



# Shortly After Dusk

By Frank Condon

A SHORT SHORT STORY COMPLETE ON THIS PAGE

HARDIE GRIMM

YOU might as well be out in the street when dusk came upon the city. It was as safe as indoors, so Mr. and Mrs. Shipton were walking. He was a little, plump, fussy man and wore a cap. He came up to his wife's shoulder, and they sauntered, their manner showing neither alarm, excitement nor any great interest.

"I don't hear any planes," she remarked. "Time for them, if they're coming."

"Don't worry. They're coming," he grunted. "Ain't dusk yet. You wait till seven o'clock and you'll have your big parade."

They came to the fringe of a street crowd and paused to look about. The street lights were off and the crowd had a shadowy look. It was coming toward seven and the Shiptons knew what that meant, having been through it often. Dusk and seven arrived together and soon the planes would be overhead.

"You know," said Shipton, as though nothing were going on or about to go on, "I sort of fixed in my mind to have a bit of beefsteak for breakfast. Beefsteak and toast, with some jam and tea. Tired of eggs."

"Well, you won't," she replied. "You'll have your eggs as usual."

They were in the crowd now, part of it, slowly pushing through, glancing at the faces, some eager, some stolid, some excited, and taking care not to slide off the curb in the dim light. Sometimes the people stood perfectly still and then the police moved in and chivvied them along.

The greater number paused in front of a rambling building that might have been a storehouse, with great doors mounted to slide back and forth, but the building was inky dark, with never a sign of life. It was a story and a half in height and seemed to glower down at the populace. Mrs. Shipton glanced upward and said:

"They're sort of beautiful, ain't they?"

She referred to the searchlights, which were already roving back and forth across a murky sky, sweeping long pencils of light and sometimes pausing overhead. There were twenty or thirty of the huge lamps, operated by men long familiar with the job. These men worked languidly, like men waiting for their task to begin.

"There they come," Shipton said casually. "I told you. Seven o'clock."

SURE enough, they could now hear the distant growling of planes, flying far to the north, the murmur fading out while they listened.

"I hear machine guns," Mrs. Shipton said.

"You do not. They're building a plane factory over yonder, three shifts. What you hear is riveters."

Next time, the planes were nearer and the rumblings louder, but again they faded into silence, as though the hour had not yet struck. It was almost seven and the police renewed their efforts to hustle the citizens along, but they preferred to idle on the broad sidewalk before the building with the great dark doors.

"You know," said Shipton, "it's sort of silly for us to be jammed in here. They step on your feet. We ought to move down the road."

"I think it's interesting. Some of these people look pretty excited. See that man. He'll fall off the curb in a minute."

The man, who had his neck strained and his head tipped back at a painful angle, was examining the sky. A policeman nudged him before he could get a crick and he moved silently away. A little boy began yelling and was hushed.

"Seven o'clock," said Shipton. "On the second. They're going to be late."

Presently the sky was filled with planes, some of them enormous bombers with four motors, others smaller and faster, and the men at the searchlights moved into more vigorous action. The searchlights danced briskly now. As the noise overhead increased in volume, the citizens seemed to feel a quickening of interest.

They paid no attention to the police, but stood still and gawked. Not a single bomb had as yet fallen.

There was no noise of explosion, either at a distance or near at hand. All about the crowd lay a great, expectant silence, but the uproar overhead was deafening.

The queer part was that nobody sought shelter or seemed afraid.

"Let's go down farther," Shipton said. "We can see better."

"I can count twenty of them," she said. "Which are the bombers?"

"Dunno. They got a good night for it. Clear as a bell."

SOME of the younger ones were laughing and pointing excitedly to the planes, which were flying unusually low, and then all of a sudden, with a clangor that turned the crowd about, an enormous gong began to bang away and at the same time a bellowing whistle roared, increasing its power until it hurt the eardrums of the standing people. The police shouted vague commands. Citizens shoved one another aside and pushed forward, moving steadily toward the dark building with the high doors. You could hear men running about inside the structure, shouting at one another. Locks were noisily removed from the doors and they rolled slowly back in oiled grooves. The men pushing them seemed to be foreigners, and dark in their features, like Japanese.

