



I heard a bicycle bell behind me and a crunching of brakes, and then Megan Hunter fell off at my feet. "Hullo," she said

## MOVING FINGER

By Agatha Christie

ILLUSTRATED BY MARIO COOPER

**Beginning the story of a romance fostered by malice, shadowed by murder, and haunted by mystery**

I HAVE often recalled the morning when the first of the anonymous letters came.

It arrived at breakfast and I turned it over in the idle way one does when time goes slowly and every event must be spun out to its full extent. It was, I saw, a local letter with a typewritten address. I opened it before the two with London postmarks, since one of them was clearly a bill, and on the other I recognized the handwriting of one of my more tiresome cousins.

It seems odd, now, to remember that Joanna and I were more amused by the letter than anything else. We hadn't, then, the faintest inkling of what was to come—the trail of blood and violence and suspicion and fear.

One simply didn't associate that sort of thing with Lymstock.

I see that I have begun badly. I haven't explained Lymstock.

When I took a bad crash flying, I was afraid for a long time, in spite of soothing words from doctors and nurses, that I was going to be condemned to lie on my back all my life. Then at last they took me out of the plaster and I learned cautiously to use my limbs, and finally Marcus Kent, my doctor, clapped me on my back and told me that everything was going to be all right, but that I'd got to go and live in the country and

lead the life of a vegetable for at least six months.

"Go to some part of the world where you haven't any friends. Get right away from things. Take an interest in local politics, get excited about village gossip, absorb all the local scandal. Small beer—that's the prescription for you. Absolute rest and quiet."

REST and quiet! It seems funny to think of that now.

And so Lymstock—and Little Furze. Lymstock had been a place of importance at the time of the Norman Conquest. In the twentieth century it was a place of no importance whatsoever. It was three miles from a main road—a little provincial market town with a sweep of moorland rising above it. Little Furze was situated on the

road leading up to the moors. It was a prim, low, white house with a sloping Victorian veranda painted a faded green.

My sister Joanna, as soon as she saw it, decided that it was the ideal spot for a convalescent. Its owner matched the house, a charming little old lady, quite incredibly Victorian, who explained to Joanna that she would never have dreamed of letting her house if "things had not been so different nowadays—this terrible taxation."

So everything was settled, and the agreement signed, and in due course Joanna and I arrived and moved in, while Miss Emily Barton went into rooms in Lymstock kept by a former parlormaid ("my faithful Florence") and we were looked after by Miss Barton's present maid, Partridge, a grim



The strong arm of the goddess caught and held me while I got my stick. I stammered: "Th-thanks awfully. I'm f-f-frightfully sorry to bother you"

letters of a foul and disgusting character are never shown, if possible, to women. It is implied that women must at all cost be shielded from the shock it might give their delicate nervous systems.

I am sorry to say it never occurred to me not to show the letter to Joanna. I handed it to her at once.

She vindicated my belief in her toughness by displaying no emotion but that of amusement. "What an awful bit of dirt! I've always heard about anonymous letters, but I've never seen one before. Are they always like this?"

"I can't tell you," I said. "It's my first experience, too."

Joanna began to giggle. "You must have been right about my make-up, Jerry. I suppose they think I just *must* be an abandoned female!"

"That," I said, "coupled with the fact that our father was a tall, dark, lantern-jawed man and our mother a fair-haired blue-eyed little creature, and that I take after him and you take after her."

Joanna nodded thoughtfully. "Yes, we're not a bit alike. Nobody would take us for brother and sister."

"Somebody certainly hasn't," I said.

Joanna said she thought it was frightfully funny. She dangled the letter and asked what we were to do with it.

"The correct procedure, I believe," I said, "is to drop it into the fire with a sharp exclamation of disgust."

I SUITED the action to the word, and Joanna applauded. "You did that beautifully," she said. "You ought to have been on the stage. It's lucky we still have fires, isn't it?"

"The waste-paper basket would have been much less dramatic," I agreed. "I could, of course, have set fire to it with a match and slowly watched it burn—or watched it slowly burn."

"Things never burn when you want them to," said Joanna. "They go out. You'd probably have had to strike match after match."

She got up and went toward the window. Then, standing there, she turned her head sharply. "I wonder," she said, "who wrote it?"

"We're never likely to know," I said.

"No—I suppose not." She was silent a moment, and then said: "I don't know when I come to think of it that it is so funny after all. You know, I thought they—they *liked* us down here."

"So they do," I said. "This is just some half-crazy brain on the borderline."

"I suppose so. Ugh—nasty!"

