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THE CRIME CLUB GOLDEN BOOK OF BEST DETECTIVE STORIES

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A WORD TO THE READER

THIS BOOK is an anthology, a sort of sampler, a crime-addict's bedside book, chosen from the four hundred odd books issued by the Crime Club since it was established five years ago. It contains three novels, each of classic proportions in its own field, each introduced by a note from the author: the novel of mystery and terror (Mignon G. Eberhart's *While the Patient Slept*), the English novel of detection (Anthony Berkeley's *The Poisoned Chocolates Case*), and the American police novel (Rufus King's *Murder by the Clock*). It contains likewise work from the gory pens of H. C. Bailey, greatest of writers in the Holmes tradition, of Edgar Wallace, famous throughout the world as the prince of thrillers, and of Leslie Charteris, whose debonair Mr. Simon Templar is creating a whole new school of mystery writing. And for contrast there are two sensational cases out of the true history of crime, and a handful of bafflers for the student of criminology.

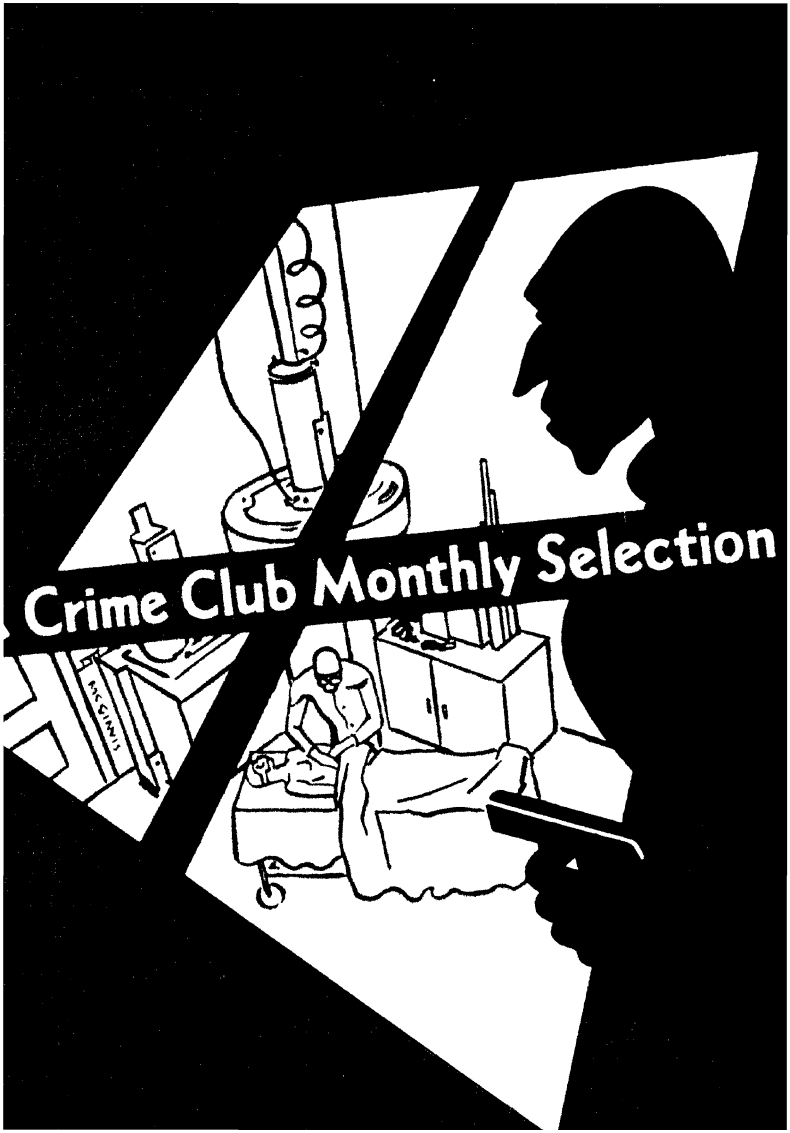
All this is by way of being an anniversary celebration. During its five years of life the Crime Club has grown to be the largest publisher of detective stories in America. It has published in those years such long-famous names as Edgar Wallace, H. C. Bailey, J. S. Fletcher, Sax Rohmer, Frank L. Packard, Frances Noyes Hart, Baroness Orczy, A. E. W. Mason, "Sapper" (H. C. McNeile), and Carolyn Wells. It has had the honor of publishing the first mysteries of John Stephen Strange, Margery Allingham, Kay Cleaver Strahan, Rufus King, Nancy Barr Mavity, Leslie Charteris, Anthony Berkeley, Van Wyck Mason, Helen Reilly, and a long list of other distinguished names. It will publish shortly the first detective novels of Sir Basil Thomson, long head of the

C.I.D., New Scotland Yard, and of John W. Vandercook, whose *Black Majesty* is one of the living books of our time.

The Crime Club is, forgivably we hope, proud of this record, proud to be able to offer this anthology. We are not, as the custom is in mystery collections, prefacing it with any lengthy history of the age and scope of detective stories (they are probably the oldest form of narrative); nor of the great of this world (such as King George V, President Roosevelt, the Archbishop of Canterbury) who find pleasure and relaxation in reading them. You have been told all that often before. Let it be enough now to say only that they are fun to read, more fun perhaps than any other form of literature in this worried modern world. And to add that in this book, and in all those that bear the Crime Club's imprint, you will be treated by the authors concerned with the greatest respect in such matters as suppressed clues, hidden passages, twin brothers, unknown poisons, hypnotism, death rays, telepathy, murders that turn out to be (a) accidents, or (b) suicides, secret passages, female impersonators and vice versa, and red herrings and untied threads in general. And with these few laudatory remarks we leave you to the book. Seldom between one set of covers will you find such a large and diverse collection of thrills and shudders, such a concentration of blood-chilling happenings and ruthless detection. We hope you'll enjoy it.

MASTERMIND.

If your own detective sense has been aroused by the fact that in the pages following the numbers start afresh with each new section, and occasionally begin with some number higher than 1, the explanation is simple. Because of complicated manufacturing problems the various books and stories are printed here from their original plates and with the original page numbers.


Crime Club Monthly Selection

WHILE THE PATIENT SLEPT

MIGNON G. EBERHART HAS WRITTEN FIVE MYSTERY NOVELS FEATURING NURSE KEATE:

The Patient in Room 18
While the Patient Slept
The Mystery of Hunting's End
From This Dark Stairway
Murder by an Aristocrat

HER OTHER MYSTERY NOVELS INCLUDE:

The White Cockatoo
Rigadoon (in press)

THERE is not, really, any argument for detective stories.

Neither is there argument against them.

It is as it is with the other good things of life. You either like them or you don't like them. If you don't like detective stories, nobody cares. If you do like them, it is for the best of all possible reasons and that is no reason at all.

To those lucky ones who have the key and the password and the secret knowledge (and no others are apt to see this page) there is only one thing to say which has significance. That is: on with the tale.

WHILE THE PATIENT SLEPT

TO ALAN

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All of the characters in this book
are entirely fictitious

CHAPTER I

THE CURVE OF A REVOLVER

TWICE, possibly, I had had occasion to travel the rather deserted and out-of-the-way road along which the old Federie house looms desolately magnificent amid the somber clusters of evergreens that surround it. At any rate, I recognized the place at my first glimpse of it through the fog, knowing that I had seen it at some previous time, though, until I arrived there that cold February day to nurse old Mr. Federie himself, I did not know even the name of the family that owned it.

It is a rambling place, built of worn red brick, with a long wing extending from the middle of the house back. The front of the house, which faces west, juts out at each corner in a three-sided tower; these two towers end in ugly cupolas above the second-floor windows and were probably the very height of architectural elegance when the house was built. The southwest tower is lined with windows on both floors, but the northwest tower has no windows at all. Add to this many chimneys bristling from the slate roof that needs repairing, narrow windows securely inclosed with shutters, rags of vines clinging to the old walls but not concealing the numerous places where the masonry is in need of mending, and you have Federie house.

The whole of it, rambling stables, evergreens, and all, is inclosed by a high brick wall, somewhat dilapidated, but remarkably solid nevertheless: entrance to a weed-grown walk leading to the massive balconied front door is provided by a grilled-iron gate.

It is not a cheerful place. There is a kind of morose secretiveness about the narrow shuttered windows and iron gate and rearing chimneys and blind tower wall that is not attractive. And its secluded location along that little-traveled road does not improve matters.

The affair at Federie house began for me one blustery day in early February. I had been off duty for several days, and when Dr. Jay telephoned, asking me to take a case for him, I promised with an alacrity that, looking back upon, seems the very essence of irony.

"It isn't a hard case," said the doctor reassuringly over the telephone. "The patient is old Mr. Federie. He has had a stroke and hasn't recovered his speech yet. You'll find the chart there and orders for the night, and I will call in the morning. Thank you, Miss Keate."

"Just a moment," I said hurriedly as he was about to ring off. "Did you say Federie? What is the address?"

He chuckled.

"A mile out Aufengartner Road from O Street corner. Then turn to the left. It's the first house after the turn." He clicked the receiver hastily upon that as if he were afraid I would change my mind. And it was not a propitious address: a nurse on private duty is supposed to have her four hours off in the afternoon, and cases that do not offer an easy and rapid means of transit into

town are not looked upon with any favor on the part of the nurses. I was positive that there was no trolley line out Aufengartner Road and taxi fares are exorbitant in B——.

However, I called a taxi and by the time it had arrived I had packed my bag with fresh uniforms and other essentials, donned coat and hat, and was ready to go. The taxi driver's naturally truculent expression took on a happier aspect as I gave him the address. The robber!

It must have been close to five o'clock by that time, for it was rapidly growing dusk, and the wet pavements caught dismal gleams from the early lights of passing automobiles that loomed out of the heavy fog and passed us with a swishing of tires. We left the lights behind, however, as we took our way out Aufengartner Road, and nothing but cold and fog-drenched landscape met my eyes. It was a long mile before we swerved suddenly to the left, off the pavement and onto a muddy, little-used country road. The outlook for a pleasant case looked less and less favorable, especially as the taxi dropped into a mudhole and out again with a precipitancy that brought my head smartly into contact with the top of the car and then thrust me with some force into the seat again, with my umbrella athwart my ankles, my traveling bag in my lap, and my hat over one eye. In growing irritation I leaned forward, pushed aside the little glass window, and spoke to the taxi driver.

"Can't you drive more carefully?"

He did not appear to hear my inquiry, and I was obliged to poke him with my umbrella. Owing to the

taxi giving a particularly frantic lurch just then I believe I poked him harder than I had intended. At any rate, he remarked "Urgh!" very distinctly and turned a startled face toward me.

It was unfortunate that he turned from the wheel and, as I pointed out later, entirely his own fault. Left to itself the taxi swerved crosswise the narrow road, bounded lightly over the ditch, and I was never sure just what happened until I found myself crawling out from a mêlée of broken glass, leather seat cushions, and my own bags and umbrella, the taxi driver keeping up an exceedingly passionate monologue all the while. Neither of us was hurt, and standing in the muddy road I stared at the wheels of the taxi, gayly spinning in the air, and for a few sharp moments the taxi driver and I engaged in a somewhat lively dialogue. But mere words, no matter how vigorous, cannot force a recumbent taxi to its feet, so to speak, and I soon realized that I should have to walk the rest of the way to Federie house. Hoping that it might not be far, I took my traveling bag in one hand, my handbag and umbrella in the other, and started out.

It was hard going through the mud, and I soon began to search the country about with anxious eyes for a glimpse of the house that was my destination. Suddenly I saw it, a great bulk of a house, looming dimly through the fog about a quarter of a mile ahead.

This, then, was the Federie place!

I recall that I paused for a moment there in the road, my pulse quickening a little as I strained my eyes to follow its forbidding outlines, and the strangest feeling of—well, it was not entirely apprehension and not

entirely depression, but a kind of vague mingling of both swept over me. But if I put any thought into definite words it was simply that dusk of a dismal February day was not the best time to penetrate the interior of that dreary-looking place.

The house was set some distance back from the road and was yet a long walk from the spot where I stood, and in spite of my heavy ulster I was chilled to the bone. I looked dubiously at the field that lay to my right. If I could cut across that field it would make a sort of hypotenuse to the triangle and shorten my walk considerably. And as if in answer to my wish I saw a stile over the fence inclosing the field, and beyond it a path that apparently wound through the field, down into a little valley, small but thickly wooded, and thence, I had no doubt, to some side gate of Federie house. Without hesitation I mounted the stile—and was to wish most fervently that I had remained in the road.

For it was just as I entered the small wooded strip and stepped upon a little bridge that crossed a stream that the thing happened which was to haunt me through weary days and fearful nights.

My bag had grown heavy and I set it down on the floor of the bridge to shift it to the other hand. In the very act of doing so a voice came clearly from somewhere near me:

"I *can't!* I *won't! I'm afraid to!*"

It was a woman's voice, young and vibrant now with a repugnance that approached terror.

I straightened up and looked about me. Just ahead of me the path curved sharply around a little thicket

of cedars, and it was from there that the voice must have come.

"Don't be a little fool!" This was a man's voice, easy, lazy, yet carrying with it more than a tinge of arrogant demand. "You must do it, March. According to the doctor he may die at any moment. Afraid? Nonsense. A Federie afraid!" He laughed with a kind of easy scorn. "A Federie hand is born to fit the curve of a revolver."