Then the interior of the building was revealed, for ten thousand electric lamps lighted up, blinding the onlookers. They were all colors—red, green, blue, purple, orange, white and pink. The crowd began to cheer. On the roof of the structure, a neon sign lighted suddenly, a sign one hundred feet long, a hundred feet high. It was, indeed, a colorful and dramatic spectacle, and while the buzzing planes swooped lower than ever and blimps lighted up signs on their sides, the crowd yelled happily and rushed the great doors, carrying money in their hands, for it was just seven o'clock, hour appointed for the official and formal opening of the very newest food and meat bazaar, the Associated Farmers' & Butchers' No. 2 Store on Fairfax Avenue in Hollywood, California.

The smiling throng circulated, betraying curiosity, buying apples, celery, carrots, avocados, lemons, oranges, spinach, beets, veal cutlets, pork sausages, grapefruit, lettuce, hamburger, green onions, figs and all the lovely gifts of a gracious Nature.

"By George," said Shipton to his wife, "I'll just dash in and get beefsteak for breakfast."

"And I'll buy a Hubbard squash from Maine," said his wife and they hurried inside.

In the sky, the planes zoomed about aimlessly and at eight o'clock, they all went home, leaving the night to the searchlight men. The proprietors stood in the doorway, smiling at one another, for this was really a much larger crowd than at their No. 1 opening.



# Evil Under the Sun

By Agatha Christie

ILLUSTRATED BY MARIO COOPER

## The Story Thus Far:

IN NEED of a rest, Hercule Poirot, noted Belgian detective goes to the Jolly Roger, a quiet old hotel on an English south-coast island. He finds the hotel well-managed; he likes the beach, to which one must climb from the old building; and he finds his fellow guests charming. But, observing those around him, he soon learns that all is not well at the Jolly Roger.

Among the guests whom the little Belgian meets are: Miss Emily Brewster, an amiable old maid; the Reverend Stephen Lane; two Americans—Mrs. Odell Gardener and her husband; Major Barry, a well-intentioned bore; Arlena Marshall; her husband, Kenneth ("Ken"); and Ken's daughter by a former marriage, Linda; Patrick ("Pat") Redfern and his wife, Christine; Rosamund Darnley, a well-known London dressmaker; and Horace Blatt, an inveterate gossip.

Watching them, chatting with them, Poirot gathers that Arlena Marshall and Pat Redfern are having a none-too-secret "affair"; and that the other guests—notably Ken Marshall and Christine Redfern—disapprove strongly of the way they are meeting, slipping off together, at every opportunity.

Not far from the hotel—and, according to legend, connected with it by secret passages—is a cavern. Known as "Pixy's Cave," it is supposed—again according to legend—to be guarded by pixies, "moor spirits." Few know where its entrance is to be found. . . .

One warm August morning, Christine Redfern, accompanied by Linda Marshall, goes to near-by Gull Cove, where Christine plans to do some sketching. . . . Wanting to be alone, Arlena Marshall paddles away from the beach on a small "float." Some time later, Pat Redfern and Miss Brewster, out for a jaunt in a rowboat, reach Pixy Cove. Seeing a woman lying on the beach, and feeling sure that she is Arlena, they row in to her. She does not move when Pat approaches her, kneels down beside her. *She is dead!*

Leaving Pat with the body, Miss Brewster rows back to the hotel. And soon Inspector Colgate, a physician, a police surgeon, Chief Constable—Colonel Weston, and Poirot arrive on the scene, examine the corpse. The verdict is: *Strangled to death by someone with powerful hands!* . . . Poirot tells Weston all that he knows about Arlena and Redfern. "But Marshall," the constable says, "did he know about it? What did he feel?" Poirot says: "He is a man who does not display his emotions." Weston hesitates. Then: "But he might have 'em all the same." The detective nods. "Oh, yes," he replies, slowly, "he might have them."

## IV

THE chief constable was being as tactful as it was in his nature to be with Mrs. Castle.

Mrs. Castle was the owner and proprietress of the Jolly Roger Hotel. She was a woman of forty-odd with a large bust, rather violent henna-red hair, and an almost offensively refined manner of speech. She was saying:

"That such a thing should happen in my hotel! Ay am sure it has always been the quyettest place imaginable! The people who come here are such naice people. No rowdiness—if you know what ay mean. Not like the big hotels in St. Loo."