As she went out into the sunshine I thought to myself as I smoked my after-breakfast cigarette that she was quite right. It was nasty. Someone resented our coming here—someone resented Joanna's bright young sophisticated beauty—someone wanted to *hurt*. To take it with a laugh was perhaps the best way—but it wasn't funny.

Dr. Griffith came that morning. I had fixed up for him to give me a weekly overhaul. I liked Owen Griffith. He was dark, ungainly, with awkward ways of moving and deft very gentle hands. He had a jerky way of talking and was rather shy.

He reported progress to be encouraging. Then he added, "You're feeling all right, aren't you? Is it my fancy, or are you a bit under the weather this morning?"

"Not really," I said. "A particularly scurrilous anonymous letter arrived with the morning coffee, and it's left rather a nasty taste in the mouth."

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but efficient personage who was assisted by a daily "girl."

As soon as we had been given a few days to settle down, Lymstock came solemnly to call. Everybody in Lymstock had a label—"rather like happy families" as Joanna said. There was Mr. Symmington the lawyer, thin and dry, with his querulous bridge-playing wife. Dr. Griffith—the dark, melancholy doctor—and his sister who was big and hearty. The vicar, a scholarly absent-minded elderly man and his erratic eager-faced wife. Rich dilettante Mr. Pye of Prior's End, and finally Miss Emily Barton herself, the perfect spinster of village tradition.

Joanna fingered the cards with something like awe.

"I didn't know," she said in an awestruck voice, "that people really *called*—with cards!"

"That," I told her, "is because you know nothing about the country."

Joanna is very pretty and very gay, and she likes dancing and cocktails and love affairs and rushing about in high-powered cars. She is definitely and entirely urban.

"At any rate," said Joanna, "I look all right."

I studied her critically and was not able to agree.

Joanna was dressed (by Miroton) for

le sport. The effect was quite charming, but a bit startling for Lymstock.

"No," I said. "You're all wrong. You ought to be wearing an old faded tweed skirt with a nice cashmere jumper matching it and perhaps a rather baggy cardigan coat, and you'd wear a felt hat and thick stockings and old well-worn brogues. Your face is all wrong, too," I added.

"What's wrong with that? I've got on my Country Tan Make-Up No. 2."

"Exactly," I said. "If you lived here, you would have just a little powder to take the shine off the nose and you would almost certainly be wearing all your eyebrows instead of only a quarter of them."

JOANNA laughed, and said that coming to the country was a new experience and she was going to enjoy it.

"I'm afraid you'll be terribly bored," I said remorsefully.

"No, I shan't. I really was fed up with all my crowd, and though you won't be sympathetic I really was very cut up about Paul. It will take me a long time to get over it."

I was skeptical over this. Joanna's love affairs always run the same course. She has a mad infatuation for some completely spineless young man who is a misunderstood genius. She listens to

his endless complaints and works to get him recognition. Then, when he is ungrateful, she is deeply wounded and says her heart is broken—until the next gloomy young man comes along, which is usually about three weeks later.

I did not take Joanna's broken heart very seriously, but I did see that living in the country was like a new game to my attractive sister. She entered with zest into the pastime of returning calls.

To us, it was all novel and entertaining—a new game.

And, as I say, when the anonymous letter came, it struck me, at first, as amusing too.

For a minute or two after opening the letter, I stared at it uncomprehendingly. Printed words had been cut out and pasted on a sheet of paper.

The letter, using terms of the coarsest character, expressed the writer's opinion that Joanna and I were not brother and sister.

"Hullo," said Joanna. "What is it?"

"It's a particularly foul anonymous letter," I said.

I was still suffering from shock. Somehow one didn't expect that kind of thing in the placid backwater of Lymstock.

Joanna at once displayed lively interest. "No? What does it say?"

In novels, I have noticed, anonymous





ILLUSTRATED BY PERCY LEASON

In the wake of the air attack comes the invasion fleet. The transports haul barrage balloons

# Retreat to Victory

By John R. Morris

UNITED PRESS CORRESPONDENT

Since 1922 this famous reporter has watched Japan build her war machine. He saw it grind into action, saw the Allies fight the delaying battles that will help win this war. From Java, he radioes to Collier's this account of the fighting and the strategy back of it



SHE was Dutch and she wore the uniform of a volunteer nurse. She stood in the little town of Serang and watched three Japanese bombers that came with an ugly buzz across the Java sea. Behind her, in the warm valley, dark-skinned women bathed in a stream beside the road, and green volcanic peaks pushed a jagged line against the sky.

