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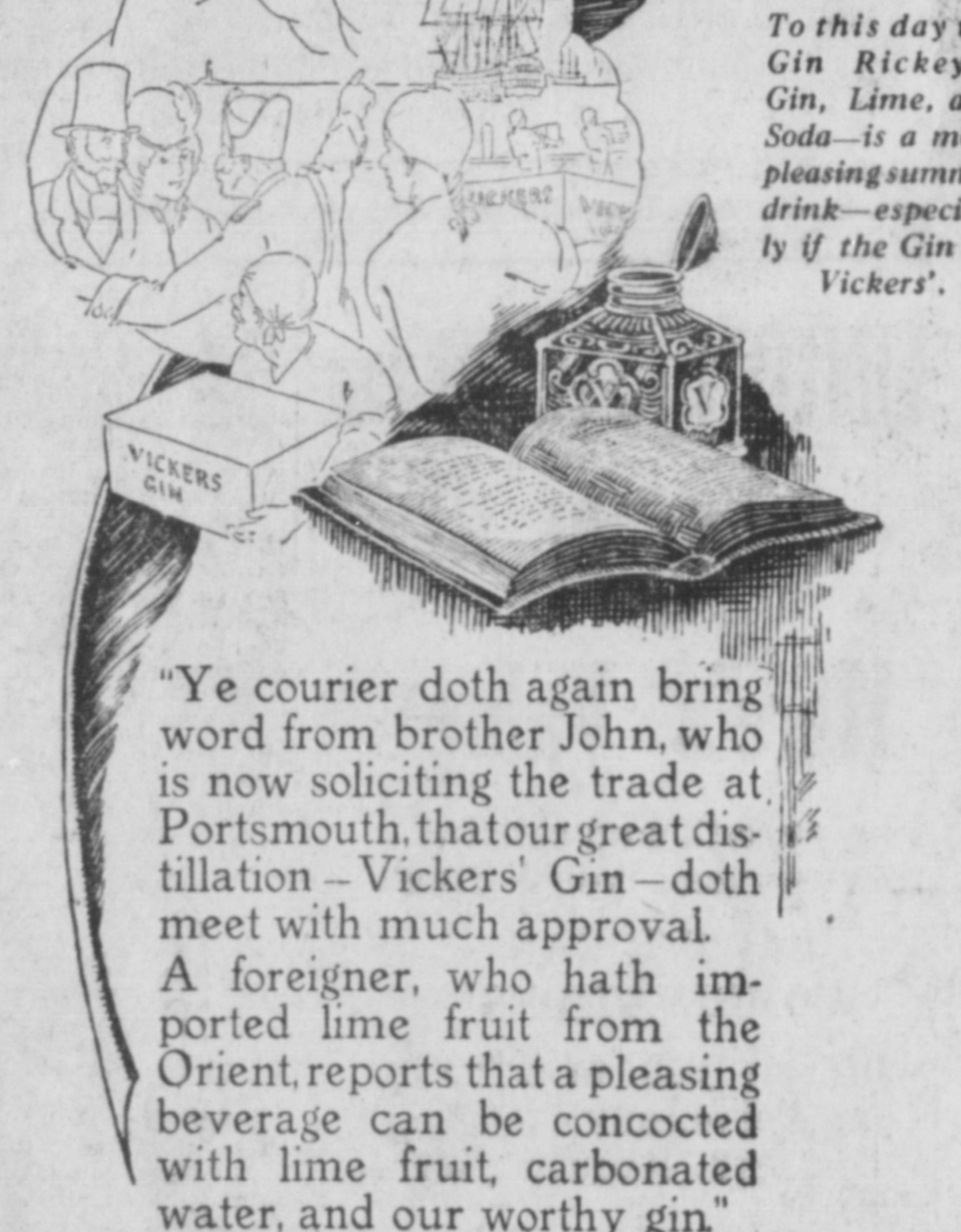
"SALADA"

