

THE SUN IN SPLENDOUR

By Thomas Burke

PART IX

The instalments of Mr. Burke's atmospheric novel which have been appearing in THE BOOKMAN have necessarily been greatly shortened to meet space requirements; but it has been the attempt of the editors to retain as much as is possible of the quality of this unusual and distinctive piece of highly organized prose.

ERIC SCOLLARD tossed a yellow packet to Arthur Negretti. Negretti caught it; took a cigarette; tossed it back. "How d't it go off?"

Negretti, with one movement, swept a match along the table, lit up, and flicked the match to the stove. "Went good-oh. Not a let-up from start to finish. Old man had got it fixed to a second. Fair marvel, he is. Real kick-starter. Give him half an idea and he's got it all. No questions. Sees it before you stop talking. Weighs it up and fixes it. Wunnerful chap. Steady, too. Held me back once or twice, and always been right. . . . Ah — got about a hundred and twenty coming from last night."

"Good. 'Nyet your old man's always saying he wants to stop it. Hates the game and . . ."

"Brrr!" Negretti flicked his father's fancies away with his cigarette ash. "Why — whether he likes it or not, it's what he was made for. Only got to see him at work to know that. It's his job. Comes as easy to him as kiss-yer-hand. Lot o' people like him, though. Grousing at the one thing they can do and wanting to do something else that they ain't any good at. Like your dad. Good landlord of a bar and rotten cello player. And hates the bar and gives all his time to the

cello. Stands to reason, if you're a perfect marvel at a job, that's the job you were meant to do. There ain't anybody who can touch my old man at fixing up a job and organizing it and working out the details. He don't have to think about it. It just comes all clear to him. It's really pretty to watch him. Yet, as you say, there he is, always hankering after a grub's life. Keeping a grocer's shop in the suburbs and joining the local Conservative Club. That's where he thinks he belongs. Silly mutt! He'd soon find out his mistake. Him keep a shop! I bet my last pair of trousers if I set him up in a shop he'd have the bailiffs in in six months.

"Well, I'll just toddle over to Notting Dale — see if they've treaced up that little Austin yet. What you doing?"

"Trying to work out the coordination of that lock. Bit of a teaser."

They stood in the back room of a little shop in Ray Street, whose window displayed various parts and gadgets for wireless sets, and one or two complete sets. The back room was lit by a frosted skylight. It was furnished as a workshop. On the bench by the window lay a number of blue prints and some lengths of flex and accumulators. The centre table, by the fireplace, where they now stood, held a plan of a different sort. Eric, in shirt sleeves, was

poring over it. Negretti, in his smart blue serge, with an orange scarf in place of collar and tie, stood with hand and hip resting against the table. His dark curly head met Eric's. A stranger, taking no more than a glimpse, would have known that they were pals and partners, without differences.

The little shop was in a discreet by-way at the bottom of the Hill, where Clerkenwell is wholly London. It is a Clerkenwell of printing works and warehouses and factories and tenements, of watch makers and jewelers and diamond cutters. The shop was a useful centre for Negretti, and Eric was useful in giving it an appearance of legitimate business to cover the other business to which he gave the most of his time. In two years he had grown to manhood. The uneasy mind that had been struggling toward perception and understanding was now awake. Negretti had begun the awakening; the escape from home had developed it. In running away, he felt that he had done the right thing; the only thing. The vagabondage of the streets came naturally to him. He had been brought up, against his will, in a respectability that was its own principle and purpose; a respectability presumptuously beyond the standards expected of a public house family. He had been turned from his natural course by shames and reticences; kept from the streets where he belonged, and from wild games, from hanging behind carts or paddling in ponds; and yet given no equipment to fit him to take a place in a less coarse life.

He had felt resentment against his family and his circumstance. Chris was different; respectability was native in him, and by his music he would be able to get into cleaner life. But Eric was vulgar and knew that he was vulgar. He had no brains and no abilities but he

had not the complacency that so often goes with lack of brains. His state was aggravated by admiration of brains and ability and decency; and achievement being beyond him, he turned to the coarse life in which he was suitably set. As he wasn't born respectable, what the devil was the good of trying to be respectable? That was being nothing — neither himself nor a good actor. If he'd had brains, now. . . . But he hadn't. He had only pluck, and he might as well put it to work as let it rot into a sham respectability.

He was not the criminal or the unmoral type. He was the problematical delinquent, and in colleges and studies, learned men were worrying about him and lecturing about him and debating him and tabulating him, and wondering why they couldn't make him and his fellows react to their treatment.

