

began to drag the planks back to their old position over the skylight. He worked with the roughness of impatience, and the first plank slid far beyond the orifice and balanced on the opposite edge, dipping and rising like a see-saw. "Couldn't do *that* again, if I tried," Deryk murmured, as he walked round and steadied it in place. "Damnably noise it would have made!" He was grown so used to the silence and solitude of the last two hours that he shivered at the idea of one moment's tense expectancy, a crash like the jar of two warring planets, the echo, echo, echo, fading gradually beyond his ears' power to recapture it. Everyone in the street—everyone in London—would jump out of his skin, pull up short, help to swell a crowd, ask silly questions. . .

The second and third planks dropped into position; he threaded the rope over and under them, drew it taut and began to drag up the tarpaulin. In another five minutes his work would be over. Three minutes to wash his hands, brush his clothes. Then he could vamp up an apology and hurry back to his guests.

Deryk had an indefinite feeling that he was letting slip a great opportunity.

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Obedient to instructions Idina had escorted the Manistys to Deryk's rooms and ordered tea. All three knew him too well to delay their own movements a single instant on his account; they sat down without noticing the time, began their tea, finished it, smoked one or two cigarettes and discovered to their common amazement that it was six o'clock and that Deryk must have been away rather more than an hour. With opportunity for reflection and candour all would have confessed to a sense of relief in escaping from him while his present mood was on.

"I can't think what can have happened to him!" Idina exclaimed.

Yolande noticed that her cheeks were mother-of-pearl in