

THE DEADLY DUTCHMAN

A RICK BRANT SCIENCE-ADVENTURE STORY, No. 22

BY JOHN BLAINE

After attending the International Technological Youth Conference in Europe, Rick Brant's pleasant expectations of a motor-scooter sightseeing tour across part of the Continent are shattered when he and his friend Don Scott find themselves abruptly involved in a deadly manhunt in Holland. For some unknown reason, Scotty is the prime target of a treacherous group headed by a deadly Dutchman. The dangerous chase rises to a smashing climax in the dark waters of a canal in Amsterdam .

In The Deadly Dutchman, John Blaine has written another thrilling Rick Brant adventure packed with high-voltage suspense and explosive excitement.

CHAPTER I

The Letter

Rick Brant was suffering from an acute case of spring fever. Like other periodic plagues, including seventeen-year locusts, smog, and hoof-and-mouth disease, the fever varied in intensity from year to year. Rick's case this year was a bad one.

The staff scientists of the famed Spindrift Scientific Foundation always observed Rick's annual attack of spring fever with mixed interest and amusement. Dr. Hartson Brant, the Foundation Director and Rick's dad, claimed that the onset of spring fever in his tall son was as certain a sign of spring as the vernal equinox, the budding of pussy willows, or the first flight of grosbeaks headed north.

Rick's symptoms ranged from outbursts of energy to complete lethargy. This year, the energy peaks, which Dr. Brant called "Rick's hyper-phase," were fewer. The drowsinesses, which the scientist called "Rick's hypo-phase," were longer and deeper.

A brief hyper-phase had set in when school let out today, and Rick had dissipated the burst of energy by walking home. He scrambled across the tidal flats that separated the island from the New Jersey mainland—it was ebb tide—and reached the Brant front porch before the hypo-phase set in. There he collapsed into a comfortable chair.

Somewhere in the spring-drugged recesses of his mind, Rick was aware that Scotty and the girls should be arriving. Don Scott, with Rick's sister Barby and Jan Miller, had chosen to return home in normal fashion, stopping at the Whiteside post office, then taking a motorboat from Whiteside Landing to the island.

Rick stared through half-closed eyes out across the lawn and sea wall to where breakers rolled in from the Atlantic. The rhythm of the waves had a hypnotic effect. He watched them drowsily, and tried to stir his lethargic mind to wakefulness. He had a problem, which Scotty shared. For the first time within memory, they had no summer plans. They had no jobs. They had no trips planned. There was no Spindrift expedition in prospect. In a few weeks, it would be vacation time, and they would be completely unprepared.

The boy yawned and rubbed a limp hand through his brown hair, as though trying to rub an idea into his sleepy head. Could they go surfing? Sure they could. Right in the Spindrift front yard. Great idea. Carry a board down to the sea wall and call it a vacation. Or maybe a hike up the Long Trail into Canada would be fun. But the very thought of a hike exhausted Rick in his present weakened condition. He closed his eyes. It might be nice to sleep all summer. The scientists could write a paper about a new kind of teen-age phenomenon. "Spindrift youth reverses seasons; hibernates during summer."

At Rick's feet Dismal, the family pup, was curled into a shaggy little ball. Diz was suffering from spring fever, too. As Rick drowsed, the little dog caught a sound and lifted his head. One of the island motorboats was approaching. Normally, Diz would have hurried to meet it, but he was too sleepy. He thumped his tail in symbolic greeting and sighed deeply.

Both Rick and Diz were sound asleep by the time the motorboat occupants came around the house from the cove on the north side of the island. They were a big, husky, dark-haired boy and two slim pretty girls. The boy was Donald Scott, called Scotty, adopted son of the Brant family and Rick's best friend. The blond, blue-eyed girl was Barby Brant, a year Rick's junior. The brown-haired, brown-eyed girl was Jan Miller, daughter of one of the staff scientists.

The trio stood at the bottom of the porch steps and smiled at the sight of Rick sprawled in the chair, his long legs outstretched, his hair mussed, and a look of complete peace on his face.

Scotty chuckled. "I knew that burst of energy couldn't last."

"Let him sleep," Jan Miller urged.

Barby Brant held a letter in her hand. "But this might be important. We'd better wake him. Anyway, it's almost dinnertime."

Mrs. Brant had heard the voices of the young people. She came through the front door in time to hear Barby's last remark. "Dinner in fifteen minutes, Barb." She smiled down at her sleeping son, then turned her attention to Jan. "You're to eat with us, dear. Your folks called. They won't be home until late."

Jan smiled her thanks. Under a bird feeder on the front lawn she saw a bluejay's feather. She picked it up, then went quietly up the steps and bent over Rick. She tickled his nose with the feather. Rick's nose twitched-and at that moment Dismal sneezed.

Scotty, Barby, and Jan laughed. "You tickled Rick and made Dismal sneeze," Barby said.

Rick struggled up out of the depths of slumber. He opened his eyes and looked at the lovely face laughing at him, and realized he had been caught drowsing. He said defensively, "I was just thinking with my eyes closed."

"Of course you were," Jan said soothingly. "Sleeping and thinking. With your eyes closed. What were you thinking, Rick?"

"I was thinking that if I became a hermit I'd get more sleep."

"You'd make a great hermit," Scotty agreed. "You could come out of your cave one month every year, and we could make a pilgrimage to see you."

Barby held out the letter. "We could even make special pilgrimages to bring you your mail."

Rick took the envelope and examined it. "Thanks, Sis." The return address was that of the American Technological Society in Washington, D.C. "Probably a membership drive," he said. He and Scotty received invitations to become student members of a dozen societies a year.

"Can hermits read letters without opening the envelope?" Jan asked.

"It takes more practice than I've had," Rick replied. He tore the envelope open and scanned the letter quickly. His heart jumped into his throat. He read it more slowly, with rising excitement, then jumped to his feet and let out a wild yell that brought both his father and mother to the porch.

"Everybody! Listen to this!" He read aloud, his voice shaking a little.

"Dear Mr. Brant: For the past several years this Society has cooperated in an international conference on Technology and Youth. Members of the American delegation have been selected from young people who developed engineering projects of an advanced nature, and who, in the opinion of their elders, could represent this country ably.

"The U.S. Air Force supplied us with a copy of your final report on your 'Personal Homemade Rocket Lift Device.' It is a pleasure to inform you that our selection committee chose it as one of the five best

projects submitted. We took the liberty of consulting both your school principal and your Air Force project officer, both of whom recommended you very highly. It is therefore with great pleasure that we extend to you an invitation to be a member of the American delegation to this year's conference, to be held in Copenhagen the last week of June.

"If you are able to accept, you should plan to give a paper on your project, illustrated by slides, motion pictures, and-if possible-the project itself.

"After the conference we plan to send our delegates to other countries which have requested such visits. We have a request from the Rocket Club of Leiden University in the Netherlands for a visit from an American delegate competent in some phase of rocketry. Your project fits the requirements admirably, and we would schedule you for the Leiden trip if you become a delegate.

"Travel to the conference will be by chartered plane from New York. After the conference, individual delegates will travel to the various host countries separately, returning home at their own convenience. Expenses while under our sponsorship will be covered fully, including the return trip, but if delegates wish to extend their stays in Europe for personal reasons, the extensions will be at their own expense.

"We think you will agree that this is an unusual opportunity, and we look forward to your acceptance. Complete details will be sent on receipt of your favorable reply."

Rick finished reading and looked triumphantly at his family and friends. They all tried to congratulate him at once.

"Of course you'll accept!" Barby exclaimed. "It's just great, Rick!"

Scotty shook hands wordlessly.

Jan Miller was radiant with excitement. "First you save our lives with that terrific rocket belt, and now this! It's wonderful!"

Rick looked expectantly at his parents. "May I accept?"

Dr. Brant said emphatically, "Of course! You can't turn down an invitation like that, Rick. It's a great honor."

"We'll talk about it over dinner," Mrs. Brant said firmly. "Wash up, now."

Rick's project was a rocket belt he had made from easily obtained parts, except for a few that had to be machined from stainless steel in the Spindrift lab. He had completed the project under the direction of Captain Bob Aster at Indian Springs, Nevada. As Jan had said, the belt had saved the girls' lives during some wild hours in the Nevada mountains, a story related in *Rocket Jumper*. The belt could be taken to Europe, and demonstrated at the conference and at Leiden, if he could obtain hydrazine with which to fuel it. He was sure a fuel supply could be obtained.

He joined in the dinner talk with only part of his mind. The letter had been an instantaneous cure for spring fever, and his mental planning apparatus was in full gear again. By the time dessert was over, he had a plan to propose.

"Out with it," Scotty demanded.

“Out with what?” Rick asked innocently.

“Whatever you’ve been plotting. You buttered the same roll three times. That’s a sure sign of wheels turning in the Brant beezers.”

Jan chuckled. “He’s been plotting how to get you in on the trip, Scotty.”

Rick grinned at her. He hoped he’d never have to keep a secret from Jan. She could read him like a first-grade textbook. “She’s right as usual, Scotty. Okay, here’s the plan. You meet me in Holland when I’m through at Leiden. We’ll rent motor scooters and travel through Holland, Belgium, Luxembourg, and France by way of the back roads. We’ll stay in Youth Hostels and see the towns and villages that tourists never get to. Then we’ll fly home together from Paris.”

“Go, Scotty,” Barby urged.

“Why couldn’t I have been a boy?” Jan wailed in mock tragedy.

“We much prefer you as you are, even if you can’t go motor scootering across Europe,” Mrs. Brant said with a smile. “But Scotty has our permission, if he wants to go.”

Scotty was grinning from ear to ear. “How can I say no to a deal like that?”

Rick waved the letter at Jan and Barby. “Now, if one of you beautiful but unfortunate girl-types will operate the typewriter for me, we can get a letter off right away. ‘Dear American Technological Society: I accept!’”

CHAPTER II

The Ransacked Room

Rick walked through the main lobby of the big, redbrick Amsterdam railroad station and through the doors that flapped back and forth to the rhythm of hurrying feet as homeward-bound Dutchmen rushed to catch streetcars to their homes on the outskirts of the city.

Because he was accustomed to the sprawling American countryside, Rick never ceased to be amazed at the short distances in Europe. On the fast, clean train from The Hague had been government workers, businessmen, university professors, and day students who commuted daily from Amsterdam to The Hague. It was not very much different from taking the commuter trains from Newark or Great Neck into New York -or from any suburban town into any metropolis.

Outside the station, he put his big suitcase down and looked around to get his bearings. The station loomed above him, a clean but not very attractive piece of Dutch Victorian architecture. Beyond the station doors were streetcar tracks, a grassy park, a road, more streetcar tracks, more grass, concrete walks, another road. The mixed transportation ways formed a huge plaza that ended where the streets began a few hundred yards away. He could see a hotel sign: Regina. The hotel faced a canal where glass-topped excursion boats were tied up.

The Regina was where he and Scotty were to stay. The Leiden Rocket Club president, who had accompanied Rick to the train, had said, "You can't miss it." In Rick's experience, those words usually meant that you could and probably would miss it, but for once the phrase was accurate. He picked up his suitcase and began to make his way through the variety of traffic-streetcars, automobiles, pedestrians, and a thousand bicycles.

He couldn't quite believe the conference was over, that his visit with the Leiden Club had come to an end, and from now on he was free to see the country. It had all happened too fast-although it hadn't seemed fast at the time. It had seemed, simply, like marvelous fun. The days were jam-packed with events; then, too suddenly for him to grasp, it was all over.

Starting at New York, the jet charter trip had been great. The American delegates had gathered at Kennedy International Airport, with the usual confusion of a mass departure. Not until the big jet was airborne was there opportunity to sort out faces and names. He clicked immediately with several boys and girls his own age from all over America. Then, at Copenhagen, the group was thrown together with delegations from all over Europe and the Middle East.

Rick had half expected the various nationalities to stick together. Instead, the great mixture of delegates had re-formed almost miraculously, it seemed, into groups with common interests.

Rick found himself a part of a loosely knit aerospace group that included a Swedish boy who had launched his own sounding rockets into the strange, noctilucent clouds above the Arctic Circle; a young Russian who had developed a highly efficient rocket engine using a solid fuel and a liquid oxidizer; a Pole who had created a solid-fuel rocket booster unit for his Italian-made sports car; an Italian boy who had designed and built a one-man sports helicopter with jet-propelled rotors, and a French girl whose project was a tiny, winged glider platform that enabled sports parachutists to soar in gradually-descending flight until it was time to open chutes for landing.

His paper on the rocket belt was enthusiastically received, and his demonstrations, using hydrazine procured by his Danish hosts, were a sensation. When several foreign delegates begged for a flight, the Danes had rigged apparatus for tethered flights and a number of delegates had flown the gadget. A few proved able to handle the belt so well that Rick had allowed them to try free flights. One of them was the French girl, and seeing her lithe, dark-haired figure ascending in the belt had made Rick homesick, because she reminded him of Jan Miller. He planned to keep up a correspondence with several young people he had met. All of them spoke, read, and wrote English to some extent, a reminder that Rick's own language had become the principal means of scientific and technical communication throughout the world. A number of his new friends put him aboard a KLM jet when the conference ended, and he flew to Rotterdam, the airport nearest Leiden, where the officers of the University Rocket Club met him.

Leiden had been fun, too. Rick was awed by the extreme age of the great university, which had been famous even before the discovery of America. But the students were as modern as any comparable group at home. They were so enthusiastic about the rocket belt that he had left it with them, to be copied and flown for a few weeks, after which they would ship it to Spindrift.

Now it was over, and he and Scotty could pick up the next phase, which was motor scootering across part of Europe. Rick stopped to let a streetcar pass, and for the first time wondered why Scotty hadn't met him. He shrugged. As a traveler with rapidly growing experience, he realized that delays, missed connections, lost baggage, and other inconveniences were normal. Probably Scotty's flight had been delayed.

Rick reached the Regina, which was not imposing in any sense. It had definitely seen better days, probably about 1850, but it had been recommended as clean and inexpensive. He walked into the lobby and looked around. The decor reminded him of a parlor in a Victorian TV play. The clerk could have played the heroine's father in the same drama. He even had Dutch-style whiskers—a rim of fuzz extending from his sideburns to under his jaw, with the chin and cheeks shaven clean.

Rick signed the register card and handed over his passport for police registration—standard procedure in many parts of Europe—and inquired for Mr. Donald Scott.

“Yes, Mijnheer Brant. He has arrived.” The clerk took a quick look at the keyboard. “Apparently he has not gone out. I believe you will find him upstairs.”

An elderly bellman took Rick's bag and led the way to the elevator. The sliding door clanged shut and the machine shuddered into reluctant life. On the third floor the bellman turned Rick over to a hall porter, who led the way down a long corridor, around a corner, down another corridor, around a corner, and three doors down to a room at the rear of the hotel.

The porter knocked. The two waited. Rick looked around at the faded hallway with its clean but threadbare rug, dim bulbs in which the filaments were visible as glowing wires, doors all alike in thick, oyster-white paint except for one with a glass panel and a blue light over it. Probably the fire escape, Rick thought.

The porter knocked again, then tried the knob. The door opened slightly. The porter asked, “Mijnheer Scott?” There was no answer. The man pushed the door wide open.

Rick gasped. He rushed inside and surveyed the wreckage of a once-comfortable room. Every dresser drawer was out and upside down. Scotty's suitcase was lying open on the floor; his clothes were in a crumpled heap in the closet. Even the bed linens had been pulled off and the mattresses dumped from the twin beds.

The boy searched frantically, his heart pounding with fear. The room, the closet, the bath—all were empty.

There was no one in the room, either dead or alive.

CHAPTER III

Scotty's Tale

The porter ran. Rick found himself alone in the ransacked room, his heart still in his throat and fear for Scotty erasing all else from his mind. What had happened? Scotty could only have been in Amsterdam for a couple of hours. How could something like this have developed?

At least Scotty wasn't dead or unconscious in the torn-up room, which meant that he was probably very much alive and on the trail of the prowler. Rick calmed down a little and made himself think clearly.

The room was in pretty bad shape, but only because a hurried searcher had dumped everything on the

floor. There was no evidence of a fight—no chairs overturned, nothing broken, no blood. Similarly there was no evidence that Scotty had been in the room while it was ransacked. But if he had gone out, the porter would have seen him. Unless . . .

Rick ran to the hallway and checked the glass-paneled door. Sure enough, it was a flight of stairs. And it was not in sight of the porter's desk. Scotty could have gone out that way. But he would use the normal method, taking the elevator, unless some emergency developed. If he had gone down the stairs, it probably meant that he was after the prowler.

Rick returned to the room and began a methodical search. He picked up a drawer and saw a wallet under it. Scotty's! Rick had given it to him as a birthday present. Bills projected from it, as though pulled out and carelessly stuffed back in again. He frowned. Scotty wouldn't have left his wallet so messed up. But if the prowler hadn't taken good American dollars, what had he wanted?

The porter, a heavy-set strange man, and a uniformed police officer arrived in a body, and the quiet was suddenly shattered by a spate of Dutch unintelligible to Rick. The stranger turned out to be the manager, whose English was fluent enough, but so heavily accented that Rick had trouble understanding him. It appeared that the manager was desolated that such a thing could have happened in his hotel. Someone would pay. And where, please, was Mr. Scott?

"I don't know," Rick replied. "He is gone. I don't know where."

"Ja," the manager agreed. "Please, where do you say Mr. Scott go?"

"I don't know," Rick repeated patiently.

The policeman had a smattering of English. He tried to be helpful. "Heask , where go Mijnheer Scott, *hein* ?"

The porter spoke rapidly in Dutch, and the faces of manager and policeman cleared. "Ah. Mr. Scott not here, /a?" the manager queried.

"True," Rick agreed. "Mr. Scott is not here."

"False," a voice disagreed from the doorway. "Mr. Scott is here."

Rick let out his breath with a prolonged sigh of relief. He shook hands with his pal. "I was scared, Scotty. Where were you? And why the shambles?"

"I was after the guy who did this," Scotty explained. "He ran down the stairs and out the back, and I lost him in the alleys. I searched, but he had vanished."

The manager and the policeman wanted to know what was going on. They had obviously missed Scotty's explanation. Scotty spoke to the porter. "Explain, Piet. I started out to meet Mr. Brant at the station. You remember? I got to your desk, and found I hadn't taken my wallet. I came back to get it, and the prowler was tearing the room apart. How long did we talk?"

"Maybe five minutes, Mr. Scott," the porter said in good English.

"We were talking about the canals," Scotty explained to Rick. "I had written some notes home, and reached for my wallet to get money for stamps, and realized I had left it in the room. In those few minutes

the prowler came in and wrecked the place. I walked in on him. He jumped and caught me by surprise. He went right over me and ran down the stairs. I went after him. "Piet, the porter, translated for the manager and the policeman. The policeman asked, "He steal?"

"I don't know," Scotty replied. "I didn't have a chance to check. I suppose he got away with my wallet. It was in plain sight on the dresser."

Rick held it up. "Nope. It was on the floor under a drawer."

Scotty's brows creased. "Funny. He must have dropped it when I walked in on him."

The policeman had his notebook out, and made it clear with help from Piet that he wanted a description of the prowler.

Scotty summed it up briefly. The surprise of finding a prowler in the room hadn't impaired his powers of observation.

"Height five-nine, weight about a hundred and sixty-five, light-blue eyes, reddish-brown hair getting thin on top, gold tooth upper right, scar across bridge of nose-not very prominent, dressed in blue gabardine, light-blue shirt, black tie, black shoes. Not shabby. Hair cut neatly. Heavy gold ring with a black stone on middle finger left hand. That's all."

The policeman finally got it all down, Piet translating while the manager scowled. Rick realized that the fact the porter spoke far better English than the manager was not according to protocol. The manager didn't like being shown up in front of guests.

The policeman and the hotel manager left, with promises that the culprit would be tracked to earth and suitably punished-promises that the boys accepted with a grin. Piet called the housekeeper on the phone, then started putting the room in order.

Scotty grinned at Rick. "Welcome to the Hotel Regina."

"It was an upsetting welcome," Rick admitted. "What do you suppose the prowler was after?"

"Money. Only why didn't he take it? He pulled the bills out, then shoved them back in again."

"Maybe he heard you coming and was planning to shove wallet and all into his pocket," Rick ventured. "Only you came into the room too fast for him. Wasn't the door locked?"

"I locked it when I left. He must have used a passkey. I put my key in the lock when I returned, and the door opened while I was turning it."

"He heard your key," Rick said.

"Sure. He must have. Only why drop the wallet? He could have held onto it and charged me with it in his hand. But he didn't. It doesn't add up."

"Look," Rick said sensibly. "He must have been after money and valuables. Why try to inflate a simple robbery into a mystery? He probably watched you leave from down the hall somewhere, then used a master key and went through the room like a tornado, not knowing how long you'd be gone. That lock is older than Father Time himself. You could get a key to fit it at any hardware store. And I'll bet the back

door downstairs isn't locked at all by day."

"It locks," Scotty disagreed. "An old spring lock. When I came back in I used a nail file. So technically you're wrong, but actually you're right. For all practical purposes, the door is unlocked. I guess it must have happened the way you said. Only why didn't he stuff the money into his pocket when he had it out of the wallet?"

Rick shook his head. "Probably nervous. Heard you coming and got rattled. Look, if you blow this up into a mystery instead of a simple robbery, you'll complicate our lives. We're here to have a vacation, remember?"

"Wow!" Scotty stared in amazement. "Is this Richard Brant, young detective, who can't let a mystery rest?"

"I just don't think it's much of a mystery," Rick insisted stubbornly. Having taken that position, he stuck to it. Only deep down inside, he was as puzzled as Scotty. Why hadn't the prowler taken the money?

CHAPTER IV

The Five Flies

After the room was cleaned up, the boys sprawled on the newly made beds and talked. The prowler was forgotten in the exchange of news about events since they had parted at Kennedy International Airport.

Rick described the conference, his new friends, and the meeting at Leiden. Scotty responded with details of day-by-day life at Spindrift, and produced a long letter from Jan and a shorter one from Barbby that he had brought with him. They talked until the built-in alarm in Rick's stomach told him it was time for food.

"Hungry?" he asked.

"Aye aye. This will be my first meal in Holland. How's the chow?"

"Depends on the place. Some of it's great, and some is punk."

"Just h'ke home," Scotty observed.

"I have the name of a place in Amsterdam the gang at Leiden recommended very highly. It's on a street called Spuistraat. And if you think that's bad, wait until you hear the name of the restaurant." Rick grinned at his friend.

"Okay. Out with it."

"D'Vijff Vlieghen."

“Meaning?”

“The Five Flies.”

Scotty got up and stretched. “This I have to see. Who are the five flies? Waiters or cooks?”

“Beats me. We’ll find out when we get there. Anyway, it’s very famous. Been in business continually since the year 1627.”

“They should have learned to cook pretty well in three and a half centuries,” Scotty agreed. “Do you know how to get there?”

“Sure.” Rick pulled out a map that had been marked for him at Leiden. “We take a streetcar in front of the hotel, go down Damrak Straat until we get to the Rokin Canal, then get off and walk about four blocks down Spui, and when we see the Singel Canal we turn right and there it is.”

“Simple,” Scotty observed with a grin.

“Very.” Rick took a booklet from his pocket. “And if we get lost, I speak Dutch according to the *Hugo’s Simplified System*. It says it’s indispensable to tourists. Imitated pronunciation throughout.”

“What does that mean?”

“I haven’t tried it yet,” Rick admitted. “So far, I’ve had English-speaking guides.”

Scotty chuckled. “Lots of luck.”

They washed up, put on coats, and followed directions. Rick had ridden streetcars with his Leiden University friends, and he led the way and paid the fare like an old hand. But they missed the first stop at the Rokin Canal, and got off a block later at a street Rick’s map identified as Helige Weg. Following the map, they turned right on Handboogstraat and emerged on Spui within sight of the Singel Canal. It was an interesting walk. The houses were large, and very old, some almost hidden by enormous trees. This part of town had once been occupied by wealthy Dutch burghers, perhaps giants of commerce in the days of sailing ships. Now many of the big houses had been converted to business offices, most of them occupied by professional people like lawyers and doctors.