Negretti flung his cigarette at the stove and went to the window. "Well . . . get along and leave you to it. Going to be a blazing day, I reckon. So long." With a quick turn he moved from the window, and the slim, patent leathered feet carried the blue suit and the orange scarf out of the shop. Eric fiddled for some time with his plan; then strolled to the shop door. Clerkenwell was stewing in summer heat, and was throwing up odors of pickles and tobacco and printing ink and metal.

The sky was of almost Italian blue. The sun was at full strength. It brought out the odors, and it brought out the Italians to bathe in it and add one more to the odors. The outlines of the factories and the tumbling cottages were as sharp to the eye as though they had been engraved on the air. A soft breeze stirred pungent and sparky dust. The live murmurs of London came from the top of the hill, but the bottom was suspended in lotus trance.

The suspense was broken by a figure

so out of harmony with derelict cottages and cobblestones and lotus that he seemed to crash into the street. He came briskly toward Eric, waving an airy greeting. Although no more than thirty, he was of a portly habit that promised corpulence. He walked erect, head back and stomach forward. His hair was thin and sleek. His face, strongly featured and tight skinned, was of the hue of wet dough. It bore a fixed furrow above the nose and sharp lines below the mouth. He was dressed from Sackville Street, with a nice elimination of style, and wore his clothes as though he had just been born in them. His figure was Parisian; his manner debonair; and his language, as he greeted Eric, mixed oddly with the rest of him. "Well, old gun!"

"Hullo." Eric turned into the shop and the visitor followed him.

"Arthur about?"

"Just gone."

"Oh, hell. Wanted to see him about last night. Know where he's gone?"

"Notting Dale, he said."

"Hell twice. Specially wanted to see him before he went there. That cod faced, knockkneed son of an anti-Christ we've got there's about as much use as oysters in August. I know he'll get us in a mess sooner or later. Told Arthur a dozen times to shunt him. You must have brains in this business; live wires, not dead eels. Can't get him on the phone, can I, or I'd give him a tinkle." He delivered this while walking through to the back room. In the back room he stood and waved his stick and stared at the floor and scowled, so that the furrow on his brow became a trench. "Well, better leave it, then." He wandered about the room, as though Negretti's absence had disarranged his morning and left him at a loss. "What about a spot of joy water?"

"Not for me. I'm on this gadget

here." Eric nodded at the plan. The visitor gave a child's pout. "Damned sarcophagus you are. Always talking about work. On a day like this, too. This isn't the office of the Board of Trade, by any chance, is it?"

Eric grinned. In the company of Victor Glean he was always grinning. As Negretti was a factor in his inward development, this young man, who negotiated the results of Negretti's work, was a factor in his outward development. By contact with Glean he had learned to soften his manner and speech, and to shed the remaining traces of the suburban public house. Victor Glean had been decently born, and he had Harrow and Oxford behind him. But he had long ago renounced his heritage, and nothing now remained of his past save a tarnished polish and a pleasing accent. Without any excuse of environment or necessity, he had deliberately made his way to the mean and the coarse, and because he had come deliberately to it, he was meaner and coarser than any of the "boys" of Notting Dale. Eric had little liking for him, but he never turned from his company. Few people, indeed, save practised observers, would have hesitated in cordiality toward him; by some trick of manner he evoked it. The practised observer would have hesitated because he would have noted that the eye was a little too steady, the face too direct. It was the unflickering eye [of the liar.

In the middle of his pottering, Glean sat down, crossed his legs, and tilted his chair. Eric noted idly his posture, and wondered how it was that a man who always sat crosslegged could retain from morning to midnight a perfect crease in his trousers. Another of Glean's secrets.

"By God, I could do with a dose of

throat-joy. Come on out, now, for five minutes."

"No — not now."

"Oh, don't be such a damned anchorite. What's the idea of this mortification of the glottis?"

"I'm busy, old chap. Later on I'll join you, but not now."

"Oh. . . Well, later on I shan't be in this unprofitable Sahara. Toddling back to civilization. How long you going to be over that?"

"Can't say."

"Any date fixed for the job?"

"Just as soon as I've worked it out. Everything else's fixed. The feller who created this certainly knew his job. I take my hat off to him. . . . But I'll come his way in a day or two. I'm pretty near him now."

Glean got up, still glancing about the room as though at a loss. "Well, if you won't, I suppose you won't. Hope Satan comes behind you and mucks up your work. Tell Arthur I want to see him. I'll be at Golden Square from about three to half past five."

Eric followed him through the shop. At the door Glean stopped and looked up at the sky. "What a God's gift of a sky! Just right for a field day with Simon the Cellarer. Feels good just to be alive, don't it?" He stepped into the street. "Well, so long, old gun. Loose Moments!"