"But—this——" faltered the woman's voice and broke.

"This is nothing if you look at it in the right way. If he were not so desperately sick—but he is! There's no time to be lost. It must be to-night. Everything's at stake." He ended on a note of urgency and there followed a short silence. I dare say I should have made my presence known, but I'll not deny that this extraordinary scrap of conversation caught my interest, and I am not a stickler for the niceties of convention at such a time.

"Very well, then," said the other voice suddenly and with indescribable reluctance. "I'll do it. But I think there could be some other way."

"This is the only way. You can arrange the whole thing, March, and no one will know anything about it. And you'll do it to-night?"

"Yes."

"Good girl! I knew you wouldn't fail me. To-night, then. Be careful no one sees you."

"Yes."

"Good girl," he repeated. There was a rustle, the

unmistakable sound of a kiss, and then the muffled sound of footsteps and twigs and branches brushing against each other as if the speakers were departing by way of the shrubbery. I picked up my bag, advanced a step or two along the bridge, rounded the little curve beyond it, and came upon a girl who turned a startled white face toward me.

Even in the twilight that filled the small hollow I saw that she was remarkably lovely. She was of slight figure, I thought, though I could tell little of that because of the heavy folds of a long blue cape that completely enveloped her. The cape had a scarlet-lined hood that fell back over her shoulders, capuchin-like, and her dark hair, close cropped and falling in soft little curls, was beaded with mist. She had an arrogant, straight little nose, a willful chin, and a rather sulky mouth that kept its soft crimson even though her face had apparently lost every shred of color at my unexpected advent. But her eyes were the most arresting feature of her face. They were blue, a very deep, sapphire blue that looked directly at you from between extravagant black lashes and from under brows that were very black and straightly penciled and rather heavy and at that moment wore a frown that intimated displeasure rather than anger.

"Can you tell me if this path leads to Federie house?" I asked somewhat hurriedly, feeling, in truth, a little bothered as I recalled the bit of conversation I had overheard, with its tender and abrupt conclusion.

She did not reply at once, studying me instead with those incredibly blue eyes.

"Yes," she replied finally. "It does. I am March Federie. Are you the nurse Dr. Jay was to send out?"

"Yes. My name is Sarah Keate. Is it your father who is ill?"

"My grandfather." She continued to survey me with a steady look that I found a trifle disconcerting.

"My taxi broke down," I found myself explaining. Instantly she was full of hostess-like concern.

"Why, you poor thing! Did you have a long walk? From Aufengartner Road? Come, we'll hurry to the house, and I'll make you a hot drink while you get into dry clothes." A pretty color flared into her cheeks as she spoke, but the momentary vivacity lapsed into a frowning and troubled silence as she walked along beside me, following the wet path. It was dusk by this time, and objects were growing blurred and indistinct before we emerged suddenly at a gate set in the brick wall that surrounded the house. I was much concerned with my wet feet and the pangs of neuralgia that were already beginning to shoot up my right elbow and paid little attention to the enormous dark bulk, with lights showing here and there in bright bars through the shutters that the opening of the gate disclosed. The girl led me through a desolate and uncared-for garden, where vines of the previous summer must have madly overrun the paths, around the southwest tower corner and toward the great old door. There was no porch, only steps, and above the door was a hideous arch of many-colored panes of glass through which a faint light streamed in eerie greens and reds and purples.

It was at the step that I dropped my umbrella, and

as I stooped to recover it there was a sudden rush of feet, a low growl, and then March Federie's voice, as sharp as a whiplash.

"Down, Konrad!"

I grasped the umbrella and turned. A German shepherd dog, looming enormously tall and lean through the dusk, stood as if checked in mid-charge, not six feet from me, his head low, his ears back, and a growl rumbling in his great throat.

"It is Eustace's dog," said the girl. "He is unchained at sunset. We are somewhat isolated here, you know," she concluded somewhat wearily, and then added as if at an afterthought: "Eustace is my cousin."

She turned to the door, fumbled for a second with a latchkey she must have had, and then the great door swung slowly back, a thin light streamed through the foggy shadows, and at her gesture I entered the wide hall. I blinked a little, although the light was not strong, and then my eyes fell upon a man at the far end of the room. It was not the man so much as his position that caught my eyes, for he was standing on a stepladder, engaged in the somewhat singular pastime of smoothing the walnut wainscoting with his bare hand.

"Grondal!" said March, in much the same tone she had used in speaking to the dog. He was either a little deaf or so much engrossed in his curious occupation that he was oblivious to our entrance until the girl spoke. And when he turned it seemed to me that the barest hint of consternation crossed his face. Then he got down from the stepladder quite deliberately and approached us.

"The walnut panels need waxing, Miss March," he said.

Now a man is to blame for his manner, but not for his face, and while Grondal's manner left nothing to be desired I am bound to admit that he had the most villainous cast of countenance I have ever seen in all my life. He was dark and swarthy, with thin iron-gray hair, small eyes of which you only caught the glitter under overhanging eyebrows, and heavy features that were not improved by a wide purple scar that ran slantwise across his face and made of his mouth a cruel and twisted line. If there was ever bandit and jailbird written in anyone's face it was in this man, Grondal's, and though I have about as lively and sprightly imagination as that of a cow I involuntarily took a firmer grip on my handbag as he drew near.

The girl at my side cast a fleeting glance toward the dully gleaming walnut panels that lined the hall.

"I think it can wait," she said dryly. "Did you light a fire in the nurse's room?"

"Yes, Miss March."

"Then take her to her room, please," the girl directed crisply. "I shall send up something hot for you to drink presently," she added, addressing me.

Grondal advanced, grasped my bag, and took his way very sedately up a vast stairway that appeared at our right, and I followed, admiring as I went the walnut paneling, the slenderly carved newel post, and the broad, thickly carpeted steps. It was a little too shadowy, however, to suit my taste, as our sole illumination, once we got beyond the light cast by the hanging lamp in the hall, was from a candle thrust into a queer

old wall bracket at the head of the stairs. The light from this flickered and wavered and cast elongated shadows from the figure of the man before me. Our footsteps were not audible on the heavily padded steps, and the stairway seemed interminable. But we did reach the top step, where Grondal turned to the left. Ahead of us and behind us stretched a long hall, papered and carpeted in a somber green that lost itself in shadows. Here and there were heavy doors of some dark wood, all closed, and over the whole place hung a thick silence and that chill, musty atmosphere that the walls of an old house seem to hold. I took a step forward and trod on something soft that galvanized itself into a squalling, yellow whirlwind and fled down into the shadows of the hall, shattering the silence as it yowled hoarsely at every bound. It was very disconcerting.

"What is it?" I cried.

"It is the cat," said Grondal with what, I think, passed for a smile. "It was the cat, Genevieve. You must have stepped on his tail, and he's very sensitive, if I may say so, as to his tail." There was a touch of satisfaction in his voice; whether at the cat's discomfiture or mine I did not know. He pushed open a door, beyond which a light appeared, and placed my bag on a chair. "A bathroom is the next door to the left. If there is anything further, please ring." He indicated a red plush rope that ended in a frayed tassel and hung beside the door, bowed briefly, and backed out, closing the door softly. Owing, I suppose, to the well-carpeted hall floor, I did not hear his footsteps departing and for a moment experienced the absurd feeling that he was lingering just outside my door.

The days of Federie prosperity must have predated electricity and centralized heating, for an old-fashioned, oil-fed lamp hung from the ceiling amid many bangles and gave a mellow but wavering light, and what heat there was came from a small, round-bellied heating stove whose fat sides were already growing red with its exertions. Back of the stove lurked a skimpy fireplace that looked as if it had not held a fire in thirty years. The room was high ceilinged, not too large, and was crowded with massive black-walnut furniture, dusty red curtains, and a padded carpet, and lugubrious steel engravings with tarnished gilt frames hung from the walls. I was to find that if Charles I and Mary Queen of Scots lost their heads once in that house they lost them a dozen times.

I had little time to consider my surroundings. In fifteen minutes I had got into dry clothes, figured out how the marvelously ancient plumbing in the bathroom worked, downed the hot and disagreeable drink that March Federie brought to me, and clad in a fresh white uniform, with my starched white cap concealing the gray streak in my abundant red hair, was descending the stairway.

No one was in the great hall and I paused irresolutely, looking at the numerous curtained doorways leading from the hall and wondering how and where I should find my patient.

Most of the doorways were dark, but from one under the stairs came the gleam of light and the sound of voices. As I started toward it, someone—a man—laughed loudly and unpleasantly, and through the dark green velvet curtain came a burst of furious music.

It was the first time I heard that particular composition; it was a wild, eerie tune that made little shivers start from inside my elbows, and it was curious that I immediately and definitely disliked the thing.

I crossed to the curtain, thrust it aside, getting a whiff of the stale smell that clung to its heavy folds as I did so, and entered a book-lined room at the opposite side of which an open fire snapped and crackled. At one end of the room a concert grand piano of the massive style of the 'nineties loomed out of the shadows and at its yellowed keyboard sat a young man, dark, slender, and meticulously groomed, whose nervous fingers lingered for a moment on the keys, even as his narrow dark eyes sought mine with interest, and his thin mouth curved in a smile that held a kind of cruel amusement.

Then he sprang lightly to his feet, bowed with an exaggerated courtesy, and advanced with quick, lithe footsteps.

"I am Eustace Federie," he volunteered, his quick eyes missing not a curve of my rather ample figure, nor a lace of my sturdy black oxfords. "I presume you are the nurse."

There was something familiar about his voice, and I hesitated in replying as I tried to recall where I had previously heard it. He did not wait for my assent, but turned with a panther-like grace toward a wing chair in front of the fireplace.

"Deke," he said with the little mocking overtone that I was to find his words always held. "Have you no manners?"

There was a movement, and another young man rose

somewhat reluctantly from the wing chair and turned to face me. He was a handsome young fellow in a clean-shaven, boyish way, with blond hair and nice blue-gray eyes, but his chief characteristic at the moment seemed to lie in a most remarkable sulkiness that completely enveloped him.

"Miss——" Eustace Federie paused, his brilliant dark eyes on mine.

"Keate," I supplied.

"May I present Deke Lonergan?"

Deke Lonergan bowed grudgingly and with a lack of interest that was not flattering. Eustace laughed.

"You find him at his worst, Miss Keate. He has been disappointed in a matter that lies near his heart. But he is a good friend. When the news of my grandfather's imminent demise brought me to this morgue of a house, Deke accompanied me. Volunteered, in fact, and insisted. Wouldn't take no for an answer."

"Oh, shut up!" growled the Lonergan man. His fists had doubled up and he thrust them viciously into the pockets of his brown tweed coat as if to hide this evidence of his feelings. Eustace's eyes glittered and he laughed again.

"Suppose you take me to your grandfather, young man," I suggested a trifle abruptly. Something very like a flicker of surprise crossed Eustace's face; I dare say he was accustomed to members of my sex addressing him with more deference. However, he murmured, "Assuredly," and swept the curtain backward for my passage. There was a shelf under the stairway that held matches, candles, and quantities of candlesticks, old and new. Several matches broke under his impa-

tient fingers, and when the candle he finally lighted flickered feebly and went out he said something under his breath that I made no doubt it was as well I did not hear

The next time the flame held, and taking the candlestick in his hand he led me across the entrance hall and thence through a succession of dreary rooms that so far as I could see by the wavering candlelight were exactly like my room upstairs, save that they were drawing rooms instead of bedrooms and held a multitude of hideous sofas upholstered in shiny black haircloth or worn green plush, and numerous little cabinets crowded with the curio claptrap of forty years back. The candle cast a little circle of light around us, and it was only the furniture that lay near our path that was definitely visible. Somewhere along the way the cat, Genevieve, picked us up. The first intimation I had of his presence was when Eustace hesitated for a second and then kicked violently into the shadows ahead. There was a spit from the cat, a savage "Devil take that cat!" from Eustace, and I craned my neck to see beyond Eustace's shoulders. There ahead of us, just within the circle of light, marched the cat with his great orange tail hoisted triumphantly. There was masculinity rampant in the majesty of his long-legged stride, and I never knew why he had been given a name of such feminine frivolity.

Then Eustace held back another curtain, Genevieve and I passed through a doorway into a narrow and very dark passage, whose dankly musty air struck me unpleasantly, and thence around a curve where we brought up before still another curtain. I was to grow

heartily to detest the many stifling curtains in Federie house, but at the moment I only gazed with interest into the room that the lifting of the heavy green velvet disclosed.

It was a large room, as gloomy and dreary as any of its predecessors. Its northwest corner was a sort of alcove with three sides, along which climbed an angular, narrow stairway, with a banister that was thickly hung with tapestries and rugs. The stairway made two sharp turns at the angles of the tower, and from the steps to the floor below there was an elaborate paneling of some dark wood like that in the entrance hall. A wood fire smoldered under a mantel of dismal black marble, and near it was a great curtained bed. The old-fashioned curtains were pushed back, and my patient, an old man, was lying there, his face darkly flushed against the white pillows and his unseeing eyes half open. As I started toward the bed a man arose from somewhere in the shadows.