The Five Flies, as they soon saw, were five houses, all very old. Inside, they found that the houses’ interiors were connected, forming a single restaurant. It was a delightful place, made up of a series of rooms with heavy, age-stained beams overhead, genuine leather covering the walls, ancient ship’s lanterns giving soft light, and relics of Holland’s great days as a sea power all around. The boys were seated at a massive oaken table in a room in which the fronts of vast wine barrels formed one wall. Each barrel, which Rick remembered was properly called a “tun,” was nearly five feet in diameter. The spigots were shining brass; the hoops of gleaming copper.

Scotty was hungry. He decided on *huzarensla*, a salad made of cold boiled beef, hard-boiled eggs, and beetroot served as an appetizer, then the famed Dutch *groentesoep* - a soup made from every imaginable kind of fresh vegetable. Rick settled for an appetizer of tiny Baltic shrimps, lettuce, and a dressing called *garnalenmayonaise*. For an entree, Scotty chose *blinde vink* - sliced veal stuffed with minced veal and covered with bacon. Rick, who loved the tasty miniature shrimp, chose a *garnomelet*, an omelet stuffed with the delicious tidbits.

The famous restaurant lived up to its advance billing. The food was excellent. They topped off the meal with generous portions of a whipped-cream pastry that was rich and delicious, but unpleasantly named *slagroomgebdk*. It sounded unpleasant, anyway, Rick observed.

It was late when they emerged from the Five Flies. But the night was cool and pleasant, and Rick agreed with Scotty's suggestion that they walk back to the hotel. There were few people on the street. Showing off one of his few newly acquired words of Dutch, learned from his Leiden friends, Rick observed, "Not many *voetgangers* out tonight." He pronounced it correctly as "footgahngers."

"Even I can understand that," Scotty said with a grin. "Footgangersequals footgoers, equals pedestrians."

"Right. That's A for tonight's Dutch lesson."

"Here come two. We are not alone."

Rick had noticed the two, standing under a tree. He had seen them as he and Scotty emerged from the restaurant. Now the two were walking toward them. They met under a huge linden tree and the men blocked their path. They were big men, well dressed but with tough faces. One of them spoke to Scotty.

"Where is it?"

Scotty asked, "Where is what?"

The speaker grabbed the boy by the coat lapels and pulled. "You know what I mean. Where is it?"

Scotty objected to being manhandled. He brought his arms up sharply, breaking the man's hold, then followed through with a jab to the solar plexus. The man doubled up, but recovered instantly, swinging a big fist that Scotty evaded.

Rick had stared for a fraction of a second, then realized he had better take a hand. The second man was half a head taller than Rick, and nearly fifty pounds heavier. Rick knew he couldn't fight on equal terms. He launched himself like a charging lineman, shoulder first into the man's stomach. It was like hitting the side of a two-ton steer. The man had seen what was coming, and braced. Rick bounded off like a BB shot from the side of a blimp, and as he fought for balance, a fist like a wooden maul descended on his head. He kept going down, onto the pavement.

Holland whirled dizzily around Rick. He managed to get to his hands and knees, then fell sideways. He realized vaguely that scuffling figures were doing a wild dance around him, and he heard a dull smack, like a baseball hitting the catcher's mitt. Heels caught against his stomach and a ponderous shape crashed down next to Rick.

From somewhere a million miles away a thin, high skirl sounded, and a fast tapping echoed through Rick's left ear that was against the pavement. The man on the ground scrambled to his feet, and the tapping was replaced by a pounding, like a herd of buffalo stampeding.

Rick was hauled to his feet, and Scotty asked anxiously, "Are you all right?" He leaned Rick against a tree.

A voice called out, "*Wat* ist?"

Rick shook his head to clear it. A blue-uniformed policeman, club in hand and whistle dangling from his lapel, was approaching at a run. A bit farther down the block another policeman was hurrying to join them. Rick realized the skirl had been the officer's whistle, and the tapping on the pavement the signaling of his club for help. That meant the herd of buffalo had been the two assailants running off.

"Two men attacked us," Scotty said.

The officer responded with a rapid flow of guttural Dutch. Scotty shook his head helplessly.

Rick tried another bit of his newly learned Dutch, acquired from his Leiden friends. "Spreektu Engels?"

The second policeman arrived in time to hear the question. "I speak a little. What go?"

"We were stopped and attacked by two men," Scotty said. "They ran when they heard the whistle."

The two officers conversed. The one who spoke a little English turned to the boys. "Please, you come."

"Can you walk?" Scotty asked Rick.

"Sure. I'm okay, except for the back of my head." He explored it gingerly. "It feels sore. But I'm not dizzy any more. Let's go with him."

Fortunately the distance was not far. Rick was feeling a bit nauseated from the blow on the back of the head, and his legs weren't steady. Scotty offered an arm, and Rick took it gratefully. They walked three blocks, around a corner and down the canal to a house that turned out to be precinct offices for the police.

The precinct house was brightly lighted and cheerful. The boys waited in an anteroom while one of the police officers talked with a higher-ranking officer, and then disappeared for a few moments. He returned with a tall, slender man with gingery hair, a tweed suit, and a beautifully colored meerschaum pipe.

"I hear you boys ran into some difficulty," the man said in English that was only faintly accented. "I'm Inspector Klaus Vandiveer. Want to come into my office and tell me about it?"

"Thank you, sir," Scotty replied. "My name is Donald Scott, and this is my friend Rick Brant."

The inspector's eyes narrowed. "I am pleased to meet both of you. My office is this way." He led them to a comfortable room furnished with a neat desk and leather armchairs. Motioning them to chairs, he went to his desk and spoke into an intercom, then returned and sat down in another armchair.

"I've ordered some tea. It will help you to relax."

His keen hazel eyes focused on Rick. "You look ill. Are you?"

"Nothing serious, sir. I took a punch on the back of the head. It kind of jarred my brains loose for a minute."

"I see. Suppose you settle back and relax while Mr. Scott describes the circumstances of the punch."

Scotty did so, briefly but completely.

Inspector Vandiveer puffed a fragrant cloud of smoke from the meerschaum. “Interesting. You are certain you had never seen either of the men before?”

“I’m certain.”

“Humph. Neither of the two was the man you chased at the hotel earlier today?”

Scotty stared, then grinned. “No, sir. Was that affair reported to you?”

“It was. At first I dismissed it as a typical attempt at hotel robbery. I don’t mean we dropped the case; we are cross-checking the description with other cases at our Central Research Bureau. I mean only that I did not give it any unusual significance. But this incident tonight changes my mind. Obviously it was significant. The first man asked you ‘Where is it?’ The question is, ‘Where is what?’”

“I haven’t the faintest idea what he was talking about,” Scotty stated.

“But he thought you did.”

The door opened and an officer came in with a tray. There was a pause in the conversation while the inspector poured strong tea into blue Delft mugs, then added milk and sugar.

Rick took his and tasted. It was hot, strong, and good. He settled back and sipped appreciatively.

Inspector Vandiveer addressed Scotty again. “Your wallet was intact when you found it. The money had obviously been pulled out, then stuffed back in again?”

“That’s right.”

“Nothing else was missing, even after the room was cleaned up and you checked?”

“That’s right, sir.”

“Humph.” The inspector sipped tea. “So we must conclude that the man who searched your room didn’t find ‘It,’ and that resulted in tonight’s demand for It. You agree?”

Scotty shrugged. “It sounds logical. Or, it would if I had any idea what ‘It* might be.”

“You brought no gifts, letters, or any objects into Holland with you, perhaps as a favor to someone?”

“Nothing, sir.”

“If we searched carefully through your clothing and luggage, we would find nothing?”

“You’re welcome to search,” Scotty said a bit angrily. “I’m telling you the truth.”

“I don’t doubt it. But human memory is fallible, as we policemen well know. Obviously there are men here in Amsterdam who believe you have something they want. What could it be?”

Scotty shook his head.

“Very well. Then let us seek an answer to another question. Why do these men believe you have something you do not have?”

“I don’t know.”

Rick had been listening with interest. The tea had cleared his head and he was thinking again. “Inspector, is there much smuggling in Holland?”

“About as much as elsewhere. Why?”

“Could it be that someone due in Amsterdam today—maybe another American—was bringing something in, and didn’t deliver or didn’t arrive, and Scotty was assumed to be that person?”

The inspector tapped out his pipe with great care so as not to crack the delicate meerschaum. “You think, then, that we have here a case of mistaken identity?”

“Isn’t it possible?”

“Yes. Quite possible. You see, I eliminate as an assumption that you two are anything other than what you seem to be. They spoke quite highly of you at Leiden University, Mr. Brant, and said they had also heard favorably of your friend Mr. Scott. So I do not assume that two young men from a distinguished scientific foundation are party to any plots. I also assume that you are intelligent and would not conceal any attempts to bring packages or letters into Holland—after all, that is done every day, quite legally. So I am inclined to agree that we may have a case of mistaken identity.”

“What else could it be?” Scotty asked.

“I don’t know. Until we have a definite answer, I want you to keep in touch with me if anything unusual occurs. I will give you my card. Meanwhile, there is one more step we can take. We have on file photos—I believe you call them mug shots in America—of most of our Dutch criminals. Would you be willing to go through them?”

The boys agreed that they would. The inspector summoned an officer, and dictated details as the boys agreed on size, probable weight, coloring, and other characteristics of the men who had accosted them. Scotty repeated the description of the hotel prowler. The officer took his notes and departed.

“He will phone what we have to Central Research,” Inspector Vandiveer explained. “They will program our computer to eliminate all criminals who do not come close to the descriptions. By the time we arrive, only those who fit will be pulled out for your examination.”

The boys rode with the inspector to the Central Research Bureau, discussing their plans for a trip the next day, and asking his advice on routes and points of interest. The inspector was a gold mine of information. He even gave them the name of a place where motor scooters could be rented at minimum cost.

At the Central Bureau the computer had already done the sorting. Even so, there was a large stack of punched cards, each carrying the photo of a criminal. The boys went through them rapidly, hesitating over a few, but finally rejecting them all.

“Interesting,” the inspector commented. “Either we are dealing with amateurs, or some of those really clever criminals who avoid getting mugged. Either way, it makes the task more difficult.”

As he drove them to their hotel, the officer said quietly, “Of course, if this is a case of mistaken identity, we have to accept that it is not yet cleared up. You may hear from these people again. They may even become insistent. Keep my telephone number with you. No matter where you may be in Holland, ask the local policeman to phone me. My section of the Ministry of Justice has jurisdiction throughout the country. And if you get any ideas, call me. Agreed?”

The boys agreed without hesitation. At the hotel they thanked Inspector Vandiveer and took the elevator to their floor. Piet was off duty, and the night man was drowsing at the desk. He handed them their key with a grunt.

Rick was tired, and his head ached. He slumped down on his bed and started to undress without a word. Scotty rummaged for pajamas, then stood up suddenly.

“Rick!”

“Huh?”

“They did a more careful job this time. They’re not giving up.”

Rick came fully awake suddenly. “You mean they’ve searched the room again?”

“Yes. My stuff is neat, but it isn’t exactly the way I left it.” Rick groaned. “Okay. Give Inspector Vandiveer ten minutes to get back, then call him. I’m going to bed and dream about ‘It.’”

Scotty grinned. “If you dream the answer, wake up and tell me.”

“That I will,” Rick promised.

CHAPTER V

Madurodam

The two Vespas buzzed along Route E-10, heading southwest from Amsterdam to The Hague, marked on Rick’s map as, “’s Gravenhage.” The day was bright, the superhighway uncrowded, and the countryside interesting. The strange events of yesterday afternoon and last night had taken on the aspects of an unpleasant dream.

Inspector Vandiveer had sent a fingerprint team, which had gone over the room with care, but he had not been hopeful that much would be turned up. Fingerprints of past occupants, the hotel staff, and the boys themselves would confuse things. But it was all he could do. He urged the boys to keep in touch, and to be careful.

In the morning they had checked out, leaving suitcases with Piet and taking only their knapsacks. They planned to spend a few days in southern Holland, seeing the great delta engineering project that reclaimed hundreds of square miles of land from the sea, and other sights of interest. The Hague was the

first stop, and especially the miniature town of Madurodam, highly recommended by the Leiden students.

It wasn't a long trip. From Amsterdam to The Hague was only fifty-four kilometers, about thirty-four miles. Little more than a half-hour after leaving the city of canals they turned from the main highway, and after some searching found the Youth Hostel run by the Netherlands government for traveling students. It was a comfortable old place, formerly one of the outbuildings of a great estate. They checked in and were assigned a tiny room with double-decker bunks. It was Spartan, but entirely adequate and clean.

Leaving their knapsacks at the hostel, the boys mounted their Vespas and followed a road called Waalsdorperweg, past the Haagse Golf and Country Club, past the great Oostduinen Park with its bridle paths and bicycle paths, along other roads and eventually to Madurodam.

Rick paid their admission, and the two walked across the town walls encircling the miniature city and paused with the town at their feet.

Scotty exclaimed, "Shades of *Gulliver's Travels*! It's Lilliput!"

"Looks like it," Rick agreed. Madurodam was Holland *itself*, scaled down so that a five-story building was about waist high. He could see an exact replica of Amsterdam's busy Schiphol Airport, with jets lined up for take-off, motors roaring. Trains, both electric and diesel, ran on tracks around the countryside, hauling Dutch products. There was a large polder—a field enclosed by dikes and kept dry by windmill-powered pumps—with flax growing and the sails on the windmills turning. There was the seaport of Rotterdam, ships loading at docks under swinging cranes.

"Come on!" Scotty said excitedly. "I want to see the people who live in those houses."

Rick chuckled. The miniature layout was so real that one did expect to see people-scaled down to proper size, of course—walking on the perfectly formed streets.

They stopped for several minutes to inspect the ancient Chambers of Parliament, which had its full-scale counterpart only a few miles away in the center of The Hague. There was the Hall of Knights, the Court Lake, the quadrangle of the inner court, and dozens of buildings. They stopped again at a replica of Oost-Voorne Castle, built in the year 1000 on the island of Voorne, then went on to an old fishing harbor which the Dutch called New Harbour because it was rather recent, having been built about a.d. 1600.

"It's incredible," Scotty stated. He waved an arm at the miniature Holland. "How did it come to be built?"

Rick replied, "According to my Leiden pals, the original money was supplied by a family named Maduro. Dutch, but they live in Curacao, that Dutch island in the West Indies. They gave the money in memory of their son. He was an officer in the Dutch Hussars in the Second World War. I guess he did something heroic and got decorated. Then, later, he was captured by the Germans and died in the horror camp at Dachau. So this is his monument. The profits are used to aid Dutch students suffering from tuberculosis."

"Quite a monument," Scotty observed.

They walked along the street to a canal and stopped to look at the ancient, patrician houses, so much like those they had seen near the Five Flies.

"It makes one feel like Gulliver in Lilliput," Rick said as he put his finger casually on the chimney of a

five-story house. The next instant the chimney brick exploded under his finger. For a moment he stared, stunned, then he yelled, "Down!"

Scotty hit the pavement at the same moment Rick did. He twisted sideways and looked at Rick. "I heard a sharp crack. Was it-?"

"It was," Rick said grimly. "Sounded like an air gun. The slug hit the chimney directly under my finger."

They were protected by the ranks of houses unless they stood up, but they couldn't lie in a miniature street all day. Rick considered, then spoke his thoughts aloud. "If your mysterious buddies sent a sniper, they either sent a lousy shot or he didn't intend to hit me. My hand was outstretched. I'd say the shot was a warning."

"Uhuh. A warning to turn 'It' over?"

"What else?"

"True." Scotty rose to his knees and took a quick look over the line of houses. Rick stood up when Scotty did. His skin crawled, expecting to feel the impact of a slug, even though he was sure the shot had only been a warning.

There were other people wandering through the little city, and they all looked like casual tourists. The boys waited, ready to duck again, but there was no further incident.

Rick let his breath out in a long sigh. "Guess it was just a warning, all right. Scotty, that shot kind of took the charm from Madurodam."

"I agree!" Scotty said feelingly. "Let's get out of here." He led the way back toward the gate. "You know, I hoped we had left this stupid business in Amsterdam."

"Same here." Rick, like Scotty, was keeping a sharp eye out, but saw no one who was suspicious looking. They crossed the town wall, went through the exit, and walked to their Vespas. As they approached, Rick stopped short.

There was a girl seated on his scooter, a slim, pretty teen-age blonde clad in tailored slacks and a sweater. Her hair was a shade darker than Barby's, but Rick was reminded strongly of his sister.

"Pretty girl," Scotty said. "And she's waiting for us."

Her wide blue eyes watched them approach. As they came close, she slid from the scooter and stood up. Her eyes went over Rick, then focused on Scotty.

"Hi," she said. "Are you ready to turn it over, Mr. Donald Scott?"

Rick looked at Scotty. His pal's jaw sagged a little in surprise, but he recovered quickly. "Turn what over?"

One loafer-clad foot tapped impatiently. "The information, of course."

"What information?"

The girl spoke flawless English, with a faint British accent. "Look, Mr. Scott, don't play games. That air-pistol shot was a warning, to let you know how easy it would be to put you down."

"Did you fire it?" Rick asked.

"No. I'm that good with a rifle, but not with a pistol. How about it, Mr. Scott? Do you give, or do you get into real trouble?"

"What kind of trouble?" Scotty demanded.

The girl shrugged. "My friends play rough. And they want that information."

Scotty grinned. "I'd like to oblige, but I honestly don't know what you're talking about. I haven't any information."

The girl shrugged again, and walked off. She paused after a few steps and looked back, her blue eyes troubled. "Are you going to hold out?"

"I have to," Scotty said. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"All right. Lots of luck." She walked briskly away.

Rick watched until she disappeared behind a row of parked cars. "Suppose we should have held her and called the police."

"I thought of it," Scotty admitted. "But we'd have lost. She must have friends close by, and if she struggled and yelled, we'd have been swamped by friends and bystanders. Who wouldn't come to the rescue of a pretty girl?"

"True," Rick said. "Only we'd better report this to Inspector Vandiveer."

By the time they worked out the intricacies of the Dutch public telephone system, with the aid of a helpful passer-by, considerable time had passed, and the inspector's line was busy. They walked the streets of The Hague for a half-hour, then tried again. The inspector was out. They walked through the Chambers of Parliament, the originals of those seen at Madurodam, then tried again. This time they got Vandiveer. He listened to Scotty's story, then commented:

"An interesting development. It shows clearly that our assumption of mistaken identity was wrong. You agree?"

"Not necessarily," Scotty replied. "Perhaps they had no name, and got mine from the hotel."

"Before or after your room was searched? No, Mr. Scott. The probabilities are against it. I have been uneasy about this since yesterday. Why choose you out of all the American tourists in Amsterdam?"

Rick had been listening, his ear close to Scotty's. "Makes sense," he whispered.

"We're with you, Inspector. But I still don't know what this is all about. I have nothing anyone could want."

"Well, someone thinks you have-you and not some unknown stranger. Are you returning to Amsterdam

?”

“We can come back any time. We planned to spend a couple of days in the south.”

“Well, don’t change your plans, but do stay out of dark alleys. And if anyone contacts you again, as I’m sure someone will, say that you are willing to give them what they want if they’ll tell you what and where it is, and how you were supposed to have obtained it. Agreed?”

“Yes,” Scotty said.

“Very well. And keep in touch. I would offer a bodyguard, but I think that would be futile. You will not be harmed from a distance, I’m sure. It would be silly to shoot you, because it would destroy any chance of recovering this mysterious information. And if you watch yourselves, you will not get into situations where you can be taken physically. If you should, tell them what you know and don’t know. Don’t try to hold out. Be completely honest and they may be convinced. Also, you may pick up some leads that will help me get them.”

As they walked through The Hague, keeping to the main streets, Rick dwelt on the mystery. “Of course the inspector was right. It would be futile to assign a bodyguard. At least it would be from his point of view.”

Scotty chuckled. “Meaning that we continue as bait until something definite happens? A bodyguard would keep the cats away from the mice.”

“That’s the idea. Are you getting hungry?”

“Yes,” Scotty replied promptly.

They had breakfasted late and skipped lunch. Now it was approaching dinnertime. Rick took out his notebook and checked. “There’s a restaurant my friends at Leiden recommended. Saur’s. It must be near here.”

It was not far from the Chambers of Parliament and the American Embassy. Saur’s was upstairs in an old building, the entrance marked by a neon sign in the shape of a lobster. They dined on fillet of Rhine River salmon wrapped in fillet of North Sea sole, poached and covered with Rarnaise sauce, with white asparagus on the side. It was superb food, better even than the Five Flies. Then, well-fed and happy, they made their way back to the Youth Hostel.

For a while Rick read the literature they had picked up during the day, written for tourists in English, Dutch, German, and French, then washed and got into bed. It was early, but he was tired. He drifted off into a sound sleep. Scotty was already asleep in the top bunk.

Rick awoke with a feeling of acute danger. He opened his eyes and blinked at daylight flooding through the window, then he gasped. Bending over him was a skinny youth with long, dirty blond hair and a skimpy beard. He wore a black leather jacket, and black shirt open at the neck with dirty T-shirt showing. In his hand was what Europeans called a flick-knife, known in America as a switchblade. The knife was held at Rick’s throat.

Rick stiffened.

“So easy,” the knife-holder whispered. “Easy to chop the t’roat, *hein*? Tell Scott. Him.” He jerked his

free hand upward. “We want what he has. If he not give , we chop you./a?” He grinned wolfishly, turned, and was gone in one jump. The door closed softly behind him.

“Tell Scott we want what he has,” the knife-holder whispered

It was useless to follow. The youth wouldn't let himself be caught, and he had a knife. Rick lay still, sweating. “So easy,” he repeated to himself. They had locked the door, and so what? Locks on doors were to keep honest people out, he had heard it said. They didn't bar thieves and cutthroats. He could testify to that.

CHAPTER VI

The Unknown Danger

Rick and Scotty cleaned up and dressed in silence, both deep in thought. The one thing they had going for them, Rick decided, was that killing Scotty wouldn't get the unknown enemies the information he supposedly held. He also had to admit that the same reasoning did not necessarily apply to him. Scotty was the key; Rick Brant was incidental. If he got in the way . . . well, the air-pistol shot at Madurodam and the knife at his throat this morning showed how easily he could be removed.

What were the unknowns after? What was the mysterious “It”?

There wasn't a single clue.

Scotty broke into his train of thought. “Ready to go? I'm hungry.”

“Okay. Lead on.” Rick slung his knapsack over his shoulder by one strap and followed Scotty into brilliant sunlight. For a moment he blinked, then stared. The pretty teen-ager who had waited on the Vespa was leaning against a tree, just outside the door. She gave them a big smile and held out a slim hand to Scotty.

“Are you ready to give it to me?”

Scotty shook his head. “I'd like to, but I don't know what it is. Tell your friends that. So far as I know, I have nothing that belongs to them. If they can identify it and tell me where it is, I'll gladly turn it over. Okay?”

The girl's smile vanished. She looked very grave. Her blue eyes surveyed Scotty with something very like sadness. “You're cute,” she stated. “You're much too cute to be cut up over something silly like this. Why don't you give it to me?”

Rick could see Scotty was making a great effort to keep his patience. “I can't, because I don't know what it is. Understand? I do not know! Tell your friends that.”

She turned and walked away from them, not hurrying. For a moment Rick was tempted to run and grab her, to hold her while Scotty called the police. But yesterday's reasons still held good. Probably

somewhere close by the hoodlum with long hair was waiting for the girl, and he undoubtedly had friends with him. They couldn't hold her without a fight, and Rick didn't think it was worth it. There was no grounds for police action. She had broken no laws.