Eric turned back to the shop. Glean looked about the street, and puffed heavily. He turned toward Back Hill and slowly climbed it. As he walked he struck his stick at the garbage in the gutter; and then, into the blue morning the debonair hedonist spat his soul's secret.

"God! I wish I was dead!"

In the close darkness of the back room of the Ray Street shop Eric

Scollard and the elder Negretti were talking in murmurs. They sat uncomfortably on their chairs with the alert air of men who are awaiting the word "Go." The room was hot but the windows were closed; they had a reason for this and a reason for sitting without lights. The season was mid-summer and the darkness was of that gentle hue which marks the nights of summer from the nights of other seasons.

Eric was leaning forward from his chair with elbows on knees. "Hope this comes off all right."

A furry voice came from the corner of the room. "Gutter take yer chance. Never know how these things go. Never know how much *they* know. That's the worst of it. Like stalking in a forest or being stalked. Never know whether you're chasing the other feller or him you." The voice took a sudden tang of deliberation. "Why don't yeh get out of it, boy? Why doncher cut it out? It's no game fer you."

"Eh? What d'you mean?"

"What I say, boy. Cut it out. I been watching you a long time. You worry me. I was young meself, once. Get out of it, boy. Get out o' this dirty game. You wasn't made for a *criminal*. You wasn't made to stand up in court and take yer twelve months or three years. You wasn't made for a crook."

"I'm not a crook. What d'you mean?"

"What I say. Y'are. We're all crooks. It's all right fer some. They was born rats and toads. But you wasn't. There's better things in life fer you than this. You take my tip and get out of it. You don't want to join what they call the Criminal Classes."

"I'm not a criminal. I don't forge

checks. I don't take bribes. I don't sell my pals. I don't sneak money from the till. I'm not a twister like some of those City people. This is my way of getting a bit of excitement. If there wasn't any danger I wouldn't be in it. It'd be mean. It's the sporting chance I like about it. The odds are level. It ain't like selling a firm's secrets or running a brothel or any of the other safe and dirty things. It's a straight deal, and we're extended all the time. That's what I like about it."

"Ah, you can talk, boy. But I'm telling yeh. You're young now. You don't see very far ahead. It's all right just now. Sporting and all that. Every youngster likes to chance a nap hand. Only natural when you're young. But believe me, boy, this road ain't straight. It's got nasty turns in it, hairpin bends, and it don't lead nowhere except backward. And downward. Pretty soon you'll lose all the fun of it. You won't be young always. There won't be no sport in it at all — but it'll be too late to stop. You'll lose the idea of playing the game to yer pals. You'll play fer yesself. And worst of it is, you won't know what's happening. You'll think you're keeping on the flat and all the time you're going down. This is a game what leads to all the other dirty games. And you go down. And down. And down." He finished on a slow bass note. Then, with a spurt — "Fer the love of Mike, boy, cut it out. Before it's too late."

"But what about you? If it's all you say it is, why not chuck it?"

"Got a reason. Reason I couldn't give you without making it sound silly. Standing by Artie. That's the idea. Just to keep an eye on him and see that he — Anyway, it don't matter about me. I'm too old. I been in enough times now that if I was caught on this

job I'd get Camp Hill. That wouldn't matter. I got nothing to lose now. And Camp Hill's a residential hotel. Just suit me. I could do with a rest.

"But you, boy — you're in time. You ain't got much to wipe out so far. Wipe it out now. Cut the whole damn thing. Listen — here's a thing I'll tell yeh. Every feller I know that — What's that?"

Eric got up and reached for his hat. He wore the relieved air of the churchgoer at the end of the sermon. "Only the clock upstairs. I set it for three o'clock, case I dozed off. Ready?"

The old man got up. His venerable head was bent and his step was unwilling. It seemed that he was charged with urgent things that he had not yet said. But Eric was at the door, and he followed him with: "All right. Push along. But you think over what I was telling yeh. Else yeh'll be sorry." Then he shut his lips, and for an hour did not open them.

They slipped out of the shop into a hush that pervaded the dark city like a presence. As though he were handling a sleeping baby, Eric closed the door, and they walked swiftly up Back Hill to Clerkenwell Road. Here they turned to the right, crossed Gray's Inn Road, and went through Theobald's Road to Southampton Row.