But she faced toward the sea as she explained in slow, dignified English that the Dutch would fight and destroy and that she would stay at her post.

"Nobody," she said simply, "can be humiliated by the enemy."

That was the way the Dutch met Japan's offensive into the fabulous treasure-land of the East Indies. They fought quietly, skillfully and utterly without fear. Dry-eyed, they touched the torch to great storehouses, oil tanks and docks that generations of sober colonists had built into property worth billions of dollars. They looked to the future even as their past went up in flames at Tarakan, at Palembang and at Macassar, because they were not fighting alone.

In a bowl-like jungle valley high up in Java's mountains a tall Texan, sweating and rubbing red-rimmed eyes, leaped from a Flying Fortress at a camouflaged airdrome: "Hell! We can do it. Just give us the planes—and some sleep!"

Down on the sun-soaked coast, a red-faced little petty officer, Jock Leehan of Glasgow, made fast one of His Majesty's smallest patrol boats and grinned up at his Dutch hosts: "Anybody got a sandwich? It's a long way from Singapore. Who says we're licked?"

American reporters saw men and women like these, day after day, even in that desperate hour when the enemy thrust gigantic claws across the green islands of the Philippines and down the slim arm of Malaya to the greatest prize of all—the oil and tin and minerals of the Dutch East Indies. These were the resources Japan's war lords gambled to win before the United Nations could mobilize their fighting power. And it was around the island of Java that the Dutch and their allies massed to inflict the greatest possible losses on the enemy, with knowledge that their courage would one day be amply repaid.

Because, although it might give our enemies a laugh at this stage to hear it said, we are literally retreating to victory.

Our retreat, depressing and discouraging as it might seem superficially, is as essential a part of our ultimate victory as the counterattack which eventually will drive the Japanese back to their own islands.

For most of the last five of my fifteen years in the Far East I have been retreating with the Chinese, and latterly with the British, the Dutch and the Americans, from a foe who is already celebrating exultantly his victory over us and our allies. Because the United States was a "neutral against Japan" until last December, I was able to intersperse my retreat with frequent visits to the enemy camps, including Tokyo, occupied Nanking, the puppet state of Manchukuo and other areas. There, all the resources of a vigorous, energetic and intelligent Japanese nation were concentrated for the sole purpose of

gaining complete control of a region of the world vitally important to our welfare and the welfare of our allies.

This almost uninterrupted retreat has been a depressing and often humiliating experience. My colleagues and friends (among them Jim Marshall of Collier's) were on the U.S.S. Panay when the Japanese deliberately sank her by aerial bombardment. I was in Tientsin during the days when Japan provoked a hard-pressed Britain to the limit by stripping and searching British men and women. I was in Shanghai when American women were slapped by Japanese soldiers who destroyed as much American property as they dared throughout China because the United States was a "neutral enemy" with whom they proposed to clash at some later date to be chosen by Japan's war council and that of her Teutonic ally.

## The War That Wouldn't Wait

For Japan and Germany were allied in fact long before the Axis pact was signed, just as the United States stood by China to the utmost of her limited ability long before we became active belligerents.

The principal reason these years were so depressing is that we were compelled to take up arms long before we were prepared to fight foes who had made war their principal business for years. It is surely apparent now that Japan is as expert at war as we are at running industries and making movies. The Japanese have demonstrated that they are better prepared than we are in those branches and forms of warfare in which they have

Fighter planes in large numbers strafe the defensive airdromes with explosive shells, and stay around to protect the bombers

specialized. The only surprising thing is that this was not realized before December and the only important surprise in store for the Axis forces is that the superiority they have displayed in a general way to date will not be enough to achieve their grandiose purpose.

With this in mind, let's take a look at how the Japanese carried out their pincers drive on Java. They began years ago, when the advance guard of invasion moved southward from the Japanese islands to the Philippines, Malaya and the East Indies. They were fishermen, businessmen, traders, tourists and diplomatic officials. They came by the thousands long before the Nazi "fifth columnists" filtered through a doomed Europe.

Japanese on the oil-rich east coast of Borneo owned land in almost every sector of military importance. Japanese traders told the Dyak tribesmen in the Borneo jungles five years ago that they would one day rule the island, whose oil fields they had carefully mapped. Japanese fishermen, who were naval reservists, lost money running their boats off the jutting coast of Minahassa on northern Celebes, but they were there when the imperial navy needed them to aid invader forces. Japanese-paid women haunted the hangouts of sailors around the big Surabaya naval base,

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