Not frightfully British, said the blonde

nearest bar, and chivvied him off to bed. They both needed their, rest—but Lonely had wonders to relate. Every man in the bar had talked like Kojak, and some had even flooked like him. It was better than, the telly. But he went off at last, and Callan could undress and shower, and lie down on the king-size bed—and sleep.

Valence was impervious to bullets—what you had to do was throw cakes at him. Rock buns, sponge cakes, cherry tarts. Callan threw and tinds, but Valence ducked and dodged, and somebody switched a torch on so that Callan could see better, but the torch was in his eyes, Valence was escaping Callan woke, his eyes still shut. Someone was in the room, using a pencil torch: someone who made about as much sound as grass does growing.

pro. . . And the Magnum was under his pillow, and no matter how fast he moved the intruder would be there first. So he lay still instead, and waited until his visitor came for one last look, and lashed out with a fist strike. fist strike.

It landed high, missing the target, the stomach, and slamming into the shoulder standing into the shoulder instead. Even so, the force of it was enough to send the opposition sprawling, giving Callan time enough to slide out of the bed—but only just enough time. The opposition came right back at him, and they fought in the dim light of the discarded torch. of the discarded torch. Almost at once Callan knew that he was out-classed. His only hope was to yell for Fitz-Maurice, asleep in the bedroom nearest his, but even so there was a drawing room between them. And how could he yell, and risk coppers and newspaper reports when he newspaper reports, when he didn't even know who'd sent the intruder, or whether it was just the geezer's own idea and he'd broken in to steal? Callan managed a couple of good ones—a hip throw that should have ended it all, if the feller he was fighting hadn't figated down like a leaf from a tree, and a spear strike beneath the ribs that brought an acknowledging grunt of pain; but even as it landed theredge of a hand like an axe that the back of his neck, they light from the torch exploded into blackness.

Expedded into blackness.

Le awoke to the pleasure of water, soothing, cool, pressed to his neck where an ache was pounding. FitzMaurice's massive fist was squeezing a soppling wet towel to dribble on precisely where it hurt.

"You should have sent for me," FitzMaurice said. "Why get greedy?"

"Next time I'll write," said Callan, and groaned his way back to the bed lifted the pillow. The Magnum was still

HEY'D had one plece of luck: Lonely had slept through it all—and that meant that when they briefed

James Mitchell

him his mind was centred precisely on what they had to say.

SOUTH POINT had never belonged to a Vanderbilt but it looked as if it had. Thirty bedrooms acre after acre of garden, a million flowers, and a gloriously awful mixture of architectural styles, from Tudor to Edward-ian Gothic.

The Rolls whispered down the driveway after they had been frisked at the lodge, and Valence's men had done a Valence's men had done a' thorough job there: everything from prying hands to metal detectors, and a geezer with an old-fashioned tommygun looking on while it happened. "All part of the fun sir," he explained. "Real twenties style." But old-fashioned or not, the tommygun looked like one that worked.

worked. They reached the lawn, which was about the size of the Oval, and joined the long line, of cars that were all in period: everything from a Stutz Bearcat to a Model A

Ford.

There Callan got out, to join about 100 people who were listening to a Chicagostyle band playing "Lady Be Good," and drinking gin. Men in dinner jackets, in Fairisle sweaters, in blazers, but everyone with a cigarette case, or holder, or both: and the women—varty girls all. the women—party girls all, bobbed hair, long beads, short skirts. Even outdoors the row was tremendous. need of a shave and with an all too obvious bulge near his left armpit, conducted Callan to his host. Valence sat in a wicker-work chair, flanked by other men with bulges—and one with a tommy-gun there was no way of hiding.

back to the bed. lifted the pillow. The Magnum was still there.

"He must have been good," FitzMaurice said.

"Your class," said Callan.

"The best."

"I wonder who sent him? Valence?"

"There's only one way to find out," said Callan.

The beat of the beat lifted the pillow. The beat of the blonde seated by his feet—the ultimate blonde, fragile and beautiful, and dressed in white from cloche hat to kid shoes.