The young moon had long since set. The cool air still held the reek of yesterday's heat, and the dry asphalt exhaled a faint memory of its day's sweat in a haze that gave each unit of the regiment of lamps an aureole. The streets that by day held each its visible marks of character were now one vista of impersonality, though somehow fraught with the masked power of deliberate ambiguity. They were a thousand somethings united in being nothing. Into the hush dropped the little desiccated noises of the night

— the hum of a car — the bark of its horn — the cry of a cat — a footfall; and, from very far away and always receding, the hint of surging business. But their own steps made no sound, and so detached were they from their immediate surroundings that they moved as pale organisms. They walked in the manner that their profession requires, and their passing made no more stir in the air than a falling leaf.

At the corner of Queen Square they were met by Arthur. He awaited them restlessly. As they approached he lit a cigarette and twisted it in his fingers until the tobacco dropped out. As they reached him he lit another. His feet were dancing. Eric noted this and noted his left hand. It was playing drums on his trouser leg. "What's up, Arthur? Your hand."

"Eh? Oh — too much tea and cigarettes, I reckon. What's happened to Glean?"

On the speaking of his name, Glean came dapperly from a blue vacancy into their group. Negretti threw away the cigarette he had just lit. "Well? All right?"

"Hullo, old fusillade. Yes, I think it's all clear. Been round three times in the last minute or so."

"Where's your bus?"

"Just in the Square."

Eric asked: "What car d'you bring, Arthur?"

"Alfa-Romeo."

"Good."

Negretti turned to the old man. "No need for you to wait, guv'nor. We can go ahead now. Go home and get some shut-eye. We got it all fixed."

The old man took no notice of his son. Negretti, noting his mood, turned from him to the others. "Ready? If so, we'll get on."

There was a sudden change of man-

ner. They dropped the light nervous tone they had held, and assumed a businesslike air. Their business was illegal business, but they did not use stealth. They drove the two cars openly to the great shop in the Row, and the four got out and went openly and briskly to its door. Grey streaks were visible against the night's blue. Negretti looked up at the sky and spoke sharply. "No need to rush it, but don't waste time. Now — Eric."

Eric inserted in the little lock of the iron gates the key he had spent six weeks in making. He turned it. The lock gave. He flashed an eye at Arthur and made a little click with his mouth. He put his hands to the collapsible gates and pushed them right and left. He and Arthur entered. Arthur called over his shoulder — "Stay by the cars, Glean. Come on, Dad, if you're coming."

Beyond the vestibule was a second door. Eric took another key. He inserted this in the patent lock, turned it, and opened the door. Over his shoulder he made a grimace at Arthur, and moved to enter. Arthur caught him by the shoulder. "Not the mat. Mind the mat. Go round it." They went gingerly round the mat and came into the shop. Negretti flashed an electric torch to the floor. The rays that came back from the floor showed a number of recesses behind the counter. Each recess was enclosed by a wire door. As Eric stood at the side of Arthur, he felt the thrill of his shoulder and sharp tremors from his arm. The nonchalant motor specialist was handling a new job. He was a discord of nerves. Eric took a third key from his waistcoat pocket and went to the first of the recesses. Arthur and the old man drew near. All three had the air of thinking "Now!" Eric inserted the tiny slip of metal in the lock of the wire

door. He turned it. The lock gave, and he pulled the wire door open. From his coat pocket, Arthur took a little baize bag and moved forward. But in the instant of moving he stopped and stood in the poise of a sprinter getting off the mark. With the opening of the door there opened from right of them, from left of them, from above them and from outside the shop an artillery of bells. The noise broke upon them and between them, and filled the shop with its fury. For two seconds they were rigid and dumb. Then Eric gasped: "My God! They got the Cutson-Gramart system. Never thought they were big enough for that. My God! That's ringing every station round here. Come on, Arthur."

The bells hammered and yelled. He turned to Arthur, thinking twenty thoughts at once; but in the turmoil of his thought a little clear corner noted that Arthur had ceased to tremble. He stood in the shop, as calm and alert as though he were waiting for a bus. He put a hand on Eric. "Steady. Steady, old Eric. Don't get windy. We've missed our step. Let's go easy." He went to the inner door, and stopped. Eric came behind him. "What is it?" Arthur pointed. "Shut!" The inner door had closed upon them. Eric forced his key into the lock and turned it. The lock held. "Damn! Oh, damn. The alarm alters the wards. My God!"

"All right, boy. Steady. We can't be particular now. It's messy, but it's got to be done. Get back." Arthur brought a slim steel bar from his inside pocket. He pushed it gently under the lock against the jamb of the door. He made three long, slow movements with it. The lock cracked. The brass work bent. He took a small bottle from his pocket, uncorked it and poured a white fluid into the lock. There was a smell of hot metal. With one more move-

ment of the lever the door opened, and they stepped out. As they stepped out, a sharp humming came from the street. "What's that?"