"Why, Uncle Adolph!" There was a faint jeer in Eustace's voice and his laugh grated on my nerves. "Still faithful? Such touching filial devotion!"

Adolph Federie advanced into the mellow circle of light from a shaded lamp that stood on a table in the middle of the room. He was dark like Eustace, but years of good living had given him a puffy bulkiness; his face was sallow, and there were great bags under the turgid whites of his eyes; his lips lacked Eustace's thinness, too; they were pale and hung loosely with an unlighted cigarette clinging to the lower one.

"That's enough from you, Eustace," he said in a tone

that held quite unconcealed animosity. "Is this the nurse?"

With much flourish Eustace gave us an elaborate introduction, during which Uncle Adolph's eyes studied me rather closely from under their drooping lids, and my fingers itched to come into smart contact with Eustace's ears.

"You can leave the patient with me now," I hinted, interrupting Eustace.

"Hear that, Uncle Adolph? Your loving attention is no longer needed. Come, let's leave the lady to her duties." With an airy gesture of farewell Eustace departed.

But Uncle Adolph lingered, his darkly opaque gaze not leaving me for an instant. Resolving to ignore the gentleman, I walked to the bedside table, picked up the chart, and began to study it. I was still conscious, however, of that still regard which lasted for a long moment or two before he spoke.

"I am deeply concerned about my father's condition," he said at last. "He has not spoken yet, Miss Keate. When he does speak—" the man paused while he walked over to stand beside me at the table—"when he does speak, have Grondal call me at once."

Well, that was a perfectly reasonable request, and it was only the man's ingratiating manner that affected me disagreeably. While I hesitated in replying he bent closer to me. My hand lay on the chart, and he pressed his own hand, clammy and soft, upon it. A large diamond of dubious color and set too elaborately winked at me.

"Beautiful hand," he murmured softly in my ear. His tone was very suave and smooth.

I jerked my hand away.

"A man in your condition of health had better look to his liver and forgo the study of hands," I said sharply.

"Coming, Uncle Adolph?" It was Eustace at the doorway smiling with a kind of malicious amusement into Adolph Federie's livid countenance.

For the space of possibly fifteen pulse beats Adolph Federie's eyes held mine. Then he, too, smiled.

"We'll meet again, Miss Keate," he said in a voice that held as much threat as promise, and the next moment the green curtain fell and I was alone with my patient, wiping on my skirt the back of my hand on which the touch of those clammy, soft fingers still clung, and wishing for the first but not the last time that I was safely out of Federie house.

The cat, Genevieve, with a flash of tawny tail, vaulted lightly to the mantel and sat down, curling his tail around his gaunt haunches and fixing me with an unwinking stare from his great topaz eyes that seemed to hold incalculable secrets. The fire below him sighed. The fog outside had turned to sleet, and I could hear it beating gustily against the shutters. A rug from the banister of the tower stairway slithered to the floor, and at the whisper of its fall I whirled, my heart leaping to my throat. Then I laughed a little nervously and turned resolutely to the charts. But I gazed at the red temperature line without seeing it, for all at once I knew why Eustace Federie's voice had seemed familiar to me.

It was the voice I had heard down by the little bridge, not an hour ago, wringing that reluctant promise from March Federie. What was it March had promised to do? What was it he had urged with such anxiety and determination? She had promised to do it "to-night."

I shivered suddenly, though I was not cold, and moved nearer the fire. There was that about the place that I definitely and positively did not like, and it was clear to me, even then, that it would not be a pleasant case.

And it was not.

CHAPTER II

ON THE TOWER STAIRWAY

I WENT about my duties somewhat mechanically, though at any other time my patient would have interested me. He was very old, with fine generous features, flushed now and full looking, vigorous white hair, and heavy eyebrows that were yet black and whose fine indomitable sweep reminded me of those of March Federie. Her face, for all it was so deliciously young and feminine, held much more of the strength and will that characterized the face of her grandfather than did either of the male members of his family.

At seven Grondal appeared, telling me in a hoarse whisper, presumably so as not to disturb my patient, that dinner was served, and he would show me the way to the dining room. I acquiesced, of course, and followed him. He carried a lamp in one hand and wore a faded and threadbare mulberry velvet livery that ended somewhat surprisingly in long wool golf socks and black brogues. This time we did not go through those ghostly drawing rooms, but followed the dark little passage around two corners and into the dining room itself.

March was already there, standing very straight at the head of the table quite as if it were her rightful place. She wore an amazing and very lovely dinner gown of crimson velvet, tight bodiced and long, with

silver cloth lining its irregular hem line and a silver ornament holding her soft dark curls back from her forehead. She wore silver slippers, too—lamé, I think—and altogether the outfit must have cost an astonishing sum of money, which item was something at variance with the rather barren condition of the household. I thought it also a too magnificent costume for a simple dinner at home, but I was yet to learn of the remarkable state and dignity with which the simplest Federie act was invested.

Toward the other end of the table stood a tall, gracefully rounded woman, who I found was Mrs. Adolph Federie, although March addressed her as Isobel without the courtesy title, Aunt, and did not seem to be on terms of intimacy with the lady. Isobel Federie was an attractive woman, in a sense, although her hair was a little too obviously touched up in color until it was a peculiar crimson red that was swept very low above her eyes. Her eyes were a dreamy reddish brown with apparently no pupils and were heavily made up. Her somewhat sharp features, high cheek bones, and curving nose were disguised by the soft, fleshy curves of her face and hidden under cosmetics; her thin lips were thickly salved with red and her finger nails long and pointed and highly polished, which called attention to singularly broad and large-knuckled hands. She wore an elaborate yellow taffeta dress, with an enormous emerald, not very clear, hanging by a thin chain at her throat. She spoke to me in a studiously low voice and said not another word during the entire meal.

Eustace was standing beside March, speaking to her in a low voice to which she listened abstractedly.

Deke Longergan and Uncle Adolph were there, too and all of the men were clad in the most impeccabl dinner jackets, which with the glitter of linen made nice black and white contrast. From another doorwa came a member of the household I had not previousl seen and whom March, interrupting Eustace's remark with the utmost composure, presented as one M Elihu Dimuck.

He was a short little man of fifty or thereabout almost entirely bald, with a round, shiny face, benev lent eyeglasses with heavy gold rims, and a tiny paunch that made him look not unlike a very fea- and decently clothed Cupid.

"So this is the nurse," he said in a high-pitched voi rubbing his hands together happily and peering me through the heavy lenses of his eyeglasses. "No perhaps, we shall see some improvement in your gra father's condition, Miss March. I trust we may, deed. I have already lingered past my time. So improvement, yes. Yes, indeed. I trust we shall some improvement now, dear Miss March."

"I hope so, I'm sure," agreed March dryly, giv him a rather cold blue look from under those level bl eyebrows. She glanced about the room. "I won why Miss Frisling seems to find it impossible to c to meals on time. Did you ring the bell, Grondal?"

"Yes, madam," said Grondal impressively. I to learn that whenever he wore that unspeakable berry livery March was "Madam."

March frowned and Eustace waited impassi his eyes following the soft white curves of her arms with a gleam in them that was not cousinly.

"I see no reason why we should wait longer," said March, biting off her words with an imperious displeasure.

"At your pleasure, Cousin," said Eustace. He pulled out her chair with the air of personal compliment with which some men are able to invest their slightest courteous gesture.

"Ah——" March paused as a woman in faded blue fluttered hurriedly through the doorway, hesitated under March's cold regard, and then skittered nervously toward the vacant place opposite me, the festoons and fully rouged beads on her dress tinkling agitatedly. Fe[illegible] the type of person whom I dislike at first sight pasty faced and fatter than a woman of her size should be, with colorless hair, light eyes, a vacuous mouth, and a fluttering, deprecating air that always irritates me.

Something to my discomposure I found I was to sit next to Uncle Adolph, and amid the rustle of chairs being pulled out and napkins unfolded I glanced toward him only to find that he was surveying me with what seemed to me at the time to be a peculiarly speculative look. He dropped his eyes at once when they encountered mine, but more than once during the meal I was conscious of his covert scrutiny. At the moment I attributed it to baffled vanity; there is no beau like an old beau, and possibly he felt that an old maid with a nose like mine ought to be more appreciative, so to speak, of his gallantries. Not that my nose does not suit me, for it does; it is large and high bridged, and while not pretty still I feel that it has character.

He and Isobel might have been the veriest strangers

for all the attention they gave one another, although once I caught her dreamy gaze upon him in a look that held in it something of scorn, something of malice, and nothing at all of affection.

It was a painfully quiet meal and not pleasant. Grondal served, looking more like a highwayman than ever in the flicker of the tall candles that lighted the long table. There was little conversation save from Mr Dimuck, and with the salad even his fluty voice piped out under the stern unsmiling eyes of his young hostess. Every so often Eustace bent forward to murmur something to which March never responded save with the coolest syllable, and her manner certainly held nothing of tenderness in it, despite the loving parting I had inadvertently overheard.

Somehow the dreary dinner dragged along. The young fellow, Deke Lonergan, was still sunk in the most extraordinary sulkiness and scarcely lifted his gaze from his plate. I believe he saw more than one would think, however, for once when Eustace leaned near to March, placed his hand for a second on her hand, and then ran his fingers lightly and smoothly along her bare arm to the shoulder before March could draw away, Deke Lonergan looked up suddenly, opened his mouth as if about to speak, closed it with a click, and returned, glowering, to his plate, with a white line around his tight lips.

Eustace caught the slight motion.

"What did you say, Deke?" he inquired solicitously. "Nothing? But I thought you were about to speak. Thought better of it? How nice it is to have Deke with us, eh, March?"

It was just at that moment before March could reply that from somewhere outside came the sudden sound of a deep and prolonged howl. It was an unearthly howl that made my skin prickle, and everyone at the table looked up sharply. Even Eustace appeared to be taken aback for an instant. Then he smiled.

"It's Konrad," he said. "Someone has passed along the road, too near the gate to suit his taste. He's a faithful brute, is Konrad. Police, judge, and jury rolled into one. He detects, judges, and executes, all in about ten seconds."

I believe I should not have remembered the incident had I not happened to glance at March. She was suddenly as white as the tablecloth and her slim hand gripped a fork until the knuckles stood out sharply white. Then she caught her breath a little and met Eustace's smile.

"We are well guarded," she observed, with the first touch of lightness I had yet seen her evidence. But her eyes remained darkly blue and troubled, and a moment later, when Uncle Adolph was moved from his abstraction to relate a tale that illustrated the sagacity of the so-called police dog, she listened with a frigid detachment that I'm sure wound up Uncle Adolph fully three minutes before the story was complete. Uncle Adolph shot her a glance of positive malevolence, and it was not difficult to see that he and his niece entertained no mutual fondness.

Conversation lapsed again, and several scanty courses came and went with much formality. Once Mittie Frisling sneezed, and March asked Grondal to place another log on the open fire, casting at the same time a coldly

disapproving look at Mittie's bare, bulging shoulders that threatened to burst the loops of blue beads across them. And once something soft brushed my ankles, and on suppressing a cry and looking downward I saw Genevieve stalking from under the long tablecloth and bearing in his gaunt and ravenous jaws a chicken bone that someone—I suspected the Frisling woman—had surreptitiously passed him.

It was toward the end of the meal that a trivial but startling thing occurred. I was involved with a rather messy custard dessert when, impelled by that curious feeling of being under observation, I looked up suddenly toward the swinging door that led into the butler's pantry. The little slot in the middle of the door had been pushed aside, and I saw very distinctly a pair of yellowish eyes, which were fixed in a disquieting way upon me, and caught just a glimpse of a broad nose, a dangling gold earring, and a wisp of black, straight hair. Then the slot dropped into place.

"Your pardon, miss," said Grondal in my ear. "It is Kema, the cook."

Eustace, whose restless dark eyes saw everything, laughed acidly.

"Old family servants take a degree of interest in affairs of the household that is somewhat embarrassing." He spoke apparently to me, but his eyes went to Grondal's face.

"We'll have coffee in the library, please, Grondal," said March, rising before Eustace could get to his feet.

Having no desire for coffee and less desire for another strained half hour of their company, I did not accompany the others into the library. Instead I took a

candle, found my way upstairs to my own room, secured my knitting, and returned through those darkened drawing rooms to my patient.

There was little I could do for him, so presently I pulled a chair up to the fireplace and sat down, letting my eyes roam around the large room. The narrow, angular stairway in the corner made it an unusual room. I reasoned that this three-sided alcove must be the northwest tower and that the presence of the stairway accounted for the tower's blank wall. Momentarily I wondered where the stairway led and even took a few steps up its length to the first turn, craning my neck in an effort to see around the second turn. However, it seemed only to provide a convenient approach to the second floor from the north end of the long house.

Having no wish to lose myself in the rambling upper story, I retreated to the chair again, knitting busily and casting occasional glances at an elaborate silver clock, tarnished but running, that stood on the mantel. Beside it were various objects of art—a Dresden bowl with dusty cigars stuck in it, a paper weight of varicolored glass, a couple of empty pottery vases, and a green elephant, not much larger than my hand, that looked to my inexperienced eyes as if it might be jade. It was a rather lovely piece, if you like that kind of thing. The slendering trunk, the large, fanlike ears, and the tiny sinister eyes were all carved very delicately and finely, and the small tusks were a shimmering crystal white that I thought might be white jade. The leathery folds of skin, the square, sedate legs, even the clumsy toes were artfully suggested, and the clear,

"Mr. Federie is quite insensible."