She looked at Callan, blue eyes as unwavering as a cat's, while a tall Chinese in a mess-jacket handed him a teacup filled with amber fluid The Chinese looked as tough as any man there, but his right shoulder seemed to pain him. All those teacups to fill,

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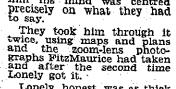
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Lonely, honest, was as thick as two planks, thought Callan, but get him on to thieving and he was a minor genius. Every time. They fuelled him in the dining room, where Lonely reduced the walter to awe by eating two steaks, then left for Newport, Rhode Island.

There they left Lonely in an hotel with a beer, and used his room to change. Callan into a suit with a double-breasted waistcoat and spats, and an old Etonian tie knotted tightly over a gold tie-pin, and two-tone shoes. FitzMaurice into chauffeur's uniform of the period—hussar jacket, breeches and riding boots. They looked at each other.

"I won't laugh if you won't."

"I won't laugh if you won't," FitzMaurice said, and went to fetch the Rolls from its gar-

man was sitting. He rose as call was single malt whisky, and the cup was full.

"Glad to see you, Mr. Tucker," Valence said.

"Good to be here," said Callan. "Thank you."

The cold eyes looked into his. "I like your car," Valence said unheeding. "I want it,"

And that was sitting. He rose as Callan lurched up to him, supported by FitzMaurice, and disappeared inside his coat. "You lost sir?" he asked.

"I'm sorry," FitzMaurice said. "He just can't seem to remember his room. No way."

Callan raised the bottle, drank and then staggered.

want it."

And that was the start of the party: Charleston and rye, Black Bottom and bourbon, on the lawn or in the ballroom with the revolving globe, and relay after relay of musicians. and a Victrola and old 78s when they were all too exhausted or too drunk, to play.

At midnight they went on the lawn again and spotlights played on an enormous cake, and Valence pulled a ribbon and the blonde jumped outbirthday suit for the birthday boy.

day boy. Callan wandered off to-wards the stables, near a garage, and behind him the garage, and bening him the jazz pounded, the champagne corks popped, and girls shrieked merrily as they were flung into the pool. Before him FitzMaurice appeared, a part of the night's blackness.

"You all right?" asked. Callan.
"It's not exactly the Ritz." said, FitzMaurice. "but I'll

"I'd appreclate it," said Callan. "He's got himself a blonde. I don't think he'll be up and about much longer.

My room; quick as you can." can."

He turned and left, and the flowers smelled good and the band still played—and then he paused, wary as a huiting animal is wary. By a tree a man was watching him. Callan went up to him.

"Looking for something?" he asked. "I was wondering if you'd like a piece of cake sir," said the Chinaman, and held out a plate, "Everybody else got

ITZMAURICE reached Callan's room unobserved,

but even so he wanted to l it off. It's the Chinaman," said Callan, and FitzMaurice nodded. "I'm ashamed of you," said Callan. "Racial prejudice from you." "I'm always prejudiced against risk," said Fitz-Maurice. "I don't care what colour it is."
"It's one we'll have take," said Co'' never

"It's one we'll have to take," said Callan. "We'll never get a better chance." never get a better chance."
And they waited for Lonely.
Lonely in the Valence livery of striped waistcoat and bootlace tie, with a cake on a silver salver. Smug Lonely, because he'd got in no trouble at all, and when he carried the cake no one even glanced at him. There was cake wherever you looked.

"Smashing party, Mr. Callan," he said. "Can't I stay?"

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stay? "You might get tette-poisoning." Lonely fled.

The cake was too small for a girl, even a midget, but the two Magnums and the silencers were a snug enough fit. The two men prepared, and Callan picked up a bottle, and they moved to Valence's suite. Outside the door a



Isle of Wight



The fight was epic ... 'If only remember his room. No way."

Callan raised the bottle, drank and then staggered, and FitzMaurice grabbed for him, but somehow the grab missed Callan, and the two hands struck, one at the man's forearm beneath the coat, and the other along the jaw-line where the nerve is exposed. The man crumbled, rubber-legged, and Callan caught him as he fell, relieved him of a Colt 38.

"That was the easy part," said FitzMaurice.
Callan took out the silenced Magnum. "Tell me something I don't know," he said. "Now you open that door and take cover."

FitzMaurice argued, but obeyed at last. Callan was we'd sold tickets...

leader after all, and if he failed, somebody had to get Lonely out.