Eric went through the broken door to the outer door and peeped through the grille. He turned angrily upon Arthur. "Well, I'm damned."

"What? Come on, Dad. Lively."

"That's Glean. Glean's gone off."

For the first time in his knowledge of Arthur, Eric heard him swear. "The rat! The damned yellow rat! The bloody little rat. Come on — quick. We can pack Dad in somehow. Thank God I piled up some petrol. The yellow rat! I always thought he'd twist if we got in a corner. Come on, old man. Easy. Easy and quick. Nothing so yellow as the English gentleman when he stops being a gentleman. Don't rush it, Eric. Easy. What's that?"

They looked at each other with a start, as men start under an explosion. But it was only an explosion of silence. The bells had stopped. They got to the street. A furlong away two constables were hasting toward them. Eric made a grab at Arthur. Arthur shook himself off. "Steady. Steady. Come on, Dad."

The old man stood in the vestibule. "I'm staying."

Eric snapped, "Arthur! Arthur! They'll be on us in a second."

"What's the game, Dad? Don't be a fool. Come on."

"No. I'm staying. You go. Get yourself away and the boy."

"What you talking about?"

"I said, 'Go.' You go. See? Quick. Else it's no good. I'm staying. It's only a chance but it might come off."

"And leave you?"

"Arthur!" The old man made a gesture with his arm. "You'll dam-well do what I tell yeh. Else I'll curse

yeh. D'y'ear? I'll curse yeh. You been a curse to me all through. Now fer once you do what I say. I can hold 'em back with a tale long enough fer you to take a chance."

"What d'yeh think I am, Dad? My name ain't Glean."

The old man became the eternal father of the stage. He put his face on Arthur's face. He took Arthur by the arm and shook him. "Look 'ere — one rat's gone because he was afraid to stay. You want to stay because you're afraid to go and leave me. Afraid of yer conscience — that's what it is. Well, you'll damwell put up with yer conscience. See?" He stood back to watch the flight of his shot. "You and him got to go. That's my orders. See? Now — you mean to be a rat or not?"

Eric was dancing. "Arthur — pull him along. They're nearly on us."

For three seconds Arthur met the old man's look, and their eyes fought. Then Arthur looked away, beaten. Something in his father of indomitable righteousness hit him where he had no defense. "All right, Dad. I'll go. Good luck."

They went with easy haste to the car. As they entered the car, the officers came level with them. Negretti made an excited gesture toward the shop and nodded vigorously. "Something funny going on in there. Bells ringing. Saw two fellows slip into Queen Square. Want any help? I was just going to buzz round and fetch up somebody." Between words he started the car. One of the officers went to the shop; the other came to the car. A lantern flashed over it.

"Just a minute. Finish what you was saying, Negretti. Here — stop. Come now. Hi! Carford!" The officer hesitated between calling his mate and grabbing Negretti. Negretti

smiled. "Sorry, old man. Got a committee meeting." The officer jumped for the footboard and missed it. The car shot sideways from him, swerved and slid down the Row toward Euston. He shouted. His shout was followed by shrill blasts of a whistle.

Old Negretti, in the shop, stood still for some seconds. He knew that this meant the end; and in those seconds the dream came large and clear. The little tobacconist's shop in Tufnell Park, himself proprietor. The pleasant customers. The casual esteem of the neighborhood — "Nice chap, old Negretti." The local Conservative Club. A game of billiards in the evening. A meeting with other shopkeepers in a quiet saloon bar. The news of the day. Passing a word frankly and without fear to the policeman at the corner. A bit of garden to look after. Everybody respectable and open and easy of mind.

With one of those lunatic touches of farce that visit men in moments of dreadfulness, he drew a chair up to the counter, and sat down with the air of a serious citizen making a purchase. The first officer found him in that position.

The car streaked northward to Camden Town, but at Crowndale Road there was a block. The Southampton Row whistle had been picked up and passed on. Two constables took the middle of the road. Negretti drove sheerly at them; then, as they parted, he swerved to the left into Mornington Crescent, recovered, and slid into Arlington Road. "Thank God there's no rain. Had been — couldn't a-done that."

Eric found himself in a light tremor. His stomach was shivering. It had no contact with fear, but arose from the situation. For the first time, he was tasting flight and pursuit, and the sensation was galvanic.

Whistles followed them. Negretti's face was set in an expression of urbanity. He was talking quietly to himself. "Going to be a bit tricky, this. Day-light, too. Good job the roads are clear. Hook off the top number plate. . . . Careful, now." Eric reached to the back of the car and pulled a wire which lifted the number plate into the car and revealed a new plate. Negretti gave commands. "Sit down . . . floor. They'll be looking for two. . . . Keep well down."

