you hell, too, when they find you have stuck me.”

Procter was dazed by the savagery of his death or he would never have given himself away like that. Grosman's crafty eyes were devouring him. The message was already on its way to the station. That meant that at least two of them had got into the warehouse. And it also meant that that was probably all there were, just the two of them. For surely, had there been others, they would have come to their colleague's assistance. They would not have stood by and seen him murdered in cold blood. Grosman goaded him along. Outside was one of his men, waiting and watching in case Maxick managed to make his escape. Grosman laid his plans far ahead, and Maxick was doomed. It might be that his watcher would see the police officer leaving the building. And in that case he had no further need for qualms. That message would never get to the station. And the messenger would never live to carry another Judas letter.

He signed to the coolies, and they released the fallen man. He was far gone, and there was no further need for restraint. The life was ebbing; nothing but the fine fighting spirit remained, and its flame burned bright and high.

“Your message could never leave this building,” said Grosman gently. “Do you think we are such fools as to leave our entrances unguarded? He will

never get to the river station. Even if he eludes my man a fast car will be at the station before him and silent knives will lie in wait. It is unseemly for you to die with false impressions, Procter. Your messenger will never get through."

It was then that the gloat in the river man's heart blinded him to what he was doing. The astuteness of his move in winning Maxick over was too good a farewell bullet not to fire at the smug face above him. By sheer blind chance he had stumbled on the only messenger likely to get through the cordon—one of the gang's own members.

"Won't he? Won't he get through?" he snarled. "That's just where you step on the soap, you fat lump! My messenger was Maxick, the poor devil you were going to murder. He's under police protection now. Safe as houses. By to-night he will be where none of you will ever get at him. And he's in with us! You can kick a man all you like, but there are limits. You found Maxick's when you went out to murder him for damn all. I was in the store there. I heard you. There's only one real man in the whole of your rotten crowd. And that's old Lingard. And he darn nearly queered the lot of you. He got Maxick away out of it. And I got him at the top of the stairs. Got him and talked to him. Poor brute! Livid with fear he was. And he fell for me, fell for my way out of your clutches."

"Maxick turned renegade, eh?" said Grosman. "That was why he was booked for death, Procter. He was a prospective squealer from the first. So was his brother. That was why they died. For, believe me, Maxick is already dead." Grosman's voice had

sunk away to a soft purr and he seemed to be almost fondling the idea of Maxick's death. It gave him an infinite satisfaction. It was the greatest stroke of luck that could have happened to him. For Maxick, of all people, to have proved to be the police messenger was a veritable gift from the gods. Maxick was the one person on earth who was doomed never to leave Gunn Lane alive. And it was all against Grosman's soulless nature to let the river man die with the taste of victory in his mouth. He had his last contemptuous kick at him as his life ebbed away.

Procter glared up at him. "You don't kid me," he croaked. "Maxick is alive. I saw him go. And he's got the message with him. Wrote it all down for Manning to see. He will get it, and you'll all be on the run, you swabs. Maxick won't let me down. We are his only hope. And he knows it. You don't kid me. I saw him hoofing it down the fire escape."

"And at the foot of the fire escape a knife was waiting for him." Grosman smiled his villainous delight at the thought. It soothed his brutal spirit to watch the dying man's triumph turn to gall in his mouth. Procter looked up at him and the old courageousness began to wilt. He read the truth on Grosman's flabby features. The lick of victory was on his tongue, the crowing glint of it was in his eye. Death and defeat. Procter stared them both in the face as Death swung the scythe back for him. The bright flame dimmed. Flat on his back, he stared up at his tormentor.

"You're—a—damned—liar!" he said, but the voice was daunted, strangled.

Grosman smiled and leaned forward as though listening. Shouts began to echo faintly through the gloomy building, the shouting of men that merged with the screams of women. From far up Gunn Lane they sounded, growing in volume and intensity. Across the way a dog howled. Long seconds fell slowly away into eternity. The two men stared at each other, eye to eye. Suddenly the tumult died, ceased as abruptly as though a gigantic sound-proof curtain had descended on the whole of the world beyond the warehouse.

Procter looked away, scarce able to believe that Fate could be so savagely heartless with a man in his last few seconds of life. He knew what that din portended. And, more definitely than that, he knew the deeper meaning of that sudden silence. The police had arrived. The murder of Ulrich Maxick was a *fait accompli*.

His head sagged sideways. "Well, I'll say the gods—haven't—been any—too kind—to little—Procter—to-night," he mumbled.

He coughed. There was a fulness in his throat, a warm fulness that was sickly. He gasped. The blood was filling his lungs. He never knew what that fulness in the throat was. His eyelids slowly closed. He gave them a last feeble effort. Grosman had to bend low to hear it.

"Slant-eyed polecat—the boys—will—get you—yet!" he yammered, and rolled over.

There was a scratch of sound from the inner room. Grosman wheeled. Lingard was trying to sit up. Groggy as an owl, he looked about him and licked his lips. A mist was over his brain, and there

seemed to be a wall between himself and his thoughts. His brain was not functioning and there was an enormity of ache going round and round in his head; and in the middle of his left temple seemed to be centred the fountain-head of all the pain that ever tore a nerve.

Grosman pointed to the dead body. "Weight that and drop it through the trap," he said. "Hurry. We must get that message back."

The seamen broke out the woodwork from half a dozen windows and returned with an armful of sashweights. They stuffed them into the dead officer's pockets and dragged him away through a long corridor. At the first sound of the shouting Grosman had plunged the whole building into darkness. The only light in the place came from the inner room, which was effectively screened from the outside.

They opened a trap-door in the floor, and a cold press of air wafted up in their faces. It was thick and foetid with the smells of river mud and stagnant slime. Far down below black water gurgled by, the walled-up remnant of one of London's buried streams. Fifty yards away the river passed in its mightiness. But that body would never reach the river. The feeder stream was tidal, and, heavily weighted with cast iron, the body was doomed to drift up and down between the warehouse and the outfall.

They dropped him over. After a second or two there came a dull, heavy splash from down below that reverberated with all the ponderousness of a heavy weight falling into deep water. The cold air

swirled up again as the body disappeared and they silently closed the trap.

Grosman went through to Lingard. The big man propped himself up on one elbow and looked up at him, blinking uncertainly. The sight of the Chinese pulled him together a little. He blinked again and tried to puzzle things out. But that mountainous ache in his head precluded all consecutive thought. All he knew was that somehow his power had crumpled. He could not remember how, but he knew it was true. He felt the ascendancy of the other man. Something inside him whispered a warning that Grosman had declared himself master and had demonstrated the fact in no uncertain way. The pain in his head told him that the method had not been without force.

Grosman picked up the gun and thrust it into his own pocket. The movement recalled things to Lingard. That gun was connected in some way with his present condition. Little bits of the mist began to clear away. Grosman shook him roughly.

"Well?" he growled. "Perhaps you believe me now!"

Lingard passed his hand shakily over his face. He was beginning to remember. "Better pull yourself together," said Grosman. "There is much to do. That damned rat Maxick has squealed on us. Turned right over to the police."

The mention of the name Maxick brought him back with a rush.

"Maxick? A turncoat?" he said weakly. "I don't believe it."

"It does not matter a button whether you do or not. The police have been here and——"

Lingard looked up with a start. The police! His thoughts went off into a maze again.

"Don't worry," said Grosman. "There are ways and means of dealing with the police. Maxick, too, has been dealt with."

"But—but what happened?" Lingard looked his incredulity.

"No more than was to have been expected when you take on the staff such runts as the Maxicks. Procter got at him. That was only to have been expected, too. That was why I wanted Maxick out of the way long ago. I had anticipated it. And I had a man posted outside to deal with any emergency that arose regarding him. His orders were to kill him no matter what happened. Maxick must have given us away to the police; must have told them of this rendezvous and how to get in. Anyhow, Procter came in here to-night. It was just after you had your—accident. Procter had stumbled against something in the dark. He gave himself away. Well, he has gone where he won't give anyone else away."

"Procter! You've murdered him?" Lingard's grey face had gone ashen, his jaw sagged away. The imbecility of it numbed him. He saw all his carefully built up schemes crumbling to the dust. That act would bring the whole pack of wolves snarling at their heels and there would be no let up until the whole organisation was smashed.

"Yes. We murdered him. Slipped a knife into him and he is down through the trap by now." Lin-

gard was about to break into hot protests, but Grosman silenced him with a sudden outburst.

"What else could we do?" he demanded. "Procter was wise to all we had got down here. He must have been listening to all that was going on since before you came down. He was out in the snow store. He knew where the drugs were and how they were packed. He knew all about the girl because we were talking about her in here. He knew where she was; knew that she was still on board and that there was a secret compartment on the *Yangtse*. And then, over and above all that, he wrote down the whole story and sent it through to the station."

"Good God!" gasped Lingard.

"Nice to know that even you realise the position was serious. Procter admitted it all while he was dying. He boasted about it. Fortunately for us we were prepared. Procter was using Maxick as his messenger. After your theatrical release of the man the way was left open for him. Actually you are more responsible for what happened than any of us. Procter had to die because of the knowledge he had gained. We couldn't keep him a prisoner indefinitely. He just had to die. But the trouble was, and still is, with Maxick. Procter got hold of him and actually passed his message over. Maxick got outside. My man got him and you can see how the position stands. Maxick is lying out there, dead. And the message is still on him. The police are there. They are going to find that message!"

Lingard was staggered. In a flash he realised the hopelessness of the situation. Once the police knew, even if it was only the address, the game was up.

Thoughts of immediate flight shot into his mind. He stumbled to his feet.

"Quick!" he gasped. "They will be here. We must get out. We will be taken like rats in a trap."

Grosman regarded him coldly. "Easy!" he said. "You have got us into this mess and you have got to help us get out. We have got to get at that message and destroy it. If the police read it we are doomed. We can't commit wholesale murder; can't very well kill off the whole staff at Scotland Yard. But the police are not going to read it. That letter will have to be destroyed before they get a chance to see it. Panic methods won't help. We shall have to work as silently as cats. Running away will do us no good. And do you think I am going to run—with a hundred and fifty thousand pounds of my own money lying there in the store? You are a little less sane than I thought you were."

"But—how—what can I do? I'll do anything that will keep us clear. Anything short of murder. Murder I flatly will not be linked up with. My sheet is black enough now." Lingard was as near panic as ever he was in his life. His eyes were darting about like a hunted animal's, and his ear was cocked towards the door as though he could detect sounds coming from somewhere out there in the darkness. He shivered and tried to moisten his dry lips. But his tongue was like sand. A slow despair was beginning to gnaw at him.

"Listen, Lingard—and try to act like a man. The beat policemen are out there now. They will telephone a report. And a Yard man will be sent out. They will have instructions not to touch the

body till the Yard man gets out there. That is the usual custom here, which you should know as well as I. That gives us about ten minutes in which to act. It's too late to go out right away. We should be interrupted by the Yard man; or the chances are a hundred to one that we should. There will be eyes up at the windows till the Yard waggon arrives. I will deal with the matter myself. But you need not shiver. There will be no more murder to-night. I have a little gun here that is quite as effective. In this case even more so. You had better keep out of it. You haven't a mask. And a mask is very necessary when that little gun goes off."

"Is it a poison gas? That won't help us. They will still know about this place and raid us." Lingard spoke in short, clipped-off sentences. He was rapidly becoming a mass of nerves.

"No. It is not poison gas. And it will not kill them. It will not even render them unconscious. But after it has gone off there will not be one of them able to take that message away. And if they don't read that letter, Lingard, how can they know about this place? But we are still in grave danger. It will be known that we carry on operations somewhere adjacent to Gunn Lane. This place will be suspect, and the whole lane will be under police surveillance. Every visitor to this lane will be watched. It means that we shall have to move from here. The front entrances will be barred us. To use them would be suicidal. That is where you come in. You will have to get this stuff away at lightning speed. If you lay claim to being something of an organiser,

now is your opportunity to prove it. You'll never have another chance like it as long as you live. The old railway sidings are out there at the back. You'll have to use them. Bring the lorries up under cover of night. Rent another dump until we can find our new place. Any old store will do until we can get fixed up again. It's a hell of a risk, but we shall have to chance it. Hardtack biscuit is uninteresting enough not to excite anyone's curiosity. But it's neck or nothing from now on. The thing is that it will have to be done immediately. This place might be raided to-morrow night for all we know. If so, then it's up to you to get us clear. The police will come and find the birds flown—and a hundred and fifty thousand pounds will have gone with them. That's all. It's your job and it's up to you. I will see to the rest."

The seamen returned and for some seconds Grosman talked to them in a quick undertone. They listened without a word as Grosman gave them their instructions. Grosman produced from a cupboard in the room a queer looking instrument that resembled a revolver in some ways and yet was unlike any gun that Lingard had ever seen. It was short and stubby. There was a butt for a grip and trigger to fire it, but there the resemblance to a revolver ended. It had no barrel; but where the barrel should have been was what appeared to be a strong steel pan, two inches wide. Across the pan were three flat-looking cartridges, lying side by side, held in place by little metal clips at both ends.

The seamen pulled masks from their pockets and adjusted them over their faces, so that they hung

down to their necks. Lingard saw that they had no eye-holes. They were just thick pads of exceptionally heavy felt. They pulled them down so that their eyes showed, and Grosman, fitting his own in position, gave the signal to move off.

They switched out every light and crept through the darkened building. From the top of the fire escape they could see the torches of the two constables as they stood guard over the body.

Grosman whispered in Lingard's ear. "You had better stay back here and wait till you hear me whistle. When you get the signal, make a bolt for it. Don't get excited—just walk off as though nothing had happened. The coppers will still be up there, but they will not be able to hurt you. They won't even know you are there. And whatever you do, don't move from here till you get the signal—or you might get a dose of what those policemen are in for."

Lingard nodded and buttoned his coat closer about him. He was shaking badly. Grosman grunted a scornful epithet under his breath and the murderous-looking group moved off.

They progressed as silently as a cloud passes over the moon. Like black ghosts they went down the escape and out into the lane. At the bottom they separated into two parties, each creeping silently along in the deep shadows of the warehouses. They got to within twenty yards of the constables and waited there, silent and motionless. In a little while the ambulance drew up. Grosman's thick lips pressed up into a scowl of hatred when he saw who it was climbing out. He recognised Sterling in the light of the car's headlamps; Sterling, in charge of the case,

and who had sworn to get him. He reflected that fortune could not have served him better. Here was a luck-sent opportunity of paying two debts with a single cheque. It gave him a sense of infinite satisfaction to know that it was Sterling who was to be the recipient of his little present.

They saw him hold his conclave with the constable, and saw him go down on his hands and knees to examine the dead man's belongings. Then Sterling found the cigarette packet. They saw him open it and take out the sheet of paper. Grosman knew from his sudden excitement that he had found the message. Without a sound he began to close in on the group.

Sterling called to the other constable for more light. The seamen crept up behind with drawn knives in case Grosman's attempt failed. Their masks were right up over their eyes now, and they were feeling their way along by the side of the walls. The driver had climbed down and had joined the group. He had put the stretcher down by the body. Sterling's sudden jump of activity excited his curiosity, and he bent over the group as the constables focussed their torches on the paper. All four heads were poring over the message at once, and Grosman stepped forward without a sound.

What happened next was so unexpected and was done so quickly that they were powerless to prevent it. Grosman's hand slid in between them with the revolver gripped in his fat fingers. Just for one startling second they saw it, a weird apparition that had suddenly appeared in their line of vision out of nowhere. Their eyes fixed on it, half in puzzlement,

half in surprise. And then the finger flexed on the trigger.

Grosman's other hand was up against his face, plugging the mask hard against his eyes. A sudden scorching sea of light welled out of the steel pan, blinding, searing, ferocious in its enormous intensity. It was as though the livid cores of a thousand suns was suddenly centred on that single livid spot. All the glaring, eye-killing light of a universe incandesced into an incredible brilliance, a brilliance so intense that the fierce, blinding stream of a searchlight was as the pale gleam of a struck match beside it. For just that one blinding second it lit the skies, throwing the surrounding buildings into a wild futuristic silhouette of black and white, as though a ton of magnesium had been fused into luminance through monstrous lenses in that terrific fraction of a second.

The piercing glare of it was so tremendous that it progressed on beyond the normal whites of light. It achieved a colouring of blue; burning, disintegrating, electric blue that penetrated on through the gelatines of the eyes to the very optic nerves behind the retinas.

The four men fell back helplessly pawing at the air, their faces screwed up in an access of agony. Sterling rolled over, kicking spasmodically, his hands gripped up at his blinded eyes, whimpering with the exquisite agony that had brayed his sensory nerves. He had taken the full force of the ray; the instrument was less than six inches from his eyes when the discharge came. The jelly of his very eyeballs was roasted.

Jerky, frightened cries began to break out on the night, the panic-stricken cries of men in the first throes of blindness, groping sightlessly in the midst of a new and shattering darkness. The paper fluttered to the ground. Grosman, evading the clawing hands, leaned over and picked it up. One of the constables, unable to believe the enormity of the thing that had overtaken him, was staring into the eye of his torch, feverishly stabbing the beam on and off, with the bulb pressed hard into his eye. And as fast as he moved the button his bewilderment increased, for, although he could feel the heat of the bulb against his eye, his brain did not register the faintest reaction to the sharp streak of light. He was as blind as though red hot irons had been thrust far down through the iris of his eyes.

Grosman turned and whistled, a low soft note that floated down the lane to Lingard. The drug runner, even at a range of seventy yards, had been affected by the blinding ray. He had been following the movements of the Chinese with frightened intensity, and when the glare came he was staring hard at the centre of the group. The beam died, almost as abruptly as it had burst out. And the resultant darkness, doubly emphasised after the shattering precipitation of brilliance, found him almost helpless. A wall of blackness enshrouded him, and he fumbled to the wall for guidance. He heard Grosman's signal, but it was some seconds before he could reorientate his sight to the pall of the night.

The seamen had taken off their protective masks. Grosman sent one of them back to pilot Lingard

away. The big man was still dazed when he approached. Grosman told him to hurry. He was tearing the message into infinitesimal pieces, tearing and re-tearing each fragment until it was smaller than confetti.

Grosman's car came purring round the corner and paused there.

"Is your car handy?" he asked Lingard.

Lingard nodded dumbly. He wanted to get away from the sight of the stricken men groping blindly about down there on the ground. Sterling could hear them talking, and he was making a last effort to get at them. But with the sudden onrush of utter blindness his sense of balance had gone. He could not remain upright for more than a couple of steps. Lingard's last vision of him was of a man, valiant to the last, making a series of body-shaking falls and staggering up again in a wild attempt to get at the man who had thrust the black-out of ultimate night upon him.

Lingard shuddered and turned away. "I have a car two streets away," he said. "For God's sake let me get away out of this."

"I will see you at noon to-morrow," replied Grosman. "Come to me with your plans. Hurry; the whole neighbourhood will be awake in another couple of minutes."

They climbed into the car, and the wheels were in motion before the door was slammed. The driver stopped just long enough to drop Lingard at his own car and then sped back to the side streets by the wharf.

There they all separated and approached the

Yangtse by different routes. Crouched in the far recesses of the store-sheds opposite, Manning watched them come creeping back. The gangway was lowered and one by one they silently stole on board. The last to come was Grosman himself. Manning saw him limping along by the mooring bollards, stepping heavily over the network of mooring lines and wire guys. The gangway rose again as his bulky figure went on board, and a minute later the silence of the night closed down over the river.

CHAPTER VII

HILLARY opened her eyes slowly. A racking misery was crawling to life in her nerves. Her head throbbed maddeningly, and every heartbeat seemed to be bumping its way through her temples against a vast compression. She was in a bath of perspiration, and there was a feverish heat in her flesh that seemed to be consuming her. She tried to sit up, but the effort was beyond her. There was a palsy in her muscles, a flabbiness that rendered them lifeless; they were a part of her in thought only. She knew she had them, but they did not belong to her. There was a dead insulation between herself and her senses.

She tried to think, but her mind refused to con-

centrate. It forswore and denied her. She could not even arrive at the faintest idea of time. It appeared to be still late at night. At least, the electric lights were still burning. Then she saw that she was in a room without a porthole. Sunlight never penetrated there, and it might be blazing midday for all she knew.

She closed her eyes and relaxed. The streaming light, poised there a few feet above her head, stabbed at her eyes and hurt. It cut into her head like knives and gave her a feeling of nausea. It was as though she was being rapidly revolved in a spinning drum, with no chance of either stopping the drum or of getting out.

For many minutes she lay back, slipping back again into a state of comatose lethargy. All the beastliness, the misery, and the deadening lifelessness of the slow return from drugging was loaded heavily upon her.

Full consciousness began to return to her in a series of growing waves, and each recurring wave seemed to leave in its wake a greater and more profound sea of depression.

It was an hour before she had strength to move her body, and the action brought with it violent physical pains. She did not want to move, did not want to think, did not even want to breathe. It would have been a blessed relief to have quietly sunk away into oblivion, to have closed her eyes and let Death have his way with her. She did not want to live. An ocean of melancholic depression encompassed her.

Gradually she opened her eyes again. The blind-

ing jabbing in her head redoubled. A revolting sickness seized her like the aftermath of a long anæsthetising by chloroform. She turned over and wept in the sheer hopelessness of despair.

Hillary Kittredge did not know, but she was experiencing the first nauseating symptoms and reactions of the drug addict when the potency of the narcotic begins to wear off; a depression, a misery, a state of absolute mental bankruptcy that can only be warded off and nullified by yet another administration of the drug that caused it. In a little while her very blood would be burning for the spurious relief of cocaine.

Vaguely she remembered fleeting fragments of the events of the night. She tried to disentangle them from the webs of vacancy that surrounded them. She snatched at them blindly, and it exasperated her to realise that she always missed them. She could get nothing connected from the jumbled mass of glimpses. It was another hour before it dawned upon her to look at the time by her wrist-watch. The hands pointed to half-past two. But the watch had stopped, and it did not even occur to her to listen and see if it was still going.