"You mean—he can't hear?"

"He is quite insensible. He can neither hear nor see."

"I hoped you would say that he is better," he continued with a sigh. "I am a busy man. But Mr. Federie is an old—client of mine, and one feels obligated. Yes, obligated." The firelight glinted cheerfully on his bald head and cast grotesque shadows about the shoulders of his old-fashioned dinner coat.

"Indeed," I said.

There was a short silence; then he sighed again and turned away.

"Well, I trust morning will see some improvement. By the way, Nurse, as soon as he is able to speak, will you call me, please? I am remaining here for the express purpose. He asked me to come to see him about a business matter; he must have written the day before he suffered this stroke. When I arrived I found him like this, and I've been waiting for three days."

"Certainly, Mr. Dimuck, if his family wish it. He

may not be strong enough to concern himself with business for some time yet."

He considered this thoughtfully, his head tipped to one side.

"Of course. Of course. We shall see. I really cannot delay my departure much longer, however, and from the tone of his letter I judged the matter to be urgent. But I should not like to retard his progress. No. No, indeed. Well, we shall see. Good-night." As he pulled back the curtain Genevieve marched composedly into the room, his eyes catching the light for a moment in an uncanny way. I think the cat's unexpected entrance startled Mr. Dimuck a little, for he said something under his breath and departed rather more hastily than was necessary.

The cat sat down near me, fastening a steady gaze upon my knitting needles. Not a sound from the library at the opposite end of the house drifted through those cold, intervening rooms, and I must say it was rather lonely. I knit rapidly for some time, went carefully over the charts and the orders for the night, and let my thoughts speculate widely as to the curious household in which I found myself.

About eleven I resolved to make myself comfortable for the night and arranged my chair with its back to the tower stairway so that the light from the table lamp would not fall in my eyes, found a footstool, and took one of the dusty tapestries from the stair rail to throw over me in case the fire went down. The night outside was increasing in violence; the shutters and window frames were rattling in the gusts of wind, and it seemed to me I could hear the somber evergreens

tossing and moaning. When I went to adjust the window, however, I found that the shutters, rattle though they might, were yet remarkably solid and utilitarian in appearance and were fastened securely with old but heavy locks. They did not prevent the icy gusts of wind and sounds of the storm from filtering in through the spaces as I pushed the window up several inches. It was a wild night; the kind of night to spend, safe and warm, in one's own bed, not to spend sitting up with a sick man in an enormous old house that was so still that the sleet flying against the shutters, the sigh of the wind in the chimney, the creak of shutter hinges, and the moaning of trees were the only sounds to be heard. And assuredly these were not nice, cozy sounds.

I had barely lowered the flame in the lamp, removed my cap, and ensconced myself in the chair when there was a motion of the green curtain and March Federie entered, stood poised for a moment against the green curtain while she looked about the dimly lighted room, and then approached me. She still wore the crimson and silver gown which looked out of place in the dark old room, but had changed her silver slippers to small, black satin mules, with large crimson rosettes of ostrich feathers almost covering their toes.

She looked very tired and sank down on my footstool with a little sigh.

"Is Grandfather any better?" she asked quietly, and as I shook my head she turned to scrutinize that flushed face which showed dimly among the shadows of the bed curtains.

"Why—why does he hold his mouth like that?" She

turned back to me with a touch of horror in her half-whispered inquiry. "Half open like that with his tongue showing—is he in pain?"

"No, he's in no pain," I assured her. "They always hold their mouths like that."

"Oh. Can't he hear—or see——" She faltered.

"He is unconscious."

"Miss Keate, I wish—the moment he is able to speak, I wish you would call me. I believe he will want to see me."

"Very well," I promised readily, feeling, indeed, that if my patient would want to see anyone it would be this level-eyed, crisp-tongued granddaughter of his.

My ready acquiescence must have impressed her favorably, for she went on in a tone almost of confidence:

"You see, I think he felt that he wasn't in good health, for he sent for me—I was away visiting—asking me to come home. I arrived about four days ago, but——" She faltered, her voice died away into space for a moment, and then she continued: "Then he had this stroke. Uncle Adolph was here when I reached home, and Isobel, and Mr. Dimuck came the day Grandfather became ill, and we sent for Eustace right away. And Grandfather has been like this." She faltered again and stopped altogether, her eyes somberly on the fire.

"Who is Mr. Dimuck?" I asked conversationally.

"An old friend of Grandfather's."

Genevieve arose, stretched himself in a leisurely way, stalked over to the girl, and rubbed against her slim ankles.

"Go away, Genevieve." She pushed him away, but the cat returned and reluctantly she let him arch his gaunt back and rub against the toe of her slipper. He was very complacent, purring in a loud, grating voice and nibbling at the crimson rosette.

"I don't like cats," she said, turning her blue gaze to me. "Genevieve belongs to Kema as much as anybody. She feeds him unlimited liver and cream, but he is always thin. It must all go to bone and fur. Kema is the cook," she added in an explanatory tone. "Didn't she peek at you to-night at dinner?"

"She did," I said. "And a most unpleasant peek it was, too."

"She resents strangers in the house," apologized March. "But she is all right when you know her. She has been here ever since I can remember." She smiled. "When Eustace and I were children she used to threaten to cut off our ears if we didn't stay away from the cookie jar. We were meddlesome little monkeys."

"Eustace is your cousin?" I said idly as she paused.

The smile lingering on her face vanished at once.

"Yes. He was left an orphan when very young and has always lived with us. I, too, was left on Grandfather's hands without parents. Poor Grandfather—how good he was. And how stern." She looked again toward the bed, her expression anxious and loving.

"And Mittie Frisling?" I said, perhaps inquisitively. "Who is she?"

The softer look in her face disappeared as if wiped out by a sponge and she rose, reassuming the air of distant coldness that she had displayed through dinner.

"Mittie Frisling?" she said quite distinctly. "I have not the least idea."

The curtain behind her wavered, and Eustace stepped across the threshold, his eyes going swiftly about the room. I fancied that he hesitated when he saw March, but if he did it was for only a fraction of a second. Then he advanced calmly into the room.

"You here, March? I thought you had gone to bed."

The girl, standing very straight and slim in her crimson velvet, swept him a frigid blue glance from under those indomitable eyebrows.

"I'm just leaving," she said. "Is there anything you want, Miss Keate?"

"Some boiling water, please. And an alcohol lamp, if you have one. I'm to give adrenalin hypodermics when necessary and I need the water to sterilize the syringe and needle."

She looked at me gravely.

"There is no alcohol lamp in the house, but I'll have a fire kept in the kitchen range all night with water on the stove. And I'll get you some boiling water now."

Eustace lifted the curtain for her and then approached me.

"What do you think of Grandfather's condition, Nurse?"

I do not like to be addressed as "Nurse."

"I'm sure I can't say," I replied coldly.

He raised his eyebrows; they were black like March's, but had a more suave lift.

"So? By the way, Nurse, do you think he will soon be able to speak?"

"Possibly. It's hard to say. Few cases are exactly alike."

There was a short pause, during which his brilliant dark eyes sought mine as if to wrest from me any secrets of medical knowledge I might possess.

"Will he be apt to say very much when he does speak? I mean, to hold long conversations?"

"Probably not." I disliked discussing the case and had to remind myself that he was my patient's grandson and had a right to make inquiry. "Probably he will say only a few words."

He considered this for a moment or two, his eyes never shifting from their intent scrutiny.

"Do you think he is going to die?" he asked then with rather callous definiteness.

"I really can't say," I evaded.

"Well, Nurse, in case he does try to speak, see that you call me. *At once.*" His voice was curtly arrogant, quite as if he were addressing a servant and none too courteously. "My room is directly above this one." He nodded toward the tower stairway. "At once, understand?"

"I shall do as I think best," I replied with some asperity.

His eyes flashed and narrowed and he took a step or two toward me. But I never knew what he was about to say, for just then March returned with a steaming saucepan, shot a quick look at us, placed the pan on the bedside table, and turned to leave.

"I hope you have a good night, Miss Keate," she said, politely impersonal, and added firmly: "Come with me, Eustace."

He stood for a moment without moving, then shrugged his shoulders impatiently and followed his cousin quite as if she had the right to order and he to obey.

While sterilizing my hypodermic syringe and inserting the tiny needle it occurred to me that there was rather more anxiety displayed on the part of the members of the family as to when old Mr. Fedell would speak than as to his chance for recovery. And as I was measuring the adrenalin still another request came to me. It was from young Lonergan. He thrust his face between curtain and door casing, blinked a moment, saw me, and advanced hastily.

"See here, Miss Leet—Neat—whatever your name is. I've got to talk to him." He jerked his head toward the bed. "I've got to! As soon as he can speak. It's important. Will you call me the very minute he speaks? I'm bunking with Eustace in the room just above this one—and in daytime I'll be around close. Will you call me?" There was such urgency in his voice that I overlooked his rudeness.

"It's almost a matter of—life and death," he said as I hesitated. "How much longer will he be like this?"

"There's no way to tell," I said, feeling a little sorry for the boy.

He stared into my eyes for a moment; his own were quite black with excitement, his face was white, his blond hair furiously tousled as if he had been running worried fingers through it, and his breath came jerkily.

"If I wasn't such a *damn*' fool," he blurted all at once and his voice broke raggedly.

Knowing that, manlike, he would never forgive me

for hearing that break, I turned hurriedly away. But immediately he mastered himself.

"Thank you, Nurse. If you will call me—when he speaks—I shall be—very grateful." He spoke with labored formality, walked to the door, lingered there, his white face and lean jaw clear against the green curtain, said "Good-night" with painstaking politeness, and departed. But not before I had noted the set, ugly angle of that jaw and the blaze of something very like fury that suddenly replaced the desperation in his eyes.

Left to myself, I administered the stimulant, took a last pulse, and once more made myself comfortable in the big chair. But though I relaxed at once with the completeness of habit, gained by more years of nursing than I care to mention, it was a long time before I slept, and several times, when a shutter creaked or a log slipped in the grate, I roused hastily, looking with curious uneasiness into the shadowy corners of the old room.

I thought of all kinds of things, as one does when just about to sleep—March's lovely face and stern eyebrows, Eustace's laugh, and Uncle Adolph's clammy hand all merging fantastically together. I turned and twisted uneasily, opening my eyes to stare at the black, winking windowpanes, at my patient's still face, at the flames in the grate leaping and lowering spasmodically with the gusts of wind. Once my gaze fastened on the old-fashioned bell rope beside the door and I speculated idly as to how long it would take to summon Grondal in case my patient took a sudden turn for the worse.

And once I dozed and was dreaming when some sound aroused me and I sat up, blinking and searching the room with my eyes. The shadows in the corners, the storm outside, and the thick silence inside were not conducive to cheerfulness, and I was sharply conscious of being alone on the deserted first floor of the great house, with only a sick man for company, and that all the others were presumably sleeping at some distance. It is easy to imagine things under such circumstances, and for a moment I felt quite sure that eyes were watching me from some place near at hand. The impression was so strong that I even turned hastily and looked upward into the increasing shadows of the tower stairway. There was nothing there, of course.

Genevieve, I saw, had resumed his position on the mantel. Possibly he had disturbed some of the claptrap with which the mantel was laden and the slight sound had been the cause of my awaking. Convinced, if not entirely satisfied, with this explanation I leaned back in the chair again and pulled the musty tapestry over my shoulders. The cat had his enormous eyes fixed in the direction of the stairway in a steady, purposeful stare that never wavered, and every now and then his tail twitched slightly in a fashion that, I shall have to admit, was very disquieting.

But though I turned again and peered in that direction I saw nothing out of the way, and I leaned back once more, closing my eyes resolutely. It was then about one o'clock, I think, and the storm was, if anything, worse.

Eventually I must have gone to sleep, for the next thing I remember was dreaming that I was in the

tumult of a summer storm, with lightning and then an enormous crash of thunder that brought me out of my dream with terrifying suddenness and sitting bolt upright in the chair. In the very second of opening my eyes my gaze fell on the velvet curtain over the door that I faced. It was falling slowly into place, the folds of green wavering gently as it settled into place and finally hung smoothly.

Then my bewilderment passed; I realized where I was and that some sudden crash of sound had awakened me. It couldn't have been thunder. There is no February thunder in our part of the country. What was it, then?

A faint acrid smell—was it smoke?—drifted to my nostrils.

I sprang out of my chair and stared about me.

My eyes fell on Genevieve. And at the sight my heart leaped to my throat.

He was standing at the foot of the tower stairway, his gaunt outlines but half revealed in the dim light. He was staring at something upward on the steps out of my range of vision. His ears were laid back, his eyes glaring horribly; his tail was lashing furiously from side to side and his lips were drawn back from his teeth in a soundless snarl.

Somehow I reached the table, snatched the lamp, turned up the wick with a quick motion that sent wisps of black smoke up the lamp chimney, and holding the lamp high in my hand I advanced to the stairway. The cat drew back, still snarling. I held the lamp forward and took a few steps up that narrow stairway.