The door swung open and the man with the tommygun grabbed for it too late, the Magnum made a soft popping sound, like a wet bag bursting, and Callan grabbed for the sub-machine gun left handed as its owner thudded handed, as its owner thudded down, then kicked open the bedroom door.

The blonde was wearing a white kimono, and Valence a black one. He was also eating cake. He put down his fork and glared at Callan.
"Out," he said. "How

and if he many times — "then the had to get anger died and fear replaced it. This wasn't a bodyguard. His hand slid to the pocket of his kimono.

"Scusi," said Callan, and the many times — "then the many times — "then the had fear replaced it. This wasn't a bodyguard. "Scusi," said Callan, and the Magnum plopped, once, then again, head and heart, and Valence went down like a fly swatted. The blonde winced: no more than that.
"What is this?" she said. "The Saint Valentine's Day Massacre? Not frightfully British, old top."
Behind Callan a voice said: "Not British at all. Put the arsenal on the floor, please." Callan did so, and turned to

all, for behind the Chinaman was FitzMaurice. FitzMaurice leaped, and the fight that followed was epic. Callan retrieved his arsenal in case the blonde got nervous, then settled with her to watch. "Oh boy, oh boy," the blonde said. "If only we'd sold tickets." The Chinaman went down at last, but FitzMaurice looked far from well. at last, but FitzMaurice looked far from well.

You boys are wasting your time." said the blonde.

"Not really," said Callan.

"Not really," she mocked.

"He was already dead, my friend. That cake was just about to disagree with him."

"I suppose you baked it yourself?" said Callan. She nodded, her blue eyes unwavering. Callan looked from her to the Chinaman.

"C.I.A.?" he asked:

"Hunter's Section?" asked the blonde. "I think we'd better go, chaps."

She went to a cupboard and took out her clothes—fringed dress, cloche hat—then changed. Her body matched her face. Fitz-Maurice got to work on the Chinaman, and he came to at last.

HEY got to the stables, and a Cadillac vintage 1976, but at the lodge their luck ran out. It seemed that they weren't supposed to leave without permission, and the guards brought their guns from the lodge to prove it.

Callan dropped the Thomson and reached for the silenced Magnum, but the blonde picked up the submachine gun, unleashed a blast of sound that shattered the picket where the submitted that the submitted the submitt the night. Bullets whined over the heads of the security guards, and they fled in panic.
Callan looked at the blonde: Calian looked at the molace, cloche hat still in place, tommy gun held just right: the 'twenties personified. All she needed was a cigar

the waited for the party to coalesce into a single scream. But the party roared on regardless.

"Relax," said the blonde. "Relax," said the blonde.
"It's all part of the Roaring
"Twenties, isn't it? There's
always a little action at a
Valence party—and anyway,
it's 'twenties tradition. Loose
off a Thomson and all that
happens is the band plays
louder. Now let's pick up your
little friend and get you out
of our territory.

"The C.I.A. got on to us because of the car." said Callan. "Once they'd seen it they thought it might be bait for Valence. So they sent the Chinaman to check up on me." me."
"But they let you continue." "But they let you continue," said Hunter.
"That's right," Callan said.
"For two reasons: we were the back up team if they failed—and if they needed a scapegoat we were it."
"But they didn't make you the scapegoats?"
"Two reasons," Callan said again. "One I had a Magnum and the tommy gun magazine was empty. And two, Lorelei Iancied me."
"Lorelei?" said Hunter.
"Preposterous." "Preposterous."
"All right," said Callan.
"So I don't know her name. "So I don't know her name. But I'd know her again, believe me."

"And she'll know you," said Hunter. "Why on earth did they do it?"

"Valence had sweetened his Chinese deal with a C.I.A. man too," said Callan. "So they went after him as well. We had what you might call a dead heat."

But Hunter was impervious to irony not his own. "I'm not happy about this at all." You should be," said Callan. "You should be," said Callan. "Valence bought that Rolls. He paid fifty thousand dollars; for it. Cash."

Next week: File on a tired traitor

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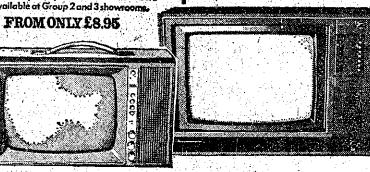
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