Her eyes wandered vaguely round the room. It was about ten feet square, and she was lying on a heap of silken cushions in a corner. The walls were covered with beautifully worked tapestries. At the far end the gross figure of an enormous Buddha, stolid and complacent, gazed inscrutably down upon her. It was a hugely magnified counterpart of the one in the saloon. The squat bulk of it sat ponderously on a black ebony pedestal, and his eyes

were focussed on a small jade altar at his feet. A rich, heavily piled crimson carpet covered the floor. The room would have been quiet and restful but for those maddening lights.

Slowly it began to drift back on her torpid senses that she had been drugged. She turned her head listlessly to see if the tiny puncture was still there. And then she wept again in a revulsion of horror. Grosman had already started on his beastly plan to enslave her. There were not two, but four, minute red dots on the smooth whiteness of her arm. Already she was beginning to wish that she could get back to that calm rapture of the previous night—the first deadly symptom of the drug calling for yet more of the drug. She would have done anything to have got some of that fearful lassitude out of her body, to have got back to some sort of a mental poise, to free her head from the ceaseless drumbeats of her pulse in her temples.

But all she could think of was the four wicked little needle-pricks. They floated through her head and drifted past her eyes in an ominous procession. Even when she clenched up her eyes and tried to blot them out they persisted, portentous purple specks dug into the marble fairness of her flesh.

With a violent effort of will she sat up. Her head swam dizzily. Every nerve-end seemed to be quivering in fierce protest. She put up her hand to her bosom. It was fully five minutes before she realised there was something under her fingers, her brain was functioning with such dulled slowness. She looked down and saw a note pinned there.

It was written in the curious spidery scrawl

peculiar to the Oriental. She read it. It was terse and frighteningly indicative.

“LITTLE LADY (it ran),

“I am sure, by the time you read this, you will admit your unwisdom in meddling with affairs that are in no wise feminine. Your cure has already begun. The treatment will be continued at six-hour intervals, gradually diminishing to three. In all other respects, little lady, you are unharmed. I find that white women, when under the influence of narcotics, are very uninteresting. No doubt we shall know something more of each other in a day or two when you are feeling more kindly disposed towards the acceptance of the needle. Should you require anything, you will find a bell-push in the bulkhead to your right. It rings directly into my cabin.

“THE MASTER.”

She crumpled the note into a ball and shuddered. A wild phantasmagoria of thoughts went rocketing through her brain. In a startled effort to find a way of escape she swayed up to her feet. For a moment she stood, reeling, and then fell headlong to the floor. Her knees had no more strength in them than soft india-rubber, and there was a rancid biliousness in her stomach that made her want to get out and drown herself.

Her thoughts ran on disjointedly. Was this horrible nausea the inevitable result of the aftermath of every injection of cocaine? Did these numbing hours of wrecked physical powers always follow the indulgence of the habit? If so human beings must

be maniacs ever to pander to the morbid desire. This misery was not worth one single second of the brief exhilaration that had come to her overnight. Not worth a whole continuous day of it. But stay. Wasn't it? Wasn't anything better than this mind-killing, body-wracking torment? Would it not be better to make an effort to get just one more quick little dose of the soothing drug? Just one and no more? Certainly no more than one. After that the return to consciousness would be easier. She would know what to expect, and its effects would not be so terrible. But all drug addicts said that. They all thought along those self-defrauding lines. Just one and no more. They all carried privily in their own minds the secret thought that this would be the end of their troubles, that the next dose would be the last, and that from then on they could make the one magnificent effort that would get them back to sanity and re-establish themselves in their own estimation and self-esteem. Just one more dose. And then they would be in a condition to make the great effort. Always that "just one more dose" . . . and the effort that never came. . . . Always it was the next time . . . and the next . . . and the next . . . until even they came to realise that, for them, the great opportunity would never come. Always it would be one longing for another healing draught as soon as the effects of the last had worn off. She could not conceive anyone enduring such a welter of abjection as she was experiencing just then . . . it was beyond human credulity . . . with the release so simple . . . just one more quick little stab with the needle . . . and then rest, release, soothing surcease from the burning aches that wracked her. . . .

“If you want anything you will find a bell-push in the bulkhead to your right.” . . .

And then the four ominous red dots came swimming before her blurred eyes again. They seemed to be scorching into the very tissues of her eyes. They were red lamps, danger signals that screamed their warnings at her. No one but a fool could be blind to their messages. Already she was falling, she, Hillary Kittredge, who had prided herself on the strength of her will, on the proud health of her young body, on the forthright sense and common intelligence that was part and parcel of her.

She shook herself and sat up against the cushions. Even if this miasma of crawling agony was the price to be paid for the winning back of her fine young fighting spirit, then it was worth the purchase. The first overdose had been so severe that the resultant reactions were doubly serious. Knowing, to the very last degree, the varying actions of all his drugs, Grosman had deliberately aimed to achieve that state to which she awoke. The necessity for just a morsel of the opiate would be too ravenous for refusal. He pictured the girl holding out that fair white arm, shakingly, tremblingly beseeching the relief of just a tiny injection of the filth that had hurt her.

She shuddered again. Memories had just come back to her of her thoughts about Grosman overnight. While the drug was taking effect she had actually begun to make excuses for the beast; distinct recollections came back to her of having persuaded herself into believing that he was not half so black as he was painted. And she had even doubted him guilty of having murdered Gilan Maxick. Great

heavens, she thought, if cocaine made her conceive thoughts like that about the repulsive brute, where on earth would it end? If her hand had ever been in any danger of going out to that fatal bell-push, it was drawn back then, finally and for ever. Hillary sat back on the pile of cushions and fought out her battle alone.

The little screaming devils that ran alive in the drug whispered, urged, goaded, tormented, stabbed at her, jabbed at her, poured scorn on her, pricked the very centres of her nerves with their poisoned lances, coaxed her, upbraided her, kidded her softly along, and then incontinently fell upon her in full force with a long-drawn attack of retching. Then a shivering ague seized her. And she sat through it all, shaking like a jelly, with her head in her hands—and the four red dots holding her grimly to her ordeal.

After two hours she began to feel the first relief of having held on. The fierce desire began to give way to an even fiercer hatred of the ghoulish who had caused her sufferings. She no longer experienced the least desire to ring that bell or prayerfully offer her vein to him. All that was thrust behind her. Her head was beginning to clear and some of the frantic pains were going out of her bones. All that remained was a fury against Grosman, burning in the inner chambers of her soul like a fiery, white-hot coal. Strength of mind had come back to her, she was beginning to see things along a more level perspective. She got up and walked weakly round the apartment. That battle was over. The ordeal had been fearful; it had shaken her badly and left her

weak as a kitten, but she had come through with it with scarcely a whimper.

And deep down in her heart a golden-clear exultant note was sounding. That same battle could be won again and again. Grosman could come in there and drug her, subject her to the hypodermic as often as he thought fit. By sheer physical force he could add to the number of those angry red dots. But he could never break that will—not now that she had already experienced the worst of it and come through with flying colours. As often as he drugged her she would fight back at him.

For she had made the great discovery—drug taking is the outcome of a purely mental state, the addiction to it is the result of a neuroticism already existing. Unless she herself wanted it, needed it to bolster an enfeebled nerve process, it could never get her enslaved in its toils. And she did not want it, she hated it. Her whole nature revolted against its sensualising effects. Afterwards, when the reckoning came, she could despise herself for the weakness of her thoughts overnight.

Womanlike, she peered round the place for a mirror. She knew that she looked ghastly. Her hair, wet with the perspiration of long endured pain, was draggled and matted into rat-tails, and her face was wet and shiny. There was not a spot of powder left on her skin, and her cheeks were the colour of fresh putty.

But Grosman's Temple of Buddha had not been arranged to accommodate the requirements of a lady. The walls, rich in the luxury of priceless tapestries, were destitute of mirrors. She inspected

the great Buddha. He was carved of a curiously smooth, oily stone, like soapstone, but of a far finer texture and much more beautiful graining. He was huge, towering up to the ceiling, and as firmly planted as a statue.

The whole place was overpoweringly hot. Without a single porthole or visible ventilation, the room had acquired a stuffiness that made, and kept her, drowsy. She wandered away from the idol. There, at the end of the pile of cushions, she saw her shoes, crinkled and shapeless where she had thrust them into her bosom before coming on board. With them, too, was her handbag. She blessed the bag if not the shoes. In it was a sufficient supply of lipstick and powder to make herself presentable and, glory of glories, there was a tiny magnifying mirror let into the flap.

For the first time she became aware of a serviette lying on the floor near the cushions. Under it was a tray of eatables—quite a palatable meal. There were some slices of breast of chicken, some cucumber shredded as fine as paper, a plate of bread-fingers, a little silver bowl of glacéd fruits, and a glass of burgundy, and some water. She let the napkin fall over it again. The last thing in the world she felt like doing was eating. There was a lump in her throat as sore and as painful as a quinsy.

She rolled back on to the cushions again and tried to think things out. But so far as she could see there was no way out. She would just have to lie there and make the best of it with Grosman's attacks, keeping up her fight till the river police discovered her plight and came through to her rescue. She took

comfort from the knowledge that she had left at least one clue behind her. The car was left back there in the little cul-de-sac, idle and unattended. The police would soon discover the identity of the owner, and a few inquiries from Johnny would establish the connection with the *Yangtse*. The mere fact of her absence would send Johnny hopping round to Scotland Yard. And Toby himself would not be far behind. Between them they were not entirely lacking in brains. Johnny would certainly make inquiries at the Caverne Diamantée—he would discover from there that she had left within a few minutes of him. It might almost lead to the paragraphs in the morning paper.

She buoyed herself up with similar hopes until she began thinking it all out sanely again, and then suddenly it all seemed terribly depressing and hopeless. She set her lips and stuck out her chin determinedly. Thoughts like that would never do. There was nothing like keeping the bright side outward. Apparently Grosman had expected her to sleep much longer than she had or he would have been in to drug her again long before that. He had not reckoned on her fine, young recuperative powers. With half her life spent in the out of doors, she had acquired almost the resilience of a man. That was the most comforting thought that had occurred to her. She got up again and walked about. She found that she felt better walking about. It was only when she rested flat on her back and let her thoughts run riot that the awful phase of depression returned.

She began feeling her way around the walls, hoping to find some secret hidden door. She knew

there must be one somewhere, or a trap-door in the floor. She hunted around, searching every tiny crack and crevice. But she could find nothing that even looked like a secret opening. She rolled back the great carpet, and underneath was nothing but the deck planking, thick, heavy, and as solidly founded as the day the ship came off the slips.

She decided it was time she sat down, had a cigarette, and made her toilette. And in the same breath she blessed the recollection of those cigarettes. There were seven left in her case, and somewhere in her bag there ought to be an automatic lighter. They would help to soothe her jumping nerves anyway. And it would be a good test of her will to ration herself—just so many whiffs off each cigarette and then carefully conserve the remainder.

And then, for some reason which she could not define, her attention was attracted again to the great stone Buddha. She sat on the corner of the divan and stared at him. And ever after she blessed the fact that the carven image distracted her from lighting that cigarette. She slowly put the bag back, unopened.

The possibility had just occurred to her of a secret opening being controlled from some fitment attached to the great god. She got up again and crossed over to him. She could not get behind him. He was flat back against the far wall and much too bulky to have been shifted. She inspected him from every angle, and there did not seem to be anything suspicious anywhere on his massive frame. She pushed and picked and probed, but every inch of him was as solid as Gibraltar. Then she climbed up

on the jade altar to see if she could find a clue somewhere up on his benign head. And no sooner was her weight firmly set on the altar than she felt the whole thing give underneath her. The whole altar depressed a couple of inches. There was a soft click and the carved robe of the great god opened out like a door. The inside of him was as hollow as a box.

She gaped into the cavity. The god was packed full of cocaine tins. And on a ledge just inside the robe she saw something that sent a wild flush of thankfulness surging through her, something on which she fastened with all the savage eagerness of a cornered animal seeing the way of escape opening to it at last.

It was a small, silver case, beautifully chased, lined with puffed silk. But it was the contents that gave her her swift thrill. It was like Grosman to house ugliness in loveliness. For that beautiful example of the jeweller's art contained Grosman's private drug set. There were three crystal bottles of pure cocaine and two silver hypodermic syringes. A little of the cocaine had gone from the first bottle.

The colour came welling back to her cheeks, and there was a quick sparkle in her eyes. That was the very case which Grosman had used when he last administered the drug to her. It needed no brilliant inspiration to realise his method. He came in through the secret door, made sure that she still slept, opened the idol, and injected the drug from the case inside. On that supposition, he would use that same case each time he drugged her. She breathed a little prayer of thankfulness and seized

the opportunity eagerly. Pure cocaine is colourless. And in the knowledge of that thrice blessed fact she saw salvation opening to her. Grosman had made the unconscious mistake of sending in a carafe of water on her lunch tray.

She hurriedly took out the bottles and drained out their contents, knowing that every second was precious. At any moment the Chinese might return and crush her new-found hopes. She carefully tipped out the liquid from the first bottle, pouring it over one of the bottom cushions of the divan. She rinsed the bottle with a little water from the carafe, and then carefully filled it to its previous level. The second she treated in the same way, filling the bottle to the top with the harmless water. She was about to empty the third when a newer and even more thrilling promise offered.

Tacked against the interior of the idol was a green felt tool satchel. It was a medical contrivance, divided off into thin perpendicular compartments and used for carrying forceps, tweezers, thermometer cases and general surgical paraphernalia. But this one contained the captain's own reserve of syringes. There were fifteen of them, of varying sizes, and some of the compartments were vacant. It was highly improbable that even Grosman's quick eyes would notice the absence of one, especially as only the merest tips of them protruded. She hastily selected one that would hold double as much as the one Grosman had used on her. In a few seconds she had filled it to its capacity and buried it under a cushion against the bulkhead. In it was enough anæsthetic to send a dozen men into unconsciousness,

and, when she was lying there on the divan, it would be handy to her right hand. She rinsed and filled the third bottle with water, wiped the shining case on her dress with the utmost care, and then silently closed the door.

She leaned back against the wall, panting softly with excitement. The golden opportunity was taken and the preparations complete. There was a little trembling in her limbs as she contemplated the possibilities. And she half wondered if she would have the nerve to carry it through when the chance offered. Even under those frightening conditions murder was not an easy thing to contemplate—and there was every possibility that Grosman would be murdered if that ferocious dose ever got into his blood stream. But the memory of the foul things he had done to her and the certainty of her knowledge of the still fouler things he intended, banished every squeamish thought from her head. She clenched her fists and swore that she would go through with it if it meant treating the whole loathsome crew in the same way.

She covered the meal tray with the napkin and lay back on the divan again. So far as she could see there was only one little thing in that cabin that could raise Grosman's suspicions, and that was so minute that the odds were a thousand to one that he would never notice it. The one thing was the level of the water in the carafe. She had lowered it by nearly half a pint, but he would have to raise the napkin to see it. And even if he did it was extremely unlikely that he would remember so insignificant an item as that. For the rest, she felt

there was not a single loophole for her scheme to miscarry.

All she had to do was to lie there feigning sleep, and the mandarin would never dream she had waked. She thanked her lucky stars she had refrained from smoking that cigarette. The fumes would have given her ruse away to that sharp nose. She had eaten nothing. Even the wine was untouched. And her face was unpowdered, her lips innocent of the touch of the lipstick. Her whole appearance and everything in the room was exactly the same as when Grosman had last left it. All she had to do was to lie and wait and hope he came while the drug pallor was still upon her. Then, if anything of courage and her own tigerish fighting spirit could avail, she would force the way of escape from that hell place alive—even though she left a dead body behind her.

Her heart was pumping as the minutes slowly passed. Another cracking headache assailed her, and it was followed by a return of the shivering ague. But the attack was in no way so severe as the first. Not a sound reached her. The place seemed to be insulated from the outside world. She was watching with the intensity of an expert watching for the solution of a conjuring trick. All her plans and hopes depended upon whether she discovered the secret of how Grosman got into the room. Without that she was penned in there for as long as the captain himself.

At last, after what seemed an eternity of hours, each one of which ticked ponderously and singly through her very brain, there came the faintest

sound from the far wall. Instantly she relaxed on the cushions like a log and began to breathe in long, steady exhalations, her lips slightly parted, her breasts gently rising and falling.

The sound had come from a tapestried panel immediately on the right of the giant image. It was vague, like the sound of a faint scratching behind the wall, and she could not locate its exact position. She watched tensely through eyes that were almost closed, her long lashes veiling the narrow glints that shone in them.

Slowly, the tall panel revolved on a central pivot until it was swung out squarely into the room. Immediately the panel began to move the glaring cluster of lights overhead went out, and small groups of lights, dim and diffused, lit up in the high corners of the ceiling.

She waited on with her blood beginning to chill. Grosman did not appear. The girl lay back doing her utmost to appear as though still in a stupor, to control her breathing to the normal easiness of sleep. Soon she heard the soft padding of footsteps coming up what was apparently a passage behind the panel.

The captain appeared in the entrance, staring silently at the piled up masses of cushions, his eyes boring greedily at the picture of slim, feminine daintiness reclining there. He came slowly into the room and gently closed the panel behind him. And as the wards of the lock slid home the lights came on again. Apparently the lighting arrangement was a signal to him when in the Temple that the outer door in the saloon had been opened.

He was dressed in his ceremonial robes of rich

blue silk, embroidered with a riot of marvellous colourings. Around his middle was a girdle of silk worked in gold. He raised his arms and bowed to the Buddha, and the sleeves of his robes fell away a yard from his wrists.

The girl lay motionless as he came towards her. He stood by the side of the divan, his hands loosely folded, staring down at her. She could hear his breathing, laboured with desire. For a whole minute she bore his avid scrutiny, maintaining a quietly feigned sleep as he bent over her, listening to her half inaudible respiration.

He peered round the room, seeming puzzled at her long sleep. He touched her softly, stroking her arm that was snuggled up beside her head. Then he brushed her eyelids, and the lids did not even flicker. He glanced down at the tray of victuals, opened her bag and counted the cigarettes. He appeared to be satisfied that she really was asleep, still drifting through the drugged torpor of lazy unconsciousness, for he tiptoed to the Buddha, made another profound obeisance, and leaned his weight heavily on the altar.

The side of the robe opened and he took out the hypodermic case. With deft, practised fingers, he took one of the syringes, inserted it in the neck of the bottle, and extracted a measured dose. He held it up to the light and examined it. There appeared to be a little too much for his requirements, for he carefully squirted a few drops back into the bottle. There was humour in the idea of the man taking such meticulous pains over a drop or two of totally innocuous water, but the comedy of it was lost on

Hillary. She was beginning to feel sickeningly nervous. The horrible thought had just occurred to her that there in front of her was a human being who, in a minute or two would be slowly sinking into the lethargy of death. That great virile brute would soon be drifting helplessly to his doom. He was taking the last few footsteps of his earthly life. Those precise, measured actions of his, as he graduated the dose, were his last. And she was going to be the agent responsible for his end. Within the next minute or two she was going to be a murderess; for the rest of her life she would be self-stigmatised with the knowledge that she had murdered a human being. She felt like a spider crouched in its lair waiting the approach of its unwary victim.

He came back to the divan and put the loaded syringe carefully on the floor beside her. Then he shook her gently, taking her by both arms and half lifting her from the couch. Her head lolled back, and she hung limp in his arms. He shook her again and let her fall back on the cushions. She felt her hand taken and squeezed powerfully.

“Little lady,” he breathed huskily, “wake up. Wake up. You have slept too long. You must wake and eat. And in a little while, when the pains begin to course through your body, you will cry to me for another kiss of the needle.”

He shook her roughly and seemed determined that she should wake. Her eyelids began to flutter. The idea was dawning on her that it would be better to wake and speak to him. Then, when the opportunity presented itself of thrusting the needle into

him, she would be able to move with far more hope of success. If she suddenly leapt into activity from an apparently profound comatose condition he would be so startled that the common instincts of self-preservation would make him grapple with her and then the opportunity would be gone for ever.

She feebly opened her eyes and as feebly closed them again. A long sigh escaped her. Dense lines of pain creased across her forehead, and she put up her hand as though to shield her eyes from the bright glare of the lights. She heard a satisfied grunt from above her, and Grosman went back to the Buddha and closed the robe into position.

She tried to sit up but relaxed again as though the effort was not worth the pain set up in her limbs. Grosman came back and sat on the cushions beside her. She heard his oily, suggestive voice.

“Little lady, wake. Your little friend is here, your little friend the syringe that will smooth out all troubles, soothe away all pains, and show you only the brightness of life again.” He stooped, and she felt his thick fingers caressing her face.

She opened her eyes again and stared round her with a puzzled expression. For a minute she did not speak. He was too well versed in the symptoms of the drug addict returning to consciousness not to know that it is impossible for them to talk. It is many minutes before the first glimmerings of mental contacts return. She licked her lips and tried to swallow. Unconsciously she was repeating the same actions as when first she began to come to her senses. And all the time his gross fingers were fondling her as an over-fond woman caresses her babe. Her brain

revolted against it, the very bulk of his great body against her was overpoweringly repulsive. She wanted to rise up and lash him across the face, to feel the tough bones of her young knuckles pounding into the fat flab of his flesh, to take a toll of physical pain out of his sensuous body for all her outraged sensitivenesses of womanhood.

But she endured it. And her anger, her temper, and her determination grew. He pushed some cushions behind her shoulders and forced her to sit up. He rubbed her hands and shook her again. She tried to push him off, and it was the first actively conscious gesture she had made.

"Leave me alone—please leave me alone," she whispered faintly. Then after a little while she muttered: "My head. Oh, my head."

"Your head aches, little lady? I'm afraid it will ache for some time—and the ache will increase." His voice was infinitely soothing, infinitely compassionate. "But I have something here that will ease it, my dear. Something that will soften the pains almost before you know they are upon you." He stroked her face again; and she did not try to repel him. "One tiny prick with the needle—and all your sorrows will begin to melt away. You can count the seconds as they pass. As the healing fluid finds the troubled nerves all the aches and pains will gently go to sleep again. The world will become rosy with delight. The future will hold nothing but the rapture of dreams again. But you must *ask* me for it first, little lady. Never again shall I press the needle unwillingly into that sweet arm. I want you to ask me for it. Won't you? Won't

you offer me your arm and plead for the soothing balm?"

The ingratiating voice purred on in her ear. She listened to him as though through a daze. Her uncomprehending eyes focussed on him in a deep frown of puzzlement. Then she looked uncertainly from him to the great stone Buddha, and her eyes wandered round the luxurious appointments of the Temple.