ORANGE PEKOE BLEND

TEA

'Fresh from the gardens'

4th of a Series
EXTRACTS FROM VICKERS' DIARY — 1752



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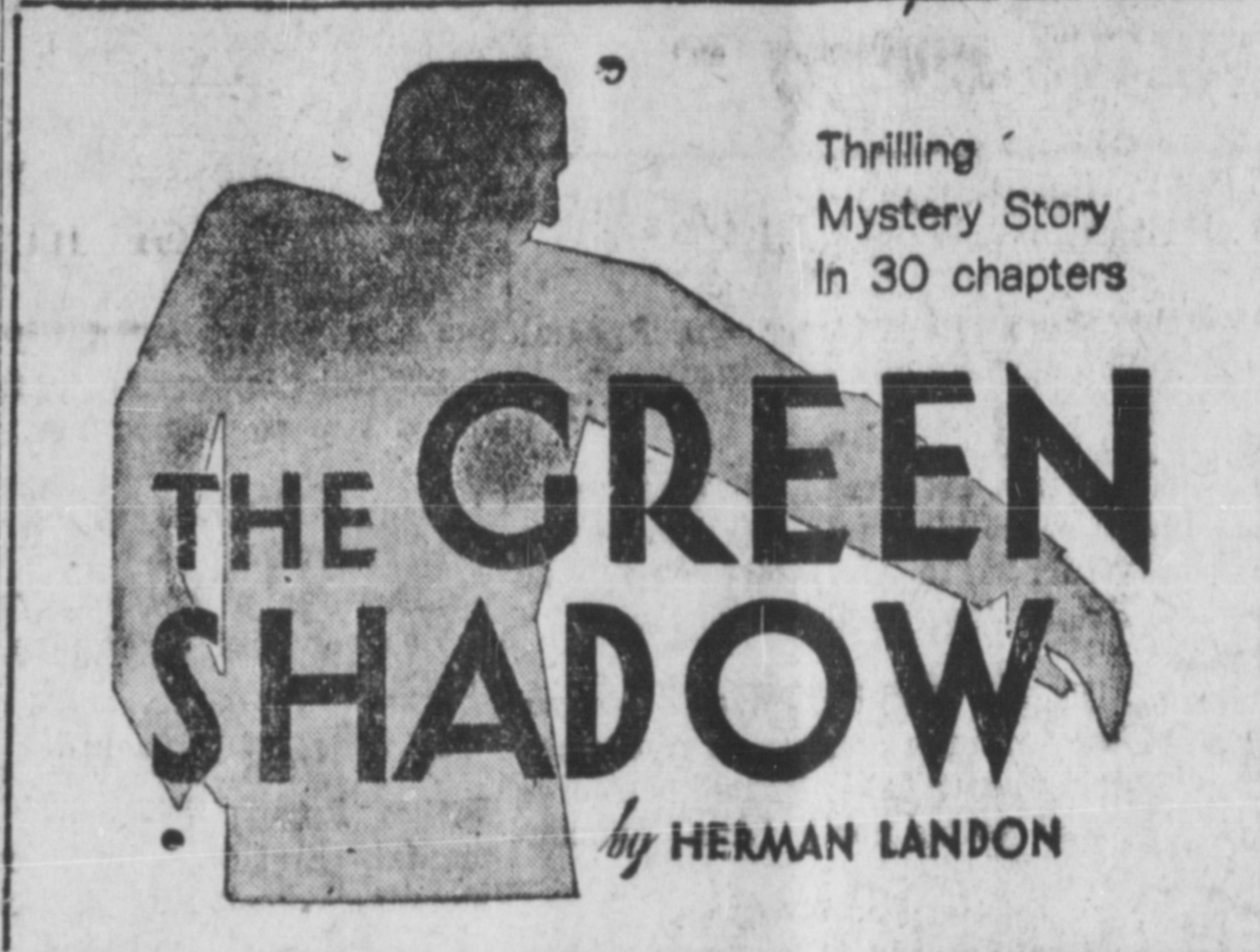
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Thrilling Mystery Story in 30 chapters

THE GREEN SHADOW

by HERMAN LANDON

INSTALLMENT TWENTY-TWO

Dale's fork paused in the act of conveying a segment of omelet to his mouth. His eyes narrowed slightly. "That's curious. I'm sure there were no clouds where I was."