It was now full morning, and the sun was up; and in the sunshine, at this hour, London was as silent and as terrible as midnight in the Mountains of the Moon. In broad daylight it held the hush of darkness. It had the feeling of a land of legend, forsaken. There might have been grass sprouting from its pavements; lizards on its walls. The highways stretched before them, empty and breathless. The side streets were cells of a skull. The houses were blind; the shop windows were farcical masks. The very sunshine, warm as it was, had a spectral quality, as though it, too, were a sun of old legend.

Through this fantasmagoria they shot into a dead road that lived under the name of Hampstead Road. A stream of shops and houses went past Eric's eyes, and they were at Camden Town; and Camden Town had scarcely made a note of itself when they were in Kentish Town. Negretti shouted above the thunder of the engine, "What's behind?"

Eric pulled his cap down to his neck and looked back. The wind made a tattoo on his right ear. "Nothing." "Bonzo."

With an insanity that was not quite insane Negretti let the throttle out and in ninety seconds Kentish Town changed to Highgate Tube Station. As they flew at the Tube Station a constable

stepped from the street refuge. Negretti slowed down. The officer came to them. Negretti accelerated. The car made a swerve to the right, curved round the constable, bumped across the pavement by the White Lion, and streaked toward the Archway. The constable gave three blasts on his whistle. Negretti shouted, "Watch him!"

Eric looked back, "Gone into the Tube."

"Damn! Gone to telephone. Hook off second number plate."

At the Winchester Hotel Negretti sent the car diving to the right toward Crouch End. He roared at Eric: "Do it . . . yet." He bent his head to follow the curve of the road. "Old man . . . be sick . . . we don't. One thing . . . got a car. We got a CAR." He moved his foot and it shot forward. The needle which had been at 50 went to 55. At Crouch End Broadway it dropped to 40, and in Turnpike Lane rose slowly to 55.

Eric now was aware only of noise and movement, of slowing and speeding. A flash of houses — Wood Green. A kaleidoscope of shops — Noel Park. A whiz — Bowes Park. A whirl of houses and a flash of fields — Palmer's Green. There was no road; no London; no sky. Their eyes saw only stationary things — the wind screen and the fixtures of the car, while another sense received dimly a tale of streets and houses and shops and sky and fields reeling and crowding past them.

Winchmore Hill. Negretti murmured a "Damn." From the bend at Winchmore Hill came warning whistles. A constable stood in the middle of the road, arm out. He stood there for one second; and made the pavement with the speed of the car. Negretti laughed and bent toward Eric. Eric, noting his look, put his ear to Arthur's mouth and waited for something heroic.

"Shouldn't wonder . . . get into trouble . . . for this!"

Before the private wire from Winchmore Hill could get to work they were at Enfield and out of it. In front of them lay the whole of England. Behind them lay a purple ocean of roofs from which rose the spires and towers of history and of today. Dumb memorial of achievement and potent promise of it. And for these two neither memorial nor promise.

Potter's Bar. Negretti took the corner at a fool's angle, and they went northward to Hatfield. The country unwound before their eyes like a colored sheet. By the rush of the air and the drone of the engine, Eric became drowsed. He forgot the collapse of their nice plans. He forgot the disaster in which they were caught. He forgot why they were running away, and did not care where they were running to, or what the end would be. Before they had reached Camden Town he had felt a longing to say to Negretti, "Sorry! My fault. I ought to have thought of the Cutson-Gramart system. I shall never forgive myself." But it was gone now. Nothing could come through the one fact of Speed.

As though he had read his thoughts Negretti bawled at him: "Proves what . . . saying . . . All through . . . going off . . . own job. Trying . . . do . . . something different . . . Oughta stuck . . . cars . . . not mess about . . ." He dipped his head to the right of the wheel. " . . . other job . . . can't do . . . If get . . . Northampton. . ." He took the curve with an inch to spare. " . . . Know feller there. . . . Lie low a bit. . . . Can't put . . . anything . . . us. No evidence . . . Thank . . . got good car . . . Whassat?"

Eric looked back, and bawled, "Car!"
"Whassort?"

"Sunbeam, I think."

"Overtaking us?"

"Yes!"

Negretti waited till they were in the straight, then looked back and clicked his teeth. "Smart boys! Picked up trail all right. Flying Squad. Feller next driver . . . Winstanley . . . One . . . Big Four. Sit tight. Goin-letterout." There was a gentle jerk and a swish. The needle went to 60. To 65. To 70. Negretti grinned. "Given 'em . . . bit o'dust . . . Bet their Sunbeam can't . . . reach that."