"Quite so, Mrs. Castle," said Colonel Weston. "But accidents happen in the best-regulated—er households."

"Ay'm sure Inspector Colgate will bear me out," said Mrs. Castle, sending an appealing glance toward the inspector who was sitting looking very official. "As to the lacyensing laws, ay am most particular. There has never been any irregularity!"

"Quite, quite," said Weston. "We're not blaming you in any way, Mrs. Castle."

"But it does so reflect upon my establishment," said Mrs. Castle, her large bust heaving. "When ay think of the noisy, gaping crowds. Of course, no one

but hotel guests are allowed upon the island—but all the same they will no doubt come and *point* from the shore."

She shuddered.

Inspector Colgate saw his chance to turn the conversation to good account. He said:

"In regard to that point you've just raised—access to the island—how do you keep people off?"

"Ay am most particular about it."

"Yes, but what measures do you take? What keeps 'em off? Holiday crowds in summertime swarm everywhere like flies."

Mrs. Castle shuddered slightly again. "That is the fault of the charabancs. Ay have seen eighteen at one time parked by the quay at Leathercombe Bay."

"Just so. How do you stop them coming here?"

"There are notices. And then, of course, at high tide, we are cut off."

"Yes, but at low tide?"

MRS. CASTLE explained. At the island end of the causeway there was a gate. This said: Jolly Roger Hotel. Private. No entry except to Hotel. The rocks rose sheer out of the sea on either side there and could not be climbed.

"Anyone could take a boat, though, I suppose, and row around and land on one of the coves? You couldn't stop them doing that. There's a right of access to the foreshore. You can't stop people being on the beach between low and high watermark."

But this, it seemed, very seldom happened. Boats could be obtained at Leathercombe Bay harbor but from there it was a long row to the island and there was also a strong current just outside Leathercombe Bay harbor.

There were notices, too, on both Gull Cove and Pixy Cove by the ladder. She added that George or William was always on the lookout at the bathing beach proper which was the nearest to the mainland.

"Who are George and William?"

"George attends to the bathing beach. He sees to the costumes and the floats. William is the gardener. He keeps the paths and marks the tennis courts and all that."

Colonel Weston said impatiently, "Well, that seems clear enough. That's not to say that nobody could have come from outside, but anyone who did so took a risk—the risk of being noticed. We'll have a word with George and William presently."

Mrs. Castle said, "Ay do not care for trippers. A very noisy crowd and they frequently leave orange peels and cigarette boxes on the causeway and down by the rocks, but all the same ay never thought one of them would turn out to be a murderer. Oh, dear! It really is too terrible for words. A lady like Mrs. Marshall murdered and what's so horrible, actually—er—strangled. . . ."

Mrs. Castle could hardly bring herself to say the word. She brought it out with the utmost reluctance.

Inspector Colgate said soothingly, "Yes, it's a nasty business."

"And the newspapers. My hotel in the newspapers!"



"Listen, my friend! Last night I had been talking with Mrs. Redfern on Sunny Ledge. On my way down to the hotel I saw those two together—Mrs. Marshall and Patrick Redfern"

Colgate said, with a faint grin, "Oh, well, it's advertisement, in a way."

Mrs. Castle drew herself up. Her bust heaved and, whalebone creaked. She said icily, "That is not the kind of advertisement ay care about, Mr. Colgate."

Colonel Weston broke in. He said, "Now then, Mrs. Castle, you've got a list of the guests staying here, as I asked you?"

"Yes, sir."

Colonel Weston pored over the hotel register. He looked over to Poirot, who made the fourth member of the group assembled in the manageress' office.

"This is where you'll probably be able to help us presently."

He read down the names. "What about servants?"

Mrs. Castle produced a second list. "There are four chambermaids, the head waiter and three under him and Henry in the bar. William does the boots and shoes. Then there's the cook and two under her."

"What about the waiters?"

"Well, sir, Albert, the Mater Dotel came to me from the Vincent at Plymouth. He was there for some years. The three under him have been here for three years—one of them four. They are very naice lads and most respecta-