"No? Well, go on. What did you do after that?"

"I was wide awake, so I drove around a bit, seeking unrequited highways. Ever feel a craving for solitude, Summers? That was how I felt last night. So I drove and drove, and the first thing I knew the engine began to sputter and my tank was dry. At that hour there was no service station open within miles, so I parked the car along the roadside, snuggled up in the back seat, and slept."

"Add then?"

"When I woke up it was too late to go to bed, so I took the car to the garage and roamed the park for a while. Ever study the protective coloring, Summers? Most fascinating study. I watched the brown little bodies of the squirrels scuttling back and forth amid the brown foliage of autumn."

"You don't say? Well, what next?"

"Then — then I went home. That was only an hour and a half ago. I found my rooms in great disorder. My man Bilkins was beside himself. Summers, old dear, next time you wish to amuse yourself by searching my humble abode, I wish you wouldn't be quite so disorderly. I detest confusion."

"Sorry," said Summers sarcastically. "Well, you've worked out a great little alibi, Dale. Barring the moon, of course. That was a mistake."

"Alibi?" asked Dale innocently. Summers chuckled. "I can't check up on you, and so I can't call you a liar."

"Summers, you wouldn't be so rude?"

"Well, I'm not saying much, but I am doing a lot of hard thinking." He lowered his head and gazed craftily across the table. "The Picaroon cut loose last night again."

"You don't say!"

"He was in one of his queer get-ups — one I'd seen him in before."

"One of his famous disguises, eh?"

"Well, it isn't disguise so much as acting-character stuff you know. The Picaroon is great at that."

"So I have heard. What time did it happen?"

"Oh, about the time you were seeing the moon through a sky full of black clouds."

"There you go, Summers!" Dale puckered his lips in mock disapproval. "Always suspicious! But tell me about the Picaroon."

Summers did, and he studied Dale as he spoke. But Dale's face showed only frank and honest interest, with a little sympathy added at the end.

"Too bad, Summers! So the scalawag got away from you again? And you say he took the rope of pearls with him. Well, well! But cheer up, old dear. You will get him one of these days."

"You bet I will!" The captain's menacing gaze hung darkly on Dale's face. "And you'll be there to congratulate me. I almost had him last night, but my mind slipped for a moment when he pulled that stuff about Miss Conway on the caretaker. Axelson looked as if a ghost had tickled him in the ribs, and I — well, a moment was all the Picaroon needed."

"He seems to have made good use of it. You say he pitched Axelson out the window to distract your attention from himself?" Dale gave a clear, hearty laugh of sheer amusement. "And then, I suppose, he escaped up the stairs and over the roof." Dale laughed again.

"Oh, laugh!" Summers grunted. "You haven't many laughs left."

"That's why I'm laughing now — making the most of life's jocular moments while they last. But tell me, Summers, you don't believe the Picaroon murdered Mrs. Ferryman?"

Summers' face knitted with hard thinking. "The Picaroon isn't the kind that goes in for murder. He has never pulled any violent stuff in the past. But every murderer has to begin some time. You can't tell what a man will do if he gets panicky and goes out of his mind. What I'd like to know is this — if the Picaroon didn't kill Mrs. Ferryman, how did he know where the rope of pearls was hidden?"

"You might ask him the next time you see him," Dale lightly suggested. "I'm asking him now," said Summers pointedly.

Dale merely smiled serenely. A little pause came. "Well, what about Axelson?"

"I — don't know. If a man ever looked guilty, Axelson certainly looked that way for a moment last night. I tried to question him afterward, but he —"

Summers shrugged. "Here's another little thing that puzzles me! Why did the Picaroon change his card?"