"Where am I?" she gasped. "What place is this?" Then as though the effort of speaking was too much for her she closed her eyes again and lolled back on the cushions.

Grosman leaned over, flicked the napkin off the tray and picked up the glass of burgundy. He held it to her lips and tipped it. She felt the cold press of the liquid against her mouth and drank. There was no need for acting there, for her mouth was as dry as a kiln. She drained the wine and thanked him weakly.

She was in a quandary. She knew which panel opened, and had a fair idea of where the panel led to. But she had not the faintest notion of how it operated. Already the way was being paved for her to make her escape—and yet, right on the threshold of freedom, the door was barred to her. If she used the needle on him the man would be unconscious in a couple of minutes. It was doubtful if he would have time to get to the door. And she would be penned in there with a dying man. In half an hour the dying man would be a dead man—and she, imprisoned in a soundproof room with a body! The thought was scarifying. It was vitally necessary for

her to discover the secret of opening that revolving panel.

"Don't you know me?" crooned the slimy voice in her ear; it seemed to come up from the nethermost walls of sensualness.

She made a real effort to clear away the haze from her brain. For long seconds she stared at him, trying to concentrate on her surroundings. Gradually a fuller understanding returned to her, and a look of horror passed over her face. She put out her hands to push him away, but he caught and held them with childish ease.

"Gently, little one, gently," he murmured. "In a little while, when you are fully awake, you will not think so unkindly of me. You will dread the thought of me going away without giving you what you need. You will beg and pray of me to stay. But first you must eat. You have been too long asleep. Far too long. And it is not good for you. When you have had a little meal you shall have another tiny vein-sip of the sweet water. Not so much this time, little one. For I do not want you to go to sleep. I want you to get back to that radiant rapture of the first few minutes . . . you remember? When all the world seemed sweet and the troubles and worries were lifted away from you like a curtain? You shall get back to that blissful state, but, little one, you shall stay awake to enjoy it. And never again will you think evilly of the master."

He picked her up and set her uncertainly on her feet. Holding her by the arm he walked her round the room. He was reeking with scent and the smell of it made her faint.

"Leave me alone!" she panted. "I don't want any more of your beastly drug."

"Ah, but you will, my dear," he assured her. "In a little while when your nerves are again able to register properly, you will be crying for it."

And then he declared himself in all his vileness. "Even if you don't fall so easily as the rest," he said, "even if you fight against it a little longer than the others, it will get you in the end. Every piece of food that comes in to you will be faintly powdered with the precious dust. Every drop of water sent in to you will be impregnated with the water of delight. Even the burgundy you have just drunk——"

She broke from his grasp and started back with a gasp of horror. But he took her again and chuckled.

"Do not be alarmed," he said softly. "It was drugged, little lady, but not with cocaine. Oh no. There was something much more subtle, something much more—shall we say, interesting?—in that little draught of wine. Really, it was not necessary for *you*. You are young and in full possession of all your virile youth. That drug is only taken by those whose years are on the wane, whose powers are no longer on the full flood of glorious youth. But you have heard of such things, I am sure. You appreciate its point." The tones of his voice seemed to be stroking her in the same way that his eyes were devouring her. "It was just a little boost," he said. "You might not be feeling yourself, might not be—as the saying is—up to the mark, after your little ordeal of the past few hours. But you will be feeling much better soon, much better, little lady."

“You beast!” Hillary turned and faced him with blazing eyes.

Grosman frowned. Such violent passion, such heaping scorn and fiery indignation was foreign to one who had only just returned from the depths of a serious injection of cocaine. He looked at her darkly, the first faint rustlings of suspicion beginning to whisper in his brain.

“So!” he growled, and seized her violently, staring straight into her eyes. He read there the truth. The girl was play-acting at him. Those eyes were not the eyes of a girl still struggling to clear away the fogs of anæsthesia. They were clear, alive, and the brain behind them was active. He could feel the strength in the pressure of her arms. Her weakness was all a pose.

He flung her fiercely back on the cushions and forced his knee against her chest. The man went into a sudden frenzy. She punched and pummelled and kicked at him and tried to free herself, but his weight held her down. He seized her arm and bared it to the elbow.

She struggled frantically, hammering at him like a virago. The robe slid away from his thigh, and with a sickly revulsion of disgust she saw that the brilliant royal blue robe was the only garment he was wearing.

And suddenly, like a sunburst, the realisation broke upon her that here was the opportunity for which she had prayed, the God-given chance of ridding herself for ever of the grim menace of the Oriental. The Chinese, holding her down by his bared knee, her arm held straight out along the

cushions, was leaning over away from her to get at his hypodermic. The force of his grip on her wrist was agonising. She scratched at his leg and tore at him with a flurry of nails. Wildly she groped among the cushions for the hidden syringe. Her questing fingers found it and fastened on it with the viciousness of frenzy.

After such a savaging as she had scored on his thick skin there was not the faintest possibility of his feeling the tiny prick of the needle making ingress. And even if he did he would neither know what it was nor have time to prevent the dose from being injected. She pinched him with all her might over the purple blue of a vein, and then, before the nerves could react, she forced the needle point in and began to squeeze down on the grip.

She felt the stuff going in. An odd thought fluttered through her head; she had never imagined it would require so much pressure. If she had thought of it at all she had expected the drug would flow in as easily as though she was squeezing it into thin air. But against the tough flesh she found she had to exert all the strength of her lithe young fingers.

The piston head was halfway down the cylinder. Grosman had already received enough of the deadening narcotic to render him senseless for some hours, and she was aware of a sweeping thrill at the thought of having beaten him with his own weapons. Then came a tiny prick in her own arm, just a suspicion of a stab, so minute that she scarcely noticed it against the pain of his grip on her arm. She knew that Grosman had retrieved his syringe and was pressing the dose into her. And all in that wild,

incredible moment she wanted to laugh, to burst out into peals and peals of hysterical laughter. In a mad, rabid way she saw the grotesque, macabre farce of Grosman's efforts—he trying to drug her with harmless water, while she had already pumped enough of the real drug into him to knock him into a stupor for hours to come.

She never knew what happened in the next few seconds. A whole age seemed to spin through her head with each moment. All she remembered was that after what seemed interminable hours she found that the piston head of her hypodermic was rammed down hard against the neck of the glass cylinder and that she was staring at it. She had taken it out and it was there in her fingers, her finger-tips still cupped round the grip and the palm of her hand still constricting madly on the handle.

She thrust her hand back against the bulkhead and rummaged down among the cushions, forcing the instrument far down. The awful crushweight of Grosman's thigh was lifting from her breast. She saw him fling the syringe against the wall and stand up. He released her arm and stood there, glowering down at her as though he would have liked to have taken her up and torn the limbs out of her.

He was panting with fury, and the perspiration of desire was beading out upon his forehead. His brows were dark as a thundercloud, and he mouthed unutterable things at her. His vanity had been torn to shreds, kicked and trampled on. Grosman, who thought he knew every infinitesimal phase and nuance of cocaine consumption and its after effects had been fooled by a woman, bluffed by the very

girl on whom he had centred his lustful intentions. He was ravaged between the mastering emotions of fury and desire.

"So! Little brat! You would make a fool of me," he rumbled, and his words seemed to come from deep down in his chest, from a very tempest of fury that lurked there. His fat fingers were working in queer, spasmodic jerks, itching to get at her smooth white throat; but in his eyes was the burning gloat of dominance. She was at his mercy, alone, helpless, and, though she screamed her lungs out, no whisper of it would pass beyond those dumb walls. And she was white, and beautiful—even in her rumped disarray she was beautiful. . . . The dark eyes glowed hotly.

She stared back at him challengingly, crouched back against the bulkhead. She was all flexed for a spring at him. It only required a few seconds now, and the great brute would be sinking down to the floor, and she was ready to claw the eyes out of him rather than let him get those foul hands on her again.

But Grosman was not eager to rush. He knew the potency of the drugs he had administered and knew their effects could not be long delayed. He watched her as a cat watches a mouse, his eyes fixed on her face, watching for the first symptom to become manifest. He knew what it would be, a gradual diminution of that animal fighting glare, a softening of that passionate, warlike defence. The slow amalgamation of the two drugs would be irresistible. In a few minutes she would be relaxing on the cushions, unable—and unwilling—to defend herself. She would be limp and wholly responsive,

a softly caressive little child who would look on him with eyes of pleasure.

Meanwhile there was an odd coldness coming over him, a spreading numbness that was not altogether pleasant. It was some seconds before he realised its presence; it seemed at first like a quickly passing shiver. He was not worried, his attention was centred too hungrily on the lovely little thing crouching there on the divan.

He waited. Still she crouched there, tigerish, vixenish with aggression. Suddenly, just for a fleeting second, she blurred before his eyes. It was all over in a moment, like a picture gone momentarily out of focus, but it was startlingly real. And that odd chill was increasing. His left leg felt extraordinarily heavy, as though he had to exert double the power to lift it as he did the right. He brushed a hand fitfully over his eyes. It was all very unusual. His faculties did not usually play him tricks like that. He had half an impression that he was experiencing the first rush of a terrific overdose of cocaine. Only once had he done that, when the strength of his drug had been unexpectedly changed and he had given himself a normal shot of a mixture five times as strong. But he banished the thought almost before it was formed. It was impossible. He had not taken a spot of the stuff for weeks. He only resorted to it when going down through the Red Sea, where the murderous heat was too much even for him who had been nurtured on the sweltering banks of the Yangtse Kiang; and a man must do something to get the thoughts of the sun out of his head.

He took a step towards her, and a puzzled frown spread over his face. For though mentally he performed the action of taking that step forward, he was bewilderingly conscious of the knowledge that he had not moved an inch. His nerves had moved, but his muscles and his body had remained immobile. He tried to move his leg again, but it remained rigid. He grunted gutturally and tried to pull himself together. Something had gone radically wrong. The whole of his left leg had gone dead. He knew it was there, but somehow it did not seem to belong to him. He could feel it with his fingers, but he could not feel it with his leg! It reacted to no touch; his leg could not even feel the press of the fingers. He pinched his thigh incredulously, and his amazement increased. He could not feel it, even though he dug the exaggeratedly pointed thumb-nail deep into the flesh. He lifted the right leg and almost fell over, for the right leg seemed to be functioning properly, but the left would not adjust itself to the shift of his weight. And—and—somehow it seemed all utterly absurd and impossible, but the lustful heats were dying out of his body. He no longer desired that lovely creature with every fibre that was in him, he no longer regarded her as the ultimate perfection of feminine seductiveness. She was slowly becoming very ordinary to him, and the puzzling question began dribbling through his head as to why he had ever thought her so eminently desirable above all other women.

The sweat on his brow was turning clammy cold, and his loins felt leaden. The left leg was completely gone. There was less feeling in the sensory

nerves than if he had slept on it all night with the leg doubled up beneath him. All the numbing ache that preceded a drastic attack of pins and needles was coursing through it.

He tapped his right leg jerkily, feverishly. That, too, seemed to be losing its strength. He could not move; he was pinioned there with neither power to move forward nor back. And a vast "still" was coming over him, a lack of warmth and an entire absence of feeling that was positively frightening. Thoughts were slipping out of his head—he was not even worrying whether there were any thoughts there or not. All he knew was that he wanted to get away out of the lung-choking stuffiness of that cabin, out into the fresh air, out anywhere so long as it was away from that glittering-eyed little harridan in front of him, that fierce-eyed little beast who, for the first time in his memory, had refused to succumb to the dictates of cocaine administered direct through a vein. It was totally incredible, unbelievable. But there she was, full of fighting spirit still, a direct proof of the staggering fact that a girl can take a drug one day and lie unconscious for hours and the next day fight back as though her constitution was impervious to any toxin in the pharmacopœia. His thoughts swayed up into a bibulous perplexity; he was flatly beginning to disbelieve the evidence of his own senses.

The palms of his hands were like slabs of ice, wet ice, and there was a continuous tremor running through his biceps. He tried to force himself, but he could not keep the muscles still. He blinked and stared down at the girl. There was a slight bump in

the cabin, and he found himself staring *up* at the girl—Captain Grosman had slumped down to his knees.

And then she laughed, a shrill, piercing cackle of high-pitched laughter that progressed up the scale through breathless relief to wild hysteria. It rang through the room like a thunderclap and ceased as abruptly. With her hands clutching up at her throat she gazed down at him, fascinated. A man was dying under her eyes—and she had done it, she had administered the poison that was slowly and surely sending him out to his Creator. And there was neither remorse nor pity in her. That was the most surprising fact of all, even to herself.

He blinked again as he looked up at her; blinked slowly, for the drug was spreading up to his head. She had found the great thigh vein, and the thin stream of the fluid, mingling with the blood, had gone quickly back to the heart, to be pumped to every part of him. He made a violent effort to collect his fast-scattering faculties. That ringing laugh had something to do with it. It pierced right through to his brain. There was something in the fierce note of it, something of triumph and savage mockery that was directed straight at him.

It came upon him with the force of a mule kick: these horrible sensations, these deadening waves of inertia that were sweeping over him—they *were* the symptoms of a fearful over-administration of cocaine.

The shock of it sent mental activity flooding back through his brain. He knew that in some way totally beyond his comprehension he had absorbed a tremendous dose of the killing drug. From the

frightening sensations that were coursing through him he knew that a fatal dose had somehow got into his system. In a little while he would be writhing with convulsions. The urgent demand for action was hammering at him, kicking him into motion. His arms were still able to move, though terribly slowly, but a deadly, overweighted dulness was inevitably mounting to his brain. He felt its relentless ascent and fought against it with a cold vengefulness. The girl's face, the glittering look of triumph there that lit it up as though with a flame, told him that it was no accident, no astonishing freak. She was responsible. She had premeditated it, planned it, and somehow, by some utterly incredible means, she had put her scheme into execution.

Something had got to be done before that fearful coldness enveloped him. By sheer physical strength he began hauling himself across the floor. He progressed like a great lizard, his legs trailing out uselessly behind him. His weight was on his forearms, and his action was a slow, gross waddle. The altar was only a few feet from him, and he exerted his last ounce of effort to reach it. He needed to get that great idol open again. There were antidotes in there, precious mixtures that would nullify to some extent the awful virulence of the stuff that was running amuck in him. His rate of progress slowed visibly even before he reached the altar. But he kept on, with ice-cold beads of sweat beginning to drip from his chin.

Hillary watched him with wide, staring eyes. The grim fight the man was putting up frightened her. Any other human being would long since have sunk

into a coma. His jaws were clenched up until the lines of his lips were almost invisible. She found herself praying feverishly for the man's powers to wane away into oblivion.

He reached the altar at last and hung there panting. She wanted to jump off the divan and force him back, to hold him down until the long sleep overtook him. Sudden misgivings assailed her. His actions were so definite, his intention so purposeful, that she began to be afraid. He had some new trick up his sleeve, some unexpected expedient that was surely going to wreck her hopes.

It took him long seconds to get one great arm up over the altar. She could see the muscles on his neck standing out in thick cords, and the big blue veins were pulsing with the effort he was putting out. Slowly the other arm came up and, with an unbelievable exertion of sheer will-power, he hauled himself up. His weight came on it, and the jade slab sank. The concealed door swung open. The promise of life blossomed again to him, the precious antidotes were lying there within a yard of him, a little nest of bottles that seemed to be grinning at his helplessness. He fell away from the altar with a thud, and his hand went out shakily for the bottle.

It was a matter of seconds for Grosman. He moved as one moves in a nightmare when some horrible apparition is following, with limbs that were weighted beyond the strength to lift them, as though powerful elastics at full tension were attached to every muscle. Hillary covered her face with her hands. She had suddenly become frightened of her-

self. The very thoughts of murder horrified her. Now that the thing was done it became an enormity in her eyes. A wild scurry of thoughts flashed through her head. Why had she given him so much? Why hadn't she been content merely to have given him sufficient to have sent him unconscious for a few hours? She knew the quantity of the dose near enough. She had seen Grosman himself measure it out the first time he drugged her. A little more than that would have sufficed. And her whole purpose would have been served.

Grosman would have been knocked out long enough for her to have ferreted out the secret of opening that revolving panel. And even if he regained consciousness before she was free she could always have given him another shot from the needle.

The big man never quite reached the bottles. He collapsed within a foot of them. His great shoulders slumped down flat on the floor, and only his eyes remained alive, staring sombrely at the little vials of salvation, beyond his reach by a foot.

Hillary found herself getting off the divan without really knowing what she was doing. A stronger, more domineering self seemed to have entered her and taken charge of her actions. Shakily she crossed the floor and knelt by the stricken man. It was apparent to her that there was something in that receptacle of which the man stood in dire need. She was eager to give him that much assistance. So far as she knew, she was administering a crumb of comfort to a man already beyond help.

Hurriedly she took the bottles and held each one questioningly before his eyes. She had to do it in

'dumb-show, for Grosman's eardrums were no longer working. As she held up the third bottle he signalled with a scarcely noticeable twitch of his face muscles that that was the one he wanted. She wrenched the cork out and held the neck of the bottle to his lips. Slowly the liquid trickled down his throat. When he had had enough he let his head fall away. And still that compelling, insistent command shone in his eyes. She realised there was something more he wanted.

Again she took up the bottles and held them before him. And again he signalled his need of one of them, a bottle containing a pale brown liquid. But when she held it to his lips he resolutely shut his mouth. For a moment she was dumbfounded. It was obvious that the man needed the mixture with every scrap of yearning that was in him, and yet he refused it. He wanted it and yet he didn't want it. She looked at him distractedly, and still he was beseeching her with his eyes to give him the antidote. It was a desperate quandary, and she could see no way out.

She tried him again with the bottle, and a leaden look of hopelessness came into his eyes. It was as though he knew he was passing out, with salvation holding out both hands to him and only ignorance holding it back.

She looked down at him in helpless remorse. And then she noticed the faintest twitching of the muscles of his throat. He was doing his utmost to speak, but the vocal cords were no longer able to vibrate. She bent her head until her ear was close against his mouth. A hissy whisper, so faint that it seemed to

be part of his exhaling breath, said: "Wrist—inject."

She scrambled to her feet, cursing her blindness. It ought to have been obvious even to a child that a poison injected into the blood would require the antidote to be administered in the same way. She snatched a syringe from the satchel and filled it with a quick snapping back of the plunger. With a woman's intuition she ignored the wrist, realising that Grosman did not know where the drug had been injected. To her it seemed fairly plain that the antidote would do most good if given in the same spot as the drug itself.

By that time Grosman was too far gone thoroughly to appreciate what she did. He could not help her gauge the dose, so she gave him the whole syringe. Before she had finished, Grosman was lying like a dead man, utterly oblivious of everything. She did her best to make him comfortable on the cushions, but in her weak state it was many minutes before she could get his ungainly bulk raised and settled. Afterwards she had to sit and rest to still her shaking limbs.

A deathly quiet hung over the place. The only sound that disturbed the silence was the cramped, laboured breathing of the man on the couch. His face had taken on a sickly yellow pallor. She turned away with a shiver.

Her immediate task was to discover the secret of the panel, and she set about it with a will. It had not occurred to her that, having got the panel opened, almost certain recapture awaited her on the other side. All she wanted to do was to get out of that horrible place. Beyond those walls there was at

least fresh air and cleanness. She had not the vaguest idea whether it was day or night outside. If it was broad daylight the whole crew would be up and about and her chances of getting clear were slight indeed.

The deathly silence of the place made her flesh creep. There was something machine-like in the soft hiss of escaping breath from the man on the couch. For the sake of getting her nerves under control she began thinking aloud, telling her own inmost thoughts to herself, trying to co-ordinate the loose ends of her tangled ideas.

"Hillary Kittredge," she said with tight-lipped gravity, "you are in the very devil of a mess. And what is more, you darned fool, you got into it yourself. Grosman was right; I've got nothing more than I deserved for interfering with what was essentially a job for men. Hillary Kittredge, you're frightened. You are. You're dead scared. Gosh— I wish that beast wouldn't wheeze like that. If Toby saw you now, my girl, he'd laugh your head off. Or would he? Blessed if I know. You never know what men will do. Probably go mad and sink the whole ship, hook, line, and sinker. That'd be fun. Provided I was having a comfortable snooze about ten miles inland. Oh, for a nice hot bath and my own bed—with nice clean sheets and the window open. All the windows open—open wide. Phew—this place is stifling. Wonder what the folks are thinking at home? There's going to be holy murder for me when I get back. *If* I get back. Dad will go pots. Probably already gone pots by now. Wonder if he's got that Scotland Yard billet yet? Wouldn't it be a scream if his first big job was to haul his dutiful

daughter out of a Chink hooker by the scruff of her neck. M'm, jam for everybody but me. I'll bet he docks my pocket money for a month. And I'll bet I deserve it. Of all the born fools, Hillary Kittredge, you're the one outstanding first-class example. Will you ever poke your long nose again into other people's affairs? Yes, my girl, *you will not*—and well you know it. Well, having had the courage of your own insanity and admitted it, what are we going to do about it?"

She sat, very quietly, with her hands in her lap, thinking out the position. It had just occurred to her that, having got the revolving panel open, her troubles were by no means over. On the contrary, there was the possibility that, having got out of one horrible mess, she would find herself heading full tilt into another. And probably the second would be every bit as bad as the first.

"What would Toby do?" she demanded of the atmosphere. "Certain sure he wouldn't go bull-headed at the job of opening that panel," she muttered. "For all I know there may be half a dozen Chinks in that saloon. And then I *would* be in for a gaudy time." She shivered again and looked helplessly at the insensible Chinese. His face had lost even the yellow pallor. It had taken on a ghastly hue like solid quicksilver that had lost its sheen and only retained its leadenness.

"Even if I get out," she argued, "it's a hundred to one I won't be able to get off the ship. If it's daylight I'll surely have to wait for nightfall. And where can I hide on this horrible ship till then? And how can I get a message ashore?"

That was an inspiration that gave her an idea.