"Let's eat," he said. Scotty stopped staring after the girl and joined him. They went into a small restaurant attached to the hostel and ordered *cafe complet*, the standard Continental breakfast of coffee, rolls, butter and jam.

Rick found a copy of the *London Times* on the chair next to him, apparently abandoned by a British traveler. It was only a day old. The lead story was about "Peril to the Pound." It sounded like an armed attack on a dog pound, but it was only about the pound sterling, which was often in peril in the misty realms of international finance. He noted that a Member of Parliament had again raised the age-old question of whether the London police should carry weapons. It had been raised many times before, always with the same ending. British opinion refused to allow armed police. Rick thought British criminal opinion probably agreed with the majority. He also noted - apropos of crime - that a man who had dropped dead of a heart attack at Orly Airport in Paris had been identified as a notorious jewel thief named Rilke van Hooch. Rick grinned at the name, remembering that hooch was once the slang name for liquor in America. He wondered if there was any connection between the out-of-date slang and the odd Dutch name.

The sports section was much more interesting. Test Matches were being held between Australia and Britain. He gathered that said Test Matches were roughly the equivalent of the World Series, only in cricket.

"Hey, Scotty! Ever see cricket played?"

"Once. Why?"

"It says here that Australia scored only seventy-three runs in three innings. All due to the skill of a man named Abelard Foote-Cummings, who was the British bowler. Sounds like a cross between basketball and tenpins."

Scotty chuckled. "Don't try to solve the mysteries of cricket by reading a newspaper. You have to be led through the maze by an expert, and then you only get confused."

"I believe it." Rick put the paper down as their breakfast arrived. He looked at his friend shrewdly. "You've been pretty quiet, buddy. And I'll bet it isn't that girl on your mind, even if she does think you're cute."

"She's pretty cute herself," Scotty said with a grin. "I think she'd be sorry to see my blood all over Holland. But you're right. I was beginning to wonder if this is merely a case of misunderstanding. Maybe somebody put the finger on me by mistake somewhere along the line. Otherwise, why should they be so persistent?"

"You've gone over every possibility?" Rick asked.

"Sure. A dozen times. And I've gone through my clothes and baggage that many times, too. I even felt the seams and the suitcase handle to be sure there was no tampering. It's a mistake, all right. But how did it happen?"

Rick shrugged. "Maybe some bird dog for the gang pointed out the right guy, but the one for whom he

was doing the pointing thought it was you he was pointing at. The big question is, What do we do about it? Leave Holland?"

"I don't think it would make much difference. It's a gang. So far, we've seen the hotel prowler, the two who attacked us, the girl, and your buddy with the sticker. There must be others. None of those we've seen looked a bit like a gang boss. I'll bet the gang could follow us into Belgium or Germany, and we'd never know they were around until they pounced."

Rick shuddered. "Watch your language. It reminds me of a cat with a mouse."

"We've got a cat on our side, too," Scotty reminded him. "We'll have to report this to the inspector, and I think we'd better go back to Amsterdam."

"Suits me. Only let's go into town to phone. The only public phone I've seen here is within earshot of everyone in the hostel."

They finished their breakfast, then checked the Vespas over carefully. There was no sign of tampering. They mounted and put-putted off into The Hague.

They found a hotel with a parking area for bicycles and scooters, and left the Vespas there. As they walked up the steps into the hotel, Rick stopped short. A round-faced, rotund little man was just coming out of the hotel. Rick knew that face. For a moment he searched his memory, then his face split in a welcoming grin.

"Mr. Van der Klaffens!"

The man turned, frowned in puzzlement, then gave a shout of delight. "Rick Brant! And Donald Scott! Shades of *Le Requin Fantome*! What brings you to this corner of the world? My word, what a wonderful coincidence that we should meet like this!"

They shook hands all around, and Van der Klaffens said, "Now, you come with me and we will have coffee at my shop. No, don't look so surprised. I am a legitimate man of business now. Please. We must talk, *neen*?"

He shepherded them down the street, around a corner, and stopped at the entrance to a small, but attractive gift shop. He was apparently not only the proprietor, but clerk as well. He unlocked the door, ushered them in, put water on to boil on a hot plate, then turned on lights and raised the blinds, getting ready for the day's trade.

Rick looked around with interest. The bulk of gifts in the shop were of South and West Pacific origin, and those from Indonesia and Malaya dominated. There were dozens of intricate, very beautifully carved Indonesian figurines and heads, batik prints from Java, shellwork from Singapore, tapa cloths from Fiji, along with a selection of Fijian lalis -small rhythm instruments-also typical Maori work from New Zealand, masks made with paua shell eyes, and good-luck tikis in all sizes.

For Van der Klaffens to specialize in Pacific handicrafts was natural enough. Rick and Scotty had first met him on the French island of New Caledonia. They had liked him very much, and so had Rick's sister Barby. It had been with some reluctance that they had exposed him as an operator of a highly profitable confidence game, an adventure known as *The Phantom Shark* -or, as Van der Klaffens had said in French, *Le Requin Fantome*. The Dutchman had spent most of his life in Indonesia, and they had assumed he would stay in the Pacific.

Van der Klaffens beamed as he stirred American powdered coffee into the hot water. “This is a delightful surprise. But somehow I knew we would meet again. You are young men with-how do Americans put it?-a foot that itches? *Ja* ? And the world is small. Believe me, I know this. You are both well, obviously. And Rick, how is your lovely blue-eyed sister? A charming girl. Even when she cut open the pearl I couldn’t be angry with her. She was very brave to do such a thing.”

“She’s just fine, sir. She’ll be pleased to know that we’ve seen you.” The pearl the Dutchman referred to had been the key to the mystery, and Barby’s courage and persistence had brought about the surprising solution.

“You shall give me your address and I will send her a small remembrance from my shop. Now, what brings you to Holland ?”

Rick outlined the reason for his trip, and his and Scotty’s vacation plans. Van der Klaffens congratulated Rick on his achievement, and added it was too bad they had not known of each other’s presence in the Netherlands . It would give him great pleasure if they would use his house and shop as their headquarters.

“It’s very kind of you to offer,” Rick said, “but I’m afraid we can’t stay. We’re going back to Amsterdam right away.”

“Ah, I’m sorry. But no matter. I must go to Amsterdam tomorrow to pick up a shipment of goods from Djakarta . If you are free, we will have dinner together, *neen* ? I know an Indonesian restaurant where *rijsttafel* is served, in the old-time way. A vanishing art. It will give me great pleasure if you can be my guests.”

With a glance at Scotty for affirmation, Rick said, “We accept with pleasure, sir. If all goes well.”

Van der Klaffen’s thick eyebrows raised . “And why should it not go well?”

Rick hesitated, glanced at Scotty, who nodded slightly, then took the plunge. “I’ll tell you, sir, because you may have some ideas. Also, we’d like to use your telephone.” He outlined the unknown danger they faced, confident that he was not making a mistake in telling the little Dutchman, He knew that Van der Klaffens was a con man, but not a gangster, and that he hated violence. Also, he trusted Van der Klaffens instinctively-and always had, at least where their friendship was concerned.

When he finished, the Dutchman was thoughtful. “You need help. I know this man Vandiveer. He is what you would call a good cop, and a smart one. Put your trust in him. I have no ideas about this thing, but I will think about it. Now, use my phone. Call the inspector, and give him my respects. The sooner the police know about the events of this morning, the better it will be.”

CHAPTER VII

Police Protection

The two motor scooters buzzed merrily along a back road toward the ancient town of Delft, southeast and only a few kilometers from The Hague. Inspector Vandiveer had suggested that the boys visit for another half-hour with their old friend and then return to Amsterdam to see some of the sights of that city. The boys had agreed, but insisted upon seeing at least one of the sights in the south, the home of the world-famous Delftware. Vandiveer had approved, provided they did not leave for thirty minutes.

Both Rick and Scotty knew the reason for the delay. It was obvious that the inspector needed a little time to arrange with his office at The Hague for some kind of police protection. As they rode toward Delft, they watched other traffic, keeping an eye on their rear-view mirrors. There were cars behind, but they couldn't tell which ones, if any, were trailing them.

On the outskirts of the town, Rick motioned to Scotty as they approached the Dutch equivalent of a drive-in, and they turned off the road. In front of the refreshment stand they killed their motors and sat for a moment. Three cars passed, two Volkswagens and a Citroen. Three men in the Citroen eyed them as the big car went by, and Rick and Scotty exchanged glances. "Ever see them before?" Rick asked.

"Nope. All strangers. Hey, look at this!" As Scotty spoke, a little Daffodil, an inexpensive Dutch-made car, pulled into the parking area and stopped. There were two men in it, who looked like respectable Dutch burghers. The men made no move to get out of the car.

They didn't look like gangsters. On impulse, Rick walked over, Scotty close behind. The men watched them approach, faces expressionless. The driver was about thirty years old, with reddish-brown hair visible under his felt hat. The other was older, perhaps in his late forties, with gray hair.

"We stopped for a drink," Rick said through the open window.

The driver smiled. "Take your time, Mr. Brant." His English was accented, but quite understandable. "We're in no hurry. But it would be better if you paid no attention to us."

Rick grinned. "All right, Officer."

As they walked over to the stand, Scotty commented, "It's a comfortable feeling to have a couple of bodyguards."

"They look capable," Rick agreed.

A plump matron waited on them. "Two Cokes," Scotty requested. She looked blank.

Rick tried. "Two Cola drinks."

The woman shrugged. "Ik versta het niet."

"She doesn't understand," Rick said to Scotty. He hauled out his copy of *Hugo's Simplified System*. There was nothing in it about roadside stands. He turned to "At a Cafe" section. Coke was not mentioned, but there was a phrase for "bring me lemon squash." "It's lemon squash or nothing," he told Scotty, and turned to the section on numbers to look up "two."

"Go, boy," Scotty said with a grin.

"Just a second." He still had to look up "madam," and "please." He found them under the heading "Expressions." Now to put them all together.

Rick took a deep breath and plunged in. “Mevrouw, als’t u blieft breng mij twee citroenkivast?”

The *mevrouw* beamed. “Ja, mynheer. Met genoegen.” She bent under the counter and came up with two bottles of yellow liquid, which she opened and placed before them.

Rick put a five-guilder note down on the counter. She took it and counted out his change, then beamed again. “*Dank u, mynheer.*”

Scotty chuckled. “Congratulations. You have solved the *Simplified System.*”

Rick took a drink of his lemon squash. It was un-carbonated lemonade, nothing more. “We’re in good shape,” he agreed. “As long as we want to drink lemonade. Just don’t develop a taste for anything else.”

“When I heard you say ‘citroen’ I thought you were ordering an automobile,” Scotty told him.

Rick nodded. “Funny. I never got the connection before. Citroen or citron is lemon in several languages. I wonder why the French named a car for a lemon.”

“Maybe they like lemons. Come on, let’s go.”

Rick finished his drink, bowed to the stand-keeper, and followed Scotty to the scooters. They rode into Delft, parked the Vespas and walked around the town, admiring both ancient and modern examples of porcelain in the color known as “Delftblue,” and in the traditional Dutch scenes and designs. To their surprise, some of the Delft pieces were pink. Mrs. Brant had told them about Delft blue, and they had seen examples in America, but they hadn’t known about Delft pink.

Porcelain, however pretty it might be, was not one of their consuming interests, and within a half-hour they had purchased small pieces as gifts for Rick’s mother and the girls, and felt they had done their duty in Delft. They mounted the Vespas and rode off toward Route 10-E and Amsterdam. The Daffodil, with their police escort, followed at a discreet distance.

The boys checked in again at the Regina, got their same room back, and recovered their suitcases. They ate a light lunch at a restaurant down the block, then phoned Inspector Vandiveer.

“No more incidents?” he inquired.

“Not since this morning,” Scotty reported.

“Fine. Your friends in the Daffodil have gone back to The Hague, but you now have some new friends. Don’t look for them or try to identify them. Forget they’re around and enjoy yourselves. Have you taken the canal tour? Seen the Rijksmuseum?”

“No, sir.”

“Then I suggest both. There are canalboats that leave every half-hour directly across from your hotel. Have a good time and call me if anything develops.”

Rick had held his ear close to the receiver. He grinned as Scotty hung up. “How does it feel to be the cheese?”

“We’ve been bait before,” Scotty reminded him. “Still, I feel more comfortable about it, knowing that some Dutch plainclothesmen are around.”

“Aye,” Rick agreed. But he had a feeling of suspense, as though they were waiting for something. It was almost as though he were holding his breath without actually doing so.

On the canal across the street from the hotel were sightseeing boats, long, low motor craft with glass roofs and big windows like sightseeing buses. One boat was already partly filled. They purchased seats and watched as others got aboard. Probably at least one, and perhaps two, were police officers. It was also possible that the gang was represented, even though all passengers looked like innocent tourists.

The tour took them through the canals of Amsterdam. Some were wide, some were narrow, most were dirty. The tour conductor apologized in Dutch, English, German, and French. He explained that at one time the tides had swept the canals clean. But that Dutch land reclamation in what was once called the ZuiderZee had interfered with tidal flow, so the canals were not kept as clean by the tides as they once had been.

“Just like the Hudson River,” Scotty whispered. Rick grinned.

Some canals went through old residential districts, with magnificent old houses like those they had seen at Madurodam and near the Five Flies. Others cut through warehouse districts, and towering walls of brick. Massive doors of the old warehouses loomed overhead. The tour conductor explained that ships came into the canals and loaded and unloaded through the high doors. Once the ships had been sailing craft, hauled into the canals by barges with oarsmen. Now the ships were merely lighters which took some cargoes off at the anchorage and brought them to those warehouses still in use. Most ships unloaded at modern docks.

The tour went through the modern dock area and out into the harbor proper, then back through more canals to the motor launch’s starting point.

There was ample time to take in a museum. Scotty looked at Rick. “Want to see the old Dutch masters?”

“I’m an innocent tourist,” Rick said grimly. “I’m going to see the sights. Including the old Dutch masters. Who were the old Dutch masters?”

“Not cigar makers,” Scotty retorted. “Snap out of it, Rick. You look like Damocles waiting for the sword to fall.”

“I feel like it,” Rick admitted. “Will you be able to relax before you find out what this silly mystery is all about?”

“No,” Scotty agreed. “But I’m not going to go to bed and sleep, waiting until someone wakes me up with the answer. Let’s go see the great paintings.”

“Lead on, buddy.” Rick wasn’t as ignorant of painting as he pretended. “Incidentally, we’ll see Rembrandt’s ‘Night Watch’ at the Rijksmuseum. Did you notice that we went through the town of Rijn on the way from Delft to Route 10-E? He was called Rembrandt van Rijn, which means from Rijn, so that must have been his family’s home town.”

“I noticed,” Scotty admitted, “but I didn’t make the connection. Glad to see your brain is still functioning.”

“Slowly,” Rick said, grinning. “And not very productively.”

It took longer to go through the museum than it had to see the canals. The big old place was filled with spectacular masterpieces, from the luminous, nearly three-dimensional Rembrandt “Night Watch,” which filled a whole wall, to the fleshy, humorous portraits of Frans Hals .

The hour was late when they emerged, just before the museum closed, and they took a taxi back to the hotel. There was a message from Inspector Vandiveer asking them to phone. When Rick did so, expecting news about the mystery, it was only to receive an invitation to dinner, which the boys accepted with pleasure. There was an hour to wait. They washed up, then spent the time in the lobby, alternately people-watching and examining the Dutch publications at the cigar stand. If they were being observed by either friend or enemy, they couldn’t identify the watchers.

CHAPTER VIII

Night Caller

Inspector Vandiveer escorted the boys to a nearby basement restaurant, which was unpretentious but served excellent food. Rick kept expecting the police officer to turn the conversation to the current mystery, but Vandiveer talked about everything else.

Finally the inspector asked about their friendship with Van der Klaffens. Rick and Scotty looked at each other, and the policeman noted their hesitation.

“My interest is not official,” he assured them. “It happens that I like Van der Klaffens, and I have bought a great many things from him which I prize. We have had many long talks, but I have never asked him about the incident that caused the French police to declare him an undesirable.”

“Did they do that?” Rick asked. He wasn’t surprised.

“Yes. He was ordered to leave New Caledonia , and to stay away from French territory. Also, the police notified us through Interpol that he was under suspicion of running a bunco game.”

The inspector’s keen eyes were amused. “I assure you, his record is clear with us. Oh, I know he did some smuggling in his youth when the Dutch still owned Indonesia , but that is in the past. I’m simply curious. Of course, if you prefer not to tell me . . .”

“Actually, it’s a good story,” Rick said. “Van der Klaffens stayed within the law, but just barely. It was a highly profitable confidence game, very elaborate. I don’t think he’d mind your knowing. Why didn’t you ask him yourself?”

Vandiveer smiled. “Dutch reticence. I’m sure he would have told me, but the subject never came up, and I didn’t want to introduce it point-blank. It would not be delicate. You understand, I’m sure.”

“Of course,” Scotty said. “Tell the inspector the story, Rick. And tomorrow night at dinner we’ll tell Van

der Klaffens that we were telling tales about him, just to keep the record straight.”

“Okay.” Rick related the fantastic tale of the Phantom Shark, and the role it had played in an intricate confidence game that depended on the greediness and lack of scruples of the victim. He concluded, “Actually, Van der Klaffens and his partner did nothing illegal. It just wasn’t very ethical.”

Inspector Vandiveer roared with laughter. “Very ingenious,” he said. “It is what I would have expected from our friend. I got acquainted with him in the process of keeping an eye on him when he first returned to Holland. He has been strictly legitimate, and entirely ethical. And I suspect he finds it more profitable than the shady scheme with the pearls.”

Dinner ended with no mention of the mystery surrounding Scotty, but Rick was sure that behind the inspector’s friendly, calm face his busy mind was working on it. The hint of Dutch stubbornness in the firm chin told him that Vandiveer wouldn’t let go of the problem until he knew the answer.

On the way back to the hotel, the inspector suggested that they make Amsterdam their headquarters for a few days, but not to hesitate to take in the sights. Rick remarked that he and Scotty had enjoyed the Rijksmuseum, but they weren’t really much for museum-trotting.

“Then why not visit Edam, where the famous cheeses are made? Then go on to Volendam. The people there still wear the old-fashioned Dutch costume, wooden shoes and all. It’s an easy trip by scooter. You’ll find both towns on the map, north-northeast of Amsterdam.”

It had been a long, busy day, and they were tired. They thanked the inspector, then said good night and went to their room. As they got ready for bed, the phone rang.

Rick was nearest. He picked it up, thinking the inspector might have forgotten something. “Yes?”

A cool, faintly accented male voice said, “Now that you have left your police friend, I would like to speak with Mr. Scott.”

Rick handed Scotty the phone and leaned close to listen.

“This is Scott.”

“So, Mr. Scott, I give you your last chance. If you want to save your foolish skin and that of your friend, give the message to the girl. If the message is not written down, write it. Your police friends will not be able to help you if we decide it is necessary to extract the information by force.”

“Wait,” Scotty said urgently. “What is this message?”

The cool voice got harsh. “Don’t play the fool, Mr. Scott, or you will become a dead fool.” The line went dead.

Scotty hung up with a sigh. “So ‘It’ is a message. I wish I knew what message. To whom, from whom? I’m baffled, Rick.”

“Same.” The only thing that was perfectly clear was that the gang was dead certain Scotty carried a message. They didn’t know whether it was verbal or written, but they were sure he had it. Why? Why were they sure?

Someone knocked on the door. Scotty got there in one bound and threw it open. The pretty blonde from The Hague smiled at them. She looked cute in a hotel maid's uniform. She held out her hand to Scotty. "Give it to me."

Scotty took the outstretched hand and held it. "I haven't got what you want. This time we'll let you explain to the police what you're after."

The girl shook her head sadly. "Holding me won't help. I know nothing. I was only told to ask you for the message. Besides, you can't hold on to me without hurting me. Also, I'm strong and I'll fight. You're not the kind of boys who hurt girls."

Scotty grinned. He let her go. "You win."

"Please give it to me." The girl was really pleading now. "Please! If you don't, you'll be badly hurt, maybe even killed, both of you. You don't know that deadly Dutchman! He will torture you until you tell. He will!"

She wasn't acting. Her blue eyes dimmed with tears as she looked at Scotty.

"I wish I could," Scotty told her gently. "Really I do. But I just don't know what it is."

The girl studied him for a long moment, then she said, "I believe you. I'm so sorry, because the Group won't believe it. Not after Rick's message." She turned and ran lightly down the hall to the fire-escape stairs.

The boys watched her out of sight, then closed the door and stared at each other.

"What did she mean by after your message?" Scotty asked. "I got no message from you."

"I sent none," Rick said flatly. "Anyway, I gathered that she meant the Group had got the message."

"The Group," Scotty repeated.

"Headed by a deadly Dutchman."

"Call Inspector Vandiveer," Rick suggested. "I'm going to bed. I feel a nightmare coming on."

Scotty was already at the phone. Fortunately, Vandiveer had gone back to the precinct station and not to his home. He listened, then promised to call back. Within five minutes he did so. Scotty took the call, thanked the officer, then turned to Rick. "He's got Central Research tracking down the names, the Group and the deadly Dutchman, but doesn't think they'll turn up much, if anything. His men at the hotel saw the girl. They thought she was just a floor maid. One of them tried to make a date with her and got snubbed."

Rick grinned sleepily. "Anyway, the Group is organized. They knew the minute we came back from dinner and arrived in our room. They had the girl planted in the most natural get-up possible for a hotel. I'll bet the porter never saw her. She must have used the back stairs coming and going, and she knew exactly where to go and which door to knock on. Any doubts that we're under close surveillance?"

"None," Scotty replied grimly. "None at all."

CHAPTER IX

The Airport Ploy

During the early hours of morning, the boys reached a decision. They would allow twenty-four hours for the mystery to be solved, or for the Group to make a move. After that, they would mount scooters and head for the Belgian border. As Rick pointed out, they couldn't waste their vacations hanging around Amsterdam waiting for the mysterious Group to pounce on them.

The first step was to prepare for light, quick travel. They packed all essentials in their knapsacks, put everything else in their suitcases, and carried them to the lobby. Assuring the clerk that they would spend the night at the hotel, they loaded suitcases on the scooters and headed for Schiphol Airport .

At the ticket counter they checked their suitcases through to New York , received their baggage stubs, and went into the airport restaurant for breakfast.

The boys consulted the menu, then looked at each other. Rick grinned. "Out comes *Hugo's Simplified System*. I wonder why they don't print the menu in English."

"Maybe because the national language in Holland is Dutch," Scotty replied. "See if *Hugo's System* tells you how to order fried hominy grits with maple syrup."

Rick chuckled. "I won't even bother looking it up. If we can get eggs and sausages I'll be happy."

A man in a porter's cap approached. He took off the cap and bowed. "Mijnheer Brant? Scott?"

"That's right," Scotty said. "What can we do for you?"

"There has been a mistake. The clerk, he thought you would go with the bags, *neen* ? He will fix. Please, you give me the checks. I will bring them back ten minutes. He needs to make fix the route, *fa* ?"

"How did he make the mistake?" Rick demanded.

The porter shrugged. "His English is *niet* so goof. The other clerk, he hears, but he do not wish to make his friend-how you say?-shamed, so he waits until you go, then he tells."

It made sense. The clerk had had some difficulty communicating. Probably he had routed the suitcases to the next ready room, whereas they had to be marked "Hold" or "Will Call," or something like that for the information of people at Kennedy International Airport . "Okay," Rick said. He produced his ticket, and Scotty followed suit.

The porter took them. "Will not be long. When you finish eating, I will be back."

The waiter had been hovering in the background. Now he left for a moment to seat a tall, thin man who wore Dutch whiskers, the cheeks, chin, and lip clean-shaven, but a fringe of beard running from his sideburns down under his jaw. The waiter gave the man a menu, then stepped across to the boys, pencil

poised over his pad.