"It's a poser, Summers. But wait — I have an idea. It's just possible that when the Picaroon took the pearls he didn't know they were Ferryman's property."

"Eh?" The captain gasped. "What kind of rot are you talking? Why wouldn't he know? He took them off Mrs. Ferryman's neck, didn't he? Anyway why should it make any difference to the Picaroon who the pearls belonged to? I don't see — but you ought to know, Dale."

"No, frankly, I don't. It was just a fugitive thought."

Summers gazed at him, his brow puckering. "You're a deep one, Dale. Can't make you out."

"Oh, it's simple. The quickest way to establish a reputation for profundity is to talk drivel with a mysterious air."

"If people can't understand you they are sure you are a genius. Well, too bad you missed your chance last night, old top. You had the Picaroon in a corner with the pearls in his pocket. If you had only mused him up a bit, stripped him of his false guise, then the mystery of his identity would now be solved. But it's too late now, of course."

"The mystery is solved, as far as I am concerned," said Summers positively.

"So you think, but where is your proof?"

Summers merely squared his jaw and gave his companion a black look. A waiter appeared and placed a package in front of him.

"For you, sir. It came by messenger."

Summers gazed narrowly at the package. That it should have been addressed to him here was not particularly strange, since he often took his luncheon at this establishment. Slowly he loosened the string and unwrapped the parcel. A small sheet of paper fluttered out. He read the type-written lines:

My Dear Captain Summers — You are at liberty to claim full credit for the recovery of the inclosed article. I trust Mr. Ferryman, your superior in the police department and the newspapers will duly appreciate your brilliant detective work, and that this appreciation may partly console you for the disappointment you suffered last night.

THE PICARON.

The captain stared at the note a moment longer, then at Dale. Hastily he unwrapped something inclosed in tissue paper.

"The Ferryman pearls!" he exclaimed.

"Of all things!" said Dale.

Quickly Summers put the pearls back in the wrapping and slipped them into his pocket. He picked up the note again and glared at it.

"Full credit! Duly appreciate your brilliant detective work!" He tore the note. "Isn't he a sarcastic cuss? Monumental gall, is what I call it and nothing else."

"You're hard to please, old growler. Try one of these cigars. You are doing the Picaroon an injustice. He is merely trying to rub soothing ointment into your wounded pride."

"Soothing ointment?" Summers sported. "Vinegar!"

"Maybe he made a mistake and grabbed the wrong bottle. We all make mistakes. How is the tiger?"

"Not bad," Summers, his face dark and flushed, studied the label. "A Verona I see. By the way, thanks for the box you sent me. I like your taste, Dale." He puffed appreciatively, his bad humor gradually leaving him.

"Tell me this. Why in darnation should the Picaroon go to the trouble of stealing a bunch of pearls and then hand them back? Where's the sense in that?"

Dale appeared to reflect. A little smile tugged at his lips. "It's some little riddle, isn't it? I don't know, unless it —"

"He —"

"Well?"

"It's just possible my little theory was correct — that the Picaroon didn't know the pearls belonged to Ferryman when he stole them."

Summers pondered heavily. In the end he shook his head. "It's too deep for me," he confessed. He fixed his small, gritty eyes on Dale. "But you ought to know."

Dale paid the check and rose. "You will live and learn, Summers."

With that he walked airily away, the picture of a carefree and easy-going soul whose life had been cast to a bright pattern. But outside, some of his jauntiness suddenly deserted him.

On the opposite side of the street a lackadaisical idler had stirred himself into inconspicuous activity and was now paralleling his course. Summers was having him shadowed, naturally. He had expected that. It was something else that troubled him. For a while last night he had thought himself in a position to bargain advantageously with Dr. Moffett. Then he had discovered that the pearls were Ferryman's property. That had made all the difference. Now —

To Be Continued Tomorrow

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