She was in possession of certain knowledge that would be of inestimable value to the authorities that were tracking down the gang. It was knowledge of which only she was aware. Wouldn't it be the sensible thing to do to write it all down as clearly as possible, actually to put it into writing, so that if the opportunity occurred of getting into touch with a friendly spirit, her message would get into the hands of either Manning or Procter with the least possible delay? The wheels would then be immediately set in motion for her rescue—and what was honestly more to her even in that pressing emergency, the police would have all the information they needed to arrest the whole gang. She decided that it was the most sensible idea that had occurred to her since that idiotic night in the Caverne Diamantée when she had first decided on the fool venture.

She opened her bag and took out a neat little gold pencil and a tiny memorandum book. Also she remembered the cigarettes. With a sigh of thankfulness she lit one and blew long blue streamers at the ceiling. The nicotine soothed her tormented nerves, and she smoked the cigarette right down to a stub.

Then she turned her attention resolutely to the task of writing her evidence.

“This is Hillary Kittredge,” she wrote. “I am imprisoned in a secret compartment on board the *Yangtse*, the entrance to which I believe is through the after bulkhead in the saloon. Grosman, the captain, is in here with me, drugged. I drugged him myself after he had already forced four injections of cocaine on me. I have no idea of how long I have been here, but it was about three o'clock on Wednes-

day morning when I first came on board. Grosman is the big cocaine smuggler the police have been looking for for years. It, I mean the cocaine, is stored in this secret room. You will find it in the great stone Buddha, here in what he calls the Temple. You can open the robe of the Buddha by leaning all your weight on the green jade altar in front of the god. I don't know how the secret entrance works from the saloon, but ingress to here is effected through the tapestry panel immediately to the right of the god. When I have written this I am going to try to force it. Grosman is probably dying. I gave him a whole syringeful of pure cocaine. But just before he went unconscious he managed to swallow an antidote which you will also find in the body of the Buddha. When I came here I got into the steward's service room and listened to a conversation between Grosman and a man named Blind Rudley. Rudley is the man who pretends to hawk studs and things round the riverside public-houses, but is in reality the chief messenger between Grosman and a man named Lingard. From what they said it appears that Lingard is the head of the distribution organisation of the gang. Lingard is getting restive and Grosman has threatened him. They have a code method of communicating between themselves whenever Grosman wants to get into touch with Lingard on important affairs. It is this. Grosman sends Lingard a plain post card, and from that alone Lingard knows that something urgent has happened and that Grosman wants to see him at once. There is no writing on it whatever—just a plain card addressed to Lingard. So that if you can discover Lingard's address you have only to send him a plain card and then

trail him when he sets out to obey the summons; for that card calls him to their secret rendezvous. Where that rendezvous is I don't know, but I do know from their conversation that there *is* one and that that is where they meet when there is important business afoot. Grosman brings the drugs to England and lands them and Lingard does the rest. How Grosman lands the cocaine I don't know and neither does Lingard. I think that is what the friction is about. But there is an enormous quantity of the stuff here in the Buddha and from what they said there is another huge store of it somewhere on shore in their secret rendezvous. If you can trail Lingard to that place I think you will get the biggest haul of your lives. There is one other thing I want to say, and that is, that Grosman is the man who murdered Gilan Maxick. I was present on the river when the police were recovering his body, and I warned Sergeant Manning of my suspicions. Incidentally, I was thoroughly well smiled at for my pains. Still, that is neither there nor here. But it was in consequence of that that I find myself in this particular predicament, and I would mention that no one will be more delighted and relieved than myself if you will rescue me without any further delay. I have a good deal more information to impart, but it is of minor importance and merely corroborates what I have already written here. All my evidence is at your disposal, and, if Grosman lives, I assure you I shall not have the slightest objection to being a witness when he comes up for trial. But at the present moment I must say that he does not show any particular signs of ever seeing the inside of the dock. That is all. I will do my best to get this ashore by someone I can

trust. But if I should be unfortunate and get recaptured I am going to slip these pages in the heel of my stocking and trust to them being discovered. That is, if they should kill me—which wouldn't surprise anyone if you knew them as well as I do. There should be enough evidence here for you to trace them down and act accordingly. That is about the best I can do. Anyhow I knew I was right about what I said to Sergeant Manning on the river. And you would be conferring a favour on me if you would kindly carry that message to Mr. Toby Essex, whose motor speed boat lies up at the moorings by the Houses of Parliament.

“Yours faithfully,
“HILLARY KITTREDGE.”

Having finished it, she read it through from beginning to end. Her efforts at clearness and concision at first amazed her and then disgusted her. “Well I'm blest,” she muttered. “If Manning ever gets hold of this he'll think it's come from a maniac—or a practical joker. And I wouldn't blame him either. Of all the fool bits of writing, it's just about the dotty limit.”

It did not occur to her that, despite the shock of her savage treatment and of the mental uproar that was still seething about in her head, she had somehow managed to get every fact in her possession down on paper. And, womanlike, she had also managed to get in her own self-righteous “I told you so,” at the people most concerned.

The fact was that Hillary Kittredge, thanks to the clean living virility and resilience of her young body, was rapidly getting back to the full use of her

faculties. The fact was evidenced by her subsequent actions, for the addressing of her missive presented only minor difficulties.

She tore out the pages, rolled them tightly into the cylinder of her pencil, leaving the edges slightly protruding above the pencil-case. Then she rummaged an old dance programme from her handbag and wrote a hurried note upon it.

“The finder of this pencil will be rewarded with a ten-pound note from Sir John Kittredge if he will take it, intact, immediately to Sergeant Manning at the river police station, Wapping.”

She tied the programme to the pencil with the cord, stuck the whole lot in an old envelope and hid it in her dress.

Then she turned her attention to the panel. She went over it with the care of a searcher hunting for a gold lode; she pressed it from every angle, sideways, up and down, lengthwise, and across the middle. And the result was precisely nil. She charged her whole weight against it and the panel did not even budge.

She drew back and regarded the thing spitefully. In her own mind she had hardly expected to stumble on the secret at the first attempt. Grosman was too ingenious to do the obvious, she had seen too much of his methods not to know that.

The thought brought a brighter idea. Admitting that Grosman had a positive genius for hiding his methods, was it likely that he would leave the system of opening that panel to the accidental experiments of a stranger? Wasn't it far more likely that the trick of opening that panel would only be discovered after a covering secret had been elucidated? It seemed

highly probable to her. Almost intuitively her thoughts turned to the great Buddha. That would be just about on a level with Grosman's general craftiness, to hide the secret of the panel inside the secret of the Buddha—an investigator would first have to solve the problem of the god before he could get out of that mysterious room.

Without another thought she forced her weight down on the altar and the long robe swung open. For some minutes she ferreted about inside, but there was nothing there that even looked like producing a clue.

Then came a sudden interruption. The lights suddenly went out and the dim corner lights came on. Her heart almost stopped beating. She froze like a rabbit scenting a stoat. There came again that soft click from behind the wall and the panel began to swing open. For a moment she thought the trick that had been evading her for so long had sprung of its own accord—that some accidental pressure of her own inside the god had actuated the hidden catches.

And then her heart began to pound in her bosom. Soft footsteps were coming up the connecting passage from the saloon. She almost sank to her knees with the sudden nausea of fright that seized her. From the soft padding of the feet she knew it was one of the crew, someone who walked shod in felt. That almost silent scuff-scuff was unmistakable. She could have wept in sheer helplessness and self-pity. After all her efforts and plannings it was bitterly unfair to be caught like that—Fate was being inhumanly vindictive. If that coolie caught her there and raised the alarm her life would not be worth the toss of a coin. Grosman's unconscious body lying

there on the verge of death would condemn her out of hand. And she had seen more than enough of their methods of dealing with those who offended them.

There was just one chance in a hundred that the visitor might be so nonplussed for a moment that she could effect her escape. With her feet shaking so badly that they scarcely supported her she crept into the aperture and pulled the great robe close behind her. She left an opening of about half an inch, just enough to enable her to see into part of the room.

In a few seconds the visitor appeared. It was the steward, dressed in his short, white coat and loose dungaree trousers. He was carrying a tray of Chinese foods, all daintily set out in little silver bowls, and there were glasses of cordials and syrups and delicate finger-bowls and towels. He came into the room and looked down uncertainly at the couch. She could see him standing there less than a yard from her, a comical frown of perplexity on his olive face, the tray held sideways in sheer astonishment.

She opened the door as silently as a cat and stepped out. Some odd telepathic influence on the Chinaman made him wheel. He was so startled that he dropped the tray with a crash and stood staring at her. Then he jerked his head sideways to see if the noise had wakened his master. But the captain still slept on, breathing in odd, jerky gasps that seemed to wrack him. The lungs were not more than a quarter filling at each inhalation.

His gaze returned to the girl, and it was wide open with astonishment. For once the monumental Oriental calm was shattered.

"Lady, what iss matter?" he asked at last. And

the girl suddenly felt all fear drain away from her. The man was unaware of the true nature of her presence there. To him she was just one of a string of feminine visitors invited occasionally to share the privacies of the Temple with Grosman, one of a line of interesting but completely immoral young ladies whose presence on board was always entirely voluntary. He was merely obeying a long standing order when he entered with the refreshments; it was part of his normal duties. And he was as frightened as he was perplexed. She could tell that from the scared way he kept looking down at the wreckage of the beautiful things on the floor. Apparently there would be a heavy reckoning to pay when his master came to be informed.

The words tumbled out of her mouth. "Matter?" she gasped. "Your master is ill, terribly ill. He must have help. A doctor must be brought immediately. Help me to get out—I will run and bring an English doctor for him."

The steward looked at her uncertainly. He was at his wits' end. He only understood a half of what the girl had said; his English was poor and she spoke so emotionally that he could only pick out a word here and there. But what he did realise was that his master was really critically ill.

Unable to put his thought into any other series of words he again bleated: "Lady, what iss matter?"

Hillary explained, doing her best to speak slowly and with sufficient emphasis to convey her full meaning to the man.

"Your master, he came in here to me, smiling,

laughing, all right, proper—you understand? He no ill when he came in here."

The steward nodded rapidly. Yes, yes, he had got that bit.

"He came in and we talk. You understand, he talk to me and laugh. And he give me glass-wine—big glass-wine. Look."

She whipped the napkin off the meal tray and the steward nodded again and grinned broadly. He knew all about that glass of wine. He had seen many prepared for the same identical purpose. Yes, yes, he understood all about the glass-wine.

"He sit on the cushions, down there with me," she went on. "And then he cough. Plenty cough. No can stop. Then he go very white. He stand up and try to open the door. But he no can get there. He fall back on the cushions. And he gasp, and gasp, and gasp. And then he lie very still like you see him now. He no move. I get frightened. I hammer on the walls, I shout, I scream. But no one hear me. I think he die. Why don't you come before?"

She barked her last question at him and advanced threateningly. The steward cowered back and threw up his hand as though to ward off a blow.

"Lady," he protested. "I no can hear you in here. Shoot a gun I no can hear. Me no hear you call. Me no hear you shout. Come pronto if I hear you. Master he say, no come in for one hour. Not allowed to come in here at all unless he say. He say come in one hour—in one hour I come in. That iss right, lady."

"Well, you'd better show me the way out. You savvy? Take me to the jetty. I get doctor for him.

Maybe he die without doctor. You get me there pronto, I tell master I break those things."

The steward brightened at once. Here was a blessed way out of what looked like being a highly unpleasant business for him. If the white lady was willing to take the blame for all the broken crystal on her own pretty shoulders that would suit him admirably. Grosman was notoriously as lenient with his own little charmers as he was harsh with his servants.

"You come back?" he stipulated, unwilling to see his scapegoat leave the ship. White women had a habit, when trouble brewed, of slipping off quietly and leaving the sailormen to clear up the mess with the police as best they could.

"Yes—I come back," she assured him viciously. "He no pay me yet!"

Again the steward grinned. That was assurance enough. If the white lady hadn't been paid then most decidedly she would return, and with a doctor. For how could the master pay her unless he woke from his extraordinary sleep? Most emphatically she would come back and see that the white doctor did his best for him.

"And you tell him it was *you* who break the tray?" he asked hopefully.

"Yes, yes, I tell him. I tell him I knocked your elbow as you came in. I tell him all my fault."

He nodded, satisfied, and beckoned her towards the panel. She stepped in after him and he piloted her through. As she had surmised, she emerged into the captain's saloon. The place was empty then, and she turned curiously to see by what means entrance was obtained through to the Temple of

Buddha. She saw the steward slam the side of the great sideboard into place, and the knowledge thrilled her, for she knew that a couple of constables with hatchets could smash the whole thing down in ten minutes.

They went through to the upper deck and she waited there with her heart in her mouth. It was broad daylight and she was terrified lest Ying should put in an appearance. And almost in the same moment she calmed her fears. There were more than a dozen white men busy about the deck. The *Yangtse* was loading for sea. The men were stevedores and ship labourers, tough, hard-muscled men who would not stand for any hanky-panky stuff from the Chinese where white women were concerned. The riverside folk boasted no high intellect or cultured refinement, the very nature of their livelihood precluded it, but there was one thing that ninety per cent. of them definitely resented—at times actively resented—and that was the association of Chinese with white women. Hillary knew that she only had to open her mouth and start screaming at the top of her lungs to have the whole of that uncompromising looking crew tearing in to her rescue.

“Wait here, lady, I see first officer; tell him,” said the steward.

She glanced round, looking hungrily for the gangway. But it was up. The ship was loading by electric crane from an enormous line of packing-cases piled on the wharf. A big, brawny craneman passed her, and smiled at her cheerfully. He knew all about it, did that craneman. He had seen it too often. Well, it was the kid's own business.

Nothing to do with him. If she wanted to consort with a lot of slant-eyes it was no affair of his. All that was implied in his grin and his nod.

And then he stopped and looked at her again. He was a man a cut above the average of his calling. There was something about his eyes, a twinkle in them, perhaps, a little finer shade of tolerance; it made her take a quick half-step towards him. He noticed the gesture, and eyed her shrewdly. She was no common riverside bought woman. The cut of that dress was not that of a common little Southside Magdalen. She was something out of the ordinary. Grosman certainly knew how to find them. There was a niceness about her, too, a grace that placed her above her mere presence on the *Yangtse*.

"What's up, Miss?" he asked abruptly.

She stepped right up close to him and there was no mistaking the urgency in her voice. A rush of words whispered in his ear.

"You look a decent sort of boy; would you help anyone in trouble—serious trouble? I don't want money—it's not that—I'll give you some. Plenty. But I want someone I can trust, someone who will get off the boat right now and carry a message for me. Will you? Will you?"

"Nothing crook, is it, Miss?" The answer was as solid and dependable as anyone could have asked. She could have gone down on her knees and kissed his fingers.

"No, no. That's the last thing I'd ask of anybody." He nodded. He had already formed that impression himself.

"What is it? I am going off with the next shift."

She snatched the pencil out of her dress and thrust it into his hands. "Quickly—take this," she whispered. "Take it to the Thames Police Division. Their head station at Wapping. Don't ask me any more. Just take it there and leave the rest to them. And above all, don't try to find out what it's all about. There is a message in the pencil, but it is for the police alone. You will be better off if you know nothing about it. If they ask you any questions tell them. Tell them the truth. Tell them where you saw me and where I was. And tell them I swear that what is in that message is true—every word of it. You will get ten pounds for your trouble. I'll promise that myself. And maybe a gold watch, too. Will you? Will you do that for me?"

The man nodded again, ponderously. "Yes, Miss," he said good-naturedly. "There's no harm in that. I'll see it gets there."

"Quickly, then. Hide that pencil. Deliver it only to a police officer. Leave your name and address at the river station and the money will be forwarded to you. Hurry."

The wharf foreman was bawling raucously from an overhead crane, and the man moved off. She watched him grasp a chain and step on an empty hoist that went swinging up from the deck. And in a few moments he was lost to sight in the hurly-burly of activity on the dockside.

She turned to see the steward heading back towards her. A tall, thin Oriental was at his side, a man dressed in an officer's uniform with two gold rings on his sleeve. The hoist came rattling down again with a fresh load, and, clinging to it was another man, hanging on to the chains with both

hands. She did not see him, did not even notice that the hoist paused at the upper deck to enable him to step off before continuing down into the hold. Her attention was fixed on the two Orientals. They paused in front of her, and the steward spoke to the officer in a rapid undertone.

The officer bowed to her, but his cold, analytical eyes were boring into her. She sensed hostility in him from the first moment.

"When did you come on board?" he asked. It was the voice of a cross-examiner, chilly as a wind off the poles.

"Last night," replied Hillary, shrinking. "It—it was very late. He asked me to come down to see him. It was about—I think it must have been nearly three o'clock."

"I was on duty myself between two and three last night." There was no mistaking the frigid unbelief in the tone of that quiet voice. It implied that she was telling a calculated and very ill-informed falsehood.

"But it's true," she broke out. "It was all very dark and you may not have noticed me."

"It was not all very dark, madam. The arc lights were burning all night. I myself was on deck from midnight till four o'clock, when my watch terminated." His English was clipped, definite, and precise. The calmness of his statement staggered her.

"But—but I assure you you are mistaken," she said. "There were no lights at all. The whole place was deserted. There was not a soul about. That was why I came. Captain Grosman told me himself that no one would see me if I came at that

hour." She spoke in a flurry. She realised that something had gone wrong. The man's attitude was glittering with aggression. It was impossible to suppose that he was speaking anything but the truth. And yet so was she. She was perfectly willing to have told any lie to have got off that ship, and yet the very clash of their statements held her prisoner there.

"Madam," he said icily, "the fore and midship holds are fully loaded and the hatches battened down. If what you say is correct, and that no one was working on this ship all night, the stevedores must have broken all records for rapid loading by many hundreds of tons and by fourteen hours. We are now loading the last hold."

She gasped and looked wildly around. It was true. The tarpaulin covered hatches were battened on the fore and midship holds. It suddenly swept across her senses that she had spent not merely a night in that hidden room, but at least thirty-six hours. A whole night and a day and another night had passed since she first made that perilous boarding over the wire guy. The *Yangtse* was loading in haste for sea. Day and night shifts were working on her.

"I—I'm sorry," she managed to get out, looking beseechingly at the officer. "I made a mistake—foolish of me—of course, you are right—it wasn't last night at all. But I've been down in the room with the captain. There are no ports there, and honestly I did not notice the passage of time. The captain—he was indiscreet—he gave me more snow than he intended. I'm not used to it and it made me sleep too long. I've only been awake a few

hours since I came on board—the—the night before last.”

Something of the hostility faded off the man's face. That was a likely story. It rang true. He took another good long look at the girl. Yes, it was more than probable that she was not a drug addict. And if the skipper had given her a normal dose for one who frequently indulged the craving, then it was highly possible that she would sleep the clock round.

“Ask yourself,” she urged. “How else did I get on board unless the captain invited me? How else could I get into the Temple unless he took me? Why, I couldn't even get out. Mr. Grosman has been ill for over an hour, and I've been hammering on the walls till my hands are sore. And I've screamed myself hoarse. For God's sake let me get a doctor. He will die without medical attention. And then all the ghastly mess of it and the inquiries will fall on me. If only you would realise—he's terribly ill. *Please* let me get him a doctor.”

“Hold that girl! Grab her—don't let her go!” A strange voice bit suddenly into the conversation. She spun round and gaped at the new-comer. It was Blind Rudley, his ear thrust out towards her to catch the inflection of her voice. His tray of merchandise was slung round his neck and he was supporting his weight on the long ash stick. And the expression on his sightless face was bitter with animosity.

“That's the bitch,” he rasped. “She came aboard here the night before last. I heard her, listening in at the service hatch. The old man grabbed her and took her through for treatment. She's a police spy.”

Before she could speak or utter a sound a tough, yellow hand clamped over her mouth from behind

and she felt herself lifted off her feet and carried swiftly back through the bulkhead door.

One or two dockhead workers saw the little by-play, fleeting though it was. They turned and stared after her as she vanished into the black recess. It was all over in a couple of seconds. But they were not unduly concerned. They grinned and spat on their hands. That sort of thing was not unusual. Also, it was just as well not to interfere with officers' women. That was the way good jobs were lost. And no doubt the girl knew what she was about, or she wouldn't be on the boat at all. The bulkhead door slammed to with an iron clang, and the handles of the clamping dogs thudded home.

CHAPTER VIII

MANNING sat moodily in his office. Things were going badly. The Chief was on his way to the river station, and he knew what that portended. He was in for the carpeting of his life.

The Chief came in, looking grim. He nodded to the sergeant.

"I think," he said, without preamble, "that this is where we proceed to make things happen. Have you anything further to report?"

"No, sir. Not a thing. Constant watch has been maintained on the *Yangtse* both from the river and the shore. She is loading, as you know, for a hurried departure. She is the first ship on the river for eight

months to employ day and night shifts. Short of a sudden raid by about a dozen men, we seem to be up against a brick wall."

"A raid is out of the question," replied the Chief stiffly. "It can't be done. At least, not yet. We must get the whole crowd or none. If we raid now, all we get is the smugglers, and the big West End crowd goes free. And it's the West End organisation I want most. We can take the others any time they come in. The *Yangtse* won't get away with it again. She goes right through the sieve next time in—and every time in. But it's the controllers we want—the men who plant the drug all over the country. We have the chance now and we've got to take it. We won't have another opportunity like it till the *Yangtse* comes in again. And that will be months too late."

"Is Miss Kittredge back yet, sir?" asked Manning hopefully.

"No—and is not likely to be. Sir John is raising the very devil. He knows as well as we do where she is. But thank Heaven he's sensible about it. He is as anxious to come in with a grand slam as we are ourselves, and he knows that if we raid the *Yangtse* we show our hand. The West End crowd will take fright and lay low. But he is like a cat on hot bricks; and small wonder. He knows what is likely to be happening to his daughter with that crew of yellows."

"Must be pretty tough for him, sir," said the river man slowly. "I reckon if I had a daughter in that position I'd raid twice an hour for a fortnight."

"And that is why you will never be Chief Commissioner. Every second of this waiting is going

through him like a knife. But it's one of the things that have to be done when you hold the reins. Other people matter more than your own." He broke off and stared out through the office window to where the moving panorama of the river flowed ceaselessly up and down.

"Sterling and the other men are in a bad way," he said quietly. "Harley Street has been in."

Manning leaned forward. "Is it likely to be permanent?" he asked.