A dark shape lay just beyond the first angle. It was a man sprawled grotesquely on his face.

The lamp flared and smoked and flared again.

Then I forced myself to take another step or two and bent and turned the distorted body so its face was turned to the flaring light.

It was Adolph Federie.

He had been shot through the heart.

CHAPTER III

LANCE O'LEARY COMES TO FEDERIE HOUSE

I HAVE never known how long I stared, horror drugged, at the fearful sight.

But all at once the cat gave one long raucous yowl and fled into the shadows of the room below. The ugly sound roused me from a paralysis of terror and I let the inert body drop heavily on its face again. And at that second the light in the lamp flared wildly again and went out, leaving me in gibbering blackness with a man who had been violently done to death within reach of my hand, and someone—it must have been I—screaming madly through a stiffened throat.

My knees were shaking and I felt dizzy and sick, and I think it was the quick dread of falling on that sprawled body at my feet that frightened me to a vestige of rationalism.

I must do something—call someone—arouse the house. I recalled the bell rope across that dark room below and with the thought started down the narrow steps, felt for the banister, edged past the body, felt cautiously for the floor beyond the last step, and crossed the room. By this time my eyes were adjusting themselves to the blackness and I found that the faint glow from the dying fire vaguely outlined the

shadows of furniture. But still it was dark, and I had to grope my way across the room, feeling that grisly hands were clutching at me from every shadow. At last I found the post of the bed, guided myself past it, stretched my hands out before me, and advanced a few steps before my fingers touched velvet that billowed and gave under them, groped for the side of the door, found a plush tassel, gripped the bell rope, and pulled it up and down in a very frenzy of released energy.

And at that instant there was a sound of running feet from over my head, and a man's voice called from the head of the tower stairs.

"What is it, Nurse? Was it you screaming? What is the matter? What—— "

The voice broke oddly. I think the speaker must have started down the stairs, stumbled, and stooped to feel in the darkness of the stairway with his bare hands, for there was a sharp silence, a quick-drawn breath, and then a hoarse whisper that hissed across the black void between us: "*What's this!*"

"Miss Keate! What is it? What's happened?" Voices now from the passage, the glimmer of candles, hurried footsteps, and March, closely followed by Eustace, burst into the room.

I remember Eustace lighting a lamp and how the bosom of the dress shirt he still wore glimmered whitely between the dark satin lapels of his lounge coat while his dark gaze flashed about the room. I remember Deke Lonergan, in light pajamas, leaning from the shadows of the banister above and crying in horrified, curiously hoarse tones: "Eustace, look here! Look here! Look here!" And I remember how I clutched at March's

silk negligée, feeling dimly that she should not look at what lay on the stairway, and how she jerked away from me and followed Eustace, stopping only to snatch the lamp.

Wave after wave of nausea was sweeping over me by that time, but I, too, followed. Near the stairway, just about at its foot, I stumbled over something. It was the little green elephant, and I stooped, picked up the thing, and automatically replaced it on the mantel.

Then Elihu Dimuck brushed past me, a strange figure in a bright yellow dressing gown, and paused abruptly to stare at the group on the stairway. The body lay as I had left it; Eustace was kneeling beside it but not touching it; Deke was standing above, leaning over; and March, crouched down below Eustace on the stairs, was holding the lamp high so that its light threw into relief those grotesquely huddled shoulders and contorted limbs. All three were looking downward, immovably intent, as if held by some evil spell.

"What is it?" cried Dimuck, his voice rising to a terrified squeal. "What happened? Who shot him?"

And with the fearful question, Grondal thrust aside the curtain and ran into the room; he was barefooted and still wore a nightshirt, but had hastily donned trousers whose suspenders were all twisted over his shoulders.

"What's the matter?" he cried, and at the sound of his voice Eustace rose slowly and turned to look over the banister. The eyes of the two met in a long look before Eustace said deliberately:

"It's—Adolph. He's been shot."

Through the hubbub of excited questions that seemed to have no answers, of finding more lights until the whole room flared garishly, of all of us crowding around the narrow stairway, but few things stand out distinctly in my mind. I recall assuring them over and over again that I had heard nothing and had seen nothing until I was aroused from sleep by what must have been the shot that killed Adolph Federie. I recall March's paper-white face and how it seemed to me she was forcing herself to stand there, the toe of her slipper all but touching the dead man while she held the light for Eustace. And I recall how Eustace looked up at me presently and said:

"How about it, Nurse? Shall we call a doctor?"

"You might," I replied dubiously. "But it is too late. I think he was killed instantly. It seems to me—" I hesitated—"it seems to me that you had better—call the police. At once."

"The police!" cried March in a tight voice.

"We have found no revolver," said Deke Lonergan soberly. "It—cannot be suicide if there's no revolver."

"Do you mean—do you mean—— *Is this murder?*" screamed Elihu Dimuck.

There was a moment of silence while the word rang in our ears and was taken up in muted echo among the shadows and muffling curtains and garish, flickering candles and the heavy walls themselves, and repeated by the very wind outside in whispering sighs: "Murder! —murder!—murder!"

Our terrified eyes, staring from death-white faces, met each other's. Then Eustace, with the barest hint of a shrug, rose to his feet.

"It looks that way," he said coolly. There was a touch of fatalism in his manner; a kind of "so be it then, and devil take the hindmost."

There was another silence packed with unnamable fears.

"You'd better carry him to a bed," said Elihu Dimuck suddenly. "Try to do something for him. You can't just—leave him there on the stairs. It is not—decent." His thin voice shook a little and he kept darting anxious, troubled glances about him.

"Very well," agreed Eustace briefly. "Can you take his arms there, Deke? We can put him on my bed."

"No, no," I interposed hurriedly. "You must not move him. I'm sure you must not. The police must find him just as we found him."

Eustace darted a strange look at me, but acquiesced at once—so promptly, indeed, that it occurred to me that he had not been acting in ignorance.

"Miss Keate is right," he said. "We must leave him just as he is. The only thing we can do is call the police."

I left the group on the stairway and crossed hastily to the bed. But old Mr. Federie was apparently as he had been, no worse and no better for the tragedy that had taken place almost at his bedside, and after assuring myself of his condition I returned again to the others. They had followed me away from the stairway with its dreadful burden and were standing in a cluster near the fireplace, talking spasmodically in low voices. As I reached them Dimuck was saying worriedly:

"—if we could find the revolver. He might have taken his own life. It's terrible. Terrible! Never happened

before to any of my clients. Never! Never!" He probably would have kept on chattering in high-pitched syllables had I not interrupted. As I spoke he turned to me peevishly, pulling his amazing bathrobe tighter about his rounded front.

"Nonsense! That man there did not die by his own hand. It was murder. And someone—someone shot him, right here in this house."

"Telephone to the police, Grondal," said Eustace crisply.

"Mister Eustace, you'd better wait. Wait till morning." Grondal's low words carried an oddly warning note.

"It's a clear case of murder, as Miss Keate says," said Eustace coolly. "Someone certainly shot him and we'll have to give the police all the help we can. Have them come at once so they can search the place."

It just happened that my eyes fell on March as he spoke. She was standing a little back of the others, and at Eustace's words she started violently, her face set itself into a grim white mask of terror, and one hand flung itself across her mouth, palm outward, as if to hold back a scream. Then, as I watched, she appeared to recall herself, dropped the hand, set her mouth in ugly straight lines, and—well, it was not pleasant to see her eyes narrowing furtively as they darted about the room.

"Isobel!" she cried suddenly. "Isobel doesn't know! Someone must tell her. I'll go!" Without waiting for another to offer to take that difficult duty she hurried from the room. And it was just then that, bursting upon my consciousness like a thunderclap, the memory

of the conversation between March and Eustace which I had overheard down by the little bridge came upon me—a conversation that in the light of the night's horror took on a new and sinister meaning. I have never known why I so immediately resolved to keep my knowledge of her strangely reluctant promise a secret—unless it was because of that white, helpless terror in the girl's young face.

"Telephone at once, Grondal," said Eustace sharply, and as the green curtain dropped after the butler's figure Eustace laid another log on the fire, pulled up a chair, and sat down. Elihu Dimuck was teetering gingerly on the edge of a straight chair, and Deke Lonergan dropped into the easy chair where I had rested, his silk pajamas looking chilly and himself plunged in gloomy thought.

"We may as well make ourselves comfortable while we wait for the police," said Eustace calmly. "Cigarette, Deke? Dimuck?" He selected a cigarette for himself from the case he held open, returned the case to the pocket of his lounge coat, and lighted the cigarette with a steady hand. Save for the lounge coat in place of the dinner jacket, he was dressed exactly as he had been the evening before, and a question went through my mind that concerned the reasons for his being up and dressed at an hour when respectable people are in peaceful slumber.

There was a stir as a shapeless figure in voluminous gray padded softly from some corner of the room, and I caught my breath sharply before I had a glimpse of black hair and broad, dark face and the glint of a gold

earring, and knew that it was the old cook. Had not March called her Kema?

She padded toward the tower stairway and up a few steps. We could see her stoop and survey what lay there without a flicker of expression on her dark face. After a long moment she drew a rug from the banister, which, slowly but without tenderness, she adjusted over the body and without a backward glance descended the steps and squatted easily on the hearth rug, where she sat like a brazen image in absolute quiet.

"The police are on the way," said Grondal, lifting the curtain.

Eustace looked at the silver clock on the mantel.

"They'll be here in about a quarter of an hour." He flicked a dark glance from one to the other of us, and added with gruesome impudence: "Have we our stories ready to tell them?"

No one replied.

It was a ghastly vigil. Through the banister left bare where Kema had taken the rug from it we could see the huddled dark outlines of the body on the stairway and from under the rug protruded a patch of white that looked like starkly clenched fingers.

At last through the storm outside and the heavy silence within the great house came the sound of a siren and the furious barking of a dog. My patient's pulse had seemed to weaken a little, and I touched Kema's shoulder.

"I need some boiling water."

"In the kitchen." She surged lightly to her feet. "Come with me!"

And at that second Isobel Federie entered the room, stood fo a moment looking at us, her flowered negligée brilliant in its gay orange and green and purple, and her face sharply haggard without its make-up, and then approached us.

"Did he die?" she asked with a curious glance toward the bed.

Eustace rose to meet her.

"Didn't March tell you?"

She met his eyes blankly.

"March? Why, no. I haven't seen March since last night. I heard someone scream—oh, quite a while ago. I knew what it was, of course. I didn't see how I could help, so I didn't come down right away." Her eyes went to the bed again. "Did he die?"

"Isobel." Eustace reached for her hands and held them tightly. "You don't understand. Someone died. But it wasn't Grandfather."

"But—we've been expecting him to——"

"Yes, yes!" interrupted Eustace. "But—Adolph died. Adolph—was shot to death."

For a ghastly moment she just stood there staring at Eustace. Her face grew suddenly hard and yellow like cold wax and her eyes were sunken. Then she pulled her large hands from Eustace's grasp, drew the silken folds of her negligee more closely about her so the somewhat exaggerated curves of hip and bosom and very slender waist showed through the gleaming silk, and looked slowly about the room. It was strange that her eyes went almost directly to the tower stairway.

"Here, Isobel. Sit down. Get her something to drink, Kema."

But Isobel brushed away Eustace's arm.

"Is he there?—I see him."

"Stay here, Isobel."

"The police, sir," said Grondal from the doorway, pulling the curtain aside with an impressive air as he ushered tall, blue-coated figures into the room.

"I'll get you the hot water," said Kema to me.

I snatched a lighted candle from the table and followed Kema past the crowding policemen through the little passage, across the great shadowy dining room, between the cupboards that lined the butler's pantry, and so into the kitchen. Apparently Kema could see in the dark, for she padded on soft feet ahead of me. I might say that I always suspected Kema of going barefoot, although, owing to the concealing folds of gray gingham, I never actually saw her feet. But there was a soft thud and beat in her tread that suggested bare, broad heels and led me to what, so far as I know, was an entirely baseless and unjust suspicion.

The fire was low in the great range, but under Kema's skillful manipulation it burned furiously, and the water in the kettle began to bubble. I was pouring the steaming water into a pan when all at once there was a click back of me. A current of cold air struck my shoulders and I turned in time to see March Federie, wrapped in her blue cape, closing the door that led apparently to the back entry and thence outdoors. Her hood shaded her face as she bent to listen at the door, her hand still on the knob. Then she turned. She was breathing heavily as if she had been running, her cape looked wet, a brown leaf shred clung to the rim of her hood, her bedroom slippers were muddy and

sodden, one crimson rosette gone and the other wet and draggled, and her slim bare ankles were pink with cold. I think she had not expected to see me, for she drew back when she met my astonished gaze, and her eyes sought Kema's swiftly as if conveying some message that I could not understand. It was the clearest of impressions, caught during the moment that she stood there, her hand clutching the folds of cape about her, and her face, white and fear ridden, looking out from the scarlet-lined hood.

There was a sudden scuffling of feet outside the door, and at the sound March darted another meaning look at Kema and without a word ran on light feet toward the pantry. The swinging door into the pantry was still moving when two policemen burst into the kitchen from the back entry. I don't know what felonious impulse led me to step quietly to that door and steady it with one hand, while the policemen were blinking in the light and reaching politely for their caps when they saw me.