Scotty asked, "Do you speak English?"

"Only so leetle , mijhneer ."The waiter smiled his apology.

The thin man with Dutch whiskers leaned across the aisle. "May I be of service, gentlemen?"

"That's kind of you, sir," Rick replied. "We want to order fried eggs and sausages with coffee for us both."

"Certainly."The man spoke to the waiter. " Twee spiegeleimet worstjes . " To the boys, "Perhaps you'd like some fried potatoes? And do you want black coffee, or coffee with milk?"

"We'd like the potatoes," Scotty said. "And white coffee for both, please."

"*Very well. Twee gebakken aardappelen, en twee koffie met melk .* "

Rick smiled. "The trouble with Dutch is that it seems as though I should be able to understand it."

"I'm sure you could learn it very quickly," the Dutchman said politely. "You probably find that the spelling looks difficult, but when you hear the words they sound much like English."

"That's true," Rick agreed.

"Actually, Dutch and English are very close. They both originated with the ancient Low German. In your case, it merged into the old Anglo-Saxon, then blended with many words from the Romance languages. Ours still resembles the original more closely, but many words have the same roots, and even the same meaning."

"That's interesting, sir," Scotty commented. "Actually, it's the *fs* that throw me."

The man smiled. "Ignore them, or consider them as *y's* . I take it you're student tourists?"

"Yes, sir."Rick could see no reason for involved explanations.

"I hope you're getting out into the countryside. That's the realHolland . Seeing onlyAmsterdam orRotterdam is like trying to seeAmerica by visitingNew York orBaltimore ."

"We're doing some touring," Scotty explained. "We have motor scooters."

"Excellent. By all means stop in the villages. The townsfolk are always friendly and helpful. Of course you'll visit Volendam?"

"We hope to ride up there today," Rick said. "And we want to seeEdam ."

"Of course.Be careful, though. They'll overload your stomachs with their hospitality. Cheese is a great food, but only in moderation."

"We'll remember," Scotty told him.

“Incidentally, another bit of warning.”

Rick tensed. “What, sir?”

“You’ll undoubtedly want to buy *klompen* . Everyone does.”

Rick relaxed. “You mean the wooden shoes?”

“Yes. Don’t buy them at Volendam. It is such a popular tourist attraction that the prices have become exorbitant. Buy your souvenirs in Amsterdam . It’s much cheaper.”

Rick thanked him, then asked, “Can you tell us the most convenient way to get on the road to Edam without going back through Amsterdam ?”

The Dutchman could and did, recommending a route that would take them through the extreme east end of the city to the Zee Weg , or Sea Way , and north across the Afgesloten estuary.

Their breakfast arrived and they fell silent. The friendly Dutchman, having offered his services and helped them out, paid attention to his own breakfast. The porter returned with their baggage stubs and assured them that all was now correct. They finished, paid the check, thanked their Dutch friend and left.

As they walked through the main lobby, Rick stopped. “You know, it might not be a bad idea to make certain the suitcases are checked through properly.” He had learned that luggage could easily go astray in international air travel, and he wanted to be certain.

“Why not?” Scotty agreed. “Let’s go talk to the clerk. And we’d better be sure his friend is standing by to translate.”

The clerk greeted them by name. “Something, Mr. Brant? Mr. Scott?”

“We want to be certain our bags are all right,” Scotty said.

The clerk’s eyebrows went up. “But why not? You have them. You can take look yourself.”

A warning bell rang in Rick’s head. “We have them? You mean the porter came and got them?”

“But yes. As you know.”

“You didn’t send for our checks?” Scotty demanded.

The clerk beckoned to his colleague. Apparently Scotty’s question had baffled him. The newcomer asked in excellent English, “Is something wrong, gentlemen?”

Rick explained quickly what had happened. The two clerks conversed in Dutch, then the newcomer shook his head. “The routing was correct. My friend did not send for your two stubs. Do you mean that you do not have your bags?”

“No. We have the stubs, but we don’t know where the bags are.”

Things happened fast. Within minutes clerks, porters, and airport guards were scouring the station, both for bags and the false porter. Someone found the suitcases in a cubicle in the men’s room, and they were

brought to the ticket counter. The boys inspected them in silent rage. The locks had been pried open; the padded handles slit with a knife. Inside every bit of lining had been torn loose. Clothing had been stuffed in carelessly after what was obviously a thorough examination.

The airport officials were horrified, but helpless. They suggested that the boys file an insurance claim when they returned to the United States. A security police guard found straps and lashed the bags shut, then checked them through again. Another security officer produced long forms that had to be filled out for the airport, and more forms for the Amsterdam police. It was over an hour before the boys could leave.

As they walked to their scooters, Scotty said, "Neat. The story held together and the man looked authentic."

"True," Rick agreed. "We should have been suspicious anyway, just as a matter of course."

Scotty shrugged. "Maybe we should. Anyway, we'll know better next time. If there is a next time."

"Smart gang," Rick observed. "The Group is well-organized, and they know every move we make."

Scotty slipped into his scooter saddle. He said, "Let's hope the police do, too." He kicked the motor into life, and Rick followed suit. They headed around Amsterdam toward the Zee Weg.

CHAPTER X

Windmill Refuge

It was a pleasant trip to Edam. They crossed canals and natural waterways more often than they would have crossed intersecting roads in America. The landscape was flat, but well-tended. And always, on their right as they headed north, was the great dike, like a long hill of earth, that separated the lowland from the water of the IJsselmeer, the great sea inlet that had been the Zuider Zee in the days of Hans Brinker and the Silver Skates.

They stopped in Edam to visit the cheese factories where cheeses-like bowling balls wrapped in red protective coverings-were produced in tremendous quantities. Filled with cheese samples and crackers and not at all interested in lunch, the boys headed seaward toward Volendam.

Volendam was charming, a bit of ancient Holland preserved not only for tourists, but because the people wanted it that way. Once Volendam had been directly on the water, and beyond its great dike the water still ran, but only in a narrow strip. From the main street the boys looked out over the Volendam dike to the dike of Markerwaard, a great polder reclaimed from salt waters.

The boys kept their eyes open. There were other strangers in town, and there was a high probability that some of them were members of the Group; others policemen. Many of the townsfolk were wearing the traditional Dutch costumes. The women wore voluminous black skirts, shawls, white blouses, and Dutch caps; the men were dressed in breeches, black stockings, wide belts with silver buckles, and dark shirts. Both sexes wore wooden shoes.

It didn't take long to see Volendam, partly because the boys had taken the advice of the man at breakfast to do their shopping in Amsterdam . They discussed what their next stop should be, and agreed to take the back roads to Haarlem , then go on to Zandvoort on the North Sea , where they would eat a late lunch, actually afternoon tea. They buzzed back to Edam , then cut off on a small secondary road toward the little town of Axwijk . From there, the narrow, blacktop back road led south toward Purmer .

From time to time they checked behind them, but saw nothing suspicious. There was little traffic. "Maybe we've gotten away from both Group and police," Rick called to Scotty.

His comment was a half minute too early. Above the put-put of the scooters they heard a sustained roar, and turned to see a group of high-powered motorcycles overtaking them.

Rick saw black jackets, long hair under a variety of caps, scraggly beards blowing in the wind. He let out a yell! In the lead was a hoodlum he recognized, the one who had held a knife at his throat!

Scotty didn't need an interpretation of Rick's yell. He swung off the road instantly, to the top of a narrow dike that enclosed a polder. The dike was connected to others, the rammed earth barriers forming a series of squares that enclosed fields of stubble that had been growing flax a week before. Ahead, in the middle of the array of low dikes, was the windmill that kept the polders dry.

"Head for the mill!" Scotty shouted.

The two Vespas roared at top speed. Scotty led the way, and as he turned at right angles onto a new dike top, Rick saw the motorcycle gang coming into the polders. The powerful machines could overtake them easily. The only advantage the boys had was in maneuverability, and that wouldn't keep them in front for long.

Scotty skidded and swerved onto a new tack. Rick was hard behind him. Then, taking a long chance on the solidity of the ground, Scotty roared down the side of the low dike and went directly across the stubble toward the mill. The motorcycles were gaining. Rick held onto his grips and fought the bucking Vespa , now and then putting a foot down as it skidded on the spongy ground. The windmill loomed above them, its great vanes turning slowly.

"Let's go!" Scotty cut the ignition, jumped off, and ran. Rick was right behind him. There wasn't time to hunt for a door. A vane swept the ground, a wooden frame on which canvas was stretched like a sail. Rick jumped for it, expecting the vane to carry him up, but his weight was too great! The windmill stopped turning!

"Up!" Scotty yelled.

Rick didn't hesitate. He went up the wooden slats like a jet climbing for altitude and gained the great hub on which the vanes turned. There was a little door above the hub, through which the owner apparently greased the axle. Rick shoved. It swung open, and he went through headfirst. He found himself in a small, wooden-floored room into which the shaft projected. In the middle of the room was a gearbox, from which a second shaft projected downward.

Rick scrambled out of Scotty's way and turned to see his friend dive in after him. At the same moment he heard footsteps pounding up stairs.

He looked around quickly. There was a small side door, perhaps two feet wide and three feet high. That

must be the stairs. He could see there was no way to latch it, and moved quickly on hands and knees to block it with his body.

“Stand aside,” Scotty said quickly.

Rick looked up. Scotty had found a length of timber, about three feet long and two inches square. Rick saw that others were stacked at one side of the room, evidently for repairs, because they were newly cut.

Rick got out of the way just as the door swung open. A dirty mop of long hair pushed in. Scotty moved like a long-ball hitter driving for a home run. There was a sound like a melon dropping on a cement floor and the head vanished abruptly. Scotty shut the door again.

A noise from the shaft door alerted Rick. He got a billet of wood and moved to it quickly. He was just in time. A black-jacket was just mounting the hub, and he held a flick-knife in his teeth.

For a moment Rick and the cutthroat stared at each other.

“Awfully sorry,” Rick said politely, and rammed with his billet. It caught the hoodlum squarely in the chest. He went off the hub backwards, clawing for a hold. He managed to grip the canvas of a vane, and it tore in his hands. He hit the soft earth with a thud.

There was excited yelling from below. Another man started up the vane, and Rick saw still another move away from the mill and pull a pistol from his pocket. Rick drew back. The pistol sounded, and a slug came through the hub door and splintered an overhead beam slightly.

Good tactics, Rick thought grimly. One covers the window while another climbs, probably with a pistol ready. He heard footsteps on the stairs again and said to himself, “They’re rushing us from both directions at once.”

He turned. Scotty pulled the door open, sighted, and launched his billet of wood like a battering ram. There was a scream and the sound of a falling body as Scotty swung the door shut again. He gave Rick a tight grin. “Sitting ducks.”

“With guns,” Rick commented. He stood to one side of the hub door, out of the line of fire. He could see the hub and reach it with his piece of lumber. A grimy hand grabbed the hub. Rick slammed the timber down end first, as though killing a snake.

There was a scream as the hand let go, then the crack of wood breaking, and a dull thud. He shook his head. It was tough on the windmill vanes. That fall had broken one of the framing pieces.

There was excited conversation in Dutch out of sight below, then shots. One came through the window and slammed into the ceiling timbers. Others hit the heavy wooden sides, but didn’t penetrate. A slug came through the wood of Scotty’s door, but the boy was safe behind the heavy construction timbers of the mill. Rick moved back a little, but stayed where he could see the hub. They were safe enough, in spite of the guns, unless one of the hoods got through the hub window or the stair door. Rick knew no one would get through Scotty’s door, and he wasn’t going to let anyone in through the hub entry.

A hand passed the hub, reaching upward for a hold on the vane extending up from the hub. The hand’s owner was careful not to put his hand where it could be hit. Rick got into position and waited. An arm followed the hand, then one shoulder. The man was staying behind the protection offered by the vane structure. Another twelve inches, and he could fire directly through the opening into the room. He was

moving very slowly and cautiously.

Rick estimated quickly, then ran across the small room and searched through the pile. There was a length of timber nearly six feet long. He put down the one he had used, and picked up the long one.

Through the window he could see hand and arm, shoulder, part of the man's chest, and a fringe of beard. The man was protected by the vane frame from a swing with the timber, but the frame was just that—a framework of wood with plenty of space between pieces. The man's chest fitted into one of the spaces like a picture of a target.

Rick ran forward, holding the timber like a vaulting pole. Its end rammed through the frame, into the man's chest, all Rick's supple weight behind it. The man was torn loose with such violence that he went outward three feet before he started to fall. A fusillade of shots blazed through the hub opening, but Rick was no longer there.

Moments later, motors roared down below. Rick hazarded a quick glance, and was in time to see the gang roar off toward the road. Running across the polder toward the windmill were several men, some in farm clothes and some in business suits. On the road Rick saw a big Mercedes, its door open.

He turned to Scotty. "The Marines have landed. Looks like Vandiveer's men and the people who own this mill."

Scotty joined him. The motorcycles had gained the road and were revving up to top speed. The boys leaned out and looked down, waving at the arriving reinforcements. On the turf below were two black-jacketed figures. When they went down the stairs to the lower level a moment later they found Scotty's first victim, still unconscious. The hoodlums outside were conscious, but wishing they weren't. All three were ambulance cases.

CHAPTER XI

Key to the Riddle

Inspector Klaus Vandiveer puffed his meerschaum in the only comfortable chair in the boys' hotel room. He had explained that the Group had blocked his men by staging an accident that kept their car from passing.

Rick was puzzled. "But how did they know where to stage it? We didn't know ourselves what road we were taking."

"How much choice did you have? Three roads. You could have taken the main highway north or south, or the road toward Axwijk. There is a single intersection in Edam. By stationing two cars at the intersection and having the cyclists hide until called, the Group could simply fall in behind you—between you and my men—as you passed. The two cars did, faked the accident, then called the cyclists, probably by walkie-talkie. My men saw them roar by, but were helpless. Fortunately, you weren't. So the Group is now minus three helpers, now in the hospital. We've questioned them, but they know only that they were helping their leader Duif. An all-points alert is out for Duif and the rest."

“If we’d taken a main road,” Scotty said thoughtfully, “they’d have had a bigger problem.”

“Oh, I don’t know. One car to block my men, one to stay with you, the cyclists to run you down, knock you out, and pack you into the car. The highway isn’t heavily traveled. They could have picked their spot. The one thing I don’t know is, how they knew where you were going today. It took advance notice to get their men in position. Of course once you were at Volendam, everything was simple, because there is only the one road from Volendam to Edam. But how did they know to get their forces to Edam?”

“We told them,” Rick explained unhappily. He described the helpful Dutchman who had sat next to them at breakfast. “He’s the only one we told.”

Vandiveer smiled. “Didn’t your mother ever tell you about picking up with strangers? I thought that was standard practice in America.”

“I guess we’re just not a suspicious breed,” Scotty replied.

“I guess not,” the inspector agreed. “No matter. The one important thing is still before us.” He rose and looked at Scotty. “The key to all this is in your head somewhere, even if you don’t recognize it. Find it. Dig. These people have shown themselves too smart and well-organized to make a mistake in identity. You are it. And only you can tell us why. I leave it to you. Call me when you find the solution.” He nodded, and left them alone.

Rick stretched out on his bed. “He’s right, Scotty.”

“I know, but I’ve thought until I’m tired. No one gave me any verbal message, and no one hid a message on me. I’ve gone through my clothes and everything I own time and again. There’s nothing.”

“There has to be,” Rick said. “The only way is to dig it out. Go over your trip until the moment you checked in at the hotel. Start at Spindrift. Somewhere along the way is the key to all this.”

Scotty had a good memory, and was an accurate reporter. Rick knew his pal wouldn’t miss any details.

“All right,” Scotty said as he stretched out on his bed. “The family saw me off. We drove from Whiteside Landing, the usual way. Up the parkways to the Staten Island bridges, across the narrows. Nothing of interest happened. No incidents of any kind. We spoke to no one except the tollgate keepers, and that was only ‘You’re welcome’ when they said ‘Thanks.’ Dad let us off at the airline terminal, then went and parked the car. We waited for him. They all went with me to the ticket counter, and I checked in. We were early, so there was no line. I checked my suitcase through and didn’t see it again until I got to Schiphol Airport. Any questions?”

“Nope. You’re doing fine.”

“Okay. We sat in the waiting room until my flight was announced, and spoke to no one, and no one came near us. Then we walked to the gate. I had Barby on one arm and Jan on the other, and Mother and Dad were behind us. Dad had my knapsack. I was using it as a flight bag. We walked right up to the nose door on the plane. I kissed them all good-bye and got aboard.”

“Who sat with you on the plane?” Rick asked.

“No one. It was half-empty. The plane was actually the second section. The airline had oversold the flight

and had to put on a second one. I didn't know that until the stewardess told me when I asked her how come there weren't more people aboard. The ticket agent had just routed me to the second plane without mentioning it."

"No one talked to you? Bumped into you?"

"Only the stewardesses. No bumps, just food. Anyway, the flight landed at Orly, and I had to take a KLM shuttle to Amsterdam. It was an hour late."

"Where did you wait?"

"In the international transient lounge. You know how it is. Passengers not entering the country wait in a separate lounge so they don't have to go through immigration and customs. Anyway, I bought a bottle of Perrier water and some cheese crackers and relaxed."

"You spoke to no one?"

Scotty hesitated. "To one of the attendants, and I asked a man if I could help him. He was sick. He almost fell once, and I steadied him."

Rick pounced. "All of it! Every single detail! Come on."

Scotty reviewed the wait at Orly, then began to describe it. Only a handful of passengers from his flight were going on the shuttle, and for a half-hour the waiting room had been nearly empty. Then another group came in, people from a Far Eastern KLM flight who were going on to Amsterdam. One of them was a small, very pale man who looked deathly ill. Scotty, an inveterate people-watcher, had noticed him at once. He had bought a postcard, then gone to one of the stand-up counters to write it. Scotty saw him sway and clutch at the counter for support, and the boy hurried to his side and took his arm. The man swung into Scotty's chest, grabbing for support, then steadied himself against the counter.

"Thank you," he said shakily. "You are most kind. But please do not disturb yourself. I often have these attacks. They go away in a moment."

"Shall I call the attendant?" Scotty asked.

"No. I will be all right. Please do not let me disturb you."

Scotty went back to his seat, but kept an eye on the man. He had spoken with an accent that Scotty now recognized as Dutch. The man fumbled in his pockets, produced a packet of cigarette papers, tobacco, and matches. He rolled a cigarette and lit it. The tobacco had smelled odd, Scotty recalled. It was probably a drug of some kind. The man perked up and began writing. He finished his postcard, bought a stamp, then posted it. Scotty watched until he saw the man settle down, then paid no more attention until some time later, when he saw the little man pass nearby, obviously having another attack. Scotty had pointed the man out to the attendant, who had hurried to help him.

"He wasn't on the shuttle," Scotty finished. "So I guess he didn't make it."

"Is that all?" Rick pressed.

Scotty shrugged. "That's all that was unusual."

The shuttle was called in another ten minutes or so, and I thought for a second I was going to miss it because my passport case had fallen out of my pocket. But I found it on the floor next to the chair, and . . .”

He stopped. Rick was already on his feet and running for the closet. Scotty bounced out of bed, too, shaking his head.

“I’m a dope!” he exclaimed. “Holy mackerel!”

Rick emerged from the closet with Scotty’s passport case, taken from his inside breast pocket.

“It has to be,” Rick stated. “You gave him the chance he needed. When you helped him, he swung against you and picked your pocket. Then on his postcard he wrote your name and the flight number and posted it.”

Scotty shook his head. “It won’t wash, Rick. The card was posted in Paris . The Group moved in on me that same afternoon in Amsterdam .”

“You’re used to American mails,” Rick said. “We think they’re pretty good until we see how some of the European countries operate. What kind of box was the card posted in?”

“It wasn’t a box. It was a slot.”

“Uhuh. That means the card probably came to Amsterdam on the same plane with you, and was delivered in the afternoon mail. Ask Piet how often the mail comes.”

“I will. Come on. Let’s see what’s in the passport case, if anything.”

The case contained Scotty’s passport, his World Health Organization vaccination record card, his airline tickets, a stub for the bus trip from the airport to the hotel, a small conversion card for figuring equivalent amounts in American and foreign currencies, and a larger-than-wallet-size color photo of Barby Brant. There was nothing else.

“There has to be,” Rick said flatly.

Scotty began a minute examination of the many pockets in the passport case, removing every shred of lint or paper.

Rick watched tensely. It was the only thing that made sense. The man at Orly Airport had touched nothing else. And Rick was sure he knew who that man had been.

In the pocket marked “Landing Pass” Scotty found a tiny, crumpled piece of tissue. He smoothed it out while Rick leaned over to see, then they grinned at each other.

“A cigarette paper,” Scotty said with satisfaction.

There were symbols on it, a foreign script of some kind. Rick had seen writing like it before, in India .

“It was a Far Eastern flight,” Scotty said slowly. “Do you know where KLM goes in the Far East ? Among other places?”

Rick nodded. "Indonesia. He was Dutch, and there are still connections between Holland and what used to be the Dutch East Indies . Ten to one this is Indonesian script."

"I wonder why he did it," Scotty asked. "Why didn't he call someone? Or wait until his attack was over? He said they only lasted a short time."

"This one lasted too long," Rick explained. "There was an item in the *London Times* I looked at in The Hague . A man who died at Orly had been identified, and the name was so odd I remember it. It was Dutch. The man was a jewel thief by the name of Rilke van Hooch."

"Rilke," Scotty said. His eyes were wide with astonishment. "The girl, She didn't say 'Rick,' she said 'Rilke!' It has to be!"

"It all fits," Rick agreed. "It not only has to be, it is!"

CHAPTER XII

The Message

Scotty immediately called the police precinct station. The sergeant who answered said that Inspector Klaus Vandiveer had been called to The Hague , and was en route that very minute on police business of a confidential nature. The sergeant would try to get a message to the inspector that Mr. Brant and Mr. Scott had important information, but could not promise quick delivery. The sergeant inquired if there was anything he could do.

There was not. Rick and Scotty agreed that they would not entrust the cigarette-paper message to anyone but the inspector. Nothing could be done except wait until he called.

It was nearly dinnertime. They had a date with Van der Klaffens at the Bali House, but with nearly an hour to kill, they settled down to talk over the discovery of the message in Scotty's passport case.

"Rilke van Hooch must have been pretty desperate," Rick said thoughtfully. "The message might never have been found. Why do you suppose he didn't give a clue to the Group about where he had stashed it?"

"Maybe he didn't dare," Scotty replied. "Maybe he was afraid his card might be intercepted. He must have known that the Group would find me and shake me down thoroughly. After all, they didn't know that I was an innocent messenger who didn't even know I had a message. Otherwise they'd have grabbed me at once, without all this business of trying to get me to turn it over."

"I thought you'd made a thorough search of your belongings," Rick said.

"Well, who would have thought of looking in an empty pocket in a passport case, especially when I was sure I didn't have anything! I checked the pocket, and it seemed empty, so I didn't probe inside it for a crumpled piece of tissue."

“I wonder why Van Hooch didn’t write a letter and seal it in an envelope,” Rick said. “He could have given them all the dope in a letter.”

“How did he know he’d have to write a letter? He didn’t have paper and envelopes in his pocket, and the only thing sold in the transient waiting room was postcards. He had to improvise. I guess he knew he wouldn’t make it.”

Rick switched subjects. “Do you suppose the inspector went to the capital on business connected with this case?”

“Maybe, but I doubt it. He must have a dozen cases working at once.”

“Guess you’re right,” Rick agreed. “Listen, we’d better check the map so we can locate this place where we’re to meet Van der Klaffens.”

He found the address on the Keren Gracht Canal and pointed it out to Scotty. “Shall we walk?”