"The specialists won't say. But they are hoping. The light was so strong that it paralysed the optic nerves. They are in hospital and, according to the doctors, they will be there for months. Three months is the very minimum before the bandages come off." He turned back to the river man. "Sergeant," he said, "we are going to take that crowd—and take them alive! We'll get them so suddenly that they won't get a chance to commit suicide. Grosman would be likely to take a quick dose, and so would the rest of his crew. But they aren't going to get the chance. If we have to knock every single one of them senseless we will take them alive. They are going to pay for what they did to Sterling and the others."

Manning was rubbing the tips of his fingers together. He appeared not to have heard the Chief's last utterance. But very quietly he muttered under his breath: "Just five minutes with Grosman—just five sweet little minutes—and you can have the pieces, Chief. But I'd like that five minutes first."

"We begin a long comb out in the Gunn Lane neighbourhood to-day," went on the Chief. "But the trouble is the locals won't talk. They are scared

out of their lives. Can't get a word out of them. They just shut their mouths and keep them shut. Can't say I blame them. They have the lessons of Gilan and Ulrich Maxick staring them in the face. But it makes a devilish long job for the men working the case. Practically means a house-to-house search. The whole place there is a rabbit warren, and all the back areas adjoin. We shall want an army of men there to hold them all up once we have located them. But that's where the rendezvous is—as certain as I'm alive. And Procter got on to it. Poor devil! I'll swear he got on the tail-end of it all and was coming through with the news. Those Chinese surprised him and stopped him before he could get through."

Manning looked up with a sudden start.

"You don't think Procter's dead, do you?" he asked, and there was a quick whitening of his weather-beaten face.

The Chief was silent. His hawky, wintry eyes focussed on Manning's and held them. "Know the type of men you're dealing with, don't you?" he said in a curiously level voice. "And you know Procter's habits. Ever know him stay off on a job more than three hours before without coming through on the phone? If he was sick he would send word. The only word we have had is from his wife—asking where he is. The last you heard of him was heading off on the trail of the Chinaman two nights ago. Think it out, Manning. The Chinese are adepts at disposing of bodies." Then very slowly he added: "No, I'm terribly sorry to have to say it, but I don't think you will ever see Procter again, alive."

Manning looked away shakily. The dope gang was taking a savage toll. He had been worried, badly worried, about Procter's continued absence, but it had never occurred to him to presume that it was occasioned by anything more than pressure of inquiries and a persistent inability to get to a telephone without losing touch with his quarry.

"That is why I say," said the Chief grimly, "it is time we *made* things happen."

Another silence fell, a silence that seemed interminable. Manning was on touchy ground. Again that bitter reprimand had not matured. The Chief was becoming more and more of an enigma to him. He seemed to be feeling the tragedy of events as deeply as did Manning himself. There was nothing of the autocratic bully about him, nothing of the inaccessibility of the man at the top of the tree who did nothing except demand results and hand out curses if those results were not immediately forthcoming.

As horror piled on horror he seemed to become more human, more of an integral unit of the force of humans that were working day and night to smash the gang that defied them. He was one with them, not an overlord above them, serving out kicks when things went wrong, but a very able leader who joined in with the general ruck of things and who felt the same emotions as they did when tragedy stepped in and struck at them from out of the dark. Instead of scolding he sympathised; he knew and appreciated the difficulties of the road they trod.

As though from the midst of a far-away reverie, he softly inquired: "I was waiting for a report from you last night, Manning. Where were you?"

Manning shuffled his feet uneasily. "I was out at the Wapping Wharf, Chief," he said. "When Procter didn't come back I got worried. You know how things are, sir. His missus and mine—well, you know, we are pretty well next door to each other and he—he was about the best man on the station. Booked for his stripes if ever a man was. We were friendly. Perhaps a bit too friendly. And it seemed to me he was going wrong. He was taking up the land end of it. And that's no part of our duty."

He lapsed into a moody silence and then added: "Our job is on the river. If Procter had stayed on his own job he would be here now talking to you. But it's hard to strike the dividing line on a job like this, if you know what I mean. The river end has always got a land end—and often enough the two overlap. You can't always run it according to the rules. If Procter was on the job then he had got on to a clue from the land end.

"I stuck around there for the best part of twenty-four hours. I knew there was something fishy going on on the *Yangtse*. And when no word came through from Procter I got out to the store-sheds there and waited in the shadows. That was long before they began loading for sea.

"And along towards about three in the morning, or it may have been nearer four, I saw a round half-dozen of them come crawling back to the boat. If it had been just after the taverns closed, or if they had all come back together, it wouldn't have mattered so much. But they came off in dribs and drabs, one at a time, creeping through the docks as though they were scared of being seen. And the last of all to

arrive was Grosman himself. As soon as he was on board they raised the gangway. That would have been a couple or three hours after Procter last went out on the trail of Grosman.

"It looks more and more as though you were right, Chief. Procter trailed them to their secret rendezvous—and they collared him there. That would be about the time the police were called to the second Maxick job in Gunn Lane. He would have had time to get out there—and to have got murdered, too."

The Chief pondered, with his eyes out over the distant river. "You told me you had nothing further to report—and yet you tell me this," he said, and he spoke as though he was quietly going over his own inmost thoughts. He pulled out a notebook and studied some entries there.

"Procter left you at eleven o'clock," he said in a barely audible undertone. "The first call came through to the Limehouse police just before one o'clock, roughly two hours later.

"Well, suppose we take things as they ran and leave a fair margin for supposition and error. And I freely admit that most of this is nothing more than sheer supposition, with nothing whatever to substantiate it, except the deaths of Ulrich Maxick and Procter.

"Supposing Procter got on to the real live end of a clue; that is, supposing he actually trailed Grosman to that secret rendezvous. It is fair to presume that something like that happened. The gang were in a turmoil. Gilan Maxick had been slaughtered. The call had gone down river. Dope distributors were being raided every hour.

Every single individual in the West End known to be associated with the dope traffic was being watched by hot men. Something had to be done about it.

“A hurried emergency meeting was called. It was called in so much of a hurry that the usual methods of communication could not be employed. Somebody in the Outward Bound that night gave Grosman the wire that a meeting was called at the rendezvous to discuss the situation. Or it may have been the other way about—Grosman, getting nervy, called the meeting himself, and word came through that his aides-de-camp would be there to meet him.

“He set off to keep the appointment, and he was so deeply absorbed in his problems that he did not notice the dogging shadow of Procter creeping along behind him. The other supposition, and by far the more feasible one, is that he was protected, and that a third party, one of his Chinese crew probably, was trailing along in the wake of Procter. That would conform with his general craftiness; the watcher was being watched.

“Now, I admit, we come to what is nothing more or less than a presumption. Grosman was frightened of a squealer. We know that from the fact that he murdered the first man he suspected of being one. Grosman murdered Gilan Maxick for no other reason than that he suspected him of being too friendly with the police. Maxick had a brother, and it is not stretching credulity too far to suppose that brother Ulrich would not be too favourably disposed towards his leader after such a wanton act

as that. Ulrich would naturally think, and rightly, that what had happened to Gilan would happen to himself. Working purely on a psychologic knowledge of the Oriental mind, who would Grosman be most likely to suspect of being the next to turn police informant?"

"Why, I should say Ulrich himself," said Manning. "Knowing the gang had turned a sore eye on him he would be more likely to try and get police protection than to assure the gang of his loyalty. Grosman acts first and thinks afterwards. Ulrich would be the most likely to squeal—provided he knew the police would look after him when the gang was busted."

"Exactly. And now supposing, merely for the sake of trying to fit the events together as they happened in chronological order, supposing Ulrich Maxick was called to attend that meeting of the heads of the gang, supposing he was there in person to answer their questions, on trial for his life if you like.

"We know that their headquarters are based somewhere in that network of intercommunicating buildings that litter the neighbourhood of Gunn Lane. And it seems to me that Procter traced them to their lair and somehow succeeded in getting into the building. It might be that he overheard much of what passed at their secret session. The Ulrich Maxick business would be only a small item on their addenda—maybe he was already marked down for death as a threat to the others. We know that Grosman was capable of even worse than that."

"Well, they killed him, anyway," grunted Manning. "And out in the open street at that."

"Which is precisely what I mean. One of two things happened. Either Maxick got away on his own wit and was making his escape, or Procter was instrumental in getting him out of the clutches of the Chinese. But in any case he was booked for death. Someone else outside was detailed to follow him and murder him if he happened to be lucky enough or smart enough to get clear of the gang in the building.

"If Procter helped him to escape then it is more than excusable to suppose that Maxick had decided to throw in his lot with the police. Probably he had already turned informer to Procter, or, equally possible, Procter had promised him police protection provided he came straight through to you and told you all he knew. Personally, I incline towards the second theory, otherwise the blinding of Sterling and the other constables was senseless.

"Maxick was carrying a written message. We have that from the depositions of Sterling himself. He was trying to decipher a particularly atrociously written scrawl when the light smashed his eyes. And you know what that means, Manning? That message was written in the dark.

"There the line of deduction runs clear. Procter got the message away by a man who was doomed to be murdered as soon as he was reasonably free of the building. Then the gang surprised Procter. They may have seized him before, and Procter, in a moment of triumph, may have boasted that a message was already on its way to the police. Or, as I say, the whole thing may have been precon-

ceived in the brain of Grosman, and the shadower may have warned the gang that Procter was in the building.

"It is, I repeat, inference based on happenings. Maxick was murdered at a time that conforms entirely to that story. And having murdered him there would be nothing but madness in the idea of committing a further assault on the police at that hour of the night when the whole neighbourhood was aroused—unless it was to recover a damning document. The alarm was raised, and within a few minutes two constables were on the spot. They phoned for the Yard; they knew it was a relative of Maxick lying there in the road. It was the same type of dagger. You see what I'm driving at, Manning?"

"Yes, sir, I'm afraid I do," said Manning, looking away from his Chief.

"Procter did his job, that's what I'm driving at. He got away with it. And both of them were murdered in cold blood. Murdered in the moment of victory. The whole thing knits up somewhere. Procter found the junction between the ship and the shore. And that's why we can't raid."

There was a tap on the door, and a duty officer pushed his head in.

"Sorry to trouble you, sir," he said, "but there's a man out here who says he must see Sergeant Manning. Says he's got something important for him. Something to do with the *Yangtse* job, from what I can make out."

"Who is he?" demanded the Chief, rising.

"Says his name's Tom Bristow, sir. He's loading on the *Yangtse*, and a woman gave him a message

that must come through to the station here. Won't tell me what it is. Says he must see Sergeant Manning."

"A woman? That must be Miss Kittredge," said the Chief with a rush. "Show him through, officer—show him through."

Tom Bristow was ushered in, looking round nervously, not quite sure of himself. Bristow might have been as honest as the day, but men in his walk of life are apt to regard the police askance, for, in their eyes, the police are not so much the guardians of law and order as an inconvenient body of men who are liable to haul human beings off to gaol at a moment's notice. He came in, fingering his cap gingerly.

"Good-morning, gents," he said from out of the depths of his broad chest. "I understand one of you is Sergeant Manning?"

The Chief pressed the sergeant's toe under the table and told him with a penetrating look to take charge of things. So far as Tom Bristow was concerned he himself wished to remain anonymous. A man of Bristow's type might be free enough in his speech with a sergeant, but he would be likely to freeze like a puddle in winter if he knew he was talking in the presence of the reigning monarch of the whole force.

Manning pushed his chair back and rose. He held out his cigarette case. "My name's Manning," he said. "There's no need to be uncomfortable, old man, just sit down and tell us what's wrong. This is another police officer here, and you can talk as freely as you like in front of him. The duty sergeant tells me you are from the *Yangtse*. Is that right?"

"That's right, sir. Name of Bristow. Crane signalman with the Wharfingers' Alliance—loading on the *Yangtse* now, at Wapping."

"That's fine. We have been hoping for a message from that boat. What is it?"

"Well, it's a bit unusual, sir, if I might say so. I was just coming off my shift a little while ago—twelve o'clock to be exact—when I saw a female party coming through the bulkhead leading to the officers' quarters. The steward was with her, a Chink, and she was looking all upset and worried—at least so I thought. The steward left her for a bit to call an officer, and she came straight up to me and asked me to give you this pencil."

He held it out, and the sergeant inspected it with beetling brows. The cap was screwed back in place and it looked as ordinary a gold pencil as one could see in any decent jeweller's window any day of the week.

"She said there was a message in it, sir," went on Bristow, "and she told me I was to bring it here to the river station and nowhere else. She said I would be on ten pounds if it got here without anyone else seeing it—but I suppose that's all poppy-cock."

"Shouldn't be too pessimistic about that tenner if I were you," advised the sergeant. "We've known of less likely things happening. What was she like, this woman?"

"Very good looking piece, sir. All dolled up in evening clothes, but they was all so rumpled you wouldn't know they was made of good stuff. On the slim side, and fair. Somehow she didn't seem the sort to be down there playing the game that

she was. You know what I mean, don't you? It ain't legal, and I know the gels can get into trouble if blokes like you get hold of 'em. But it was obvious enough what she was doing on that hooker—and—and, as I say, I was a bit surprised. Seemed a cut above that sort of thing. She was a West End tart, anyway—she wasn't one of the general Lizzies you can pick up in the pubs that side of the water."

Manning read the message on the dance programme and the next moment the cap was off and the spill was in his hands. He unravelled the tiny pages and read them hurriedly. The Chief knew from the quick glitter that leapt into his eyes that he was on a discovery of the first importance. As he read each page he passed it silently across to his superior.

He finished and tossed the last page over.

"Mr. Bristow," he said, "you have done us a very great service in bringing this message through to us, probably a greater service than you imagine. Have you read those pages?"

"No, sir, I brought it along just as the lady gave me it. She said if I read them I wouldn't be on the tenner. And I could do with a ten-pound note. Things haven't been too bright on the river these last few months—and a tenner would take the missus and kids away for a bit."

"You will get your tenner all right. I'll see to it myself. Probably a good deal more will be coming your way. Now tell me, does anyone know you were bringing this message to us?"

"Not so far as I know, sir. Only the lady herself."

"I mean, was there anybody knocking around on

the deck when she had the talk with you, anyone who would have guessed that something was wrong and that you were coming straight along here to us?"

"I can't say. The only people knocking about were the hands loading the ship, stevedores and such like. One or two of them may have noticed me talking to her. I didn't stop to notice. She seemed in such a hurry that as soon as I had got the message I just stepped on a hoist and left the ship. And I came straight round."

"Did any of the Chinese officers see you talking to her?"

"No, sir. There weren't any on deck. Not even the steward. He was gone through to the officers' quarters to call the officer."

"Better than ever. I'm only telling you this for your own guidance, Bristow. This case happens to be connected with the dope running job that has been in the papers the last couple of days. Grosman, the head of that gang, is captain of the *Yangtse*. Two of his men have been murdered for suspected squealing, and I think it is only fair you should know what you are up against. You hadn't better go back to the *Yangtse*. I'll get you a job further down river. Know the Woolwich end at all?"

"Fairly well, sir."

"Right, I'll have a talk with one of the foremen down there and see that you are all fixed up. You'll have nothing to worry about; but until the whole thing is squared up it is just as well that you should not be seen. From what you say I don't think anyone there knows about you, but there are as many eyes on the *Yangtse* as there are rats in a run. Now, about this lady. You say she was looking worried?"

"I'd say a bit more than worried. She was looking real frightened to me. Looked as though she wished she could get off the boat. That was what drew my attention to her. But there are no gangways on that hooker. The tide was right down, and she couldn't have got off unless she had climbed the piles of the wharf."

"She actually looked as though she was being held a prisoner there?"

"Not right at that minute, because she was all alone on deck. But from her dress and the way she looked I'd say she had been held there against her will for some time. Looked downright ill to me. All white and kind of glittery about the eyes."

"Did she get off the ship after you left?"

"Can't say, sir. I got right away out of it as soon as I stepped ashore. When I looked back she was talking to the first officer."

Manning took him by the arm and piloted him to the door. "Thanks very much, Mr. Bristow," he said. "That will be all I shall want from you to-day. If I should want any more information from you again I will come over and see you. Meanwhile, if you call in here later on in the evening I'll leave you a note telling you where you can start in the morning."

Bristow, looking profoundly uncomfortable, thanked him and was gone. Manning went back to the Chief with the light of eagerness on his face. For the first time since the case broke he began to see success shining ahead.

"Looks as though we have got a line on it at last, Chief," he said, rubbing his hands.

"Twenty-four hours should see it all cleared up,

Manning," replied the Chief quietly. "But every avenue will have to be tackled at the same moment. There will have to be a zero hour, and it will want organising down to the last second. What a brick that girl is! It's a hateful thing to say, but I don't think we need worry about her yet. She seems more than able to take care of herself. And, from what she says, she has given that captain enough cocaine to keep him quiet for some hours."

"Well, she certainly has given us something to get on with. And she is right about that secret rendezvous too. That's the place out at Gunn Lane, the place poor old Procter found."

The Chief was pulling at his lip. "Lingard. Lingard," he muttered. "That name is familiar. Now where does he link up?"

"Nowhere in connection with cocaine, Chief. I can tell you that definitely. I've gone over every drug dossier for the last ten years, and there is no such name in the records. I think I could recognise the name of every suspect offhand. I've pored over those files till I'm sick of them."

"I didn't for a moment think he would be under the drug headings. The gang organises itself too well for that. As soon as a man became suspect on that count they would pass him out and bring in someone whose record is clean. Just a moment."

He reached out for the phone and called Headquarters.

"Put this call through to 'Records,'" he said, "and tell them I want all the Lingards they can trace. Initials, addresses, records, and convictions, if any."

In ten minutes the call came back, and the officer

at the other end reported that the archives contained the names of eight different Lingards who had been prosecuted in various parts of the country since the end of the war.

Slowly the voice enumerated them, and as each one's record was called over the Chief slowly ruled them out. There was a coiner, a confidence trickster who sounded promising until the filing department told him that the man was still serving a long term in prison, an arson expert who specialised in insurance fires, two housebreakers, a long-firm swindler, and a diminutive little area sneak who only measured four feet two and had never been known to possess more than five pounds in his life. Regretfully the Chief drew his pencil through each.

"And now the suspects," he said. And at the first one his heart gave a jump.

"There's a Graham Lingard down on the list, Chief," said the voice from the other end. "But we can't seem to get anything definite lined up against him. He's a proprietor of dud night clubs, but he never runs them in his own name. Been a pest to us for years. He gets a cat's-paw to register them in his own name and pays him well to take the rough stuff when the clubs are raided. He has four running in London now and he mushrooms a few more round the coast for the summer seasons."

"Yes; anything more about him? From your end, I mean."

"Well, sir, we have had our eye on him for a long while as a possible distributor of cocaine. But there is nothing concrete. All we know is that lots of the stuff is collared in his clubs whenever we stick him up on a raid. But it may be that his places

are just central meeting-grounds for runners and addicts. They all seem to gather round him, anyway. As soon as we close one club down he opens another, like as not next door. Cool as a snowball. He knows we suspect him, but he doesn't care a rap. Pays his men well, and they stand by him when trouble comes."

"Thank you, officer; that will do splendidly. And the address is?"

"The Everglades, Loughton. Got a big country house there, with a full staff of servants and all the trimmings. When in Town he generally sleeps in a flat over one of his clubs. The latest one is that new flashy one in Soho, La Caverne Diamentée. 'Scuse my French, but that's the way they pronounce it. I'm told he has a very luxurious suite of rooms just over it. Do you want him watched, sir?"

"Yes. He's the man I want. Get after him. Put two good men on him. And have a messenger report his movements here every hour—here to the Wapping station. I'll have a man at this end to take all phone calls."

He put the telephone down and turned back to Manning.

"Well, what do you make of it now?" he asked.

The sergeant was busy writing down the addresses. "I think I've got my end of it, Chief," he declared. "There is only one link wanted now—and it looks to me as though we shall find it in Chinky the Junk's store-yard."

"Taking, at the same time," said the Chief, "particular note of the activities of Engelberg. There is a strong connection between him and the Chinese captain. The facts as we find them now are obvious,

Grosman is the only one who sells biscuit to Chinky. And Engelberg is the only one who buys it from him."

"And he certainly doesn't buy it to feed to chickens," said the river man warmly. "I asked for a dozen eggs a week from him, and he had to order them from the local dairyman! That chicken business is only a blind. He's in this business somewhere—in it up to the neck. That is why I want to get another look in at the junk yard. If I can trace Engelberg's game down I think I shall have something worth while to report."

"You should have good hunting," said the Chief, smiling grimly. "Grosman swears he will land the rest of the stuff—whether Lingard can accept it or not. By to-night the pace should be red-hot. Lingard will keep out of the way. It is a thousand to one that he will stay at one of his clubs to-night and let Grosman stew in his own juice. At a long shot we shall locate him at the Caverne Diamantée. I'm going to try it, anyway."

"Are you going to send him that post card, sir?"

"I surely am. The postal authorities will have to help. But I've no doubt that will be the simplest difficulty. Get me our department at the General Post Office, will you? I'll speak to the Superintendent myself."

The call went through and the Chief took the telephone.

"Is that the Superintendent?" he called. "This is the Chief here. I want you to send a man to Wapping and to mail a plain post card there. The address is: Graham Lingard, La Caverne Diamantée, Soho. I want it to be imprinted with the

Wapping stamp, and the time must be back-marked to ten o'clock this morning. Do you get all that?"

"Yes, Chief; I understand perfectly."

"And I want that card to be delivered to him at the Caverne Diamentée by the nine o'clock post. That is very definite. You will have to trace it right through and see that that card is included in the mail delivery there at nine. Nine is your last delivery in Soho, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir; nine o'clock is general for the last mails right through London."

"So much the better; it will be all that much more natural. You will see that it is done?"

"Without fail, sir. I will see that it goes through privately. It shall be sent over by special messenger for delivery at nine. It has already missed the routine sorting schedule; but it will be there by the last post."

He hung up the receiver. "I'm going over to the Outward Bound," he said. "I want to take a particularly good long look at Blind Rudley. There appears to be a good way of approach through that gentleman. Maybe it can be done. Is Chinky the Junk on the phone?"

Manning wrote down the number on a card and passed it over.

"Good. I'll get through to the office here as often as possible. If you have anything to report, leave the messages here for me. You will have all your work cut out in the junk yard."

