THE BUNDAY EXPRESS September 5 1976

Your towel's slipping, said Callan

equality — or hadn't yom heard ' Women drive airplanes now, and dig ditches—and pull triggers." And to save his life Gallan couldn't be sure whether she would or she wouldn't. To save his life. . . . He shrugged and moved towards the phone, a moved that brought him a little closer to her. "Your towel's slipping," he said, and she looked down because the way he said it she believed it: the smug male chauvinist pig way when the pig is in for a treat. . . By the time she looked up again Gallan had leaped, and the flat of his hand had slapped the shotgun's barrels, knock-ing it from her hands. It lay on the floor beside them, still at full-cock, and she bent for it and he grabbed her, and this time: the towel really cid slip, but all he could think as she struggled was how strong she was, then her right hand became a fist that slammed into the side of his neck, and Callan grunted with the pain and paid his tribute to women's lib, caught the fist as it simed a second blow, twisted and threw her. The carpet was thick, but even so the fight was over.

threw her. The carpet was thick, but even so the fight was over. He had all the time he needed to pick up the Purdie and extract the shells as she got up, already aware of bruises.

"I told you your towel was slipping," said Callan. and this time it was. Her fingers leaped to adjust it. "What now?" she said. "Rape?"

Hape ? "How your mind does run on assault," said Callan. "First shooting then a punch-up, then rape." "You forget theft," said the girl. "I didn't come to steal"

the girl. "I didn't come to steal." "You couldn't anyway. Rod doesn't keep drawings here." "He keeps you here."

"Only when I want to come," said the girl. "Where is he?"

She shrugged, and the towel only just survived the strain. "He didn't leave a forward-ing address," she said, "and even if he had----"

"Now tt's your manners that's slipping," said Callan. "Give him a message, love. Tell him a man came about his life insurance." "What about it?" "Tell him to increase it."

E got out quick then, and found a phone booth that hadn't been vandalised, dialled the long, familiar number. "Yes?" Hunter's secretary

said. "Let me speak to Charlie, please. . . .

Hunter came through at once. Didn't he ever sleep? "You've got something ?"

he asked. "Yeah," said Callan. "A clip round the ear.... Can you get an exchange tap on Mercer's phone in Farm Street?"

Hunter sighed. The G.P.O. were never happy about tapping phones, "If I must," he said "You must," ne said. "You must." said Callan, and told him why. "Who is she?" Hunter asked.

'Keep this man alive. the "YOU ever heard of Rod Mercer ?" asked

> Admiralty need him'

# by JAMES MITCHELL

"They'll do rather more than that." said Hunter. "They'll kill him." "A bit drastic." said Callan. "If we all started that every time an engine broke down there wouldn't be a car-dealer left alive." "Shin B'eth have looked into it." said Hunter. "In fact one of their people was killed on a test-run. They say it's a particularly clever kind of sabotage—and that one of the Palestinian groups put lance only-on the sofa table "Oh he delivered." said ther. "He was pleased—

Hunter. "He was pleased— he'd been paid in dollars after all—and they were pleased— they had their engines. . . . Only they're not pleased any more. The engines don't work."

St. A State of the

to do?" Said Callan. "Send a wreath?" "You're supposed to keep him alive," said Hunter. Against Shin B'eth. Pros as good as any in the world: tough, dedicated, deadly with small arms. For them to kill Mercer was as easy as blow-ing out a match: for Callan to keep Mercer alive was about as difficult as picking up that same match and mak-ing it light a second time. "Why don't you give me an easy one for a change?" said Callan. "Just to relieve the monotony." "You're too good for the easy ones," said Hunter. "and we both know it." He pushed

work." Hunter said expression-lessly: "The Admiralty says the Israelis tested it wrong. In the same expressionless voice he continued: "I've never met a sailor yet who wasn't certifiable. All the same they want Mercer. His corpse would not be an acceptable substitute." He nushed the file over to Callan. acceptable substitute." He pushed the file over to Callan. "Most urgent, David," he said. "How long before the Israelis move?"

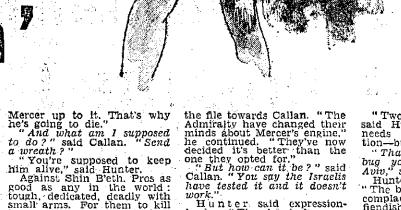
Jamaica, but had a nasty tendency to bob up in other places too. . . It wasn't just unfair, it was downright impossible to keep this dis-appearing jet-setter alive if Shin B'eth wanted to kill him. "Two days, perhaps three," said Hunter. "An execution needs very high authorisa-tion--but they'll get it." "That's a hell of a good bug you've planted in Tel Aviv," said Callan.

Hunter looked complacent. "The best." he said; then the complacency vanished. "But fiendishly expensive." him. . Callan called Mercèr's design Callan called Mercer's design office and got a secretary; the house in Berkshire yielded a caretaker, the Mayfair flat nothing at all. The house in Jamaica produced a very Caribbean mixture of static and incomprehension. Well at least his first job was obvious. First he had to find Rod Mercer. It wasn't easy. To begin with Mercer didn't have a factory, just the design office Callan had phoned, and Callan sent Meres there as a prospective customer to talk to the secretary, and Meres when he was trying could get anything out of a secretary. The troutle was that there was nothing to get. All she

**R** ODNEY ALBERT MERCER—call me Rod. Aged 43. Educated at a secondary modern and a long list of technical colleges. Married twice. Divorced twice. But still fond of women. . . And wine. . . Estimated net worth, three million. House in Berkshire, flat in Mayfair, house in







Colland.