“Sure. We can keep to well-traveled places with lots of people around. Besides, we’ll have a police escort somewhere behind us. Let’s wash up and get going.”

On the way out they stopped at the porter’s station. Piet was just going off duty. Rick asked, “Piet, if someone mailed a card from Orly Airport in Paris in the morning when would it be delivered in Amsterdam?”

Piet answered promptly, “In the afternoon. The mail service is very good. In some parts of the city, like here, we have four or five posts each day.”

As they went down on the elevator, Scotty commented, “That settles it. The card got to the Group not long after I checked into the hotel. They could have located me with a few phone calls. After all, there aren’t many hotels in Amsterdam where foreigners are apt to stay.”

“Were you in the hotel long enough for them to locate you and set up a search before you went out to meet me?”

“Sure. I checked in about two, then took a long shower and sacked out for a while. I didn’t get up and start out to meet you until pretty late.”

They left word with the clerk where they could be reached in case Vandiveer called, then set out for Bali House, keeping to main streets and avoiding alleys. Scotty easily spotted their police escort within a few minutes after leaving the hotel. There were two, he reported, and obviously police officers. He could tell because they wore identical shoes, of a kind that usually went with a uniform. If the Group had tails on the boys, Scotty didn’t spot them.

Bali House turned out to be a converted mansion on the canal, an attractive old place with typical Bali decor, including wallpaper in the ancient batik patterns. Van der Klaffens was waiting for them at a corner table. He greeted them cordially and suggested that they allow him to order. The boys were glad to do so.

They talked at length over numerous courses, starting with delicious hors d’oeuvres, and the Dutchman gave them further details of his exploits with the Phantom Shark, stories they had not heard before. Rick told him that they had given the inspector some of the background, and the Dutchman smiled. “But I

would have been glad to tell him myself. It is the kind of thing that would amuse him. I will give Vandiveer more details next time he drops in to my shop. He is *a* fine man and a brilliant policeman. Had he been out in the islands, our little scheme would not have lasted so long.”

They fell silent as the main course began to arrive. It was the famed *rysttafel*, or rice table, developed by the Dutch in Indonesia. Curried breast of chicken was served on mounds of steaming rice, then covered with nearly two dozen sauces and seasonings. Rick identified fresh-grated coconut, the tiny dried fish known as Bombay duck, fresh ginger, chutney, red peppers, green peppers, pickled peppers, oyster sauce, black-bean sauce, chopped cashew nuts, mango pickles, strips of dried trepang, and pickled banana buds. Then he gave up. When the Indonesian waiters were through serving, their plates were heaped in great mounds. The combination of all the tastes was indescribable, but delicious.

“The world changes,” Van der Klaffens observed as they sipped coffee. “Indonesia was the home of the *rijsttafel*. Now that the Dutch have gone from there, one can get a good *rijsttafel* only in Holland.”

“Let’s not permit the art to vanish,” Rick said with a satisfied grin. “It’s too delicious.”

The Dutchman nodded. “Yes. We will keep the art alive in this country, even if it vanishes from the Far East. But permit me to change the subject. You have not spoken of this mystery of yours. Has Vandiveer found an answer?”

“No, but maybe we have.” The boys had agreed to trust the Dutchman. Rick nodded to Scotty, who described the incident at Orly and the finding of the message. He produced it from the same pocket where Van Hooch had put it, and handed it to Van der Klaffens.

The Dutchman smoothed it out and said, “How very strange. It is in Indonesian, but it makes little sense—at least to me.”

“Please read it,” Rick urged.

“Of course. It says, ‘Brick five up, three out.’”

“Is that all?” Scotty asked incredulously.

“That is all. ‘Brick five up, three out.’ This means nothing to you?”

“Not a thing,” Rick replied. “I’d guess it’s a location for something. Whatever it is must be hidden behind a brick that’s five up and three out in a wall somewhere in the world. But where?”

“And what?” Scotty added. “I guess we have one clue to that. Rilke van Hooch was a jewel thief, according to the paper Rick read. Maybe it’s a cache of diamonds.”

“And maybe not,” Rick concluded.

Van der Klaffens looked at his watch. “It is time for me to leave for home. I must unpack my shipment of goods tonight and mark up the prices so as to be ready for business in the morning. May I take you to your hotel?”

“No, thank you. We’ll walk off some of this big meal,” Rick replied.

“Inspector Vandiveer is in The Hague,” Scotty said. “At least that’s where his office said he had gone.”

“And you want badly to get in touch with him,” the Dutchman finished. “When I get there I will call around and see if I can locate him.”

“We’ll appreciate it,” Rick said.

They shook hands and parted in front of Bali House, and the boys watched Van der Klaffens drive off in his Volkswagen bus, the back loaded with the parcels he had picked up from his shipping agent. Then they began to walk leisurely to the hotel.

The way led along the canal, past ancient houses, still elegant, although many were no longer used as homes. Rick looked behind them and saw no one. Neither the police nor the Groupwere being obvious about tailing them.

As they passed a narrow break between houses, someone hissed at them. Both boys turned quickly, crouched to flee or fight. In the dimness they saw the girl, beckoning. Her whisper was barely audible. “Please trust me. Come quickly before the others see.”

The boys hesitated. Rick remembered the sadness on her face as Scotty had let her go in the hotel corridor, and he made a quick judgment. “Go, Scotty.”

They melted into the shadows. She whispered, “Mr. Scott, take my hand. Mr. Brant, take his.” She led them into the darkness of the alley, stopped briefly, and Rick heard the squeal of rusty hinges. She led them through a doorway and stopped long enough to push the door shut. They were in total blackness, now. Rick put a hand out and felt a stone wall.

The girl knew her way perfectly, because she didn’t hesitate. She guided them through blackness to another door, pushed it open, and brought them into a walled garden. They could see faintly in starlight, and the reflected lights of the city.

“We haven’t much time,” she whispered. “I asked him to give you one more chance. I don’t want you hurt. Give me the information, quickly, before the others find us. Please!”

An idea suddenly occurred to Rick. They couldn’t very well give her the message before checking with Vandiveer, but they could give her something that might hold off the wolves until the inspector’s return. He hoped she didn’t know Pig Latin. He whispered, “Als fay opeday. Tell her, Scotty,” knowing that his pal would catch the “false dope” part, but hoping the girl wouldn’t

“Okay,” Scotty said softly. “Your motorcycle gang almost got us today, and we’re tired of this business. The message is ‘Brick two up, nine out.’”

The girl repeated it softly. “Is that all?”

“Yes. Do you know what it means?”

“No. I don’t really know anything, except that you’ll be caught and tortured. Now I’ll hurry ahead of the others and tell him, and maybe you’ll be safe.”

“Who is ‘him’?” Rick asked.

“I can’t tell you. He’d kill me. But he’s a nasty, deadly Dutchman. I hope you never meet him. Good-by,”

now.”

“Wait,” Scotty whispered. “What’s your name?”

“It’s Gretchen, Scotty. Good-by.”

“Thanks, Gretchen,” Scotty whispered, and Rick echoed the thanks.

“I hope it works out,” she answered. She pointed toward the back of the house in whose garden they stood. “On the right is a door that will take you out on the canal again. I go another way. Good luck.”

They watched as the girl hurried to the back of the garden and slipped through a small break in a high hedge.

“After her,” Scotty whispered. “I’ll go out front and pull the police and the Group after me. Stick with her and find out where she goes. I’ll be at the hotel.”

“Okay.” Rick hurried after the girl. He moved carefully through the hedge and found himself against a board fence. Feeling with his hands, he found a loose board, tilted it inward, and looked through. There was a sidewalk outside the fence. He looked both ways, and saw the girl nearly a block down the street. Turning his shoulders sideways, he slipped through, losing a coat button in the process. Then, staying close to the fence, he hurried after her.

Gretchen walked swiftly and steadily toward the waterfront, in the general direction of their hotel but a bit further north. She didn’t look behind her; evidently the idea that she might be followed hadn’t occurred to her. A pretty confident and self-sufficient girl, Rick thought. A good thing she had been attracted to Scotty. He felt a momentary guilt at following her when she had obviously stuck her neck out to help them, but he pushed the thought aside. She was tied up with the Group. The Group was an efficient, ruthless mob that must be brought to justice. Gretchen was undoubtedly no more than a messenger. She could probably be charged only with being a minor part of a gang, maybe an accessory before the fact. If he and Scotty made a plea on her behalf, chances were that Inspector Vandiveer wouldn’t even bother about her. If ... if they ever did find the Group, or figure out the meaning of the message.

The girl moved from the city proper into the warehouse district, where old commercial buildings were backed up to one of the canals. Rick had to go more carefully now. There was danger that his footsteps could be heard, echoing among the buildings on a deserted street. They had left all other traffic behind.

Rick moved from doorway to doorway, always ready to duck into deep shadows if Gretchen looked behind. And he was careful to be silent. The street was lighted only by ancient gas lamps, set far apart. They did little to break the gloom.

Gretchen turned a corner, and Rick hurried to catch up. Around the corner he passed a vacant lot where a building had been torn down, and he caught a glimpse of a black canal, the water looking oily in the dim light. He wondered how far she would lead him. They must be nearly at the main waterfront by now. It was a good place for a gang hideout, he thought. The area obviously was not a busy one. The buildings were very old and run down. The street was paved with cobblestones; the sidewalk worn brick. He passed under a street light and saw a weathered, painted sign: *Mayrant Padding. Filial- lenen Batavia , Soerabaja , Singapore , Penang , Manila , Calicut .*

The names Batavia and Soerabaja hadn’t existed for a quarter of a century. Rick wondered if the firm of

Mayrant Padding still had branches throughout the Far East and thought the branches had probably been closed long ago.

Ahead, Gretchen walked briskly. Like an athlete, Rick thought. She was quite a girl. He doubted that she was Dutch. Her accent wasn't at all Dutch; it was more British, with a trace of something else. It made him wonder if the Group was Dutch. But she had spoken of the deadly Dutchman, so it probably was. Anyway, he decided, she would never make a good mob girl. Not if she kept going soft over the fate of the victims.

Suddenly Gretchen turned. Rick faded into the shadow of a brick pillar that ran up the front of the building he was passing. She went into a doorway and Rick was alone on the street. He moved cautiously until he reached the doorway. The door was set in a few feet from the entrance. There was no light.

He tried the door. It had an ancient lever handle. He turned it and pushed. The door was locked.

Stepping back outside, he looked up. There was a sign above the door: *Hansa*, 373 Lentestraat. Rick knew he wouldn't forget it. He turned and walked silently but quickly back toward civilization. Now to catch the first taxi he saw and join Scotty at the hotel. He was jubilant, certain that the girl had led him to the gang's hideout.

CHAPTER XIII

The Boys Move In

There was a stranger with the night porter when Rick reached his floor of the hotel. The stranger stepped forward and showed a badge. "Where did you go, Mr. Brant?"

"I went after some information for the inspector," Rick told him. "Did Mr. Scott return?"

"Yes. He is in the room."

"Has the inspector returned?"

"No, mijnheer. He went from The Hague to Rotterdam. But he will be back soon. Maybe before midnight."

Rick glanced at his watch. It was only a little after nine. "Thank you."

"You will stay in now?"

"Yes. At least until the inspector comes." Rick nodded good night and went around the corner to the room. Scotty was seated in the armchair, reading. He looked up as Rick came in.

"Any luck, Rick?"

“Plenty. She didn’t look back once. We went into the dock area and she turned into an old warehouse that backs up to a canal. How did you make out?”

“No problem. I got out on the street and there were our two police buddies running around like crazy, searching alleys and doorways. Two other men, probably from the Group, were watching from near the restaurant. I hailed the police officers. They wanted to know where you had gone. I told them you were doing an errand and would return to the hotel. They didn’t like it, but there wasn’t anything they could do. We walked back to the hotel together. One went off to report and the other one stayed at the porter’s desk.”

“Have you tried to reach the inspector?”

“Sure. He phoned the station from The Hague, but had to go on to Rotterdam. He left word he’d be back as soon as he could, maybe around midnight.”

Rick sat down on his bed. “Now what do we do, wait?”

“Sure. What else?”

“Nothing, I guess. It’s out of our hands now. At least until the Group discovers the information is false. I wonder what the message means.”

“I think you hit it back at the restaurant,” Scotty replied. “Van Hooch stashed something behind a brick in a wall. He was a jewel thief, so the obvious guess is jewels. But it might be money, a safe-deposit key, or nearly anything.”

“If the wall is in the warehouse where I left Gretchen, the Group is probably already tearing the wall down,” Rick said. “I’ll bet it is. If the wall wasn’t at the gang headquarters, Van Hooch would surely have given a location.”

“How do you know the warehouse is the headquarters?” Scotty wanted to know.

Rick shrugged. “I don’t. But it’s a good location for a headquarters, and I don’t think Gretchen would rush to the big boss anywhere but at his main hideout. Big bosses usually stay at the main place and leave the outposts to the hired hands, don’t they?”

Scotty grinned. “I don’t know. I don’t watch television dramas that much. But what you say makes sense. So, somewhere in that warehouse is a wall, which is now being taken apart. If they find nothing behind the brick I told Gretchen about, what will they do?”

“Tear the wall down,” Rick guessed.

“I think so, too. They would think that either we got the message wrong, or she did.”

“Once they have the loot, there goes the ball game,” Rick observed unhappily. “We’ll never know what it was. What’s more, it’s the only evidence Vandiveer can use. If it vanishes, he has no ease!”

Scotty sighed. “I get the message. Okay, put on sneakers and a sweater and I’ll do likewise. We’ll go see what we can see.”

Rick moved, heading for the closet, then stopped. “We’d better leave a note for the inspector.”

“You’re right. Want to write it?”

“Okay.” There was paper and envelopes in the room desk. Rick hurriedly scrawled a note to Inspector Vandiveer, giving him the address, the text of the message, and saying that he and Scotty were going to the warehouse to observe. He sealed the note in an envelope and wrote the inspector’s name on it, then took it down the hall to the police officer.

“This is for the inspector,” he said. “We’re anxious that he get it as soon as possible. If he’s not back by midnight, I think the senior officer at the precinct ought to open it.”

The policeman hesitated. “I have no way to get this to the station.”

“Take it,” Rick suggested.

“But I am supposed to stay here.”

“It is no longer necessary,” Rick told him. “We will not be bothered here in the hotel for a while. We know the Group is busy on something else.”

“Very well. I will take it, then come back. Anyone who comes in must pass the porter anyway. The downstairs door has a new lock and a bar. It cannot be opened from the outside.”

For a moment Rick was tempted to tell the officer that he and Scotty were leaving, but thought better of it. The officer wouldn’t let them go. Rick liked the idea of police protection, but he was also confident that he and Scotty could take care of themselves. Besides, they didn’t plan to be seen by the Group.

Back in the room, he changed his suit jacket for a heavy sweater and put on sneakers. Scotty was already dressed to go out.

“Do we walk out through the lobby, or try the fire-escape exit?” Rick asked. He told Scotty what the officer had said about the new lock.

“The Group may still be watching us,” Scotty said. “If we go out the back way, we may lose them.”

“Let’s try,” Rick agreed.

“Just a sec.” Scotty took the bit of cigarette paper with its message from his passport case and tucked it under the edge of the rug, then he put the case in plain sight on the dresser. “Okay. Just in case anyone decides to make another search.”

They left the room, closing the door silently, and walked to the back stairs, which also served as a fire escape. Scotty knew the way from his first chase of a Group member. They wound down the stairs to the lower level, and faced a door with a newly installed bar and lock.

“I wonder how Gretchen got in with a new lock on the door,” Rick asked.

“There’s an entrance on the side. Used for deliveries, I guess. She probably walked right through the kitchen and came up on the service elevator.”

Scotty slid the bar out of its holders and put it down on the floor, then turned the handle that controlled

the dead bolt of the new lock. The door opened with a push, and they stepped out into a dark alley. No one was in sight. For long moments they waited, but there was no sound, no sign of anyone else in the alley. Scotty led the way down it, then turned into another alley that brought them out onto a side street. They walked toward the railroad station where taxicabs were plentiful. Rick had a feeling that someone was watching, but there was no sign of a tail.

A cruising cab answered Scotty's hail. Neither boy saw the black Volkswagen, parked where it could see both the front and side of the hotel. Its motor coughed into life as the cab moved off. In the alley from which they had emerged, a man collapsed the antenna of his small walkie-talkie and put it back into his belt holder.

Rick leaned forward and spoke to the taxi driver. "Meer Wegen Borstelstraat." Ocean Way and Brush Street intersected two blocks from the boys' destination. That was close enough by taxi. They could walk the rest.

"Good thing you know where we're going," Scotty observed.

"I watched the street signs on the way."

They rode in silence, until the taxi pulled up at the intersection Rick had requested, then he leaned forward again and asked the driver, "How much? - *Hoeveel is het?*" It was one of the first phrases he had learned in Leiden.

"Tweeguilder."

Rick gave the driver the two coins plus a tip. They waited until the taxi was out of sight, then Rick led the way toward their destination.

"Not a busy part of the city," Scotty commented.

"Probably not very busy even by day," Rick replied. "It was probably the center of shipping trade a hundred years ago. Now it's about due to be torn down and new buildings put up."

As they neared the Group's hideout, they fell silent, moving silently but wasting no time. Occasionally they looked behind them, but there were no pedestrians, and only a single car, a black Volkswagen that came down the block toward them, then turned off into a side street.

Rick turned the final corner, Scotty at his side. He paused to survey the street. No one was in sight. He moved swiftly to the door through which Gretchen had vanished. The buildings were in a continuous row, and Rick hoped to find a nearby door that would open. He whispered to Scotty, "I'll check this one once more, then you go left and I'll go right."

He quietly tried the door handle. The door was still locked. As he stepped outside, a black Volkswagen came around the corner. It paused a few doors up the street and a man jumped out. Then it continued on, past the boys and braked to a stop a dozen yards away. The driver jumped out, and he had a pistol in his hand. The boys turned to run, and faced the passenger. He was advancing with a gun extended before him.

"Stay there!" the passenger snapped. "Hands above head. Quick."

There was no choice but to obey. Rick was raging inside. They had been taken neatly, like a pair of

amateurs. Well, they *were* amateurs. This proved it. They must have been followed from the hotel.

The two men came close, but stayed out of reach. The passenger directed, “Hands against wall. Lean.”

The boys knew this drill. They complied, putting their weight on their hands. The passenger frisked them quickly and thoroughly.

“Good. Catch.”

Rick held out his hands and caught the object the man tossed from a safe distance. It was a key.

“Open door. No fast moves.”

Rick fitted the key into the lock. The door opened into a small hallway with stairs running up one side.

The guard gestured with his gun, careful to stay out of reach. “Up. Slow.”

Rick gritted his teeth. The guard was too careful a pro to be caught off guard. They were neatly trapped. He heard the Volkswagen drive off as he and Scotty started up the dark stairs, their captor a careful four steps behind.

CHAPTER XIV

The Deadly Dutchman

It was only a short climb to the second floor. As they moved away from the faint light of the street, the guard produced a flashlight and shot the beam upward. Rick saw a door at the top of the stairs. He reached it, Scotty at his side, and waited for instructions.

“Open. Go in.”

Rick turned the knob and pushed the door. It swung open. He walked into a huge loft, dimly lighted by a single bulb. At the back of the building were great doors, like those of a barn, that he guessed had once been loading doors for cargo that was transferred to and from ships that tied up in the canal. Overhead were blocks through which frayed ends of rope were still reeved. They had evidently been the means by which heavy cargoes were lifted or lowered through the doors. He saw that the doors were fastened together with a single big hook and eye.

On the right a heavy beam, like a hitching rail for horses, stood away from the wall. A heavy iron rod ran its length, and bits of ancient rope dangled from it. On the left two doors were set into the wall about twenty feet apart.

“Move!” the guard ordered.

The boys moved into the loft.

“First door.”

They walked obediently to the first of the two doors, and waited.

The guard yelled in Dutch. The door swung open and bright light flooded into the loft. A man Rick recognized as one of those who had accosted them near the Five Flies stood in the doorway. He asked a question in Dutch and the guard replied. The man in the doorway stood aside.

“In,” the guard directed.

Rick and Scotty walked into a big room that served as a combination office and living room. It was well furnished and looked comfortable. There were four people in the room, but Rick’s attention was attracted immediately to the bewhiskered Dutchman who had been so friendly at the airport. The man surveyed them for an instant, then he whirled on Gretchen, who was standing, stunned, her hand to her mouth.

“Fool!” Whiskers shrieked. “Stupid littlefool to let them trail you here!” He drew back his fist to strike the girl.

Scotty leaped like a striking panther, caught the fist before Whiskers could hit Gretchen, and delivered a single punch. Whiskers had an astonished look on his face as his knees buckled. He fell forward. In an instant the big man near the doorway dove at Scotty, driving him to the floor, pinning him down by sheer weight. Rick tensed to jump, and the guard warned him.

“Stay! Or you die!”

Rick stood very still.

The big man stood aside. As Scotty was halfway to his feet, the big man aimed a kick at his stomach.

“Neen!”

The foot stopped in mid-swing.

Rick looked at the man who had spoken. He was seated behind a massive desk, a once-beautiful piece made of teak, battered and scarred now from a century of misuse. The man was small, pink-cheeked, and white-haired. With a beard, he would have looked like Santa Claus, or a jolly little apple-cheeked elf. But this Santa was not jolly. His light-blue eyes were the coldest Rick had ever seen.

“Let the boy alone,” Santa said in faintly accented English. “Sidney deserved what he got. No one strikes Gretchen but me, her uncle. That is understood.”

Her uncle? Rick looked at the girl. There wasn’t the slightest resemblance. Gretchen was standing with eyes on Scotty, her face pale.

“We speak English, in deference to our young guests,” Santa stated. “You will sit down, Mr. Scott and Mr. Brant. Those comfortable chairs. But do not be misled. It is not your comfort which concerns me. It is merely that I judge you as young men with quick reflexes who are capable of sudden action, and you will not find those deep armchairs easy to get out of quickly. Should you try, Johann will shoot.

He is an excellent shot, and he will aim to break a thighbone. Do we understand each other?”

The blue eyes met Rick's, and he shivered. He had no doubt whatever that Gretchen's uncle was the deadly Dutchman. His cherubic face had showed no expression, and his eyes never seemed to blink.

Both boys nodded in answer to his question.

"Good. It will make things just a little bit easier for you if you cooperate."

Sidneye was stirring, coming around at last. Scotty and Rick had an old-fashioned streak of chivalry that showed whenever anyone tried to use violence on a girl-any girl, not just pretty ones like Gretchen. But when Scotty retaliated, he didn't pull his punches and he could hit harder than Rick.

"Help him up, Kurt," Santa directed.

The big man lifted Sidneye to his feet and helped him into a straight chair. Sidneye swayed and held a hand to his jaw. His eyes were venomous as they focused on Scotty.

"You will remain quiet, Sidneye," Santa stated. "The next time you attempt to strike Gretchen, I will let Kurt teach you some of the finer points of karate."

The merciless eyes swiveled to Scotty. "So, Mr. Scott. You finally decided to let us know that you did have a message from my late friend Van Hooch. That was sensible."

"I didn't know I had a message," Scotty told the man.

"So? Why not?"

"Let me tell you what happened." Scotty launched into the story of his flight into Orly and the aftermath. Rick looked at his pal in amazement. Scotty wasn't normally so talkative. Then he realized what his pal was doing. He was stalling for time.

The minutes ticked by. Scotty had captured the fascinated interest of everyone in the room.

"When Kurt and another man stopped us our first night in Amsterdam, I really didn't know I had the message," Scotty explained. "Then, at The Hague, when we first met Gretchen, I still didn't know. When you phoned me-I assume it was you-and Gretchen knocked on our door a moment later, we were still innocent, and I meant what I told her. If we had had the message then, I would have given it to her just to get you all off our backs."

"And what led you to the message?" Santa inquired.