"Where is she? Where did she go?" they cried almost together, one adding: "Didn't someone just come through this door?"

The boiling water in the pan splashed onto my hand just then, and somewhat abstracted me while Kema assured them blandly that there had been no one besides the two of us in the room, that no one had just entered through the door, and would they please close it behind them.

"She must have dodged around the house, then," said one.

"Or into some of the other doors in that back entry."

The speaker pulled the back door wide, and I could see beyond him a back hall, bare and cold looking, with a closed door or two leading into what I supposed were store closets, and at the end of the hall a shabby flight of stairs starting upward around a turn. At once the policemen departed as hastily as they had arrived, and as the door closed Kema turned unconcernedly to me.

"Here is more boiling water, miss."

Once having connived at deception there is no use repenting it. I held the pan of water steadily this time, and with the candle again in my other hand I took my way back through the dining room.

It was just at the end of the long table that a small object, lying at my feet within the little circle of light, caught my eyes and I stopped and bent to examine it. It was a small, sodden, black satin slipper. March must have dropped it in her flight. And as I identified the thing there was a sudden stir from somewhere close at hand.

"*Sarah Keate!*" said a man's voice out of the darkness. "*Sarah Keate!* Look out—you are going to drop that thing!"

With an effort I righted the pan of water.

"Who——"

"I did not intend to startle you like this," continued the voice good-naturedly. "But—you startled me, so accounts are even. Now what in the name of common sense are you doing here?"

As he spoke he moved toward me, so that gradually his face loomed up out of the darkness into the light from my candle. The light was wavering and flicker-

ing, but at once I recognized the young, rather delicately cut features, the thoughtful forehead, and the clear, penetrating gray eyes, almost black now in the faint light.

"Lance O'Leary!" I cried. And at once: "Did you come with the police?"

"I did," he said gravely. "And I suppose you are the nurse they told me of?"

I nodded, my eyes taking in every feature and expression of a face that I remembered well.

"I'm glad to see you again, Miss Keate," he said. "It's been a long time."

"Are you going to have charge of this——" I paused, at a loss for a word.

"Investigation? So it seems."

"Thank heaven!" I said devoutly, and remembered the slipper that lay at my feet. "Thank heaven," I repeated, a shade less devoutly, as almost without conscious volition on my part my foot began to grope about on the floor.

"Your faith is very flattering," O'Leary was saying as my foot found the slipper and began to edge it toward the long tablecloth. "I only hope you'll give me the assistance you gave me the first time we met. I remember that your help was invaluable."

"Oh, yes, indeed," I said earnestly, wishing I dared look down to be sure the cloth hid the slipper. Not that it meant anything, but still, with this slender, clear-eyed young man opposite me, it was not safe to take a chance. He was looking at me somewhat curiously and I added with haste. "I have been here only since last night. I have not seen much of the household."

He smiled.

"You being you," he said with doubtful compliment, "you probably know more of the household after one night than another woman would in a month. Your patient is old Mr. Federie?"

"Good gracious, I must get back to him!"

Lance O'Leary nodded.

"I'll see you again, Miss Keate."

It was with mingled feelings of relief and apprehension that I hurried on through that dark little passage, along whose walls my starched skirts rattled nervously, and so into the tower room. The lights were still blazing furiously, and a policeman was on his knees on the first turn of the tower stairway, his broad blue back visible through the banister. Another policeman was wandering about in the room. He gave me a questioning look, but I proceeded at once to my patient and he said nothing.

My patient's condition was unchanged and the matter at hand took only a few moments. As soon as possible I returned to the dining room, intending to retrieve the slipper and hide it somewhere, at least until I knew where my duty lay concerning it.

But at the door into the dining room I stopped, blew out my candle which was dripping hot wax on my hand, and peered through a crack of the curtains. Lance O'Leary, a flashlight in his hand, his face clear and pale in the reflection of light cast by the white tablecloth, was standing there, gazing quietly at something he held in one hand, directly in the glow of the light. I made no doubt it was the slipper.

Well, the thing meant nothing, anyway, I told my-

self sensibly. All it could possibly indicate was that March Federie had some errand that took her out of the house, and had not wanted—as who would want?—to be caught by the police. The only thing that troubled me was the thought that it must have been a singularly pressing errand that took her outdoors in the middle of the night, into a storm and with murder at large, in such haste that she had not even put on her stockings. And, moreover, she had offered an excuse to get away. "Isobel!—I'll go." But apparently she had not gone near Isobel.

And again I recalled the sinister conversation I had overheard—and again resolved to protect the girl.

"Oh, Miss Keate," said O'Leary quietly. "Come here, will you, please?"

I had forgotten the man's exasperating way of having eyes in the back of his head and ears all around. I advanced, feeling like a child caught in mischief.

"Why did you kick this slipper out of sight?" he asked pleasantly. "My experience with you leads me to think there was some reason for it."

I hesitated.

"Come on," he persisted, still with the utmost good humor. "Out with it. You know I'm not going to pin guilt upon anybody without complete proof. So don't be afraid of implicating anyone."

Well, of course, that was perfectly true. Besides, having once found the slipper he would get at the truth of the matter by hook or crook, so I might as well tell him the little I knew.

I told him simply that it was March Federie's slipper, that an errand had taken her outside, where she

was pursued by two policemen whom she had naturally endeavored to escape, and had succeeded. But I added nothing to that, although the words "A Federie hand is born *to fit the curve of a revolver*" rang guiltily in my memory.

As I talked Lance O'Leary studied the small, muddy slipper with a most peculiar look on his face.

"How did you know it was her slipper?" he asked when I had finished my very brief statement.

"I recognized it. I saw her wearing it last night—that is, to-night—about eleven o'clock. And also a few moments ago when she came into the kitchen."

"Was it always plain like this over the toe? It looks as if something had been stitched there and had pulled loose."

"There was a rosette, but she must have lost it."

"Rosette?"

"A feather ornament."

"Blue?"

"No, red."

"I see. Thank you, Miss Keate." He stuffed the slipper into his pocket. "You were in the room when the shooting occurred, were you?"

"Yes. The sound awakened me. But I had seen nothing and heard nothing that would throw any light on the matter."

"Don't be too sure of that, Miss Keate. By the way, is your patient entirely unconscious?"

"Yes."

"There's no chance of a witness there, then?"

"Not the least in the world," I said decisively, and O'Leary sighed.

"Well—I'll see you later in the morning. There are some things I want to know. And—er—Miss Keate!"

"Yes."

"I shall be very grateful if you give me any information that comes your way. You know, you do have the most extraordinary way of—er—being around when things are happening." He smiled. I had forgotten, too, his remarkably winning smile. It changed and lightened his whole face. And while his words were just a polite way of calling me a busybody, still I couldn't be angry. It's true that while I hope I'm not snoopy, you understand, nor meddlesome, still there's no use denying the fact that I do have a lively and inquiring mind.

So, before I knew it, I found myself pledged to help him if it lay in my power to do so.

Once again in the tower room I took my cap, crushed and wrinkled, from the chair where I had been so fearfully aroused, and sat down to fill in my neglected chart. The two policemen were still in the room, and while you may say what you like as to the blundering methods of the police, still and all I never saw anything like the thorough way in which they examined that great, cluttered old room and narrow stairway. They finally ascended the stairway, stepping lightly past the body that still lay there, and I surmised that they were going through the room at the head of the stairway. Some other men came into the room presently, too, with cameras, and besides taking pictures of the body on the stairway, and filling the room with smoke from their flashlight affairs, they also blew a kind of yellowish powder over things and appeared to take pictures

of that also. I watched them with interest, but did not know enough of such matters to understand exactly what they were doing, though I knew in a general way, of course; and I did not like to ask. They, too, went up the stairs after a while. They had barely gone when O'Leary himself came into the room, and without so much as a glance at me he, too, ascended the stairway and vanished beyond the second turn. But after a few moments he came down again, a heap of men's clothing from which dangled some very gay silk suspenders, freshly laundered shirt cuffs, and knife-edged trouser legs on each arm. I guessed that the clothes belonged to Eustace or young Lonergan or both, but could not even hazard a guess as to what O'Leary was doing with them.

It was only a few moments later that Grondal lifted the green curtain and ushered in two orderlies, carrying a stretcher.

"It's on the stairway," said Grondal, leading the way across the room. The orderlies followed, their white duck coats gleaming, and their eyes darting curiously about, and I left the room somewhat hastily. I have nursed for too many years to be squeamish, but I simply could not stay there and watch them lift that rug.

Lights in the library led me there. A little group was huddled desolately near the cold ashes in the fireplace. Isobel, still in her thin silk negligee, was sitting with Eustace on the old red plush sofa; she looked rather horrible, her dyed hair disarranged, her yellowish pallor accentuating her sharp features, and her eyes small and sunken in dark rings. She was composed, however, and was smoking very deliberately. March had managed

to get into a little crimson wool frock that made her look about fourteen, and some stockings and slippers, and was sitting very straight and still opposite Isobel. Elihu Dimuck, too, had dressed, but the Lonergan man was draped modestly in a tapestry rug, which he pulled closer about him as I approached, though, goodness knows, white silk pajamas with blue polka dots on them are no treat for anybody's eyes, let alone those of an elderly nurse.

Mittie Frisling was nowhere to be seen.

No one spoke. There lay over them all a tense, determined quiet that seemed to restrain hysteria. I lingered for only a few moments. Gray daylight was beginning to filter in pallid streaks through the shutters.

At the muffled sound of the hall door closing I started back to the tower room. From the window in the hall, beyond the wet path and dreary iron gate, I caught a glimpse of an ambulance. It loomed coldly white through the dismal, gray dawn. The sleet was turning again to heavy fog. The shrubbery, bare and brown and dripping, mingled indistinctly with the shadows of the fog. Toward the north of the house the dense thickets of evergreens made black blotches. And all about the place reared that solid wall, hemming in the evergreens and the shadows and the lifeless garden and the grim old house in which I stood, where murder had walked that night.

It was a world of its own. And I, Sarah Keate, hitherto a respectable and respected spinster, was involved in that dreadful world and, by virtue of my profession, forced to stay there!

It was not a pleasant thought. The only modicum of comfort I had as I took my way back through those ghostly drawing rooms to the more ghostly tower room was that Lance O'Leary was in that house, too.

CHAPTER IV

A LOCKED DOOR

LANCE O'LEARY was, as I have indicated, a detective, although I have never heard him give himself that somewhat bombastic title. I had had some acquaintance with him several years back, during that unpleasant affair at St. Ann's hospital, which, if you live in the Middle West and read the newspapers, you will at once remember. I had heard of him from time to time since then—not much, for his was the force behind force that does not always get reportorial credit, but enough to assure me that he was progressing in his profession. He was no magician; he did not turn criminals out of his pockets as a conjurer does rabbits. Neither did he possess that quite marvelous faculty of distinguishing at a glance between things that were clues and things that were not, as do certain fictional detectives. But he did manage to solve some of the most important criminal cases that arose in our part of the country.

He was a slender young fellow, not very tall, his features clear and finely cut, his head well shaped and thoughtful, and his eyes a clear cool gray that saw everything. His light brown hair always shone smoothly; he was immaculately groomed and must have spent more money on his clothes, quiet though they were in style and color, than any man should spend. He had a

partiality for gray and liked a thin scarlet stripe in socks and tie, drove a long gray roadster of a make that I did not recognize, kept a manservant with the most discreet and secretive voice I have ever heard, and—well, beyond these few facts I knew little of him.

But if, as I went about my duties in the tower room, I felt that with Lance O'Leary in the house the fearful thing the night had held was at an end, I may as well admit here and now that I was never more mistaken in my life.

The rest of the night, or rather early morning, was like a singularly depressing dream. About six o'clock Grondal brought me a tray laden with coffee and an uninteresting breakfast consisting of a small orange, burned toast, and a soft-boiled egg that was cold and unprepossessing. I remember that as I sat down to drink the coffee I turned my chair so that I faced the tower stairway; it was the first of many times that I was to do so.

The coffee cheered me a little, though I still had a twitchy feeling up the small of my back. It was not pleasant to be alone in the room with only the sick man on the bed for company, and I worked feverishly in an effort to keep my thoughts occupied.

Grondal brought me fresh linen for the bed and hot water and towels for my patient's bath. It was faintly surprising to find that Grondal combined the peaceful duty of housemaid with his other occupations. He lifted my patient easily and gently and mitered the corner of the sheet which he helped me to adjust with as deft a precision as that of any nurse. He straightened the room, too, having, as he assured me, the permission of

"the policeman in the gray suit" to do so. He ran an antiquated carpet sweeper over the thick carpet, which looked as if it had never been taken up properly, and dusted, unlocked, and opened the heavy shutters, and as cold gray daylight crept reluctantly into the room he blew out the many lamps and candles that had been stuck hurriedly here and there. He dusted, too, with the casual attention that a man always gives to the rounds of chairs and loose articles.

"I'll put matches here on the mantel, miss," he said as he finished. He moved the little green elephant to make room for a box of matches.

"That's a pretty thing," I said, referring to the elephant. "Is it jade?"

"I don't know, I'm sure. Mr. Federie is very fond of it; he likes it to be here on the mantel where he can always see it. Very fond of art, is Mr. Federie, as perhaps you've noticed." Grondal's eyes went proudly to an enormous atrocity in oils that hung on the opposite wall.