He put on his hat and went out. The Outward Bound was less than ten minutes' walk away, and he went in through the saloon door. The place was almost empty, and he attracted little notice sitting in a corner by a table.

He slid a pair of semi-dark glasses over his eyes; one of his discoveries was that if the eyes are masked half the face is masked. And in that company there was not much fear of being recognised.

It was fully an hour before Blind Rudley came tap-tapping into the bar. The Chief rose at the same moment and ordered another drink. And from then on his eyes never left the blind man. He watched him as though he was scoring a photographic likeness of the man on his brain. His scrutiny began at the crown of his head and continued right down to the toes of his boots. And then, having taken a carbon copy of every tiny detail of his dress, his gaze went back to the sightless face, recording on his memory every line of it. Every wrinkle was taken keen notice of; even the angle at which he held his stick came in for attention.

The blind man, hearing a strange voice calling for a drink in the saloon bar, came tapping round chanting his monotonous "Pipe lights—cigar lights?"

The Chief tossed him a coin and took the opportunity of examining him from the nearer advantage of a close-up.

Rudley did not appear to be waiting for anyone especially. He seemed to be paying one of his usual camouflage rounds. In a minute or two he started out again, heading for his next house of call.

The Chief followed out behind him, keeping far enough away not to be heard by those uncanny ears. For the greater part of an hour he trailed him and then abruptly turned and went back to the river station.

There he found a message from Manning to say

that Engelberg had already taken away a load of biscuit and that the dealer expected him back again during the afternoon. Grosman was also likely to put in another appearance.

While he was reading the flimsy, Manning himself came through again.

"Is that you, Chief?" he said. "Just been trying to get you. There is certainly going to be a spot of liveliness here before nightfall. Both Engelberg and Grosman have called again. Neither of them know I am here—Chinky is on our side so long as he is not asked to take any active part in our operations. The *Yangtse* got her papers cleared and manifests through at noon to-day. So it looks as though Grosman is clearing for sea within forty-eight hours. I got that from the Port of London Authority. Do you want me to take any steps to hold her up if she tries to leave?"

"Not on your life. I knew she was doing everything to get out to sea, knew it as soon as they engaged double shifts to get the cargo stowed. Let her run. If you put obstacles in her way they will smell every rat in our bag. No; I'm aiming to have everything squared and ready before she slips her moorings."

"Right, Chief. I may not be coming through again for some time. Things seem to be working up nicely for a quick run for me. I have a chance of inspecting that new consignment of biscuit again, and if it turns out O.K. I am going to trail Engelberg. I'll come through again as soon as I have established the connection."

Manning turned away from the phone and beckoned to the little dealer. "If either Grosman or

Engelberg comes in, keep him busy here for a minute and slip me the word," he said.

Chinky the Junk nodded affably and turned his attention back to his accounts.

Manning went out into the yard to the pile of battered biscuit boxes. Another fifty cases had just come in and been flung on the heap. They were brought on a dock truck by one of the seamen from the *Yangtse*. Manning had watched him from the gloomy shadows of the tumbledown office.

And the gesture had been as innocent as one could imagine. Manning knew off-hand that the coolie had not the slightest knowledge of the contents of those tins. Grosman was too crafty to bring them himself. No captain in his senses would dream of doing such a thing as carting his own old junk about.

And Manning could not help feeling a glow of appreciation for the nerve of the man. He employed the most innocent and unsuspecting of his dupes to do the riskiest of the work. And it was done with such a naïveté and openness that only by blind chance could his method become suspect.

He saw the whole scheme as soon as he approached the heap. On each of the freshly arrived tins a little group of scratches were scored. On such battered tinware they looked natural enough. But to a discerning eye they were too regular to be accidental. Moreover, they were etched on every side of the tin.

Manning hunted for one that was more battered than the rest. He found one with a deep crack down the edge, and he smiled grimly when he noticed that the biscuit inside was as dry as stale bread.

He carefully prised the crack open and shook a

biscuit out. Cupped in the palm of his hand, it looked as harmless and innocuous as any other ship's biscuit; but before he cracked it open he would have wagered his head that the outside paste was only a thin veneer covering the drug.

He crushed the biscuit in his hand. The outer covering fell away and there was the neat, thin case of cocaine wafers left in his fingers. He did not need to open the case to know that the drug was there.

He admitted to himself that it was the neatest thing that had ever been put over on the river police. The whole system was revealed in that moment. Grosman had been as thorough as only a really fine organiser could be.

He occupied the greater part of his journey from the East in putting up the cocaine into biscuit form, packing the disguised article in any old battered tin that came to his hand. These he kept hidden in the secret Temple until the examination by the Customs officers was complete. And even if, by chance, the ship searchers stumbled on the secret of that Temple, it was unlikely that they would suspect the great Buddha to be hollow. A man of the captain's fanatical religion would be quite likely to carry a replica of his own deity on board. Much less likely things come out of the East.

For all anyone knew some of the prepared tins might even have been kicking about the upper deck while the Customs officers were examining the ship. No one but a madman, or a sheer genius, would have dreamed of suspecting broken old tins of biscuit thrown out on the open deck, awaiting a possible purchaser from the marine stores, bundled up with a lot of old rope and perished wire and rotted canvas,

of containing enough drug to have poisoned half London.

And as soon as the examination was complete the ship became open to all the normal comings and goings of dockside work.

It again spoke a great deal for Grosman's craftiness that he was not in a violent hurry to get rid of the stuff the moment the Customs officers left the ship. He actually had the nerve to leave it knocking about the ship for several days before mentioning to Chinky that he had a littering of old junk that might as well be cleared off his upper deck.

And all unsuspectingly Chinky would call around and give him a price for it, small sums enough in all conscience, for the stuff was scarcely worth the labour of carting away. Grosman might have chosen any one of a dozen other mediums for the transport of his cocaine ashore, but in fixing on old ship's biscuit he had undoubtedly put an unerring finger on the one commodity that not another soul on earth would want to buy. Hen-keepers in Wapping are scarcer than elephant tracks in the Strand. And biscuit is cheap enough in the ordinary way.

What it amounted to was that with his colossal impudence he could leave thousands of pounds' worth of cocaine lying about in someone else's junk yard, open to the rains and the suns, knowing perfectly well that it was as safe there from molestation as though it was securely locked away in a safe deposit vault.

The stuff was wheeled round to the yard by one of the seamen told off for the job in the normal course of the day's duties. He simply tossed the cans on the heap and went back to the ship.

The only weak link that Manning could see was that the method involved the employment of a second confederate ashore. But in Engelberg he had to admit the Chinese had found the perfect cover. The cheery old Hollander was the last man anyone would suspect of being concerned in anything so risky as cocaine running on the grand scale.

With his disarming, affable old face and his benign manner with the children around he was an ideal go-between. The thick pebble glasses added to the illusion of general harmlessness and good nature.

His end of the business was simple. As soon as the word came through from Grosman that a load was awaiting him in the junk yard, he ambled round to Chinky's, passed the pleasant time of day with him, and slung as many tins of biscuit on his truck as he cared to take away that day.

The tins he wanted were all plainly marked on every side, plainly, that is, to anyone who happened to be looking for that particular group of insignificant scratches. On the day that Manning had last inspected the biscuit, Engelberg had cleared the heap of every tin containing cocaine. And as often as a fresh supply came over from the *Yangtse* the Hollander came over and cleared it. There were days, of course, when there was no cocaine whatever on the heap, but he came over and bought a few tins just to keep up the deception.

Whether Chinky knew the true nature of Engelberg's activities, or suspected to what uses Grosman was subjecting his lumber yard was a matter that did not enter. Chinky was above and beyond any possibility of entanglement. And any such know-

ledge as that was deeply buried in the inscrutable soul of the wizened little man himself. The rest was entirely up to Engelberg.

All the Hollander had to do was to cart the stuff away to his master's secret rendezvous. And there his labours ended. It was, Manning decided, a thoroughly neat and ingenious scheme; one, moreover, that had proved effective through all the visits of the *Yangtse* to the river. By adhering strictly to the laws of the Port Authorities and by utilising the tiny loopholes left between the rules, cocaine in enormous quantities had been smuggled ashore right under the very nose of the preventive squads.

And right there, Manning reflected, his own labours began. All he had to do was to get on to the rear end of the Hollander's shadow the next time he called at the junk yard and the trail would lead him straight to that hidden store.

He crawled under an upturned dinghy and awaited developments. They were not long in coming. A bare twenty minutes after he had installed himself he heard the creak of the Hollander's hand-cart coming into the yard. Manning could see under the rim of the gunwale, where the curve of the boat made a slight concavity against the ground, by pressing his face flat on the earth and looking out with one eye.

The junk dealer did not give away the position by so much as the blink of an eye. He glanced up from his preoccupations at his rickety desk and waved the Dutchman on with a nod.

Manning was less than ten feet from the pile of tins, and he saw Engelberg come to a halt beside them. And every tin he picked up was scored with

the little groups of scratches. To a casual eye he seemed to be picking them up from anywhere, one after the other, just as they happened to come to his hand. But to Manning, watching underneath the boat, it was all one of the cleverest pieces of discrimination he had ever seen. Somehow it seemed to Manning that the cheery old soul was unwell, if not downright ill. He was dripping with sweat, and twice, as he bent down for more tins, Manning heard him groan.

He actually picked up a couple of tins that bore no marks at all. And in flinging them on to the barrow he made a bad shot. The tins rolled off again, and he kicked them carelessly aside as though they were not worth worrying about, anyway.

When he had taken enough he went ambling back to the gate. Chinky the Junk and Engelberg had known each other too long for the little dealer to need to check the quantity. The Hollander was as honest as the day.

He padded out on his fat old feet, beaming and waving his hand to the urchins around. As soon as he was gone Manning hauled himself out from under the boat. A hurried inspection of the pile showed that not a single marked tin remained.

He signalled his thanks to the little dealer as he crept out through the gate. Engelberg was just turning the corner at the bottom of the street. Manning hurried down after him and kept him in sight through more than a mile of squattering side streets and dank alleys. It was not a difficult task. Engelberg had made the journey so often that he had attained an exaggerated idea of his own immunity. It was a foolproof proposition. Nothing could go

wrong with it. Dozens of times he had pushed that innocent old barrow through that maze of human burrows and nothing had ever happened.

Everyone along that route knew what it was he carried. Chicken food. And damaged chicken food at that. It was not worth anyone's while to knock him down and rob him. And, besides, the Dutcher was a decent old sort.

Manning knew in a hazy kind of way that they were drawing near Gunn Lane. At least, he knew they were in that locality, but somehow they seemed to be off the line.

The man ahead turned in at a high gate that abutted on a railway siding. And so sure of himself was he that he did not even pause at the entrance to see if he was being followed. Years of immunity had brought a false sense of security.

Manning crept ahead and cautiously opened the gate an inch. Engelberg was away at the top end with his load, piling the tins on the siding platform. The river man surveyed the scene. At the far end was another gate, a high one with a fringe of spikes along the top. He realised that that was the entrance from Gunn Lane. He had come in through the back entrance that led in from the railway. And that was the entrance probably used by the inner members of the gang. If that was so he required a redoubled caution. Unseen eyes were liable to be hawking at him even then.

Engelberg vanished into the gaunt wreck of the main building. The sergeant watched him approach a door and turn the handle. He seemed to turn it an unconscionable number of times, and then he gently pulled it towards him. The handle came

away in his hand, and Manning saw that it was attached to a stout wire from the inside. As he pulled he pressed on the door itself. The wire raised a drawbar inside and the door swung open. It was just another adept contrivance planned in the brain of the drug-runner. It was self-locking on the inside, and, as a double merit for a safety device, it could be worked from either side by one man. And only a man who knew the particular secret of it could operate it from the outside.

From Engelberg's actions it seemed likely that he was alone in the place. He had given no sign of his presence to any hidden watcher and certainly no one had challenged him from the building. Manning was feeling more sure of himself. If he only had to deal with the fat old Dutcher then there was no excuse for that queer swimmy sensation that was drifting about under his belt. His own conviction was that if he couldn't double that old boy up and wrap him round a tentpole then he was willing to eat his own hat.

He slipped inside and softly closed the gate. There was a thrill of exultation running through him. If the Chief had only done half as well at his end the loose ends were rapidly being drawn together. But his chief thrill was more personal to himself, a more human one. It was the kick that he got from the knowledge that his first surmise was right. From the first moment he had seen Engelberg stacking tins of damaged biscuit on his handcart a secret little imp of knowledge had whispered feverishly in his ear that there was something suspicious about it. An inner chord in him had vibrated to the warning that the connection from the ship to

the shore was there in that old junk yard and that Engelberg's actions were definitely linked up with it.

And here he had tracked it down. Here was his justification. Any man likes to know, by clearly proved demonstration, that he is still master of his own craft, and in tracing Engelberg down to that common meeting point he knew he had every excusable reason for satisfaction.

He crawled round by the crumbling walls and explored the possibilities. He did not relish the idea of gaining admission by the same door as Engelberg. For all he knew there might be an automatic alarm attached to the drawbar inside. If he knew anything of Grosman's methods it was more than likely that there was. It would be all in accordance with his self-protective methods to cover one trick device with yet another. He was not the man to lay himself open to a surprise raid from the very entrance which he used himself.

Seen in broad daylight the place was more dilapidated and depressing than under the softening shadows of night. The roof sagged heavily in places, and it had been found necessary to prop great shoring timbers against one of the walls.

Entrances there were in plenty to anyone agile enough to haul himself off the ground. There was not a window anywhere in the building that was not smashed and gaping open. The ease of ingress made him all the more suspicious of that mechanically controlled door. The one thing that he did not know was that that trick door was the one direct entrance to the more habitable sections of the building. Procter had made that discovery for himself when he put

out his foot and suddenly found himself hurtling down that broken lift shaft.

Manning gripped the edge of a window sill and drew himself up. He listened closely. From far away down below him he could hear the soft shuffle of footsteps. He listened again—and the hair along the nape of his neck began to crawl. The footsteps limped!

He heard the dragging clip-clop of the heavy surgical boot. Grosman was down there. He took the bit between his teeth. Well, that made two to get on with. Provided he hadn't equipped himself with another charge of that damnable light or some other such lethal horror, Manning was ready and willing to tackle the pair of them. And if either of them saw fit to start what was colloquially known as the rough stuff so much the better. There would be a peculiar satisfaction about having five mad minutes in a wild free-for-all with the brute who had killed Procter and blinded four others of his working confrères.

He climbed inside and gently lowered himself to the floor. The boards creaked abominably. They were rotted almost to decay, and it was difficult to find a place anywhere to step that did not set up an immediate squeaking protest.

Manning did the same as Procter had done. He took off his boots, tied them together, and slung them round his neck. Thereafter progress was less noisy though more painful to the soles of his feet; splinters abounded, and he seemed to find them all. By tortuous paths he made his way down. He could hear the Chinese moving about down there, and now and then guttural mutterings floated up to him.

He, too, found the yawning lift shaft that had seen Procter go crashing down, but in the dim lights that filtered into the great barn of a place through the broken windows and breaks in the roof he saw it in time.

He knew there must be some other way down besides that lift. In so huge and rambling a place as that there would, of necessity, be several different stairways. But amid the lumber of old crates and packing-cases all the doorways seemed to be impossible of access.

Grosman had planned it that way. In spite of the immensity of the place there were only two ways of getting through to the basement. One was down the lift shaft and the other was through the trick door from the back. To get down by the circular staircase one had to mount the fire escape outside and come down through the roof.

Every other communicating doorway and means of access was barred up with masses of packing-cases piled up in high profusion. To have tried to disturb them would have brought the top masses down with a crash. Manning decided to use the lift shaft, lowering himself down by his finger-tips, gripping into the moulding brickwork, and hanging on like a limpet to every little projection that offered.

When he reached the bottom he crawled through to where he heard the sounds of Grosman's boots shuffling about. It was in the inner room and the lights were full on. He hugged the shadows of the far side wall, again precisely as Procter had done before him. It was a coign of vantage and by far the safest approach. He peeped in, and his brows came low over his eyes in sheer astonishment. It

was not Grosman in there but Engelberg. At least, the body and the face were the body and the face of Engelberg, but the feet, with the deformed ankle, were the feet of Grosman.

And the man was apparently in terrible pain. Beads of perspiration were standing out on his brow. He was holding his head in his hands and rocking from side to side in an access of physical misery. Manning stared at him in amazement.

After a while he saw him lay his watch on the table and sit staring at it. Minutes ticked by, and still the man sat and waited, his jaws clenched up till the muscles at his temples stood out in tight pads. He seemed to be concentrating all his will power into one dominant determination to watch the hands of that watch crawling round. The fat hands were clenched till they were bone white, and he cursed the slowness of the passing seconds in a language that was neither born of Dutch nor Saxon. The fascination of it held the river man spellbound.

The spasm seemed long in passing. The Hollander took out a gaudy bandana and wiped the perspiration from his face. To do it he put up a palsied hand and removed the thick pebbled glasses. Then he thrust his finger and thumb into his mouth and pulled out two pads of cotton-wool that had been stuffed up inside his cheeks, between the flesh and the top teeth. Shakily he wiped a piece of oiled lint across his eyes and a faint smear of pigment came away with it.

Manning almost gasped aloud. In ten seconds the benign visage of Engelberg had disappeared and he found himself staring at the hard, brutal features of Grosman, captain of the *Yangtse*.

And all in that moment the full realisation thundered across his brain. Grosman's method of running drugs ashore was complete and watertight to the last final shade. He did not even need another confederate ashore. He himself was his own confederate. Engelberg and Grosman were one and the same. He did not even need to send word through when a fresh load of tins was waiting on the dump. He had put them there himself. All he had to do was to go back, and in fifteen seconds he had changed himself completely.

True, now the river man came to think of it, the two men were remarkably similar. They were identical in build and of the same height to an inch. Engelberg was a bit fatter, perhaps, but that could easily have been accounted for by a subterfuge in dress. And anyhow, both men were naturally bulky.

But it was in the more subtle characteristics that they were so utterly different. And in that, again, Grosman had evidenced his remarkable genius. It was in the natural divergencies of nationality that the difference was so marked. The one was a scowling, bitter-looking brute who never spoke unless he was spoken to, and even then had no good thing to say of anyone or anything. A surly devil, a drug running suspect, a man who fiercely hated all thought of authority and resented the calm rulings of law and order with a fiery passion. Some of that was a pose, a magnificently carried pose, to throw into higher relief the sweet-mannered, affable-minded benevolence of the other identity.

It was a masterly disguise, and he owed it to his dual parentage that it was feasible at all. The merest touch of flesh-coloured pigment under the eyes and

the slightest suspicion of brown above them and the eyes were altered out of all recognition. And then the master touch of filling out the cheeks with the dry wad of cotton-wool shifted the whole line of his features. The face did not merely look different, it *was* different. Then the thick glasses, with lenses so heavy that they completely obscured the eyes behind them, gave the final touch that knit the illusion.

Two entirely different identities could blossom and bloom in twenty seconds, and the difference from one to the other was astonishing. No one would dream that the grim, masterful owner of the *Yangtse*, tyrant over his men, contemptuous enemy of the Customs, could possibly be one and the same with the delightful, placid, rotund-faced old Hollander whose one harmless vice was that he kept hens and whose chief characteristic was that he was the most pacific old fellow in the whole locality. It was inconceivable that anyone should associate that sinister Oriental with the cheerful old Dutchman who delighted to give pennies to the gutter urchins when times were good, and who still had a smile and a word for them when times were bad.

Manning leaned back against the wall and tried to convince himself he was not dreaming. Four hours ago he had read a message from Hillary Kittredge saying that the man was pumped full of cocaine. Something had gone wrong with the evidence; the two things did not link up.

And while he looked he saw the man breathe a sigh of relief and take a hypodermic syringe from his pocket. He filled it and waited till the hands pointed dead on the hour, and then injected the whole dose into a vein in his wrist. In a minute or

two the twitching of his tortured nerves stilled, and a slow calm settled over him. The glassy, yearning look died out of his eyes, and he rested his head on his arms, outflung before him on the table.

Grosman had had a fearful time. In those last four hours he had gone naked through the fires. From that moment when the steward and the officer had gone through to him in the Temple nothing more than the exercise of a gigantic will had kept him up and going.

He had taken a terrible dose, but it was not the full strength that Hillary had thought it was. After the first injection Grosman realised that only a very weak solution would have the desired effect on the girl, and he had diluted it down accordingly.

And it was only the expert knowledge of his first officer that had pulled him round. He and the steward had marched him round and round the narrow confines of the Temple of Buddha until their own brains began to swim. They flogged him with rolled towels and rolled him on the floor till he was black and blue. They dosed him alternately with showers of icy cold water and then with water so hot that it turned his skin the colour of a boiled lobster. Anything to get those nerves alive and crawling again, anything to get some semblance of consciousness back again into his brain, no matter if it was only a glimmer. Every twenty minutes they injected a stiffening dose of the antidote and set about their efforts again, windmilling his arms and legs until he gasped with unconscious exhaustion. It was artificial respiration on the grand, the merciless, scale.

And gradually it had its effect. The deadly pallor went out of the face, the awful leaden hue faded

from the skin. A spot of feverish, hectic colour began to burn on each cheek. The hard labouring of the lungs, pumping in oxygen with the labours of his countrymen, began to revive him.

There came a faint twittering of an eyelid, and after that they never let up on him. If it were humanly possible, they redoubled the severity of the treatment they inflicted on him. And when full consciousness finally began to seep back into him it was from no other reason than that the nerve centres could assimilate no more induced pain and action and not react.

For the next hour Grosman had literally to *will* himself to remain awake. They ran him up and down the long alleyway of the ship and soused him again in the cold water. He knew what they were doing and he allowed them to do it without protest. For he knew it was the only thing that would stave off a return of that deadly lethargy that was clamouring to retake possession of his faculties.

The craneman had seen the girl talking to Bristow and he had seen her press something upon him. He could not see what it was, but he knew it was something tangible, for he saw him thrust it into his pocket. He would not have opened his mouth about it in the ordinary way, but the Chinese officers had gone round making inquiries. And as there was a five-pound bribe held out for information the craneman was not the one to quarrel with his bread and butter. He had told. And the first officer knew that a warning had gone through to the police.