"It was the fight at the windmill. By then we were convinced that you must know exactly what you wanted and that I had it. Your operations were too efficient for you to make a silly mistake like getting the wrong man."

"I am pleased that you appreciate efficiency," Santa stated. He didn't look pleased. He didn't look anything. He had yet to show the slightest trace of emotion that Rick could see.

"Thank you. Well, Rick made me go over the trip minute by minute, knowing that somehow I must have been used as a messenger without knowing it. When I told him about Rilke van Hooch in the Orly waiting room, we knew that must be it. The other factor was that my passport case had dropped out of my

pocket-so I thought at the time-and I found it on the floor next to my chair.”

“So you arrived at the conclusion that Rilke had planted a message in the passport case.”

“Yes. We found it written on a cigarette paper, crumpled into a tiny wad, and stuffed in a pocket I don’t use.”

“Which explains why a search of your room disclosed nothing. You had the passport case with you at all times.”

“That’s true.”

Santa’s face didn’t show regret as he said, “I regret we have all had so much trouble, Mr. Scott. You see, I was forced to assume that you were holding out, hoping to profit from the message yourself.”

“There was no way we could do that,” Scotty retorted.

“No? I suggest that you still hope to profit.”

The boys stared. Rick demanded, “Why do you think that?”

“You have had a police guard since you left The Hague . Tonight you, Mr. Brant, obviously followed Gretchen here. Then you rejoined Mr. Scott. The two of you then sneaked out-that is the term? Yes, sneaked out, away from your police guard. You came here without the police knowing your whereabouts. I find that provocative.”

“I still don’t see why,” Rick retorted.

“Put it this way. What would be the interest of innocent student tourists, such as you pretend to be? Why, simply to turn everything over to the police and to disengage Innocents would not deliberately avoid their police guards and come to the Tiger’s Lair, would they? I think not. So, you are here for a purpose. My men captured you as you came to our doorway. I suggest to you that you simply intended to ring our bell and demand admittance, in order to put some proposition to me.”

Rick gulped. It was such a logical interpretation that he knew simple protests wouldn’t change the deadly Dutchman’s mind. The man couldn’t know the extent of Rick and Scotty’s curiosity, and how it had directed their actions tonight.

Santa spread his hands. “Very well. Let me hear your proposition.”

“We have none,” Scotty answered. “Except this. Let us go and take Gretchen with us. Then you can do what the message says quickly, before the police arrive.”

Santa again reminded Rick of an animated wax dummy. He moved, he spoke, but absolutely no emotion showed.

“Your solicitude for my niece is touching, and I consider it a very small point in your favor. But I assure you that I am quite competent to look after her interests. Now, Mr. Scott, perhaps you can explain how the police know where to come? We have our sources, and we know of your telephone calls. You have tried to reach Inspector Vandiveer without success. You made no calls immediately before leaving the hotel. You came down the back stairs, leaving your police guard. No, I do not think we need fear the

arrival of the police. What other proposition have you?"

The boys remained silent. Rick saw that Gretchen's eyes moved from face to face, and that she looked scared.

"I take it that you have reconsidered making a sensible proposition. Very well. We will approach the matter from another direction."

Santa paused. His eyes bored into Scotty's. Rick shifted uncomfortably.

"Now tell me, Mr. Scott, what did the message say?"

"We told Gretchen," Scotty replied.

"Come now, Mr. Scott. I do not treat you as a fool. Do me the courtesy of not playing silly games. You handed my niece a phrase. It was too easy, Mr. Scott. And I am ashamed of you for taking advantage of an inexperienced girl with such nonsense."

"How do you know it's nonsense?" Rick asked quickly.

"Simply because you gave it to her without argument, after holding out for so long. This makes no sense. Now, what is the correct message?"

"Why don't you guess?" Scotty retorted.

"I will do so. I will guess that the reference to a brick was correct, and that you gave her the wrong coordinates."

The expressions on the boys' faces must have told him that he had hit the mark squarely, Rick thought. Santa nodded a fraction of an inch. "I thought so. Otherwise you would not have mentioned brick at all. Now, what are the correct coordinates?"

The boys remained silent.

Sidneye leaned forward. "I can make them tell."

"By lashing them to the chairs and beating them? You are a fool, Sidneye. Can't you tell they would not respond to such treatment? A beating could be endured by either."

"I've made others talk," Sidneye grumbled, his hate-filled eyes on Scotty.

"Yes, but not types like these. Come now, Mr. Scott. The exact message, please. I have no wish to become unpleasant. I am aware that Sidneye's methods would not work, but I have some of my own. You would find his much preferable."

The boys didn't answer. Rick choked back a comment and sat quietly.

Santa waved his hand. "This is a soundproof room. Your screams will not be heard by anyone."

Rick saw Gretchen's small white teeth sink into her lower lip.

“Also, it is a cool night,” Santa continued. “I think a fire in the stove would be useful.”

Rick noticed for the first time that the ancient ceramic stove in one corner of the room was more than merely ornamental. It was a lovely antique, finished in hand-painted porcelain. The stovepipe had been hidden from him by the bulk of the stove when he first came into the room and he hadn’t looked that way since. Now he saw that the pipe went from the back of the stove into the wall, tilting upward at an angle to permit a draft. The stove was clearly usable.

“Light a fire, Kurt,” Santa directed.

He addressed the boys. “Have you ever noticed what a poor knowledge of anatomy torturers often show? For example, a hot poker is most often applied to the chest, to the palms of the hands, or to the feet. All places well-cushioned, and not particularly well-equipped with nerve endings in comparison with others. But the backs of the hands, that is a different matter. Of course there is a problem. If the victim fails to speak promptly enough, the tendons of the hand are destroyed. Unfortunate. I trust you will not be so foolish.”

Kurt had obtained kindling and paper from a box. He stuffed them into the stove, opened a draft, and struck a match.

Rick watched as flame rose in the firebox. He began to sweat, although the room was not warm.

CHAPTER XV

The Wrong Brick

Rick looked at the faces around the room. Sidneye was sitting back in his chair with a satisfied smile on his face. He was anticipating the pleasure he would get from seeing the hand that had knocked him out subjected to a hot poker. Rick wished for an opportunity to apply a lighted match to the fringe of whiskers under Sidneye’s chin.

Kurt, the big man, watched the fire, encouraging it with small bits of kindling.

The guard waited by the door, gun in hand and ready to use. His eyes moved from Rick to Scotty and back again. He was all business, disinterested in the fire or what it portended, concerned only about doing his job as guard properly.

Gretchen was staring at her uncle, blue eyes wide in disbelief, her face white.

And her uncle was watching Rick and Scotty, his face as expressionless as that of a stone Buddha.

Rick looked at Scotty. His friend had a half-smile on his face, but it was not a pleasant expression.

The fire settled down somewhat, and Kurt added chunks of wood. “Just a few minutes more,” he told Santa. “When the pieces catch, then we can heat the poker.”

“There is no hurry,” Santa told him.

Rick couldn't resist adding, “No, Kurt. Don't rush. Scotty and I will be glad to wait.”

This brought a grin from Kurt and the guard, a snarl from Sidneye, a hysterical-sounding giggle from Gretchen, and no response at all from the deadly Dutchman.

Scotty gave Rick a quick grin.

Rick glanced at his wrist watch. It was nearly ten-thirty. If only they could hold out for another hour and a half! If Vandiveer arrived beforemidnight , or if the officer in charge opened the message atmidnight , help would be on the way within minutes, arriving just a few minutes later. They would stall as long as they could. He was tempted to introduce a new ploy, but decided the time was not yet ripe. Nothing was happening to them yet.

Kurt took a poker from under the stove. It was a simple rod of heavy iron, hammered into a diamond shape at the end. Rick watched, fascinated, as the man pushed the tip into the glowing coals under the burning wood chunks in the stove.

All hands watched the stove except Santa, who watched the boys. Rick shot a glance at Gretchen. She was obviously horrified at the thought her uncle would use torture. But how deep was her revulsion? Deep enough so they could count on her for help if a break came? He noticed that she had moved a little closer to Scotty, almost protectively.

The minutes ticked past, and the room grew uncomfortably warm. The ceramic stove was a highly efficient radiator of heat. It was probably also a highly efficient heater of pokers. He wondered how much longer it would take to bring the poker to heat.

As though in answer to Rick's unspoken thought, Kurt withdrew the poker from the stove. It glowed with a faint cherry color.

“Make it hotter, Kurt, hotter!” Sidneye urged, his eyes gleaming.

Kurt looked at him with disdain. “Don't be a fool. If the iron is too hot it will sear, destroying the nerve ends and the pain will not be intense. No, it must be just the right temperature.”

Santa ignored the exchange. He looked at Scotty. “Surely, Mr. Scott, we need not go to such unpleasant extremes?”

“Of course not,” Scotty said. “Why don't we agree to call the whole thing off?”

“We can do so,” Santa stated. “I will be glad to drop this nasty business if you give me the correct message.”

“I can't,” Scotty said.

“Then we must proceed. I tell you frankly, the odor of burning flesh sickens me.”

“Spare yourself the discomfort,” Scotty retorted.

“Would that I could. Of course I do not expect you to consider my unhappiness, but you should think of

Gretchen. See how white she is. This is nothing for a young girl to see.”

“She has my sympathy,” Scotty said dryly. “Why don’t you spare her feelings by dropping this idea?”

“Why don’t you give me the message?”

Scotty grinned. “When I said I couldn’t, I meant it. What we didn’t tell you was that the message was written in Indonesian script, which neither of us could read.”

“Where is it?”

“Hidden in our room at the hotel.”

Santa considered. “I believe you when you say it was in Indonesian. Rilke would have done that in case it fell into the wrong hands. He knew I could read it, naturally. But I do not believe you when you say you do not know the message. Kurt, who have these boys seen tonight?”

“The report is that they dined at Bali House with a man we do not know.”

“So.” Santa’s eyes went from Scotty to Rick and back again. “Am I to believe you would not ask one of the Indonesian waiters to translate for you? Nonsense. Kurt, is the poker ready?”

Gretchen rushed forward and leaned over the desk. “You can’t burn them! You can’t!”

Her uncle’s icy eyes met the girl’s horrified ones. “Control yourself, Gretchen. At once!”

“But it’s horrible! I won’t let you, I won’t!”

Santa’s hand moved like a striking snake and cracked like a whip against Gretchen’s face. The girl was knocked sideways, grabbing at the desk for balance. Scotty and Rick were half out of their chairs when the guard leaped into position to shoot, and let out a warning bark, “Neen!”

Gretchen yelled, “No!”

The boys stopped in mid-spring and sank back.

“Sit in the corner, Gretchen. At once, or I will have Kurt put you there and tie you in place.”

The girl obeyed. She had no choice.

Santa motioned to Sidneye. “That old sea captain’s chair, Sidneye. Move it close to the stove.”

Rick watched as Sidneye picked up a massive oaken chair with carved arms and carried it close to the hot stove.

“You will sit in that chair, Mr. Scott.”

Scotty grinned. “Thanks just the same. I like this one.”

“I’m sure of it. Nevertheless, you will sit in that chair.”

“I doubt it,” Scotty said cheerfully. “I’d rather be shot than burned any day, and when you send your hired apes to pull me out of this chair we’re all going to have fun.”

“You disappoint me. It is only necessary to have Kurt and Sidneye approach you from either side.”

“My arms are free, thanks to your oversight in not tying us up,” Scotty pointed out. “Send your dogs and let’s see what happens.”

“It was not an oversight,” Santa explained. “I am not so without resources that I overlook the consequences of my actions. You will get up of your own accord and walk to the oak chair, Mr. Scott.”

“I’d rather not,” Scotty said calmly.

“Very well. Johann, Mr. Scott has overlooked a critical point. I need only one of these boys. So, I will count to five, aloud. If Mr. Scott has not walked quietly to that armchair and seated himself by the time I have finished, you are to shoot Mr. Brant through the head. Do you understand?”

Johann nodded. “Ja, mijhneer.”

Scotty got up without a word, walked over to the chair, and sat down.

“I’m pleased that you respond so well,” Santa stated. “Kurt, lash his arms to the chair arms, with a good tight tie at the wrists. Use his necktie to secure his head to the chair back.”

Kurt did so. Gretchen moaned softly from the corner of the room. Sidneye hitched his chair around to get a better look.

Rick, moving carefully, got his feet under him and tensed his arms, ready to leap. Johann anticipated the move. He took two steps, into position to take a frontal shot at Rick if the boy moved.

“The poker, Kurt!” Santa directed.

Kurt had thrust the poker back into the stove. Now he withdrew it, glowing white-hot. “It has to cool for a moment,” he said casually.

Santa nodded. “While it cools to the best temperature for producing pain, Mr. Scott, I give you one more chance.”

“I’ll think it over,” Scotty said. He glanced at Rick, and one eyelid flicked imperceptibly. Rick smiled at Johann and nodded, knowing Scotty would understand that the nod was for him.

The poker cooled to cherry red, then to a dull orange. Kurt waited until it had lost almost all color. “Ready,” he announced.

“Apply just in back of the knuckles,” Santa ordered.

The poker descended. Rick yelled, “Wait!”

Kurt looked up. Santa’s eyes turned to Rick. “Yes?”

“Don’t burn him,” Rick cried hysterically. “Don’t! I’ll tell you the message.”

“No!” Scotty bellowed. “Don’t tell him, Rick! I can take it.”

“Maybe you can, but I can’t,” Rick said, his voice shaking. He wiped sweat from his face. A salamander would have sweated in the hot room, and he wasn’t faking the gesture. “I’m going to tell him.”

“Don’t,” Scotty groaned. “You’ll ruin everything.”

“I have to,” Rick said stubbornly “I have to.”

“Don’t turn yellow now,” Scotty grated. “You cheap little punk!”

“You know I can’t stand pain,” Rick whined. “I’m doing you a favor. Why should you get the poker when I’ll only tell, anyway?”

Santa snapped, “Enough! Tell me at once, or we will proceed.”

Rick slumped in his chair. “All right. It’s ‘Brick seven up, five out.’”

“You blew it!” Scotty screamed. “You dumped the whole plan! I’ll kill you for this!”

Sidneye slapped Scotty across the face, hard. “Shut up!”

“Say it again,” Santa ordered.

“I gave it to you the way the waiter told us,” Rick said, the whine still in his voice. “ ‘Brick seven up, five out.’” He added, “Only we still don’t know what it means.”

Santa’s cold eyes impaled him. “You must have had some idea, or you wouldn’t have worked out a plan, whatever your foolish plan might have been. What did you think it meant?”

“We thought it meant a brick in a wall, maybe in this building,” Rick said dully. “Rilke van Hooch is a jewel thief-or he was before he died. Amsterdam is the diamond-cutting center of the world. So that meant a big haul in diamonds behind the brick.”

“Not a bad guess,” Santa conceded. “Only it happens to be slightly wrong. We will show you what it means. Kurt, release Scott from the chair and tie his hands behind his back, at the wrists and elbows. Sidneye, tie Brant the same way. Make sure of the knots.”

Rick stood up on order, and submitted meekly while his hands were tied behind him. Sidneye came around and stood in front of him and grinned evilly. “We are not through with you yet.”

Rick looked into the man’s face. He wondered how he could ever have found it pleasant, even when he was in ignorance of Sidneye’s identity at the airport. He remembered how the fuzzy-whiskered swine had gloated over Scotty, waiting for the poker to get hot.

“We’re not through with you, either,” Rick said calmly. He gave Sidneye a gentle smile, then moved, still smiling.

Sidneye had made the mistake of standing too close. Rick’s left foot hooked around his ankle, and the boy bent in a sudden hard bow that drove his forehead into Sidneye’s chest. The Dutchman went over

backward and landed with a crash. Rick jumped, braced, kicked. His toe caught the man exactly at the point where his upper lip joined his nose, a blow that would have killed him instantly had Rick not been wearing sneakers.

Rick's sudden move had not been entirely a matter of revenge or dislike of the whiskered Dutchman. He had also intended to take one of their enemies out of the play. Sidney would be unconscious for a long time.

Johann, pistol ready, had looked at the deadly Dutchman for instructions. Santa rose and shook his head. "Do nothing, Johann. Merely stay out of reach of both of them. Shoot if either makes a sudden move. Sidney is a fool who lets his emotions run away with him. We will have to dispose of him before long. Such men are dangerous."

Rick thought that the deadly Dutchman would never be guilty of letting emotion get the best of him. He even looked incapable of smiling.

"Kurt, get lights and tools. Gretchen, go with him. Brant and Scott, follow me. Johann, bring up the rear."

The big man opened the door and went out. Gretchen rose and followed. As she passed Rick, she looked at him, a puzzled expression on her pretty face. Rick winked, and she gave him the ghost of a smile.

Santa, standing, was no higher than Rick's shoulder. He wouldn't have needed padding under a Santa Claus suit, but the boy realized the Dutchman's rotundity wasn't soft fat. He had wide shoulders, and his hands were muscular.

Scotty gave Rick a grin and followed Santa out into the big loft. It was cold by comparison with the heated office. Johann brought up the rear, just out of reach, his pistol ready.

"Wait!" Santa ordered.

They stood in silence until Kurt and Gretchen emerged from the second room. Gretchen carried two lights, modern, sealed-beam battery-powered utility lamps. Kurt carried a heavy machinist's hammer, a crowbar, and some chisels.

"Lead the way, Kurt. Gretchen behind him."

Kurt opened the door at the stair landing and went down, the girl behind him. Santa followed, then Scotty and Rick. At the street level, Gretchen switched on a light. Kurt went into the narrow passage under the stairs and opened a door. He went down a flight of stairs, the others following.

The stairs were of rough lumber, and Rick saw from the girl's light that they led down into a basement. He realized that it must actually be below canal level. At the bottom, on a rammed earth floor, he paused to get his bearings. Kurt was walking to the canal side of the basement, at the rear of the warehouse. Gretchen had turned on the second lamp, and was shining one for Kurt, and the other for her uncle and the rest.

Rick saw that a wall divided the basement. It was of wood, covered with flaking whitewash. The canal wall was of heavy masonry, large bricks of a size no longer made.

Kurt didn't hesitate. He walked to where the wooden wall joined the brick wall and put down his tools, keeping only a small chisel. He counted seven bricks up from the bottom, and then five out from the lumber wall, then scraped the mortar around the brick until it showed white in the light.

"Gretchen, hold the light so he can see," Santa directed. "Go ahead, Kurt."

Kurt took the hammer and used it to drive the chisel into the mortar. The chisel didn't go in very far. The old builders had been good craftsmen, and the bricks were close together. The mortar had held up, too.

Rick wondered why they couldn't see that the wall hadn't been disturbed, for centuries at that point. His eyes wandered to the right brick, and he grinned. The wall was uniformly covered with a thin slime of dead algae, or so it seemed. It was obvious that Van Hooch must have scraped some of it away, but new algae had grown, and died in its turn, so there was nothing to give away the correct location.

Kurt was finding it heavy going. He substituted a smaller chisel and kept hammering. Little by little the dense mortar chipped out, until finally he could get the chisel tip of the crowbar into the crack. He heaved, and the mortar gave some more. He tried prying the brick out. It refused to be pried. The fit was too good. He went back to chipping.

Rick tried to see his watch in the backlight from the girl's lamps, but couldn't move his wrist into sight. He thought it must be close to eleven-thirty. Surely more than an hour had passed since he had last looked. It felt more like six hours, but he settled for one. He whispered under his breath, "Slowly and carefully, Kurt, like a good Dutch workman."

Scotty was standing as relaxed as anyone could with hands and arms tied behind him. Rick grinned at his friend. He and Scotty had played their roles as though they had memorized a script. That was from living, playing, and working together as a team for so long. Each knew the other's every gesture, and almost every thought, at least in tight situations like this. Also, each knew how the other would react. He had known that Scotty wouldn't resist a second longer under the threat to Rick, and Scotty had known that Rick wouldn't let him be burned, even if it had meant handing the true message over.

The deadly Dutchman spoke. "Break the brick, Kurt."

The brick was loose enough to be taken out in pieces, but couldn't be pulled out whole. Probably there was mortar behind it, too.

Kurt lifted the crowbar and thrust. It bounced off the hard brick, chipping away only the front surface.

"Here. I will help you. Hold the bar in place." The little boss took the heavy hammer and swung it like a feather, squarely against the end of the crowbar. The brick split. Kurt moved the bar, and the Dutchman swung again. Another split. Two more strokes and it was over. Kurt lifted the pieces out until a whitish layer of mortar showed against the back.

The deadly Dutchman walked over to Rick. He took the boy's nose between the knuckles of his right hand and twisted.

Pain lanced through Rick's head and blood spurted from his nose. He reeled back, groggily, and would have fallen if Johann had not pushed him upright.

"A sample," Santa stated. He didn't even sound angry. "Now we will have the correct answer. I give you a choice before we return upstairs to the fire. Tell me the right brick and I will favor you with a

painless death. If you do not tell me freely, you will tell under torture, and die anyway.”

Gretchen sucked in her breath.

“You don’t give us much of a choice,” Scotty said mildly. “We lose either way.”

“Can’t we talk this over?” Rick asked.

“The time for talk is past,” Santa replied calmly. His very lack of emotion was the most chilling thing of all. Rick knew that unless the police moved in quickly, he and Scotty would be dead or maimed, or both.

Santa continued, “We will begin this time with Brant. We will apply the poker, because he dared lie to me. Scott can decide how far to let us go. Will you let us destroy the tendons on both of your friend’s hands, Scott? Or will you give us the correct answer so that we can be merciful?”

“Funny you should use a word you don’t understand!” Scotty snapped. “How could you know about mercy?”

“Mercy is relative,” Santa said, unmoved. “I understand that a bullet through the head is more merciful than fire. That should be enough for you. Now move. Kurt, unless that hole is plugged, we will get seepage from the canal and rot away the mortar. Fill it. Join us later. I will handle the poker personally. Gretchen, follow with the light. Leave one for Kurt. Brant and Scott, follow me.”

The procession went up the basement stairs, onto the first-floor landing, then up the stairs, Rick following the stocky boss, Scotty behind him, and Johann just out of reach with ready gun. Gretchen brought up the rear, and she turned off her light as they neared the landing.

The upper door had been left open. Santa entered the loft, Rick following like a man going to his execution-and the simile was accurate!

CHAPTER XVI

In the Canal

The deadly Dutchman walked purposefully toward the office torture chamber, Rick a few paces behind him. Sidene was hanging onto the doorframe, shaking his head. He muttered in Dutch, and started forward.

It was a distraction, and Rick took advantage of it. He bent his knees, leaned forward, and charged like an offensive tackle, feet digging hard in the rough wooden floor of the loft.

His shoulder caught the deadly Dutchman in the small of the back. Rick kept charging, hard, shifting his feet to keep the Dutchman against his shoulder. Santa’s arms flailed as he fought for balance, and he tried to step aside. Rick shifted again, and again. He drove the gang boss in a weaving course all the way across the loft. With a final all-out shove he drove the Dutchman violently into the big double doors.

The man's belly saved him. He bounded back and started to turn. Rick dug in again, shoving, driving, punishing, grinding the Dutchman against the big doors.

The screws holding the hook and eye in place gave with a tortured screech. The doors burst open with a wail of rusty hinges.

Rick and his enemy plunged outward into space.

Somehow, Rick managed to throw himself into a half gainer, and landed almost feet first in the black waters of the canal. As he went under, he had a momentary thought that the ending would have been different had an old barge been tied up under the warehouse.

He hit bottom, a thick ooze, and his feet drove into the sticky goo. He pushed upward, and his feet held fast. For a second he almost panicked, then he forced himself to stay quiet. He loosened one foot at a time, and felt himself float upward. Bending forward, he propelled himself underwater, using only his feet and legs, the way he swam when skin diving or scuba diving. He hoped to reach the side of the canal opposite the warehouse, but his breath wouldn't hold out. He had to let out air, and then surface to breathe.