"The cat knocked it off last night," I said, turning my gaze hastily from the picture and going back to the elephant. "It's lucky it didn't break."

"The cat knocked it off?" said Grondal musingly, taking the small green thing in his hand and scrutinizing it.

"Yes. Somehow it rolled almost to the stairway. I stepped on it when I—" I cleared my throat as my voice quavered a little—"when I—that is, after the —shooting occurred. I hope it wasn't damaged."

"No, it wasn't damaged," said Grondal slowly, turning the thing in his hand. I caught myself staring at

that hand—long, yellow, corded, with patches of hair along the back, and on the spaces between the bony knuckles it was not nice to look at.

"Miss Keate," said O'Leary from the doorway. I turned at once. He was standing on the threshold, holding the green curtain aside. "Can you leave your patient for a little while? There are a few questions I should like to ask you all," he added, as I hesitated. "The others are waiting in the library. Will you come, too, please?" he concluded, addressing Grondal.

"Certainly, sir," said Grondal. "I'll just put a fresh log on the fire first."

I followed O'Leary through the cold drawing rooms, where the desolate haircloth of the furniture and the glass doors of curio cabinets caught dismal highlights, through the wide entrance hall, where Grondal caught up with us, and into the library. As I approached the little group sitting there I had a strange feeling that they had not moved during the few hours intervening since I had found them there earlier in the morning, even though I knew that they must have had breakfast, had presumably gone to their rooms and rested, and had certainly got themselves into less disheveled clothing. But that indefinable air of tense restraint still held them, one and all, in a silence so brittle that I felt that any sudden sound would shatter their tense rigidity and release a very panic of terror.

Mittie Frisling was not among them, and while I was too much engaged with the matter at hand to give her more than a passing thought, still it did occur to me that she was the only member of the household who had not made her appearance during the night.

Several blue-coated figures were scattered here and there, among them the chief of police himself, and I was interested to see the deference with which the chief greeted Lance O'Leary.

It was an extraordinary scene: the vast old library with its book-lined walls, its massive chairs and tables and lounges, its ornate hanging lamps whose crystal bangles glittered coldly in the gray daylight that made its way between faded red curtains which hung at the narrow windows. The tower alcove was set off from the rest of the room by curtains, too. The piano loomed, dully gleaming, in one corner; a sullen fire smoldered below the elaborate, low mantel, and above the mantel hung a gilt-framed mirror that reflected our white faces. And our feet made no sound on the heavy carpet as we approached the still group waiting us.

March, sitting very straight on the divan, moved over with a gesture like an invitation, and I sat down beside her. Her soft, dark hair clustered over her head in little curls, like a rebellious baby's, but her eyebrows were implacable and her young mouth stern.

Lance O'Leary remained standing, leaning a little on the high back of a tapestried armchair, while his thoughtful gray eyes went from Eustace and Isobel on the sofa opposite me to Elihu Dimuck, sitting in a great mahogany rocker that when he leaned back took his feet entirely off the floor but did not lessen his dignity, on to Deke Lonergan, standing just before the fireplace with his hands thrust in the pockets of a coat that did not match the trousers he wore, and included Kema, standing at ease in the background,

Grondal and March and me, all in one swift glance. It was a glance that, I thought likely, identified the brand of cigarette that Isobel was smoking, the size of shoe I wore, and the grade of linen in the handkerchief which Mr. Dimuck was passing across his shining head.

"I was given only a summary of the situation about three o'clock this morning when I arrived," began Lance O'Leary. "There are a few questions I should like to ask, and it will facilitate matters all around if you will answer promptly and—directly. It is a matter of routine, so please don't be afraid of implicating yourselves or anyone else. Just tell me the truth as simply as you can."

He paused, looked swiftly around the group again and began with me.

"Miss Keate, will you tell me, please, how and when and under what circumstances you found the dead man?" O'Leary spoke in a quietly conversational manner and seemed considerably more interested in a stubby red pencil he drew from his pocket than in hearing what I had to say. But I knew that quiet manner and told as briefly and concisely as possible of the tragic discovery I had made.

"Now let me see if I have this right," said O'Leary when I had finished. "To the best of your knowledge, you went to sleep about one o'clock. You were awakened by the sound of the shot. You roused yourself, walked over to the stairway, and found Adolph Federie dead. Why did you go at once to the stairway?"

"It—it was the cat!" The shock of that discovery was still so close upon me that I had to force myself to speak through a suddenly stiff throat. "The cat was

standing there, staring at something. I took the lamp and went to the stairway. And there—he was."

"Did you examine the body? How was it lying?"

"He was on his face. I turned him over, saw it was Adolph Federie. Then—I had turned the wick in the lamp too high and the light went out. I—crossed the room, found the bell rope and pulled it. I must have screamed, too, for Mr. Lonergan came down the tower stairs, and Miss Federie and Eustace Federie came with lights from the passage that leads from the tower room to the other rooms on this floor."

"And then?"

"Then the others—Mr. Dimuck and the butler and later the cook came. We looked at the body, found there was nothing we could do, and called the police."

"In your opinion what caused the death of Adolph Federie?"

"A revolver shot, I think, entering his heart."

Lance O'Leary studied his pencil for a long moment. I had forgotten that this was one of his gestures and it exasperated me; there was nothing of any interest in a shabby stub of pencil and there was considerable of interest in the pallid faces surrounding him.

"Such is the first report of our medical examiner," said O'Leary.

A policeman came to the door and hesitated.

"What is it?" asked the chief.

"That female in that bedroom upstairs," said the policeman. "She has still got the door locked and still refuses to come out. We can't search the room, sir, till she gets out."

March started.

"Why, it's Mittie Frisling!"

"Who is Mittie Frisling?" inquired O'Leary.

March did not reply and Grondal stepped suddenly forward.

"Miss Frisling is—an old friend of the family's," he said deferentially. "She came to see old Mr. Federie about a business matter and has been forced to remain until Mr. Federie will be in a condition to—talk with her."

"How long has she been here, then?" asked O'Leary, his bland gray eyes on the butler's face.

Grondal did not blink, but the scar on his face grew dark purple.

"A few days, sir. Several."

"Shall I have her out?" inquired the policeman vigorously.

O'Leary shot the chief an amused look.

"Gently, gently," he said, turning to the policeman. "Tell the lady that the others are waiting for her in the library and ask her to be so good as to join us."

He turned briskly to us again.

"In the meantime—Mr. Lonergan, I believe you were the next to enter the room after Miss Keate found the body. Will you tell me just what your impressions were? Had you been asleep? What wakened you?"

"I was awakened by what must have been the sound of the shot," said Deke Lonergan, meeting O'Leary's eyes with an open and candid look. "I lay there for a moment or two, trying to figure out what sound had aroused me and from where it came. Then it seemed to me that someone was moving about in the room

below me, and after a moment I heard—screams. I jumped out of bed and felt my way through the darkness to the tower stairway, there beyond Eustace's room. I started down the stairway and—and it was dark—and I—well, I stumbled over something. It was—a man's body." He stopped abruptly.

"You had no difficulty in finding your way through the bedroom and into the little room beyond it and down the stairway—*in the dark?*"

"No," said Lonergan simply. "I knew the general direction. I bumped against a table, but that was all."

"The two of you—Eustace Federie and yourself—shared the bedroom directly above the tower room?"

"Certainly," said Lonergan a bit sulkily. "We told you that when we asked for our clothes."

"Were you both in the bedroom when the shot was fired?"

"No," replied Lonergan. "I was alone."

"No," said Eustace in the same breath. "I was reading in the library. I had not gone to bed yet."

O'Leary's clear gray eyes rested for a moment upon Eustace; his gaze was speculative, but he turned back to Lonergan again as if to finish the business at hand before he went on to further inquiry.

"So you found your way from the bedroom, into the little room beyond it, started down the stairway and stumbled over—the body of Adolph Federie——" O'Leary glanced somewhat apologetically toward Isobel, but she was engaged in selecting a fresh cigarette from the case Eustace was holding toward her and did not appear to be particularly affected by the gruesome suggestion. "Go on, please. What happened, then?"

"Well, then March, that is Miss Federie, and Eustace came running into the room from the passage. Into the tower room, I mean. Eustace brought a light, and I called him to come and look. They came to the stairway and we found it was Adolph Federie. Then the rest of them came. We talked some and looked for the revolver, but didn't find it. I guess we were—sort of upset, maybe. The nurse said he was dead and we must leave him alone, just as we found him, and call the police. And we did." He concluded with an air of giving all the facts at his command, and O'Leary gave me a fleeting glance of approval.

"Let me see, now," said O'Leary with a quietly musing air that made me regard him with suddenly quickened interest. "The tower stairway leads up into the small room adjoining the bedroom that you and Eustace Federie were sharing. The only door from that room is the one leading into your bedroom. Thus anyone going from the tower stairway into the corridor of the second floor—as the murderer would have to do to escape—would of necessity pass through the bedroom, and so from the bedroom door into the corridor. Is that right?"

Deke Lonergan grew rather white but answered at once:

"I—believe so."

"Yes," said Eustace definitely. Lonergan gave him an unfriendly look, and Eustace, with a fine disregard for tidiness, airily flicked the ashes from his perpetual cigarette onto the carpet.

"Then," went on O'Leary very gently, "in the pause after the sound of the shot awakened you, did you hear

no one pass through the bedroom? The room in which you lay *wide awake?*"

There was a ring of steel in the last words. My heart began to pound faster, and March at my side was twisting her hands together.

"No one," said Deke Lonergan very deliberately. "Of course, when I awoke I did not leap immediately to the conclusion that I had heard a revolver shot. I am a fairly heavy sleeper, and it always takes a moment or two to orient one's self when aroused suddenly out of a sound sleep."

"Then you think it possible that the person who fired that shot could have retreated through your bedroom before you were thoroughly aroused without vour knowing it?"

Deke Lonergan hesitated for just a fraction of a second. It seemed to me that his eyes, which up to now had been open and ingenuous, took on a wary, guarded look.

"I think it possible," he said flatly. "At any rate I heard nothing. Personally I—am convinced that no one passed through the room." There was a slow deliberation about his words that gave them significance. And though I couldn't account for it, the moment he spoke I was sure that he was not telling the truth.

"So you heard nothing? No footsteps? No sound of a door closing?" O'Leary's voice was very bland and easy.

"Nothing," said Deke Lonergan. "Nothing save the sound in the room below of someone moving about. That was the nurse, I suppose."

"You couldn't have been confused as to the location of that sound? It couldn't have been in your bedroom

instead of the room below?" O'Leary was harping on the point with a nagging persistence that was not usual with him.

"No," said Deke Lonergan with certainty.

"You expected Mr. Eustace Federie to come to bed later?"

"Why—yes."

"Did you leave the bedroom door open—the one into the corridor, I mean—when you retired?"

"Why—yes, I believe I did."

"That being true, of course, you didn't lock the door into the corridor."

"Of course not."

"Do you have the key to that door?"

"No!"

There was a brief silence. Lance O'Leary rolled and twisted the pencil, his thoughts apparently engrossed with it and nothing else. A gust of wind blew against a window near at hand and it rattled uneasily. A policeman in the corner shifted his weight restlessly, the chair creaked, and he subsided at once. March, at my side, took a long, tremulous breath. Isobel crossed her silken ankles, squashed the end of her cigarette on an ash tray, and linked her fingers across her knees, her dreamy gaze upon O'Leary. The jewels on her curiously broad hands caught lights from a suddenly leaping flame in the fireplace and winked knowingly at me.

"Miss Keate, you say you were asleep when the shot was fired. Does that mean that you were soundly sleeping? Soundly enough so that anyone could have entered the tower room from the passage without you knowing it?"

"No," I said positively. "My chair was near the bed, with its back to the stairway. Someone might have come down that stairway without arousing me, as it is some distance from where I sat. But the least stir from my patient would have awakened me. When I say I slept, I mean that I—slept as a nurse does—with one eye open."

"Then could anyone have entered the tower room—from the passage?" asked O'Leary again. "So quietly that you did not hear him?"

"No," I repeated. "I'm sure I should have roused at once. You see to enter by that door and cross the room to the stairway, anyone would have had to pass quite near me."

"And yet at least two people did enter the tower room—Adolph Federie and—his murderer. And you are sure no one entered by way of the door into the passage, and Mr. Lonergan here is equally sure he did not hear anyone passing through the bedroom above and so by way of the tower stairway into old Mr. Federie's sick room."

"I tell you I was asleep," growled Deke Lonergan.

"Then," went on O'Leary, paying no attention to Lonergan's remark, "one of those two people escaped *after the shot was fired*, which presents an even more interesting problem, for that shot awoke both Miss Keate and Mr. Lonergan. The shot was fired presumably from the top of the stairway. In order to escape the murderer had to do one of two things: He had to descend the tower stairway, cross the tower room, passing close to Miss Keate after the shot had awakened her, and escape through the little passage. *Or*

he had to pass through the bedroom above without attracting Mr. Lonergan's attention, and thus into the second-floor corridor. You, Mr. Lonergan, are sure that no one passed through the bedroom above and also that you would have heard anyone doing so. Miss Keate, could anyone have passed you without your knowledge after the shot was fired?"