It was when that knowledge was finally hammered into Grosman's torpid brain that the man

made his monumental fight for consciousness. And he almost fought his own powers to a standstill. There was just a chance that he could get through with it before the dogs of the law were snapping at his heels.

A big raid would take an hour or two to organise, and he had just that hour or two in which to get clear, for surely the river police would soon be upon him. And with such evidence as that girl could have given they would not rest until they had unearthed the secret of that hidden compartment. They would tear and batter at the bulkheads until every inch of the ship lay open and exposed. His only hope was to get the last of the drug out of the ship and away. The line of evidence of the biscuit tins would be followed through to the lumber yard. And that made it imperative that the double task of getting it out of the ship and out of the lumber yard again should be performed without the loss of a second.

He flung caution to the winds. The store dealer might become suspicious at so much biscuit being brought into his yard. He couldn't help it. It had to be done. He might become curious to know why Engelberg should always appear a couple of minutes later and cart the same identical cargo away. He couldn't help it. It had to be done. It was a crisis and had to be met with emergency measures. The next time the *Yangtse* came to the river he would have a new scheme worked out. Meanwhile it was a case of neck or nothing.

All the biscuit was now gone from the ship. He had cleared the last of it away on that final journey from the junk yard. Great heaps of it were stacked

away there on the railway siding, waiting only for the coming of darkness and the arrival of Lingard's lorries.

Once that was done two of the three main ends would be clear of suspicion. Grosman could invite investigation. The police could raid there till all was blue, and they might as well raid Westminster Abbey. They would meet with nothing more than the galling knowledge that their information had broken down; the certainty that though they knew they were on the right hunting ground, the quarry had removed itself to pastures new. There would not be a jot or tittle of evidence to show.

All that remained was to clear the *Yangtse* itself of the drug. And now that the ship was free of the Customs and all examinations were over that would be a task of comparative simplicity. It was merely a matter of redisinguising himself again on his own ship. Not a soul there knew him in his dual personality.

In his character of Grosman he could tell the 'deck watch that the Hollander would be coming along to the ship in person to clear some of the captain's own junk out of the cabins. The stuff could be stacked in readiness for him in one of the less frequented alleyways, and ten minutes later Engelberg himself would arrive with his truck to get rid of the last of the damning evidence.

But it was a fearful strain. His head was like a leaden ball poised on the top of his neck, and its weight seemed to increase with every breath he took. His whole body was crying aloud to be allowed to lie down and sleep off the deadly coma that was

relentlessly gnawing at him. His limbs seemed to be things apart from the trunk of his body. They did not belong. His feet were like lumps of dough, without feeling, without shape; and there was a hard, cold lump in his thigh where the needle had gone in. If all that tremendous dose had found the blood stream he would have been dead within an hour. But much of it had missed the vein and it hung there in the tissues, an enormous local anæsthetic that numbed his flesh and deadened his sensibilities.

Every half-hour he had rationed himself a bolstering dose of the antidote. And the last ten minutes of each half-hour were a yelling misery to him. Every fibre of him was crying for the soothing relief of the anti-toxin. But he knew that too much of it, or doses administered too frequently, would have the same killing effect as the drug itself. With an iron restraint and with the perspiration pouring down him, he waited till the safety margin of the clock was reached.

The adoption of the Engelberg disguise was a torment. Every scrap of the Chinese, the sullen, resentful, bitter shades of his nature, was surging up in him, hating the very shadows of the men he met; but through it all he had to preserve the calm, placid, wholly equable temperament of the Dutchman, beaming on all and sundry, remembering only the Dutch tongue, trying to forget the tearing ache that seared through his eyes from the magnified pebbles in his glasses. Every nerve was twitching, every muscle shaking, and his joints seemed to have removed themselves into all sorts of odd corners of

his bones. Down there in the quiet seclusion of his rendezvous he permitted himself a let-up that he would never have shown to a soul above ground, though all the devils of hell were clawing at him.

Manning crept backwards into the storeroom, holding his breath. In the brooding hush down there it seemed as though every scratch of sound was magnified a thousandfold. He scarcely dared to breathe.

The storeroom was almost stripped of the huge quantities of the drug that had been stored there a few hours earlier. The greater part of it had been removed and was heaped up on the loading wharf of the railway siding, ready for Lingard's coming later on. There were still a few shelves packed tight with the stuff, but it was obvious at a glance that somebody had been frantically busy down there in the last few hours.

Grosman got up and helped himself shakily to a large glass of brandy. He drank it neat, and the glass slipped from his nerveless fingers with a crash that made Manning jump. The Chinaman stood against the wall, breathing deeply, slowly getting a grip on himself again.

Manning decided that he had got enough evidence there to make an arrest out of hand. The cleverest lawyer on earth could not have explained away the mass of material evidence that was piled up against him in that basement. There was the disguise and the knowledge that he had been working the same scheme for years. Chinky the Junk could be subpoenaed to prove all that. There was the fact that Grosman himself rented the derelict warehouse. And there was the great accumulation of the

drug stored up there on the siding and the rest of it down there in the store-shed. There was the letter from the girl establishing the *Yangtse* connection with the whole affair. Though the arm of coincidence were made of elastic, it could never be stretched sufficiently to explain away all that with any attempt at verisimilitude.

Grosman had lifted his club foot on to a chair and was busy with a little instrument on the heel. In a few seconds the heel opened out on a hinge and a cascade of raw cocaine tablets poured out. Manning blinked and stared. From forty to fifty pounds' worth of the drug came tumbling out on to the chair. It was then that the reason for the odd use of the surgical boot became obvious.

The Chinese captain had no more need of a specially adapted boot than had Manning himself. And Manning admitted to himself that, in confining the limp to the Chinese character, Grosman had illustrated his genius to the highest degree. It would have been so easy to have used the limp for the Hollander, on those intermittent occasions when he came to London river. That would have left him free to use his natural walk through all those months while he was away.

But the Chinese brain had worked on a higher plane. He wilfully thrust upon himself the penance of having to wear that clump boot in all his normal comings and goings. It made the disguise of the bland, easygoing Dutchman so much the more natural. One could watch that fat old figure for hours and never detect the trace of a limp or even a suspicion of a laboured walk, trying to eliminate a limp that really existed. It was not that Grosman

limped even in his rôle of himself; it was the build and construction of the boot itself that *caused* the limp. As soon as the boot was off, Grosman could walk as naturally as any man.

Manning admitted that the man was a doughty opponent. Even though he was finally traced down as Grosman the drug runner and the warrant went out for his arrest, every officer in the force would be looking for a man with a pronounced limp. The very ingenuity of that trick alone would probably have kept him immune for years.

The boot, too, served the double purpose of inducing a limp and acting as the receptacle for small quantities of his drugs. If he could take away forty or fifty pounds' worth of narcotics every night sealed up in the hollows of that boot and distributed them among his clients down river, the net sum represented highly acceptable pickings.

That was the final touch that made Manning's case complete. Neither Grosman nor anyone else could explain away that boot and its contents to a jury of twelve.

Manning tiptoed to the door and entered.

"Grosman," he said, "I arrest you on a charge of smuggling drugs through His Majesty's Customs."

Grosman whipped round as though he had been stung, and he stared at the river man as though he thought his brain was playing him tricks. But the sergeant's grim voice went on: "And I warn you that it would be unwise for you to say anything on your own behalf at this juncture; for it is my duty to tell you that anything you say may be used in evidence against you."

Grosman's soul seemed to wilt. Manning had

caught him at a moment when his powers were at their lowest ebb. Neither mentally nor physically, at that moment, could he have been a match for the hard-bitten, tough-built river man. If it came to a fight Grosman did not stand one chance in a million. He could scarcely move his arms except at the expense of wracking pains, and his brain was as torpid and dull as a stagnant pool.

He swayed weakly against the wall and gently slid down to the floor. Reaction had come, abrupt and sudden. Nerves that had been holding out against overmastering lethargy for the last four hours cracked in when the vision of the uniform of the law presented itself.

Manning was halfway to him, but he stopped in sudden indecision. The breakdown was so unexpected, so unlike the relentless, fighting devil that was Grosman that it found him hesitant to proceed. It was difficult to believe that the man was really out. He was aware of an acute sense of distrust, a sea of suspicion that swept over him like a cataract.

He looked for the subterfuge and failed to find it. The man was so palpably in a state of collapse. His chin was sunk away on his chest and he was breathing as though each inhalation tore at his lungs with knives. His eyelids were lowered drunkenly, and about him were all the signs of a slow relapse into a dead inertia.

The fight had been too terrific and the effort too prolonged. When the pendulum swung back it went back to the limit.

At least, that was how it appeared to Manning. A hazy idea began to float through his head that the man could not possibly be play-acting. Perhaps

Hillary had been right in her message and she really had managed to drug him. And maybe his own doctors had performed the miracle on him and brought him round. The fact that he had injected something into his wrist bore out that possibility. Perhaps he was fighting a drug that was still potent in his body, unfit to fight, unable to put up any sort of a show against a man whose muscles were limber and whose faculties were still unimpaired.

He fumbled for a pair of handcuffs and moved round the table towards him. A man of Grosman's calibre was better manacled than left to make another fighting recovery. He had got the brute down and out and he did not intend to give him a chance of ever getting up again—not the flimsiest ghost of a chance.

Grosman sat like a dead thing. Manning could not see that the eyes beneath the drooping lids were burning bright as glowing lamps; he could not know that the thick muscles were flexing for one last valiant effort. Grosman could force a last trick out of his brain even when it was fast going back on him. His legs were drawn up under him and the broad of his back was pressed against the wall.

And just when Manning was coming round the corner of the table Grosman made his last effort. He suddenly sent the soles of his feet crashing against the leg of the table. With his back stanced against the wall and his forearms stiffened against the wainscoting, he was able to get every ounce of his weight to bear on the lunge.

The corner of the table rammed into Manning's stomach with the force of a steam-driven battering-

ram. There was a strangled gasp from the river man, a gasp that was cut short almost before it began. The lungs ceased to function in that same hundredth of a second. A great white mist launched itself over his brain.

The table had impacted on that same vital spot known to boxers; it was as though he had taken a tremendous punch in the solar plexus. There was an instantaneous suspension of the respiratory organs, every atom of breath was knocked out of him.

He went over with a sprawling thud, his arms out over his head, rolling over in an access of agonising pain. Grosman hauled himself up to his feet and stood swaying over him. His own head was swimming with the violence of his effort. There was a blur before his eyes, and his heart was pumping like an engine. But in the midst of it there was a fiery core of hatred, a white-hot centre that burned and blazed against the river man.

All his innate ferocity centred on that helpless figure. To him it epitomised the embodiment of all the forces that had so nearly brought all his years of labour and dogged endeavour to naught. Right on the very threshold of ultimate success the arch-enemy, uniformed officialdom, had butted in and all but wrecked him. He kicked him savagely as he writhed there.

His thoughts were going round in erratic circles. What did the presence of that man there portend? What was the mass of possibilities that lay behind his sudden appearance? Had the girl got her message through already, and were the police acting on it? Did any more of those damnable busybodies know the secrets of that derelict warehouse? Was

Manning's advent only an advance-guard of a numerous raiding party already on its way out to Gunn Lane? Or was it just an accident of Fate—had Manning merely stumbled on that building in the course of the wide investigations that he knew were being intensively carried out all through the district?

And in either event, what was his own position? Was it safe to stay there and make the complete clean-up? Or did the whole thing call for instant flight? If he stayed and the police arrived in force, he might as well hold out his neck to the rope, for with all the accumulated evidence there he did not stand one chance in a million of ever getting himself clear. And as soon as the police got him into their clutches it would be all over with him; there would be dozens ready to turn informer on him. For the chance of a slight lessening of their own sentences half the gang would squeal on him, especially about the Maxick affairs.

He had no illusions about his reputation with the gang. He ruled them on fear alone—and both he and they knew it. Tyrants always ride for a fall. He had the example and precedent of all the East to draw on for that altruism, and the subsequent history of all the West to corroborate it. But he had chosen to rule on terror. And as soon as the tyrant falls the serfs rise up and rend him. The bully was torn between conflicting fears, fear of the vengeance of the gang and the sharper fear that his apprehensions regarding the police might be groundless.

If he threw up everything now, right at that moment when final success was in sight, and fled, leaving the reams of evidence as it stood, then he

would be a hunted man for life. True, he could kill Manning and drop him down through the trap. And Manning was the only soul on earth who knew about the double identity. While the police were feverishly hunting for a man with a disabling limp he could be organising a fresh business under yet a third identity.

But always he would have the fear of the law hanging over him, dark and portentous as a cyclone about to burst. He would never know peace again for any single hour of his life. For he knew that the ramshackle old place was bound to come under the police microscope before many hours were passed. It was inevitable. The inexorable comb-out was getting nearer and nearer to that building every minute.

And yet there was the bare chance that Manning was an accident there, a visitor who had stumbled on the place by sheer fortuitous chance. And if he fled now he would be flinging his whole harvest to the winds, throwing it away without the slightest necessity. If the police stalled off for just a few more hours, if they could be kept away until nightfall when Lingard's lorries had cleared the place of the last trace of illicit drugs, then there was still a chance, still a fighting, worth-while chance that the thing might be pulled off.

He slid heavily down to his knees beside the prostrate man. There was a wicked glint of determination glittering in his eyes. If a stake was worth playing for it was worth playing for right up to the last final fling. And he was not throwing away the labour of years so long as there was one chance in a hundred of bringing off the great haul. Let the

police come. Half a million pounds was worth a last battle, a fight to the death if necessary. And if the worst came to the worst there was always that great cameo ring on the middle finger of his left hand. One fierce press on the cameo with that stiff thumbnail of his and the tiny hollow needle would sink into the flesh.

And while they questioned him, while those fools of the law hammered at him and fulminated their streams of questions at him, the poison would be gently and surely trickling through to his heart. A gentle death, a quiet death, a death shorn of pain and shame, a death relieved of the ignominy of being led up like a patient animal to the dim silhouette of a gallows in the pale grey of a dawning . . . of being legally killed by those loathsome hirelings of established law and order. Such a death as a mandarin of the East might desire to die, and not be ashamed of, when he was gathered up into the innumerable caravan of his fathers.

He took the handcuffs from the river man's nerveless fingers. In a few moments he had fastened them securely on the unresisting wrists. He tried to drag him along to the trap-door, but his strength petered out before he had got him a couple of yards past the door. The river man was heavy and the captain's strength had been taxed to the uttermost. He leaned against the doorway and glared at him, and all the concentrated ferocity of a wild animal gazing on its age-old enemy was smouldering in his eyes.

"So! Lie there—sow!" he said pantingly. "Lie there till I come back. In a little while other hands shall fling you down into the darkness. You shall drown like the rat you are. And I will listen above,

at the open trap, and your cries shall be music to me.”

Manning was beginning to come to. Something of the livid paralysis was going from his respiratory muscles, a tingle of returning life was suffusing the diaphragm.

He opened his eyes and looked up. At first he comprehended nothing. Neither the glowering face of the mandarin nor the dilapidated appearance of his surroundings implied anything to him. He was like a man only half returned from a dream, a man still on the borderline between sleep and contact with his own brain. The solar plexus blow has that horrible stunning effect when the mind as well as the physical body seems to slide off on to another plane. Grosman kicked him again and cursed him gutturally under his breath.

When he finally began to drift back to his senses he could not move. He could see Grosman busily changing back into his Chinese clothes. Manning himself was bound hand and foot. Lengths of old canvas had been torn into strips and twisted to make ropes strong enough to have fettered an elephant. A Hercules could not have broken them.

He rolled over on to his side and looked in through the open door. He cursed himself for having let the drug runner catch him on so apparent a ruse. It was nothing less than blind folly. He might have suspected some sort of a trick from that cunning brain. But he had walked into the trap like the veriest novice. And his bitterness grew. Ten short minutes ago he had had that unutterable beast cornered and trapped; he had taken him single-handed, and nothing but a miracle could have pre-

vented him from getting the manacles on him and marching him along to the lockup, an ominous menace crushed for ever.

And in that short interval the tables were turned. Grosman had him at his mercy. He could have bitten out his own tongue in sheer self-execration.

For some minutes he tried to think out a way of escape, fought his own brain for a trick equally as effective as the one Grosman had played on him. But Manning was cast in the stolid mould. He lacked that quick spark of electric ingenuity that was ever gleaming in the mind of the Oriental. He struggled with his bonds, and his only reward was to feel the warm trickle of blood over his wrists where the harsh canvas rawed through the flesh.

And then he heard a sound that made him stiffen with expectancy. It was slight, ever so far away, seeming to come from right away in the back end of the building. For some seconds he harboured a wild, sweeping hope that the Chief had altered his plans and was raiding without waiting to connect up with the West End gang.

And then the sound clarified itself, identified itself into a steady, gentle knocking. Manning's heart sank. It was the soft tap-tapping of Blind Rudley's stick.

Grosman heard it, too, and he wheeled. He stood with his head thrust forward to catch the sound; and an angry frown settled down over his brows as he realised what it was. He went out into the main building and stared out among the gloomy shadows. The figure of Rudley appeared, tap-tapping along with the stick out-thrust before him, exploring the pitfalls and obstacles that beset him in the midst of his eternal darkness.

Grosman muttered thunderously under his breath and waited for him. He was so irritated at what was to him a maniacal daylight entry that he did not even go forward to steer the blind man through to the office. Coming in that way Rudley must have come down Gunn Lane and entered via the roof. A mad thing, a suicidal thing to do, with the whole locality alive with plain clothes men.

He came tapping along, heading directly for the inner room. Grosman stood aside to let him pass. But, as though sensing his presence there, the blind man came to a slow halt and his questing stick went feeling out ahead of him, searching for the man he knew was there but could not see.

The high-pitched, plaintive voice came querulously on the silence. "Where are you? Are you there, captain?"

And then Grosman let the vials of his wrath spill over. He cursed him in spitfire, metallic sentences that cut through the air like knives; heaped his vituperation upon him until Manning thought that, in the storm of repressed fury that overmastered him, he was going to spring at him and choke the life out of him.

"Am I here?" he rasped. "Am I here, you maniac? Where else did you think I would be—scurrying for cover like the rest of the rats? What the hell do you want down here? Why did you come here at all, you blind fool? Gunn Lane and all around is stiff with police. Already Manning has found out the secret of this place. I've got him trussed up there—he will be down the trap in two minutes. But how many more are there waiting and watching the approaches to this place? Waiting and

watching for some such fool as *you* to come crawling down and give them the trail. How many saw you? You came in through the fire escape. That meant that you climbed the outer stairs—in broad daylight! You've wrecked the last chance we ever had of getting away with the big haul. You've smashed us as surely as you're standing there."

Rudley was slowly coming towards him again, coming slowly and imperturbably through the tempest of cursing that bit at him with all the cornered frenzy of a polecat.

And all in a tense, electric moment Grosman stopped. The stream of venomous bitterness petered out and came to a tingling silence. Manning stared, unable to believe his own eyes. Grosman was backing, trying to get out of the way of Rudley. But Rudley was not being evaded. As often as the mandarin stepped away the blind man turned and followed him, his hands gently fumbling at the air ahead of him.

And then Grosman gasped. A burst of realisation went searing across his brain. Those eyes! They were not the eyes of a blind man. Blind Rudley was looking at him with eyes that saw, eyes that were boring into the man's very soul. Grosman squeaked and tried to jump away. But he was too late. Rudley was on him, on him in a single flying leap that took him clear to the throat of the drug runner. They went over in a flying crash with Rudley on top.

Manning felt his eyes popping out of his head. He struggled and wrenched at his bonds, trying to get free to help get the captain under. But Rudley needed no help. He seemed to be suddenly pos-

sessed of superhuman strength, and in the same moment he declared himself as a man with no small knowledge of wrestling holds.

With a single mighty heave he got the mandarin over and fastened a scissors lock on his legs. And then, with one swart hand over the instep, he slowly dragged the foot up into the position for the terrible toe-hold. Grosman screamed as the pressure came on, and he tore at the floor in the helplessness of his agony. But the hold was locked and Rudley was not letting him go until the muscles were paralysed.

And then another minor miracle happened. Blind Rudley produced from his pocket with his free hand a pair of regulation handcuffs.

Grosman was beaten. He was screaming for release, yelling that he would do anything, consent to anything, if only the fearful pressure that was cracking his very sinews, was eased. His thigh muscles were cramped up into great knots, and his face was wet with the sweat of pain.

Rudley released him. It would be an hour before the man could walk. He lay there, a quivering mass of violated nerves. Rudley silently lugged his hands behind him and snapped on the handcuffs.

And then Rudley, no longer feeling his way or walking with the testing, timorous gait of the blind, hurried back out of the inner office and cut Manning free of his bonds.

"Better walk about for a bit and get some blood back into your veins," he said. "We have got a mile of work ahead of us yet." And the voice was the sharp, authoritative voice of the Chief.

Manning rolled over and the Chief unlocked the manacles. He tried to stand up, but he was still

groggy, and he sat down with a bump. The Chief grinned.

"You asked for it," he said. "It was a daft thing to do to come here alone. You know what happened to Procter."

Manning was vigorously rubbing his arms and legs.

"Couldn't help myself, Chief," he said bluntly. "I got on the tail end of the whole job and I followed it through. There is all the proof we want here, every blessed bit of it. Grosman and Engelberg are one and the same; his disguise is hanging up there. I had a suspicion some time ago that that was how he worked it, but it seemed too tall a story to be true. And when I tested it out it all turned out wrong. That was because I had been caught out over the biscuits. The ones I fed to the birds were all harmless. And I thought my theory had come unstuck. I wouldn't say anything about it because I should have looked such a monumental idiot if things had turned out wrong. Have you had a look round up top, sir?"

"No. I have had a man posted in a building that looks on to the railway siding and he reported activity here to-day. Then we heard that you had come through on the trail of Engelberg. I had already decided to pay this place a visit. Blind Rudley had been seen in this district—and I copied his make-up. It was the best way to get through their cordon here. There is always someone watching, and I guessed that a warning would go through to Grosman. And," he added grimly, "I guessed you would be standing in need of a bit of a lift."