As he neared the surface, he saw that the light from the warehouse loft now played on the canal surface. It was faint, but it was enough. If Santa hadn't been knocked out by the fall, he would be waiting.

Rick raised his head above water and gulped air, turning to locate the Dutchman. He and Santa saw each other at the same time. Rick bent at the waist and went under, propelling himself downward, then turning underwater so he would emerge to breathe in a different spot next time. He wondered how Scotty was doing. He had expected to hear a shot, and realized any shooting would have taken place within seconds after his charge. He had known that Johann wouldn't dare to shoot when his boss was likely to get it, too. Johann's pistol carried nine-millimeter slugs, probably steel-jacketed. They would have gone right through Rick and into Santa.

He had to breathe again. He surfaced with infinite care, so as to make as little noise as possible. As he inhaled, he looked around. Santa was a dozen feet away. He yelled and headed for Rick like a charging sea lion.

Rick turned and dove, lashing out with his feet as he went under. He felt a hand brush his shoe and went deep, turning to pass under the Dutchman. He made his legs go as hard as possible, getting as much distance as he could. He kept going until he thought his lungs would burst and spots began dancing before his closed eyes. Then he let out air carefully and began to surface.

He knew he was tiring. The Dutchman had only to float. Rick's dives would get shorter and shorter. Then the Dutchman could move in.

Rick hoped Gretchen had taken a hand. She had been in position to bash Johann over the head with her light. Had she done so? If so, Scotty could have taken Sidneye out of play with a single kick, and now Scotty would have Johann's gun and it would soon be over.

Rick's head lifted above the surface. Santa had guessed right. He was even closer this time.

The boy gulped air and went under, feet first. He let himself sink straight down, knowing he would soon rise again as his buoyancy overcame the initial energy of sinking. When his feet touched mud he would go forward.

Pain in his scalp matched the pain in his nose, and he felt himself pulled upward. The Dutchman had grabbed him by the hair!

There was only one thing to do. With powerful kicks, Rick shot upward to the surface. Between the kicks and the Dutchman's pull, he lifted his body half out of the water. As he broke the surface he opened his eyes and saw Santa's face inches from his own, and he caught the gleam of light on steel as the Dutchman prepared to thrust his knife.

But Rick's sudden action had caught Santa by surprise, and his thrust was delayed a fraction of a second. It was barely enough. Rick brought his forehead down, using it like a soccer player heading the ball. The ball was Santa's bulbous nose. Rick felt cartilage crunch and had time to realize that the Dutchman's nose now felt like his own.

Santa fell back under the impetus of pain, and Rick fell back, too, but with a purpose. He lifted his legs, bent his knees, put both feet in the Dutchman's belly and shoved.

The driving push sent them swirling apart. Rick turned on his stomach and began a fast flutter kick to increase the distance. He headed toward the canal wall. If he could reach it, he could put his back against the wall and have his legs free to kick with.

He was tiring fast, but he had managed to keep alive this long and he still had reserves left. Because of his years of skin and scuba diving he was thoroughly at home in the water, and he and Scotty always kept in top physical condition. Only his diving skills and strength had saved him so far.

Santa's charge through the water, faster than Rick's because he could use both hands and feet, created a shock wave that Rick sensed. The canal wall was a dozen feet away. He wouldn't make it. If he tried to dive, Santa would have him by the legs. If he turned, he would get the knife in face or throat.

Rick had been too busy to be scared, except in the back of his mind, but now fear rushed through him. He was caught, and unless something happened quick, it was the end.

Desperate, he drew his knees up and turned over on his back, lifted his head, and lashed out with one foot as the Dutchman closed in.

Santa caught the foot. Rick drove the second one and managed to break the hold. He drew both legs up again. Santa moved sideways. Rick couldn't turn easily on his back, but he tried, kicking out to the side.

The Dutchman caught the foot easily, and this time the other one wasn't in position to break the hold. Rick squirmed, got his thighs together, and lashed out with the free foot. Santa was no longer there. He had gone under, holding Rick's ankle tightly. As he went down, he pulled Rick's foot under the boy's other leg, forcing him to turn over on his stomach. Rick's bound arms and hands flailed futilely. Slowly, inexorably, he was turned until he lay face down in the water. He could breathe by bending his head back, but he knew, too, that he wouldn't be breathing much longer. Santa had him. He was helpless.

But Rick was determined that he would not die easily. Oddly, words from a poem by Dylan Thomas flashed through his mind: "*Do not go gentle into that good night . . .*" Terror left him to be replaced by anger. He had done nothing to be killed by the cold beast who held him. He would not go gently; he would go out fighting. He threw himself forward and down, driving against the restraining hands that now held both ankles, trying to make his torso do the work of his bound hands. As he drove he twisted, swinging his shoulders, writhing like a clutched eel. One foot broke loose from the grip and he flailed with

it, driving it through the water, reaching for the hated face of his enemy.

The oxygen in his lungs was almost gone. He could see bright flashes of light, and knew he would have to breathe air, or he would be forced to breathe water.

He threw himself upward, fighting for the surface, still flailing, twisting, kicking with the free foot. He felt his ankle twist in the Dutchman's grip and instantly threw himself over, so that herose face upward. He broke the surface and gulped precious air, exhaled and gulped again and again, but never ceasing his driving kicks.

He had broken the Dutchman's calm. The man was cursing in Dutch, in a steady monotone as he tried to get a lasting grip on the threshing boy. He stopped cursing, inhaled, and went under, forcing Rick to turn again.

This time, as Rick turned, the Dutchman clawed his way forward, thrusting a thigh between Rick's legs. Flail as he would now, Rick could hit nothing. The Dutchman leaned his weight forward. Rick's face went under. He struggled, twisting. For a delirious moment he thought he had broken free, but his canny enemy had only released his leg grip long enough to change positions, straddling Rick with both legs.

Rick realized what had happened when the Dutchman inched his way forward, moving over Rick's bound hands and arms, until he was in the middle of the boy's back. His legs squeezed, driving air from Rick's lungs. Simultaneously the Dutchman grabbed Rick's hair in one hand and pushed his head completely under water.

Rick bucked, trying to throw himself over, to throw the Dutchman off. But the Dutchman had one hand free to balance himself. He would not be thrown. He held Rick's head under.

Rick's struggles grew weaker. The pain in his chest was growing intolerable. Only seconds remained before he would have to breathe, fighting not to, trying desperately not to inhale the dirty water of the dark canal.

CHAPTER XVII

The Fight in the Loft

As Rick made a break for freedom in the loft, driving the deadly Dutchman toward the cargo-loading doors, Johann rushed forward, frantically trying for a shot that would not endanger his boss.

The guard's momentary preoccupation was all that Scotty needed. Johann was beside the boy for a moment, and only a yard away. Catlike, Scotty moved. He took a half-step, braced, and lashed out in a snap-kick that caught Johann over the right kidney. The guard went down in a heap, gun flying. Scotty kicked sideways, the outside of his foot catching the guard at the junction of neck and shoulder with stunning force. Johann remained on the floor, a limp heap.

Sidneye was recovering rapidly. He made a slightly unsteady dive for Johann's pistol. Scotty jumped, hoping to kick it out of the way, but Gretchen was there before him. She picked up the pistol and backed

away, her eyes on Johann.

“Give it to me,” Sidneye grated.

The girl ignored him. “Did you kill Johann?”

“He’s just knocked out,” Scotty told her. “But he’ll be out for quite a while. Gretchen, will you untie me?”

Sidneye had turned away when the girl scooped up the gun, and Scotty thought he had given up. Now his eyes widened as the whiskered Dutchman charged. In his hand he carried a cargo hook, a vicious, sharp-pointed question mark of steel with a T-shaped handle.

Scotty poised, ready. Sidneye jumped for him, the hook flashing in a wild swing toward the boy’s side. Scotty moved back a single step and the hook missed. Sidneye swung around with the force of the blow, and Scotty launched a kick. It was only partially effective. It drove Sidneye forward, waving his arms for balance.

Kurt charged through the door from downstairs, took one look, and headed for Scotty.

“Stop, Kurt!” Gretchen held the pistol in both hands, pointing directly at the big man. The pistol was rock steady.

“Don’t be a fool, Gretchen!” Kurt snarled. “Your uncle will beat your for this!” He started for Scotty, then stopped abruptly as Gretchen fired. Even Sidneye was distracted for a moment.

“You missed my ear by an inch,” Kurt bellowed. “I’ll beat you myself.”

Gretchen kept the pistol pointed at him. “I missed on purpose. That was a warning. I’ve shot bigger game than you, Kurt. I’m not as good with a pistol as with a rifle, but I can’t miss holding with both hands like this. Now get over in that corner and sit down. Now!”

“Your uncle will kill you!” Kurt roared.

The girl was perfectly calm now. “I may decide to kill him first,” she retorted.

Scotty stared. She wasn’t joking! With the pistol in her hands, a change had come over Gretchen. She was cool as a shooter with a paper target, and all her former uncertainty and fear had vanished.

He was so surprised that Sidneye almost caught him unawares. Scotty danced back from another wild swing just in time, and from that moment he concentrated only on the whiskered Dutchman.

Sidneye stalked him like a panther after a juicy antelope. Scotty kept turning, always facing Sidneye, ready to leap in any direction. He was hampered by his tied hands, and he knew he would have to watch his balance. Once down, he was finished.

The Dutchman moved in and fainted with the hook, then reversed direction in a vicious upward swing for Scotty’s stomach. Scotty jumped clear, but he felt the wind of its passing.

Sidneye circled, crouched low, ready to take advantage of any opening. Scotty backed away, slowly, and Sidneye followed. Sidneye circled again, and Scotty understood the man’s tactics. He was trying to

force the boy against the wall.

Scotty ran lightly a few steps and stopped. He needed a new tactic himself. Frantically he cast his eyes around the room, looking for something that could help him. He heard splashing from the canal below, and he knew the deadly Dutchman must be after Rick. Fear for his friend ran through him. But he couldn't help Rick as long as Sidneye was loose with a cargo hook, and he couldn't do much with his hands tied.

Sidneye charged. Scotty waited until the last moment, then jumped aside, like a matador playing a bull. Sidneye's momentum carried him onward, and Scotty helped out with a kick that sent the Dutchman sprawling. The boy leaped forward, to get in another kick, but Sidneye rolled, grabbing at the boy's leg with the hook. Scotty pulled his kick just in time. Now he stalked Sidneye. He couldn't move in while the man was facing him with ready hook, but he could give him a few bad moments. If the Dutchman tried to use his hands to stand up, Scotty was ready. Sidneye knew it. He was in a sitting position, and he began to slide back. Scotty advanced, watching for the slightest opening.

Sidneye kept sliding back on the seat of his pants until his back was against one of the posts that held the tie rail with its iron bar for securing cargo ropes. The man never took his eyes from Scotty, and the boy saw that the grogginess from Rick's blow was gone. Sidneye's reflexes might not be as fast as usual, but he was no longer dizzy, and he was getting stronger and faster minute by minute.

The Dutchman pushed his back against the post, braced with his legs, and pushed himself upright. For a moment he was still, recovering from the effort, then he sprang. Scotty danced out of the way. Past the Dutchman, he saw the tie rail and its iron bar, and an idea took shape. He flexed the arms tied behind his back, then opened and closed his fingers. He thought he could get a grip. He would only need to hold it for a moment. He began to circle around Sidneye. The Dutchman turned with him, then advanced slowly.

Scotty could almost read Sidneye's mind. To the Dutchman, his prey was too fast on his feet for a direct frontal assault. He had to corner the boy, get him into a position where he couldn't retreat, and couldn't dodge fast enough. Then the hook would rip in, and it would be over.

Sidneye smiled. It wasn't a pleasant smile. Scotty knew why. It was because he was backing slowly toward the rail. To Sidneye, it was a good move because it put Scotty against the rail. That suited the Dutchman just fine.

But to be crowded against the rail too suddenly, with no time to get set, would be fatal. Scotty lunged forward suddenly, and Sidneye, caught by surprise, backed off. Scotty continued his slow backward movement, his eyes on Sidneye's. He could see that old whiskers was happy. From Sidneye's viewpoint, the boy who had knocked him down for trying to hit Gretchen was slowly being backed into a vulnerable position, and soon he would have his revenge. The Dutchman had no doubt about the outcome. It was only a question of time.

Scotty wasn't at all certain that his plan would work. But he had to do something. He could still hear the splashing in the canal, but only intermittently. With his hands tied behind him, Rick must be finding it hard going. If his hands had been free he could have settled with Santa very quickly.

Scotty danced sideways, then feinted forward.

Sidneye retreated a step. Scotty moved back, and this time his forearms touched rusty metal. The iron tie bar along the rail. He bent his elbows and fumbled for a grip. He managed to grab the bar with both hands.

Sidneye stopped his advance and stood upright. He had Scotty where he wanted him now, and he intended to savor the moment.

“So you slap me, eh?” He grinned evilly. “There is always a time of retribution. For you it is right now.”

Scotty put his weight on his toes, ready to lift. He said calmly, “With those whiskers you look like a mangy billy goat, and just about as bright.”

Sidneye stopped smiling. He crouched low, the hook held close to the floor, point upward, ready to swing up into Scotty’s stomach. The Dutchman moved in, slowly and carefully, intent on the kill.

Scotty had earned a black belt in judo while in the Marines, but had only advanced to brown belt status in karate. Even so, he was reasonably confident. Achieving a brown belt was no mean trick, and it had involved learning to use his feet in attack. Lacking the use of his hands for balance, he had to depend on the iron bar to give him stability. He prayed the bar would hold, if only for a few seconds.

Timing was critical. He must not make his move a fraction of a second too early, or he would miss. A fraction of a second too late and he would die with a hook in his belly. Every bit of his mind and body was concentrated on the advancing figure of the Dutchman. The feet were the key. The feet would tell him. He inhaled deeply and held his breath.

Sidneye’s left foot shot forward. His right hand swung upward like a striking snake. At the instant the Dutchman moved, Scotty shifted his weight to his hands. Both feet were free to use.

Scotty bent his knees slightly, and both feet shot out. His left moved to the side, knocking Sidneye’s hook arm away. His right foot, toes extended, hooked upward with *all* the force of his powerful leg, driving deep into Sidneye’s diaphragm.

The bewhiskered Dutchman flew backwards, arms outstretched, and skidded to a stop on the plank floor. He didn’t move.

CHAPTER XVIII

The Showdown

Scotty ran to the open cargo doors, then whirled as a shot blasted through the loft. Gretchen had just fired again, this time over Kurt’s head. He could see the yellow of splintered wood where the slug had hit. Apparently Kurt had started to get up. Now he subsided, glaring.

Scotty turned and looked down at the canal. He saw Santa, sitting in the water, hands holding something, and he saw water splashing weakly behind the Dutchman’s back. Scotty leaped far out, intending to land on the deadly Dutchman, but he was short of his mark. He hit the water feet first and plummeted to the bottom. Like Rick before him, he felt his feet drive into clinging ooze. He worked his feet free and propelled himself to the surface. He saw the Dutchman holding Rick under a few feet away and churned frantically toward them.

Sometime during the fight with Rick, Santa had lost his knife, but he still had two strong hands. He held Rick's head under with one hand and lifted the other, ready to drive his fist down on Scotty.

Scotty wasn't about to let the Dutchman club him. He bent at the waist and went under, straightening out about a foot under the surface. He had no hands to fight with, but he had the most primitive weapon of all. His feet drove him straight ahead until his nose bumped painfully. He wanted to be sure. He moved his head from side to side, and his hurt nose traced a big cylinder that could only be the Dutchman's thigh.

Scotty made his feet go, pushing him forward. He opened his mouth wide and clamped down on the pudgy thigh with all the strength of his jaws. He held on like a bulldog, working his teeth deeper into the flesh. Even under the water he could hear Santa scream. He felt blows against the back of his head, but they were softened by the water. Scotty held on, grinding like a mad terrier.

Santa couldn't take it. He released Rick and rolled, his hands seeking the throat of the demon whose teeth sent agony through him. He got a partial grip and his hands moved, seeking the windpipe.

As soon as Santa rolled, Scotty released his grip and rolled, too. He felt the hands clutch his throat and threw his body over. The hands slipped away. Scotty rolled, felt cloth against his face and bit again, hard. He had to rise to breath, and as his face broke water, Santa's fist slammed into his forehead, the force only partially broken by the water. The punch drove Scotty back. He breathed deeply, exhaled, then breathed again. He could see the Dutchman, and beyond him, Rick turning over in the water. Scotty made his legs go. He drove forward again. The Dutchman dodged, but not soon enough. Scotty sank teeth into his arm. Santa howled with pain, but his free hand found Scotty's face, the fingers groping for the boy's eyes.

Scotty squeezed his eyes shut. Holding on with his teeth, he brought his feet forward. He brought one around Santa's body, put the other one in his stomach, and shoved. The hold on his face broke, leaving fingernail scratches down his cheek. He backed off to breathe again, and as he turned his face upward he saw Gretchen in the doorway above, glancing down at him.

The girl yelled, "Get him, Scotty!"

Scotty shook his head. She baffled him. But there was no time to ponder the mystery of the girl now. Santa was charging him, taking the offensive, ready to use both hands in an unequal fight.

Scotty dove, turning away from the Dutchman, but the distance was too short. Santa dove with him, caught his belt, and heaved. Scotty shot upward, gulping in more air. Santa kept his grip from behind. With his other hand he reached for Scotty's face. The boy shook his head frantically. His legs thrashed as he tried to break loose. Now he knew how Rick had felt, and for the first time, Scotty felt fear rush through him. The deadly Dutchman clung like wallpaper, and his hand crept steadily into position. The base of his palm cupped Scotty's chin, the fingers extended upward to the boy's eyes. He began to press, squeezing so that Scotty couldn't open his mouth and bite, bringing pressure against the closed eyes.

It hurt. Scotty saw brilliant flashes of light as the pressure increased. He fought silently, writhing, throwing his legs from side to side, doing everything he could to get rid of his nemesis. The Dutchman held on. The pressure grew unbearable. Pain drove through Scotty's head. Another few seconds was all it would take and he would be blind.

Rick had felt the Dutchman move. He was almost unconscious from the strain of holding his breath and the lack of oxygen, bare fractions of a second away from breathing in water and drowning. He popped to the surface as Santa rolled off, and found strength to turn his face upward. The exhalation of pent breath was almost agony. He gulped air and retched helplessly, then gulped air again. His chest heaved as oxygen reached his starved lungs in great breaths. For a long moment he just lay in the water, face tilted to the sky, feet dangling, then beginning to move slightly to help support him. He knew he could float that way almost indefinitely. The air in his lungs would keep him afloat if he didn't struggle. He couldn't struggle. He was half dead. He had nothing left. If Santa reached him now, he couldn't even resist.

As oxygen reached into his brain in normal quantities he began to realize that he had been snatched from death by a miracle. What miracle? Surely the deadly Dutchman hadn't relented.

A movement overhead attracted his attention. He saw Gretchen standing in the loft cargo doorway, and she was looking down. Where were the others? Where was Scotty?

Rick turned in the water and lifted his head upright, moving his feet faster to keep afloat. He saw the Dutchman, busy at something, back to him. He couldn't see what Santa was doing, but he knew the deadly Dutchman was still the enemy. Rick came alive, rage flooding through him. Adrenalin flowed into his blood stream, bringing new energy. But rage didn't blind him. He propelled himself forward slowly and cautiously, letting himself float to a stop almost within touching distance of the Dutchman's back. Careful not to touch the deadly Dutchman, he lifted his weary legs and let himself lie backward in the water. Then, with a lunge, he lifted his legs clear. His face went under, but he was ready with full lungs. He extended his legs then brought them together, and felt the Dutchman's head between them!

Relaxing his legs a little, he dropped them until they rested on Santa's shoulders, then he bent his knees, brought his legs together and squeezed with all his strength. He felt hands clutch his legs and try to pry them apart, but he held tight. Santa's struggles brought Rick up to a sitting position long enough for him to gulp air, then his face went under again. He put new effort into the lock around the Dutchman's throat, straining every muscle in a great try to disable his enemy.

Scotty surfaced, his eyes paining and his face burning. He couldn't see very well, but he could make out the white blur of the Dutchman's face. He threw himself on his back, lifted a leg and kicked at the hated face, recovered, rolled over and maneuvered into position, and brought a foot in a wide sweep from the side against Santa's temple. It was hard to get any force in the blows, but he was willing to keep trying.

Scotty backed off and breathed deeply, getting ready for another maneuver that would bring his feet into position. His vision had cleared a little and he could see that the Dutchman was fighting for breath, and clawing at something around his throat, a dark mass. Scotty realized suddenly that it must be Rick's legs! He let out a war whoop. His pal was all right and back in the battle! He rolled on his face, made his legs churn, and steered past the fight. As he passed the deadly Dutchman, he kicked with one foot and felt his heel drive into flesh with an underlayer of bone. Scotty turned again, ready to make another pass.

A body dropped into the water under the open cargo door. Instantly Scotty rolled, ready to take on a new enemy.

The body popped to the surface. White collar, black tie, shiny buttons and shiny ornaments on the shoulder.

It wasn't one of themob !

A whistle blew from overhead. The boy glanced up. Inspector Vandiveer stood in the doorway. He called down in Dutch. The man in the uniform swam to the deadly Dutchman. A policeman came to stand next to Vandiveer, a powerful light in his hands. The beam hit Scotty, then switched to the Dutchman and Rick.

Vandiveer called, "Let go, Mr. Brant! Let go! My man will take him."

Rick heard. His legs relaxed. Santa was almost beyond struggling. He moved feebly, and the officer lifted one wrist at a time above the water and snapped handcuffs on them, then he towed the deadly Dutchman toward the canal wall.

Rick and Scotty saw each other for the first time. They faced each other, hands still tied, legs moving to keep them afloat, grinning like a pair of idiots.

CHAPTER XIX

The Right Brick

The ceramic stove in the deadly Dutchman's office served a useful purpose after all. Rick and Scotty's clothes steamed in front of it, drying rapidly. They sat in the armchairs they had first occupied, wrapped in blankets obtained by Gretchen from Johann's bed in the room next door. The warmth felt good. They were exhausted and chilled.

Gretchen had busied herself at a hot plate kept in a cupboard, and within a short time she had thick mugs of steaming chocolate ready, complete with a topping of whipped cream from a pressure can.

The only other occupant of the room was a uniformed police officer, who also accepted a mug of chocolate, but said nothing except "Thanks" in Dutch. He spoke no English. Inspector Vandiveer had left him as a guard, just in case other members of the gang arrived unexpectedly. A second police officer was at the door downstairs.

Inspector Vandiveer, with instructions to the boys to dry out and rest, had gone off with a load of prisoners. Johann had to be helped. He was still groggy. Kurt, of course, was not injured at all. The deadly Dutchman, whose name was Adolph Rokin, had limped to the police wagon under his own power. Sidneye had been carried out on a stretcher and taken to the hospital in a police-guarded ambulance. The ambulance doctor's initial diagnosis was a ruptured diaphragm.

Vandiveer had promised to return within a half-hour. He intended only to get the questioning of Kurt and Johann started, and to have them booked on a number of charges ranging from disturbing the peace to attempted assault with a deadly weapon. The charge for Rokin would begin with forcible restraint and end with attempted murder.

Gretchen pulled a straight-back chair to a position in front of the boys, fetched her mug of chocolate and sat facing them, primly upright and ladylike. Rick marveled at her. Scotty had told him very briefly about what had happened after he and Santa had dropped into the canal, and Rick couldn't square Scotty's report on Gretchen with the pretty, demure miss who sat so ramrod straight in front of him.

Scotty was watching the girl, too. He asked, "Why did you take a hand, Gretchen? Why didn't you let Kurt take me?"

"Then my uncle would have gotten you, too," she explained.

"But you're part of your uncle's gang," Rick protested.