The needle went to 75. The green passage in which they moved was suddenly broken by a smudge of grey and red, and then was again green. They had gone through Hatfield.

"How are they behind?"

"Can't see 'em."

"Can't see 'em? Listen." He slowed down. "Hear 'em?"

"No."

"That means telephoning. Better turn off here."

They turned into a lane of green light and swam blandly through it to Cole Green and Essendon. A change of gears, a rush of trees, and they were at Broxbourne. A slither across a grassy corner, and they were on the Old Great North Road. Another minute and they were through Hoddesdon.

"Anything behind?"

"No."

They came to Ware, and at Ware the chase was taken up. Drawn across the road at the entrance to the town was a railway lorry. Negretti saw it in time to be an artist with his brakes, and the car stopped within twenty yards of the obstruction. Two men came from behind it. Negretti took a keen look at them from under the peak of his cap; reversed, and backed to the edge of the ditch. The men shouted and rushed; but on a turn of

the wheel the car shot away and covered its own trail to Amwell. At Amwell they turned and flashed through Hudson and Widford and Much Hadham. At Little Hadham they greased round a corner and took the road to Bishop's Stortford.

With nothing in their minds but flight, they were silent; but a mile from Stortford Eric said, "God!" and Negretti said, "Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" Two cars, each holding two men, blocked the road. Negretti played the same game; reversed, turned, and sent the car headlong back. But this time he was not dodging a dead lorry. The two cars took the middle of the road and came buzzing after them. Negretti clicked his teeth and began to mutter. "This is nasty . . . Now then, ole bus. Now then, me ole Alfa. Show us yer form. Let's hear from yeh." The needle crept steadily up. "Hope they . . . haven't got us . . . locked in . . . loop. Main roads . . . all round us . . . up to Cambridge . . . down to . . . Waltham Abby. . . Just a matter . . . striking some bit . . . haven't posted."

They streaked through Braughing and up to Barkway, and from Barkway into the road that leads from Royston to Sawston. "Now for . . . Newmarket . . . How are . . . they?"

Eric cried, "Creeping up."

Voices came from behind commanding a stop, and grew in volume and clarity. "They got . . . good . . . car!"

There was a report and a spit of dust in the road ahead of them. Negretti made a cry of protest. "Dirty dogs! . . . Trying . . . frighten us. Don't get . . . windy . . . Only firing . . . round us. . . Daren't fire . . . at us. . . No evidence . . . no . . . *Oh my God!*"

The car was at 80. Past their eyes,

like a bullet, went a notice board — "ROAD UP." Two seconds later they were upon poles and trestles and an open road and a steam roller. Negretti made one mad turn of the steering wheel and one movement at the brakes. There was a strident appeal from the engine, a grotesque twisting of Negretti's hands and a revolving landscape.

These things Eric saw and heard. A second later there was a crash which he did not hear.

In the parlor of "The Sun in Splendour" company was assembled. A company so dazed that it appeared to be at ease. Mrs. Scollard in a straight chair looking before her with eyes empty of expression and charged with the inexpressible. David standing over her, pipe in hand, just as he had come from the bar; a solid restful figure whose massiveness gave no hint of inner turmoil. Aunt Julia, with red eyes, sitting by her sister with the air of the penitent on the form. Fred Gore strolling about with hands in pockets and head down, whistling silently: the bright and chatty fellow, conscious of the presence of drama and trying to order his demeanor to it. And Chris.

They did not know what they were doing or what they were thinking or what walls enclosed them. If it were possible to stun the spirit of a room, the spirit of that room, which had suffered a hundred domestic "scenes", had been stunned.

On the table lay an evening paper. A front page headline in bold capitals streamed across three columns: "DRAMATIC DEATH OF TWO MOTOR BANDITS. SUNRISE CHASE THROUGH THREE COUNTIES." In the centre was a two column block of a snapshot—secured God knows how—of Eric and Negretti, arms on each other's shoulders, grinning at the camera.

Mrs. Gore patted her sister's knee and whispered. Mr. Gore coughed. David stood rigid. Chris was at the window. He did not take any share in this roomful of grief. He was an artist; the affair had hurt him but it had not shocked him. He was conscious of disaster but not of grief; and he was there only because he felt he ought to be there. Eric had gone his own way and had met his own end, and Chris could not achieve any facile sorrow for him. But for decency's sake he had to simulate sober feelings and downcast face.