Hunter. Callan did his best : "Pop singer ?" he asked. Hunter snorted. "He's

even richer than that. ... He designs engines, makes them, sells them. A vulgarian, but remarkably wealthy for this day and age." "You don't like him?"

Hunter\_ snorted once more: first a wrong answer, then an irrele-vance.... Not my day, vance. . . Not thought Callan.

thought Callan. "He's a nuisance," said Hunter, then gestured to the drinks table to show Callan he was forgiven, went on as Callan mixed Chivas Regal, ice and water. "Clever people so often are. He designed an engine for a motorboat, a very large, very fast motor-boat—the sort that can carry rockets, and cannon. The Admiralty were quite keen for a while, then somebody else came up with something better—or so they thought." "Too bad for Mercer."

"Too bad for Mercer." in front of him, and moved "Not immediately." said where—Israel to be precise. "Zoo bad for Mercer." is so that it was exactly "Not immediately." said barber of the solution of the solution in front of him, and moved it so that it was exactly "You mean he didn't de-liver?" asked Callan.

... The Israelis liked it very much. Just the sort of thing they need. They ordered sev-eral million dollars' worth." "So British know - how triumphed once more."

"Not exactly — no," said unter His hands went out the yellow file—surveil-Hunter

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The trouble was that there was nothing to get. All she knew was that Rod was away somewhere and that was a good thing, because when Rod came to the design office he went raving mad—working day and night, even sleeping in the piace—and the phone never stopped, and the secre-tary's num didn't like her coming in so late. . . Though mind you Rod was a lovely feller. He got his stuff made under licence, it seemed. Holland, West Germany. Once it had even been Japan. You never knew with Rod. . . S p en c er Percival Fitz-Maurice drew the house in Berkshire, and the caretaker instantly assumed he was an oil sheik, which annoyed Fitz-Maurice, who was proud of the fact that he was about nine times as black as any oil sheik could ever hope to be. Nevertheless he listened redired as the caretaker fold. Nevertheless he listened politely as the caretaker told him that the house wasn't for sale and he'd no idea where Rod was-no idea at all. Never told you a thing, Rod didn't. Never a sign of him from one month to the next, then up he'd pop in a white Rolls-Royce full of birds and champague, all set for a week-end rave up. Old Rod was a bit of a shelk him-self, if you asked the care-taker... listened rtheless he HARLIE

taker....

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"Thigh." "That isn't on Merćer's file\_" Hunter memorised files. "I deduced if," said Callan. "I also deduced she'd been taking a shower." "You'll stay with her of course," said Hunter Callan looked out of the phone box: rain was falling, dreary and persistent. "Ch of course," he said. "Why should I want to go to bed when I can stand about outside and get wet?" "Precisely," said Hunter, and hung up, and Callan passed the time by phoning Lonely. It took eleven calls: a great night for thieving, thought Callan, and hoped the little man had done better than he had.

B to relieve him the rain had stopped, but even so the little man was sunk in gloom. He and his partner of the moment had not had a successful night.

"Four houses we done. Mr. Callan," he said. " and three flats. And we hardly made petrol money. I tell you straight — this old country of ours is in a mess."

self. If you asked an exercise taker. taker....
HAT left the flat in Farm Street. It was: a conversion, and its front door would have taken Lonely a minute, no more, even under the uncertain light of the street lamp. It took Callan five ... but he was in at last, and climbed the stairs. Fop music from Flat A, Moussorgsky from Flat B, but from Flat C. Mercer's flat, no sound at all. No light either. Callan took a set of keys from his pockets, and set to work. He made no more noise than Lonely would have done, but the little man was lightning fast... A hell of a time for him to go out on an h on est night's thieving, thought Callan, and went on probing, twisting, until at last the door's locks yielded : he slipped inside
Anallway that was mostly parquet, and one exquisite painting on silk that Mercer must have picked up in Japan, and to the right of it a mahogany door that led into a' living-room with a desk. Callan took a pencil-slim torch from his pocket and examined the lock, and sighed : another long job. He reached for the keys once more, and as he did so the lights went on: "You'll ruin your eyesight, working in the dark 'like that." said a voice. It was a woman's voice, mocking : low-oftched. Callan spun round. She was a sight to see all right at callan's midriff. Worth a couple of thousand at least. An expensive way to die.

Nice

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way to die. All expensive "1 suppose you're going to tell me you've come about the drains," said the girl. 'No," said Callan. "I've come about Rod Mercer," "He's not here," said 'the girl. "and you knew he wasn't here. You've come to steal." She lifted the sholgun very slightly. "The phone's on that table over there: Pick it up and call the police." Callan made no move. She lifted the sholgun very slightly. "The phone's on that "Be a pleasure." said table over there? Pick it up and call the police." Callan "Listen." the girl said. "We're living in times of subject in a towel, and Mr.

of ours is in a mess." Callan rubbed the spot where Angela Wain had hit him, and agreed, then told Donely what he must do, and at once the little man was happy: he didn't even haggle about money, because follow-ing posh birds was his hobby anyway. . Callan went home to bed, and slept, but not for long. Lonely rang him at 9.30. The

Lonely rang him at 9.30. The subject was at a travel agents, buying a ticket for Malaga. She'd also inquired about a hire-car from there to a place that sounded like Fuerto Sanchez.

"Just one licket?" Callan asked.

"Yeah," said Lonely. "Iberia. Afternoon flight. It was the first she could get." His voice hoarsened a little. "You really see her with nothing but a towel on ?" "I did," said Callan. "Stay with her."