Her blue eyes flashed. "I am not! I never have been. I hate my uncle. I hate him! I'm glad the police have him. Besides, he is not really my uncle. I think he is what you call a second cousin."

"Then why did you stay with him?" Scotty demanded. "Why didn't you go home to your folks? Or don't you have any folks?"

"Of course I have folks." Gretchen smiled at him. "But it is not easy to go home. I live in South Africa."

"You're not Dutch?" Rick exclaimed.

"Not really. My grandparents were Dutch. You would call them Boers. They left Holland for South Africa after the First World War. That is, my mother's parents did. My father's parents were born in Africa. His grandfather fought for Oom Paul Kruger during the Boer rebellion."

"That's why you have a bit of English accent," Rick observed. "It's really a South African accent."

"Yes," Gretchen assented. "My Dutch isn't very good. The only reason I can understand it so well is that we speak Afrikaans as well as English at home, and that's kind of a corrupted Dutch. But my accent is poor when I speak. The girl students laugh at me, but the boys think the way I speak is charming."

Rick grinned. He could imagine.

"Where are you a student?" Scotty asked.

"At the Rijksmuseum Art School. That is why I am in Holland. It is the only art school I wanted to go to. My parents wouldn't let me come without family connections, so they sent me to my uncle. That is what mother told me to call him, even if he is not her brother. She said it would make him feel good, to have a pretty girl be his niece."

Rick thought the cherubic little demon probably couldn't have cared less.

"I found out he was some kind of illegal within a week or two," Gretchen continued. "But I didn't care, just so I could go to art school." She added, "I'm a very promising artist."

Very confident of her good looks and talent, Rick thought. Well, why not?

"Did you get along with him?" Scotty wanted to know.

"No. He was cold and cruel. When I would bring home a painting everyone thought was very good, he would grunt and call it a messy daub. Once, when I got sick, he told me to get out of bed and stop malingering. I did. I went to school, but I had a high fever. A boy I like took me home to his mother, and she kept me in bed and treated me for three days. Then, when the boy brought me home, Rokin had Kurt beat him up. I wanted to leave, but if I did I couldn't stay at school. I wanted to kill him sometimes,

too. Maybe I would have, if the police hadn't taken him." She smiled charmingly. "He made a mistake when he tangled with you two. I wish you had drowned him, Rick."

"It was almost the other way around," Rick told her.

Scotty demanded, "If you're such a bloodthirsty creature, why didn't you shoot Sidneye when he was chasing me with that hook?"

Gretchen shrugged. "Oh, I knew you could take him, even with your hands tied. He is too slow and stupid to get out of his own way. And I was right, wasn't I?"

Scotty smiled weakly. "I wish I'd had your confidence."

"If he had killed you, I would have shot him," Gretchen assured him earnestly.

Scotty stared. "That's nice," he managed.

"I've never shot a man," the girl confided. "But I'm a good hunter. My father taught me. He's a game warden in Kruger National Park. Once I went with him after a wounded rhino some fool had hit with a truck. He let me kill it. He said rhinos are much harder to kill than a man."

"I suppose he's right," Scotty admitted.

Rick decided it was time to change the subject. "How did you get involved in Rokin's operations?"

"Oh, I didn't. Not very much. Once or twice he had me carry messages, and he sent me with Duif, that's his nickname; it means 'pigeon' - to talk to you in The Hague. We followed you in our Saab. I didn't like it, because I don't like Duif. He smells. Only when I met you, I told my uncle I wouldn't mind taking some more messages to Mr. Scott, so I did."

Scotty turned pink. "Duif is the dirty one with the stringy beard?"

"Yes. He is a good shot, and he leads the dickey boys, the motorcycle mob." She smiled happily. "I was so glad when I found out you had won the fight. Duif told my uncle how you knocked his men down the stairs and off the windmill, and some were badly hurt. My uncle was furious. He beat Duif. I wish he had climbed the windmill so you could have broken his back, but he is too cowardly to take chances."

Rick stared. He had heard bloodthirsty utterances before this, but never delivered so calmly and with a smile by a pretty girl.

There was an interruption. The police guard rose and faced the door, ready. Inspector Vandiveer came in. With him were two other officers in plain-clothes, and a tall, attractive woman in her late thirties or early forties. He introduced her as Police Matron Gertrude Lieber, and told Gretchen he was turning her over to the matron.

"Am I arrested, Inspector?" Gretchen asked, wide-eyed.

"No, dear," the matron replied. "Not yet. I must ask you some questions, and then we will see. The inspector tells me that Mr. Scott has spoken in your behalf. I believe you picked up a pistol and protected him from one of your uncle's men. That is very much in your favor. Tomorrow we will decide when we see the magistrate. Now, you come with me. My car is downstairs. We will get you some clean

clothes and take you to Central.”

“Will I spend the night in jail?” Gretchen asked. She might have used the same tone of voice in asking, “Shall I bring a toothbrush?”

Matron Lieber smiled. “No, my dear. You spend tonight with me at the women’s police duty quarters. It will be comfortable. Now come, please.”

“All right.” Gretchen turned and smiled at the boys. “Good night, Rick and Scotty. And good night, Inspector. I’m sure we’ll meet again tomorrow.”

“Indeed we will,” Inspector Vandiveer said. “Good night.”

Gretchen left with the matron, chatting excitedly. Scotty grinned at Rick and shook his head.

Rick chuckled. “I want to see what you say about Gretchen when you write to Barby.”

“She’d never believe it,” Scotty replied.

Inspector Vandiveer said, noncommittally, “Pretty girl. She seems nice.”

Rick said tactfully, “Yes, she does seem nice.” He reserved further comment, and Scotty said nothing at all.

“How about getting into your clothes?” Vandiveer suggested. “It’s time we got to work. Feel up to watching a bit of wall-cracking?”

“You bet!” Scotty was first up. He tested the clothes. They were still slightly damp but wearable. He shed his blanket and got dressed. Rick was right with him.

Vandiveer said something in a language that didn’t sound like Dutch. Rick asked, “What was that?”

“Indonesian for ‘Brick five up, three out.’”

Their note had given Vandiveer the message, but only in English. “How did you know it was in Indonesian?” Scotty demanded.

“I stopped to phone Van der Klaffens on my way from Rotterdam to Amsterdam. You see, you had said you were dining with him, and I wanted to check on your safety. I suspected that he, as a friend, might know things you hadn’t told my officers.”

“Like the nature of the message?” Rick asked.

“Yes. There had to be one, and I had confidence in you. Once you accepted the idea that Scott did carry a message, I knew you would get to work and dig it out. Anyway, after I called Klaffens I phoned my office and the desk sergeant said you had sent a message. I had him read it, then ordered a squad to proceed to this address at once, and I would join them. I broke every speed record in Europe, and got here just as they arrived. It had taken time to assemble a squad and cars, you see. We do not have the facilities of your police departments.”

The boys were dressed now. “Come on.” Vandiveer led the way to the cellar, the two plainclothes-men

following. At the first-floor landing the men picked up a tool kit and two big lights.

Rick flexed his arms as they walked to the wall that held Van Hooch's secret. His wrists and elbows still hurt from being tied. His nose hurt, too, and his legs were so weary he wasn't sure how long he could stand up. But he felt fine. "Quite different from the last time we were down here," he observed.

"I wouldn't have given a wooden guilder for our chances," Scotty agreed.

Vandiveer counted five up and three out after Rick told him which wall Rokin had counted from. The inspector pointed to the right brick, and his men got to work. From the toolbox they brought out a battery-powered drill and fitted a tungsten-tipped bit into place. One man held a light and the other manned the drill. A hole was made in the brick, then a second hole and a third.

The tool was returned to the box and another drill-like tool was taken out, and a small chisel of hardened steel fitted into it. The battery-powered tool was an electric hammer. The chisel drove into the brick between the holes with no trouble at all. In less than ten minutes the brick was in pieces. The men pried the pieces out with curved pieces of steel tools obviously made for such jobs.

Then the men stepped back. One said something in Dutch.

"There it is!" Vandiveer translated.

Rick and Scotty crowded close as the inspector went to the wall. In a hole behind the brick was a shiny rectangle, the face of a box protected by a thick plastic coating.

"Get it out," Vandiveer ordered in Dutch, then translated for the boys.

The helpers produced a tool that looked like huge forceps with flattened ends. With infinite care they worked the ends in at the edges of the box, then gripped, and pulled straight out. The box came free. One handed it to the inspector. It wasn't a large box. It might just fit into a cigar box at home, Rick thought. He was itching with curiosity.

"Shall we open it?" he asked.

"Certainly. But let's go upstairs where it's a bit more comfortable." He issued instructions in Dutch. The helpers closed the toolbox and led the way.

Inspector Vandiveer placed the box on Rokin's desk.

"Have you any idea what's in it?" Scotty queried.

The inspector shook his head. "Not with any certainty. I have a suspicion, and I hope it is the correct one. But shall we see?"

"Yes," both boys said at once.

The inspector grinned. "Very well." He motioned to the helpers and stepped back.

One of the men took a knife with a short, very sharp blade from the toolbox. Another helper carefully cut through the plastic covering, following the lines of the box. Then he peeled the protective covering off. The box was wooden, and Rick thought it looked like teak.

The helper examined it, then lifted the top. A layer of cotton batting met their eyes.

The helper stepped back. Inspector Vandiveer reached over and carefully raised the layer of cotton.

Rick gasped in amazement. Jade! Pure, translucent jade, of the deepest, most beautiful green he had ever seen. The jade pieces formed a necklace, each piece in a setting of pure, gleaming gold.

Vandiveer sighed deeply. "Suspicion confirmed."

"What is it?" Scotty asked. His voice was hushed.

The inspector took the magnificent necklace out of the box and held it up. "An incredible thing, isn't it?" He touched one of the lovely stones, with reverence.

"This necklace was given to a Maharanee of Bali centuries ago, long before your continent was discovered. It was given to her as a testimony to her great beauty by the Maharajah of Travancore. This Indonesian queen was the pearl of Asia, of such extraordinary loveliness that the princes of India and other countries made fantastic gifts just to attend her court so they could see her. This necklace is worth a king's ransom even today. I wouldn't dare guess at its value. But let's see. There is one other possibility."

Vandiveer peeled back another layer of cotton wool, disclosing a small bundle of golden silk. He picked it up and unwrapped the silk. A single gem lay in his hand.

Rick stared. It was green, cut like an emerald, but it was not an emerald. The color was lighter, and the sparkle was different. It reflected and refracted light like a diamond, but of course it couldn't be a diamond—could it? Rick thought. The size was too great. The longest dimension of the gem was nearly three inches. Yet, diamonds weren't all white. The Hope diamond was blue, the Tiffany diamond was yellow.

He asked hesitantly, "Is it ...?"

"Yes. It's a diamond. The legendary Crown of Coromandel, given to our lovely queen by the Nizam of Hyderabad."

Scotty asked, "May I hold it?"

Vandiveer smiled. "I think you've earned the privilege."

Scotty took the gem and studied it. "I can't see a flaw in it. I'll bet it's worth more than the jade necklace."

"I don't think so," Vandiveer disagreed. "Colored diamonds aren't as highly prized as pure whites or blues of the same size. I think they're probably worth about the same, if one can put a price on such treasures."

"Anyway," Scotty observed, "Barby would love it."

"My sister," Rick explained to the inspector. He knew that Jan would prefer the jade. Aloud, he asked, "Why did you suspect that the treasure might be these?"

Vandiveer was rummaging through the box. There was nothing else in it. "A policeman's long memory," he explained. "These jewels belonged to the Queen of the Netherlands, but they were kept in the Dutch East Indies as a royal gesture to the people of the islands. On special occasions they were displayed to the public at the governor's headquarters. Then, when the revolution came, the jewels vanished. Our intelligence services were able to find out only that they had been smuggled out of the East Indies. Rilke van Hooch had disappeared at the same time, although there was no evidence to connect him with the jewels—except the fact that he specialized in jewel thefts. He was questioned, but it came to nothing. There was no evidence at all, only the suspicious minds of the Dutch police. One can't arrest a man for a crime on so little."

"So when you read in our note that Van Hooch had planted the message, you remembered the old business," Rick finished.

"Yes. Obviously Van Hooch had kept the jewels hidden all these years simply because such distinctive gems are very hard to sell. No dealer in stolen goods would touch them, because he couldn't find a buyer. I suppose Van Hooch could have broken up the necklace and sold the individual pieces, but I think he had a genuine love of jewels besides profiting from their theft, and he wouldn't want to destroy the beauty of the necklace."

"Couldn't he have had the diamond cut into smaller pieces?" Scotty asked.

"Yes, but the appearance of a number of green diamonds with no legitimate source would have attracted unpleasant attention. It is not a common color. I think he preferred to keep them, maybe enjoying them like a miser with a hoard of gold."

"Rokin knew he had them," Rick guessed. "But Van Hooch probably refused to give away the location. Then, when he realized that his heart was giving out, he used Scotty for a messenger."

"Yes," Vandiveer agreed. "It must have been like that. He had had several minor heart attacks, and the one at Orly must have been sufficiently different and more painful so that he probably realized he was finished. So he did the only thing he could, short of having his secret die with him."

"What will happen to the jewels now?" Rick asked.

"Tomorrow my chief will notify the Prime Minister, who will undoubtedly notify Her Majesty. They will end up with the Dutch crown jewels."

Vandiveer gazed at the lovely things. "Rather a pity. The jade would look much better on my wife." He grinned suddenly. "I can't help thinking that these objects were taken from their original owners, the descendants of the lovely Maharanee, by threat if not by force. But that was the way of empires in those days and now Holland hasn't much empire left to help support the homeland. Someday these jewels may help support the value of the guilder in the international money market, so as a loyal subject of the queen, I should be happy."

"You're thinking what I am," Scotty said. "These shouldn't be hidden in a vault. They were made to be worn by pretty girls. But that's not the way the world goes. Anyway, I'd much rather have the queen get them than see old Rokin gloating over them . . ."

"And us," Rick finished.

Vandiveer laid the jewels back in their box. He said soberly, "Amen to that!"

CHAPTER XX

End of a Group

Inspector Vandiveer picked the boys up at the hotel and eyed them critically. “You look none the worse for wear,” he said finally, “except for Rick’s nose. Are you sure it isn’t broken?”

“No, just swollen and sore. I won’t be sticking it into anybody’s business for a while, that’s for sure.”

“How’s my pal Sidneye?” Scotty asked.

“Sick. The hospital confirmed a ruptured diaphragm. Be glad you didn’t have hard-toed shoes on. It might have been embarrassing.”

“I know,” Scotty agreed. “It’s no fun damaging people, but he didn’t give us any choice. He’d have killed me with that hook and enjoyed doing it.”

“Oh, I’m not criticizing you,” Inspector Vandiveer said. “On the contrary. Don’t be so sensitive. I’m delighted you two knew personal combat techniques well enough to get out of a bad jam.”

“How’s Gretchen?” Rick wanted to know.

Vandiveer grinned. “Enjoying herself thoroughly. She and Matron Lieber have become great friends. You’ll see her in court.”

The courtroom was in an ancient stone building typical of courthouses the world over—dusty, impregnated with the odor of thousands of cigars, shabby, decorated with portraits of judges and magistrates long departed, but somehow impressive. The courtroom was clean; the benches of worn, polished oak. The magistrate wore a white wig that sat like an abandoned bird’s nest on his head. He peered at the boys through half-spectacles as they came in, and nodded at Vandiveer.

Gretchen waved delightedly from the next table, and the boys waved back.

A door opened and uniformed guards ushered Kurt, Johann, and the deadly Dutchman in, directing them to railed enclosures where they stood quietly. Johann held his neck stiffly, but Rokin showed no traces of the fight in the canal.

Rick looked at Scotty. His friend still carried faint scratches from Rokin’s nails, and he wished that he had managed to leave some kind of mark on the deadly little squirt. In the same moment, he was ashamed of his vengeful attitude. Rokin would be taken care of by Dutch justice, and would spend most of the rest of his life behind bars.

Vandiveer whispered, “This is only a preliminary hearing. I’ll tell you later what happens. When the magistrate looks at you and asks a question, just nod and say ‘Ja, mijnheer.’”

The clerk, also in a wig and black robe, called Gretchen's name. She rose and walked to another railed enclosure. The clerk read for a good five minutes in Dutch, while Gretchen listened with complete composure. Then the magistrate spoke at length, directly to the girl. When he finished, she gave an old-fashioned curtsy, turned, winked at Rick and Scotty, and walked sedately to where Matron Lieber waited. She and the matron went out together.

Another man in a white wig, set slightly askew, walked to the magistrate's bench and spoke. The magistrate nodded. He addressed a question to Inspector Vandiveer, who rose and answered, apparently in detail. Rick wondered what was going on.

"Rise," Vandiveer whispered.

The boys did so. The magistrate peered over his glasses and asked a lengthy question in Dutch. The two responded together.

"Ja, mijnheer."

The magistrate seemed pleased. He turned to the three in the prisoner's dock.

Rick watched Rokin's face. It was expressionless as ever. The magistrate spoke sternly, then he banged his gavel and rose. Everyone in the courtroom rose, too. The magistrate walked out, and the guard led the prisoners away.

"It's over," Vandiveer said. "How about some coffee?" He led them to a small coffee shop in the courthouse basement. When they all had cups before them, he explained, "The clerk read the statement Matron Lieber prepared about Gretchen, and how she helped Scotty. Then the magistrate told Gretchen she had been an innocent victim of a vicious relative, and the court did not intend to hold her for further action. She'll be taken care of. Matron Lieber is working out the details with the Juvenile Division right now."

"What did we answer to?" Rick asked.

"Well, the Crown Prosecutor read the charges against the prisoners, and then explained that the principal Crown witnesses were two foreign students here on tour. He asked the court's permission to take depositions immediately, with the prisoner's advocate present to cross-examine. This would then become a matter of court record, and would form the principal element of the Crown's case. However, there would be additional evidence from the police officials in charge of the case, so it would be unnecessary to bring you back from America for the trial."

"That's good," Scotty agreed. "Unless you want another trip to the Netherlands at Crown expense, Rick."

Rick grinned. "The trial will probably take place in midwinter. It gets cold here."

"Oh, not so very," Vandiveer said. "But the sun seldom shines. So you're wise to stay in America. Anyway, the magistrate asked me to outline what I had witnessed personally, and it seemed to be enough. Gretchen already has agreed to be a Crown witness. So I guess it's an open and shut case."

"When do we go through this deposition business?" Rick demanded. "Scotty and I want to hit the road and see the country."

Vandiveer looked at his watch. "In about a half-hour. Relax and have some food for a snack, with

another cup of coffee. How about some *pannekoek met appel* ?”

“I’m learning Dutch,” Scotty said. “That can only be pancakes with applesauce. I’ll have some.” “Same here,” Rick agreed.

The snack was more like a big meal. Feeling stuffed, they went upstairs to a small hearing room. The Crown prosecutor was there, minus wig and robe, a shorthand clerk, and a granite-faced man who was the attorney for the defense. The boys told their story, then the prosecutor asked questions and the defense attorney tried to shake them or find inconsistencies in their testimony. Both were accurate reporters who had learned to say exactly what they meant with a minimum of words, and they weren’t easy to shake. The defense attorney shrugged and gave up. The prosecutor beamed. Finally they were excused, but only temporarily.

As Vandiveer walked to the door with them, he explained, “Now the testimony must be typed, and you have to read it and swear to it before the magistrate. That won’t be until after lunch. Come on back at two. I’ll meet you in the entryway.”

“Will that be it?” Scotty inquired.

“That will be it,” Vandiveer replied.

“Good. Then we’ll check out of our hotel and be ready to travel from here as soon as we sign the transcripts,” Rick told him.

“Fine. Have a good lunch, boys.”

Rick groaned. “Don’t mention food. I’m stuffed to the ears with *pannekoek* .”

Instead of eating, they wrote long letters home, bought stamps from Piet, and mailed them. Then Rick completed his collection of Dutch publications, including more maps, a Dutch-English dictionary, and a copy of a huge book containing reproductions of the masterpieces in the Rijksmuseum. These were mailed home, too. They packed their knapsacks, said good-bye to Piet, checked out, and rode their scooters to the courthouse.

The transcripts were neat and accurate. They read them, were ushered into the presence of the magistrate, and swore that the words they had spoken were true. Then they signed their names, watched the royal seal embossed over the signatures, and the case of the deadly Dutchman was closed so far as Rick and Scotty were concerned.

Inspector Vandiveer bade them a cheerful good-bye, congratulated them on their behavior, and wished them well with a promise that they would all meet again. They said good-bye a little sadly. Both boys liked the inspector.

Then, as they walked to the rack where their motor scooters were parked, a pretty blond teenager came to meet them.

“Are you going away now?” she asked Scotty.

“We’re on our way,” Scotty confirmed.

“What happened to you?” Rick asked hurriedly. He saw Gretchen’s lip begin to pout and wanted to

choke off any sentimental comments quickly.

“Oh, I’m fine. Matron Lieber will write to my parents and tell them what happened. Then, if they approve-and they will-I’m to become the ward of the Juvenile Division. Doesn’t that sound silly? Juvenile? Why, I’m all grown up!”

“Practically,” Scotty said. “And what does being a ward mean?”

“It means I can stay in Amsterdam and go to the art school. Matron will recommend that I be allowed to live in the dormitory with the other girl students, and I have to report to her at least once a week, and I can call her any time I need to talk to someone, or if I have problems. Isn’t it wonderful?”

“Just great,” Rick replied. “I’m glad it worked out.”

“You’ll be better off,” Scotty said.

“Yes, and when I graduate, do you know what I’ll do?”

“What?” Scotty asked.

“I’ll come to America to see you! I can hardly wait!”

Rick suppressed a grin. Scotty didn’t flinch. Instead, he counted on his fingers, then looked sad. “Gosh,” he said, “we won’t be at home the year you graduate. We’ll be on an expedition.”

“Oh? To where?” Gretchen looked just a shade dubious.

“In Tasmania. We hope to catch some wombats for the zoo.”

“Tell you what,” Rick put in. “You can go home to see your parents, and we’ll come visit you in South Africa.”

Gretchen brightened. “That’s better!” She rummaged in her purse for a notebook and pencil. She wrote down her full name and South African address and handed it to Scotty. “You can write and tell me when you’re coming. Of course you can write to me here, too, at the school.”

“Of course,” Scotty said noncommittally.

Rick kicked his scooter into life. Scotty followed suit. The three shook hands, then Rick led the way. This was no time for lingering good-bys. Gretchen waved and gave them a lovely smile as they steered into the traffic. They waved back, then settled down to ride.

As they picked up speed on Route E-10, Scotty took the girl’s address from his pocket. He rode no-hands for a few moments while he folded the paper carefully, tore it into bits, and let the wind scatter the pieces.

Rick, steering close to Scotty, said, “That’s a fine thing to do with a pretty girl’s address!”

“Pretty she is,” Scotty retorted, “but she has a little too much of her uncle or cousin in her to suit me. The way she calmly announced that she’d have shot Sidneye if he’d killed me made my hair curl.”

“A chill ran down my spine when she was wishing we’d broken Duif’s back,” Rick agreed. “I guess the only thing that upsets the family calm is biting. Did you hear Vandiveer say it had taken three stitches to close up Rokin’s leg? Good thing you weren’t really hungry or he’d have been a peg leg today.”

“Speaking of biting, I’m getting hungry,” Scotty replied. “Let’s move these beetle bugs. We’ll get to Saur’s just in time for another great dinner.”

“Food makes the vacation,” Rick said with a grin. “And a little excitement helps to work up an appetite.” He thought of those moments in the dark canal and shuddered, then resolutely put the Group out of his mind. Dark thoughts were nothing to carry on a vacation, and he and Scotty were really only starting, as of now.

THE END

THE DEADLY DUTCHMAN

A RICK BRANT SCIENCE-ADVENTURE STORY, No. 22

BY JOHN BLAINE