The silence of the room was splintered by Mrs. Gore's murmurs and Mr. Gore's cough. In a moment when Mrs. Gore was making inane attempts to offer her sister inane comfort, Fred Gore noted Chris, and, mistaking his forced attitude for the genuine, waved him apart.

"Ever seen this, old man?"

He took a piece of string from his waistcoat pocket, tied it in four knots, slipped it round two fingers and picked it off — a clean strand. "Can't learn that in one lesson, me boy. See if you can do it."

He was talking as though Christopher were still a boy of ten to be charmed from the sight of suffering. Christopher stared at him, bewildered; then jumped to his intention, and for the first time in his life he felt respect for this ungainly creature.

Mrs. Gore got up. "I'll go and get her a cup of tea."

"I don't want a cup of tea."

"Yes, you do."

"No, I don't."

"Well, you're going to have a cup of tea. Don't you be obstinate, Emily. You always was obstinate. Always set on having your own way."

"I don't *want* tea."

"I insist."

"I won't *have* it."

"Emily — you're behaving like a fool. But you always were a fool. When you were young and now you're old. You always ordered me about — now I'm going to do some ordering. You're in trouble. You want looking after. What you want —"

"Oh, be *quiet*!"

"If I didn't care for you, I would. I wouldn't bother with getting you tea. But I'm going to get tea, and sit by you and help you drink it, you poor suffering fool!"

"Julia!" Mrs. Scollard's head dropped. Her hands went to her face. Her body shook with sobs. Tears came through her fingers.

The two men moved to Mrs. Gore with a "Here — I say . . ." attitude. The thin and noisy Mrs. Gore waved them back, looked at her sister, and went to the door. At the door she nodded to the company; a nod that said — "That's what she wanted and that's what I meant to get."

Chris and his father exchanged looks, and both of them saw the foolish Uncle Fred and the fatuous Aunt Julia as people of quality.

Mrs. Gore came back with a tea tray. "Tea's ready, Emily."

Mechanically Mrs. Scollard drew her chair nearer to the table. She looked at the table and the tea tray; then said conversationally: "Why do we have children? Why do we go through it? . . . Chris, come and have tea with your mother. Don't stand there like that, Dave. Go and look after the bar. This is going to last a long time. A long time. Don't let's be silly about it."

(To be continued)

THE DIVINING LADY, E. BARRINGTON

By Grant Overton

With a Portrait by Bertrand Zadig

IF the facts were only known —

But how can they be? In the first place, she lives in comparative seclusion near Victoria, British Columbia. In the second place, besides being E. Barrington and L. Adams Beck, she is announced as having begun all over again under a third name, "quite unlike the other two". And lastly, I am no authorized interpreter.

The scientific method is too little applied in what the boys at the Café Dome call the life literary. Scientists, you know, observe a group of phenomena. Then they make up the necessary facts to explain what they have observed. I don't see why I should do differently.

For phenomena, we have the procession of novels by L. Adams Beck, to wit: "The Key of Dreams", "The Perfume of the Rainbow", "The Treasure of Ho", "The Ninth Vibration" (though these are short stories), "The Way of Stars", "The Splendour of Asia".

Obviously the work of a woman who has spent years in the East. The settings are Egypt, India, the Himalayas, China, and Japan. India and China predominate. The underlying subject is nearly always the mystical beliefs of the East; and the subject of "The Splendour of Asia" is nothing less than the life of Buddha.

But this interesting and logical progression has been constantly interrupted by the appearance of the following books: "The Ladies!", "The

Gallants" (both composed of lively portraits of eighteenth century figures), "The Chaste Diana", "The Divine Lady", "Glorious Apollo", "The Exquisite Perdita" — all signed E. Barrington and resembling the novels of L. Adams Beck about as closely as George Eliot resembled George Sand — no, *not* as closely.

Judged by these novels, what must E. Barrington be? Why, a lady of no inconsiderable gifts as a story teller, steeped in the eighteenth century tradition, a connoisseur of the manners and social customs of that day (in England at least). She should come of at least a good county family and should live in a picturesque but insufficiently heated and bathroomed house in Hants, Bucks, or Wilts. These facts are mostly wrong but so, probably, is the nebular hypothesis.

We all have single track minds, and it was to obviate this situation that two names were considered necessary for a double track author. And now that L. Adams Beck insists on becoming all three of the Brontë sisters, a third name is indispensable; but what that third name is I shall not divulge, for the excellent reason that it would cloud your intellect throughout the remainder of this lucid exposition. Besides, I do not yet know her third name — only that there is one.

The chances appear to be two to one that it begins with B. The third personality is as different from E. Barrington and L. Adams Beck as