"You were only just in time, too, Chief." Man-

ning looked up at his superior sheepishly. "He was arranging to dump me down the trap. Some sort of a hole they've got where they can drop a body down and hear no more about it. It's out through there, I think. Anyway, that's where he was trying to drag me when his strength gave out. There's some more of his scum due here at any moment from what he says. We shall have to hurry if we are going to get away with it."

"What is there of special note up there?"

"Enough dope to send half the capital to sleep. Grosman seems to have been having a general clear out. There is a couple of lorry loads of the stuff up there on the railway siding and another heap of it there in that storeroom. It looks to me as though he had got the wind up—knew the police were making an intensive comb out right through the district and knew that this place would come in for investigation sooner or later. And so he was trying to get clear with the whole lot before we stepped in. If we can collar the Chinks as they come in we ought to make a clean-up. All the gang is bound to be around here sooner or later, and we can wipe 'em up as they arrive."

"Too late for that now," grunted the Chief. "It would take an hour to get enough men round here to collar all that crowd. We can get them the other way. I want them *all*. And that 'all' includes Lingard and his crowd. You say their stuff is all up there on the railway siding?"

"Yes, sir. Some tons of it I should think. Some of it is still in biscuit form, but they've taken most of it out."

"H'm. That means they are aiming to transport

the whole lot to-night. So much the better. It means that Lingard will be wanted. Don't suppose they can manage it all without him. And they have taken the stuff out of the biscuit for ease of handling. Yes, that's it—they were going to clear out of here without a trace. Well, we've got them this time. We can——” He broke off and suddenly leaned forward, listening.

“Hear anything?” he whispered.

“No, sir.” Manning, too, had unconsciously sunk his voice to a whisper.

And then Grosman, lying on his back, began to laugh in half-hysterical relief. He was staring at the wall in front of him. And on that wall was a tiny electric lamp—and the lamp was flashing. One—two—three—four—five—six—seven—eight. To him the flashes meant salvation, for they told him that eight of his gang of merciless cut-throats were at the doors and were coming in.

The drawbar was raised. They heard the scuff of it and heard the creak of the door as it opened. And in a moment or two there came the soft scrape of shoes coming down through the building. The door was closed, and the tramp of feet came echoing through the gloomy building, treading out an inexorable message of doom.

“Where is the back way out of this?” snapped the Chief.

“There isn't one,” said Manning. “The only way I could find was down the lift shaft. We're trapped. We can't fight that lot—my arms are like jelly. Got a gun?”

“Don't carry one. Come on—quick—there's a way out. Where's that trap?” The Chief was

already running silently out through the main building towards the long passage that communicated to the rest of the storerooms.

“Going to take a swim for it?” asked Manning.

“Nothing else to do. Come on. We shall collar them yet.”

The trap was unmistakable; it was right in the centre of the passage-way, two great flaps that opened outwards.

“I’ll go first,” said the Chief, pulling off his greatcoat. “I’ll sing out to you when I’m clear of the drop.” He wrapped his flash-lamp in the folds of his coat and dropped, all standing, into the blackness below. Manning heard the ponderous splash of his body as he struck the water. Back in the office excited voices were gabbling in Chinese, and he could hear the fierce tones of the captain ordering them to rush out and retake the two officers.

Then a light shone out below. The Chief had broken surface again. The water had not had time to get through the thick material of the coat. He had rescued the lamp and let the coat drift away. Manning could see him treading water, holding the lamp high over his head, and the light was drifting slowly and steadily down stream.

“Jump for it,” called the Chief from below. Manning lowered himself over the drop, hanging on by one hand as he held up the flap with the other. He let go and dropped like a plummet, the trap falling softly back into place. As the flap fell he heard the rapid padding of feet flying round the corner. The next moment a shearing iciness enveloped him, a coldness so intense that it numbed him. He rose to the surface again, gasping. The

Chief was half a dozen yards from him, regarding him with that same humourless smile that was part of his make-up whenever a tight situation suddenly eased.

"How do you feel, old war-horse?" he called. "Damn parky, isn't it?"

Manning's teeth were chattering. He gasped out a stifled "Gosh, I never knew water could be so cold and not freeze." He struck out down stream, and the two of them swam on into the blackness.

The course of the underground stream had been bricked in; it flowed through a sort of semicircular tunnel. The tide was well out, for the tide-line was marked in thick green slime six feet up the wall, and in consequence they were helped by the flow of the water.

They had been kicking out steadily for ten minutes when a faint disc of light slowly began to shine out at the far end—daylight, where the stream made its outfall into old London River. The torch went out. Water had percolated through and shorted the battery. The Chief tossed it away with a grunt. It didn't matter then; they could see their goal—and his arm had become heavy as lead from holding the lamp aloft.

Twice they had to hang on to projections in the wall for a breather. The water was so cold that it seemed to deaden the lungs. But the tiny disc grew bigger and bigger and finally resolved itself into a great arch of masonry. The two men drifted out through it on the verge of exhaustion. Manning recognised the spot, the long, straight stretch half a mile below the Wapping station. A few yards down stream a slab-sided old lighter was moored. They

drifted down to it and hung on to the mooring lines.

“Don’t want to excite too much attention,” said the Chief. His jaws were stiff with the cold, and he could hardly speak. “When do the boats run?”

“Ought to be one every half an hour, sir. But we don’t keep to a time-table. There’ll be one along in a minute. I’ll give her a hail.”

They waited another ten minutes in the numbing cold, and then a motor-boat came chugging down river, coming gently down on the ebbing tide. Manning sent a low call over the water, an oddly pitched note that carried with remarkable clarity and was known to the river men.

The sergeant in the boat heard it and wheeled. Manning waved to him, and in a few minutes they were in the boat heading back to Wapping Station.

The Chief set about organising the raid before he had got his wet clothes off. He called for forty men from Headquarters to break in and hold the warehouse in Gunn Lane.

“Send them down in Flying Squad vans,” he ordered over the telephone. “Manning will meet them at the top of the Lane and will take charge. Arrest every man who enters and hold them till I get there. I’ll be through again in a few minutes with full instructions.”

But those instructions never matured. He had hardly put the instrument down when there came another violent peal on the bell.

“That the Chief?” said a hurried voice. “About that place in Gunn Lane. The raid’s off. They’ve fired it.”

“What?”

“Message just come through from the fire station. Place is a blazing inferno. Nothing can hold it. They’ve sent out a district call, and there’s a dozen engines on the way. But they say it’s hopeless. The building’s as old as Adam—more than half wood. And the timber is rotten as mush. They will have a fierce time saving the surrounding property.”

“Damn!” breathed the Chief. “Are you sure it’s as bad as you say?”

“According to the official fire report, it looks as though a general call will go out if a bit of wind springs up. All the buildings round there are just made for a fire. Ought to have been condemned years ago.”

The Chief turned wearily from the phone. “Well, what do you know about that?” he said.

He climbed into a spare rig of Manning’s that fitted him nowhere and hurried down to the scene of the fire. There was no hope from the first. Long before he reached Gunn Lane he saw the effects. A great column of black smoke was going up to the sky in a high, wide mushroom, and the ominous roar of the flames could be heard three hundred yards away.

The building burned like old tinder. Gunn Lane was choked with pumps and engines, and the water supply, with so many engines concentrated on it, was utterly inadequate. The brigades got through to the railway sidings and fought tirelessly to hold the flames back long enough to get into the main building and search it. But it was in the main building that the fire had been started. Petrol had been scattered round and lit in a score of places. When the Chief got there the warehouse was like a furnace.

Thirty jets were playing on it, and they had about as much effect as a toy squirter would have on Etna. The place was doomed. And with it the evidence that Manning and the Chief had fought for.

The Chief watched the holocaust with sullen eyes. The Fire Superintendent came out of the smoke and the grime to tell him that his squads had not found a single grain of drug in the whole place. The smoke-helmet brigade had penetrated as far as the railway sidings before the flames had taken hold there, and so far as they could see there was nothing there. They had felt their way along the whole length of the loading quay and encountered nothing. But the smoke was so chokingly thick that they could not see a yard. And ten minutes later the sidings, too, were involved in the volcano of fire. If there had ever been any evidence there it was now lost for ever. Grosman had played him a last savage trump right at the moment of victory.

The Chief went back to the river station. There was just a chance that the trick might be pulled off yet. The post card scheme was up in the air. The evening papers were full of the fire story, for a general call had gone out. For some time it looked as though another Great Fire of London was in its inception, for four other buildings in the surrounding property took fire and the full forces of the Fire Department had to be concentrated on the neighbourhood.

It was impossible that Lingard had not heard of the burning. Even if the newspaper reports had escaped his notice, he was bound to have heard of it from one of his runners. And what would be his position when that post card arrived? He could tell

from the date stamp that it had been posted long before the fire originated. But would he realise that Grosman was calling him urgently, that a matter of such seriousness had arisen that his presence was immediately required? And, knowing that the old rendezvous was now a smouldering monument of red-hot ashes, would he decide to go to the *Yangtse*? Certainly he would need to see Grosman, if only to get posted on the latest developments. There was obviously a big story behind the burning of that warehouse, and it was vitally necessary for him to get the full facts of it.

It was a long shot, but on that one assumption the Chief based his hopes. He ordered a raid on the *Yangtse*, and in doing so he played the craftiest card of all. The raid was a spoof from beginning to end, a dummy raid in every sense.

He knew that Grosman would be openly incredulous if no search was made of his ship after all the suspicions that he knew must have been communicated to the police in the last forty-eight hours. He would suspect guile in his very immunity, and he would shy off like a startled horse.

The raiders came. They put the ship under arrest and they hunted and harried the hull from stem to stern. And they found just nothing. They made a great show of prying into every hole and corner; they went over every bulkhead and superstructure with tap-hammer and test gauge; they questioned every officer and man for hours; and in the end they retired baffled. Manning himself made a half-hearted apology to the first officer for what he grudgingly admitted was an obvious mistake. It was as though the police fully realised they were barking

up the wrong tree, but were rather sorry that it was so. Grosman, the senior officer explained, had not yet returned from a visit to his underwriters.

The Chief allowed the hours to drag. At nine o'clock Lingard received the post card. A detective, posted in the Caverne Diamentée, reported his anxiety when it arrived. Lingard was in the midst of the whirl of what little gaiety was noticeable on the floor at that hour. White puffballs were being flung about. The ones that he caught, with some affectation of hilarity, as often as not contained a five-pound note. The ones he threw in return contained cocaine to that same value. Equally, when he offered a cigarette from his case, the knowing ones knew which white cylinder to take. And when the case was tossed back the payment for that curiously solid cigarette was neatly folded inside. An éclair might, or might not, contain cream; it all depended on the dish from which you were invited to select. He was seen to "lend" a cigarette lighter half a dozen times. None of the lighters ever came back to him—but then, neither did anyone attempt to light a cigarette with them.

That detective noted a round dozen ways in which cocaine could be passed and payment taken right under the noses of a crowd without arousing the faintest hint of suspicion.

But when the post card arrived even the assumed merriment slid off Lingard's face as though a taut elastic had snapped away a mask. Before the orchestra reached the end of the fox-trot they were playing, Lingard, muffled and overcoated, was speeding dockwards in his car.

Blind Rudley met him at the entrance to the

docks. A meeting with Grosman, he said, was dangerous in that crisis. Grosman was on board, disguised as one of his own coolies. The police had searched the ship and had withdrawn. The time was ripe for the getaway. All the dope had been taken away from the ship and from the warehouse. It was all down at the coast by then, being transhipped by friends to a boat on a lonely reach of the Sussex marshes.

Lingard's job was to get down there as fast as his car could take him and get out to sea in the boat. When far out to sea the *Yangtse* would wait on a given rendezvous, beyond the twelve-miles limit. The drugs could then be taken back aboard the *Yangtse* and disposed of elsewhere. It had to be done that way, for Grosman feared another raid on his way out to sea. He was not greatly concerned about the raid, for there was not another grain of drug left aboard, even though they found the hidden compartment, of the existence of which he was positive the police were aware—Grosman having a lurking suspicion that they were playing him like a cat with a mouse.

Rudley gave him a chart showing the exact position on the marshes where the boat lay and giving him the rendezvous. Trusted men were in charge of her, but the captain was not to be given the rendezvous until they were well out to sea. The *Yangtse* was slipping her moorings as soon as Grosman knew Lingard had got his instructions.

Lingard pursed his lips. Already he felt the grim, unseen hands of the law reaching out of the blackness for him. But it was neck or nothing now. Rudley heard the car drive swiftly away. And he

let out a long breath of relief. He had got both ends on the run now.

He whistled softly and Manning came out of the shadows to him.

"That's all squared," he said. "The *Yangtse* has notified the pilots she's slipping before midnight. Grosman is on board—together with the dope. It came aboard to-night in three loads, labelled up as ship's stores; they cleared it from the warehouse in broad daylight while we were having an underground swim. It's all in that hidden chamber by now, and we will collar them with the lot."

"Shall I phone Mr. Essex now?"

"Yes. Tell him everything is ready for him. He is to come to the Wapping station soon after midnight and pick up me and the squad. In that speed-boat of his we can hang down over the skyline till Lingard's boat comes out to pick her up. There are ten other police officers in that hooker, but Lingard will not know that until it's an hour or two too late."

"I'll see to it right away, sir. And the raid on the Caverne? Is that O.K.?"

"Surely. Phone Headquarters and tell them to let it go at eleven o'clock. Lingard will have had time to go back and change and get halfway down to the coast by then. You should find enough stuff there to put him away for years—together with what we get from them when Grosman unexpectedly meets him in mid-ocean. It should be a notable reunion."

It was. The *Yangtse* was given free passage down the old river. Grosman could scarcely believe that fortune could have been so marvellously kind to him. He waited on in momentary dread of hearing that

stentor hail come thundering over the tideway, calling on him to heave to. He was in a sweat of apprehension lest a swarm of resolute men came climbing up over the side and chopped and slashed the secret of the hidden compartment out of the ship.

But the miles slipped by and nothing happened. Shore stations bobbed the challenge at him and he answered with the name of his ship. Grey dawn broke, and he was through the worst of the ordeal. He was out through the river, out beyond Sheerness and heading away for the open Channel.

At noon he surrendered the bridge to his first officer. An immense drowsiness was crawling over him. All the reaction of his fierce drugging and the still more powerful reaction of the nerve strain of the last few hours had worn him badly. He stumbled off the bridge and went down to the saloon.

And a little later a fast Diesel-engined boat crept out on a long echelon to meet them from the coast down which it had been running all night.

It put on speed and came alongside. The first mate recognised Lingard and bawled to him that Grosman was down below, sleeping. Lingard grabbed a rope and hauled himself aboard. The motor-boat immediately put the helm over and sheered off. Lingard was too anxious to get a word with Grosman even to notice it.

And certainly he did not notice the tearing, shearing line of white that was racing up astern, sending up a bow wave that cut into the air in two creaming white arcs, leaving the waters behind her a tumbling seethe of hissing froth.

Then the strident roar of her great engines began to drone on the air, engines going all out in a shining

splinter of a hull that was pounding out fifty knots through the smooth swells. The roar increased to an ear-filling crescendo as the long lean shell came snoring up.

Lingard had gone below, but the first officer turned and stared astern at the flying streak. He got his glasses to bear, but all the *Spindrifft* looked like at that terrific speed was a whizzing core of white crowned with a central silver sheen. By the time he grasped the situation it was too late. The boat was alongside and silent; uncompromising-looking figures were swarming up over the rails.

As her gunwale grated against the *Yangtse*, Essex held her there till his human cargo was out. Then he pushed his mechanic over to the wheel and went tearing up after them. The Diesel boat had closed in on the other side, and the debacle, so far as the Chinese crew was concerned, was complete. Grosman, who had gone through to the Temple of Buddha, did not even know the ship was boarded.

Guns were out, and the crew, dazed with the unexpectedness of it, were standing around with their hands held fearfully over their heads. Essex went racing down to the saloon. The Chief and his squad were in ahead of him. The great sideboard stood gaping wide open, broken and shattered.

He went plunging through. The officers were battering at the second door. It fell in with a crash, the hatchets breaking through the mechanism of the panel with sheer murderous force.

Grosman, cornered, was standing at bay snarling like a rabid dog.

"Get back," he rasped. In his hand was the deadly light-gun.

The sharp crack of a revolver snapped out, and Grosman was dancing round holding a torn hand to his mouth. The gun had been shot clean out of it.

He looked at the hand—and whimpered with a newer and more terrible dismay. The bullet had taken with it the middle finger, taken it off at the roots, the middle finger with that precious gift of a merciful death in the hollow behind the cameo. And then Essex was at him. Grosman saw the sudden vision of the horror and the terror of the long trial, the black cap . . . and that fearful last walk from the condemned cell up the steps in the grey of a dawning.

He tried to get his sound hand at the younger man's throat. But Essex slugged him with every atom of strength that was in him. The mandarin went hurtling backwards, knocked off his heels. The whole weight of his great bulk crashed against the Buddha—and the graven image tottered, canted over with a sudden lurch of the ship, and went smashing to the floor. And behind it, trussed up, gagged and bound, her eyes dilated wide with horror, was the girl. Toby caught her as she fell.

The rest was just the inevitable anti-climax of mopping up. A Trinity House tug was puffing down to them when they got up on deck. On her bridge were the Port Authorities who would take charge of her and take out the piled up masses of drugs that choked the Temple of Buddha. Among the débris of the god was the piece of evidence that finally hanged the mandarin—the broken hilt of the dagger that was taken from the heart of Ulrich Maxick; and on the inverted V of the break was the Chinese lettering of the word "Dawn." Grosman

saw it and shuddered. He was slowly realising that in the West, as well as in the East, Death comes with the Dawn.

* * * * *

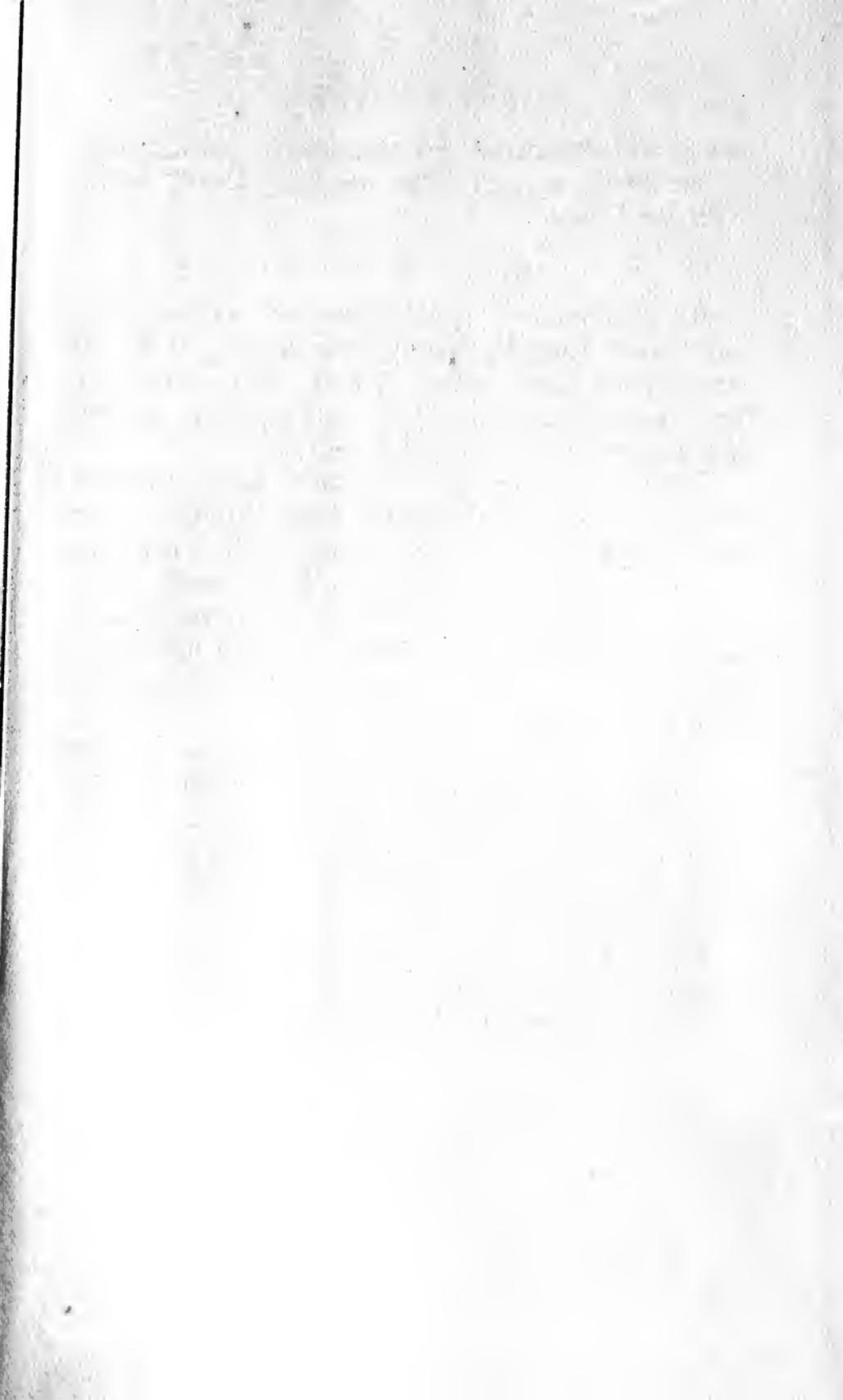
As the *Spindrifft* sped homeward, Hillary, wet but almost tearfully happy, was helping Toby to steady the kicking wheel. Toby's hand closed over hers; something crinkled in it. He gently opened her fingers. A piece of paper fell out.

"That was the only mistake Grosman ever made," she said with a tense little laugh. "It—it was what made me know I could beat him if I kept on. That was the note he pinned to my breast when he first locked me in the Temple. He never noticed it was missing when he came in to drug me again; he noticed every single thing but that. Toby, that little piece of paper saved my life."

He took her in his arms and hugged her against the wheel. "It saved a good deal more than that if you think it out," he said quietly. "And why on earth we should be stuck out here in the wet when there is a perfectly comfortable little cabin along there, heaven only knows."

He motioned the girl along. Then he turned and winked at the mechanic. "Come on, you," he said. "Come and take this darn wheel."

THE END





PR
6037
.M4
D6

Small, Austin J.
Down river