"Not without wings!"

"You saw nothing to indicate——"

"Wait!" A memory was trying to thrust itself into my weary mind. I closed my eyes trying to recall the moment of my waking. "Wait," I continued slowly, groping for that memory. "I was dreaming that it was a summer storm and there was thunder. A loud roll of thunder roused me, and as I opened my eyes I saw——" I had it now! "I saw the folds of the green velvet curtain there in the doorway wavering, and then the curtain fell into place as if it had just been dropped. That is all I saw. Then I realized that I had been dreaming, and that it was not thunder that awakened me, and I stood up and looked around the room."

"And saw nothing?" asked O'Leary very quietly.

"Nothing. Only the cat. And in the shock of my discovery I forgot the curtain moving until just now."

"Thank you, Miss Keate," said O'Leary. "Do you think that the person who dropped that curtain could have had time to descend the stairway and cross the room after the shot was fired and before you opened your eyes and saw the curtain falling into place?"

"No," I replied with decision.

"Then our problem is still a problem. Especially since—" O'Leary was studying the pencil in his fingers

very carefully—"since the door from Mr. Lonergan's bedroom into the second-floor corridor is locked. And the key is gone. And the fingerprints on the glass doorknob have been carefully rubbed away."

"*What!*" It was Deke Lonergan who cried out. The rest of us sat in a stupefied silence under the impact of O'Leary's quiet words.

"Have you nothing more to say, Mr. Lonergan? You are sure you have—forgotten nothing?"

"I've not another thing to say!" Deke Lonergan's blond eyebrows had drawn together and his face was sullen and ugly looking.

"I'm sorry," said O'Leary gently. "Because you see, Mr. Lonergan, if you were, as you claim, awakened by the sound of the shot, while someone might have slipped through the bedroom without your knowledge—mind, I say *might*—you couldn't have helped hearing the door into the corridor close and the key rasp in the lock. It would be better for you, you know, if you *had* heard something of the kind."

Deke Lonergan stared at the imperturbable features of the young detective for a long moment. Then his face darkened furiously and he sprang forward.

"What do you mean by that?"

"Nothing more than I have said." Lance O'Leary's good humor was unshaken.

"Look here, you can't accuse me of murder on such a slim excuse as this!"

"No one has accused you," said O'Leary, adding mildly, "yet."

There was a short silence while Deke Lonergan stared angrily into O'Leary's clear gray eyes. Then all at

once he dropped into a chair, gripped his hands around its arms, the fury in his face gave place to a kind of sullen and defiant reserve, and his eyes, wary and guarded again, met O'Leary's fully.

"You are trying to get me to talk. And I have nothing to say. Nothing to tell."

Lance O'Leary's eyebrows lifted a little and Eustace spoke lazily:

"By the way, Mr. O'Leary, have you got that door unlocked yet? It was good of you to bring us some of our clothes but—" he glanced at Lonergan's mismated coat and trousers—"but it is a little inconvenient to be locked out of one's own room like this."

"In fact, the whole thing is inconvenient, is it not? But I'm afraid you'll have to put up with it until—until we find who locked that door." O'Leary's face was as quiet as ever, but there was an undercurrent in his voice that was neither bland nor easy. Eustace's dark eyes gleamed unpleasantly as he examined a match he drew from his pocket case with unnecessary care and struck it viciously along the polished arm of the sofa. The tiny flame sputtered, breaking the little silence and simultaneously a subdued commotion arose suddenly in the hall that, growing louder, drew our eyes that way. And at that second Mittie Frisling, propelled on either arm by a policeman, entered the room. The fringes of her bunchy, pale-green kimono fluttered, her eyes were nearly popping out of their sockets, her sticky-looking hair was in untidy strings about her ears, and her face a sickly yellow green.

Her terrified eyes went from one to another of us, lighted on the chief of police, and she at once began:

"I know nothing of this! Nothing at all! I tell you I know nothing of it! These policemen have been knocking at my door all morning. Since early this morning! Of course, I wouldn't let them in. Why should I! It's an outrage! I know nothing of it. Nothing! *Nothing!*"

By this time she had reached us, walking hurriedly and awkwardly on the high heels of the shabby pumps into which she had thrust her pudgy feet and above which her fat ankles bulged unpleasantly.

"Nothing of what, Miss Frisling?" inquired O'Leary.

She turned her pale eyes toward him, recognizing authority in that quiet voice.

"Of Adolph's death, of course!" she cried shrilly. "Of Adolph Federie's murder!"

"You knew, then, that he had been poisoned?" asked O'Leary gently.

"Not poisoned!" she cried. "He was shot. I know nothing of it!"

O'Leary glanced at her escort.

"Did either of you tell her?" he asked.

"No, sir."

"How did you know that Adolph Federie was—shot?" asked O'Leary, turning again to Mittie Frisling.

Her eyes darted desperately from me to March and on to Eustace. She ran a quick tongue over her ashen lips.

"I didn't know it," she denied wildly. "I—I heard people talking. In the hall, outside my room. I didn't want to come out. I wanted to stay there."

Isobel leaned forward and spoke for the first time. Her voice was studiously low but had a harsh note of strain in its husky depth. She had taken time before

coming to the library to put on her make-up, and two orange-red spots of rouge showed on her whitened cheek bones and her lips were stiff with paste.

"Mittie—Mittie!" she said in a voice that was half rebuking and half amusedly tolerant. "Don't let yourself become so excited. What is done is done and we can't help it. No one is trying to accuse you. You need not deny things so vigorously. Try to control yourself."

Mittie's colorless eyes flickered once and fastened hatefully on Isobel. Her face lost some of its terror and became spiteful.

"That's all very well for you," she cried, spitting out the words like an enraged cat. "You never cared for him. You quarreled all the time. You quarreled last night. *I heard you!* You hated him. You were glad to get rid of him." She turned to O'Leary, flinging out a plump, clammy-looking hand that shook rather horribly. "Search among her things for the revolver that shot Adolph!" She screamed, quite beside herself with rage and terror.

It seemed to me that the spots of color on Isobel's cheek bones stood out more distinctly and her mouth was a sharp red line. But she laughed and leaned back against the sofa. It was a tight, strained laugh, so bitter, so indefinably ugly, that little shivers started inside my elbows, and I stared at Isobel as if seeing her for the first time.

"Still suffering from jealousy, are you, Mittie?" she said, her voice still very low and harsh and dreadfully amused. "You always loved Adolph, didn't you? And hated me."

She paused, and in the dreadful hush the smile on her painted mouth vanished, and she sighed a sigh of pure weariness.

"Good Lord," she said unexpectedly. "I wish you had had him!"

CHAPTER V

NO ALIBI

"ISOBEL!" cried March sharply, breaking the shocked silence. "He was your husband. And he's dead."

Isobel lifted her beautifully curved shoulders in a shrug.

"Yes. He was my husband. And he's dead. Give me another cigarette, Eustace, please." She lighted the cigarette with steady fingers, the jewels on them glittering maliciously. She took a deliberate puff or two, then looked straight at Mittie Frisling. "He's dead," she repeated, her voice lower than ever and somehow cruel and deadly in its soft cadences. "He's dead, and I only hope he suffered what he deserved to suffer."

"Isobel!" cried March again.

"Isobel! Stop that!" said Eustace in a curiously tight voice, laying a hand over one of Isobel's and pressing it until the rings must have cut into her flesh, although Isobel did not wince.

"Hear her! Hear her!" squealed Mittie. "I told you so! She did it! She shot him! Why don't you arrest her? Put handcuffs on her?" Her voice was rising with every word and her fat hands shaking, and all at once she began to sob—horrible high-pitched sobs that rang through the room, echoing from every corner in queer spasmodic gasps.

Well, I simply couldn't stand it. It made gooseflesh

come out on my arms and my knees began to shake and a quaky feeling came into the pit of my stomach.

In one motion I reached her, seized her bulging shoulders in my hands, and shook. In my agitation I may have shaken a little harder than I intended, for her teeth clicked together furiously, and I think she bit her tongue. At any rate, she suddenly gave a short, sharp yelp, almost strangled on a sob, and an expression of acute pain came into her face.

"Let me alone," she cried indistinctly, clutching at one side of her jaw. "You've nearly killed me."

Her voice wavered upward again, and I gave a last shake for good measure.

"Don't be a fool," I said. "Can't you see that we are all just on the verge of hysterics? We've had a harrowing experience. We are worn and tired and holding onto decent self-control with all our might. It's all we can do to keep from screaming and yelling and carrying on as you are doing. But we've got to be quiet. Why, we'd all be gibbering idiots by night if we would let ourselves go!"

In involuntary emphasis I strengthened my grip on her shoulders, and she must have thought I was about to shake again, for she turned an agonized countenance toward O'Leary.

"Take her off!" she cried, holding her jaw. "I've bitten my tongue in two already."

"She'll be all right now, Miss Keate," said Lance O'Leary to me, and as I resumed my seat he gave me a look in which there was just a spark of laughter and a good measure of respect. And I don't mind saying that when I do anything I do it thoroughly.

"Now, Mr. Eustace Federie," went on O'Leary quietly. "Let's hear your account of the night's tragedy. You say you were in the library reading when you heard the sound of the shot?"

It was strange how O'Leary's tranquil voice put a period to the tumult of ugly emotions that had been surging about us. I took a long breath and adjusted my cap, which had fallen over one ear, and March leaned back against the divan with a little sigh. But her hands kept twisting themselves in her lap.

"Yes," replied Eustace.

"You had not gone to bed at all?"

"No," said Eustace easily. "I am a poor sleeper and often read late."

"When did you last see Adolph Federie—alive?"

Eustace paused, frowning a little as if to recall exactly all the events of the night.

"About eleven o'clock, I think. After dinner we all, save the nurse and Grandfather, of course—sat here in the library until ten o'clock or so. One by one we drifted upstairs. Isobel was the first to go. Close to eleven I went into Grandfather's room. Miss Keate was there, of course, and my cousin March. March and I walked upstairs together, and she went to her room. I took off my dinner jacket and put on a lounge coat, got my pipe, and returned to the library. As I was coming downstairs I met Uncle Adolph. He said good-night and went on upstairs. And that is the last time I saw him—alive."

"You went at once to the library?"

"Yes. And settled down with a book. I read on and on and did not realize that it was getting late—for

Federie house. I was thinking of going to bed, though, and was just finishing a chapter when I heard a sound —a sort of reverberating crash. It seemed to come from the other end of the house. I did not at once identify it as being a revolver shot. But as I listened I heard screams. I dropped my book and hurried out of the library into the hall. My cousin"—his suave glance indicated March—"was just running down the stairs. I lighted candles and we hurried to the tower room."

He stopped and folded his arms composedly.

"Were you surprised to find that your uncle had been shot?" inquired O'Leary in an abstracted manner.

"Murder must always be a surprise," said Eustace smoothly. "A surprise—at least."

"About how long a time elapsed between the sound of the shot and your entrance into the hall?"

It had seemed to me that Eustace's recital of events had been a little too pat, a little circumstantial, and I listened with some interest for his reply.

"Not long," he said calmly. "It is hard to say, though. Possibly two minutes after I heard the shot Miss Keate screamed. I went directly into the hall, then. Oh, it might have been three minutes. It is hard to say exactly."

"And you say that you did not identify the sound you heard as being a revolver shot?"

"Not at once. No. Of course, I was not expecting anything like that."

Lance O'Leary glanced about the large room with its heavily padded carpets and its doorway muffled in heavy velvet.

"About where were you sitting, Mr. Federie?"

Eustace's quick dark gaze went swiftly about the chairs and massive divans. One chair stood not far from us, with a book, opened face downward, across one upholstered arm. I may have imagined that a glimmer of satisfaction lighted his eyes as, without a word, he motioned toward that chair.

"There?" said O'Leary. He rose, approached the chair, and appeared to measure with his eyes the distance from the chair to the doorway. Eustace watched him narrowly through the cloud of cigarette smoke that almost obscured his gleaming dark eyes.

But at once O'Leary returned to his former position, and without another word he turned to March.

"Miss Federie, will you be so good as to tell me just when you last saw your uncle? I know that you have been through a trying ordeal," he added. "But if you will make the effort——"

"Thank you," said March steadily. "I am quite all right. I last saw my uncle alive at about eleven o'clock last night. At that time I went upstairs to my own room, came down again and went to Grandfather's room to see if the nurse wanted anything. Uncle Adolph was in this room when I left it and I did not see him again until—until—" her voice broke abruptly but she went on—"until after he was shot."

"Did you hear the sound of the shot distinctly?"

She hesitated.

"Y-yes. That is I heard the sound but didn't know what it was. I was in the lower hall just at the foot of the stairs——"

Eustace broke in.

"You mean that you were in the upper hall at the

head of the stairs, March. You must have been there when you heard the shot. You were just running downstairs when I came into the hall and met you." He spoke with the utmost ease, rather lazily, in fact, but his eyes were very intent on March's face.

Her black eyebrows drew themselves together and she bent a slow regard upon her cousin that was in no way friendly. Then she met O'Leary's clear gray gaze directly and spoke with just a tinge of defiance.

"I was just at the bottom of the stairway out there in the hall when I heard the shot. It—frightened me a little, and I just stood there listening for—possibly two minutes. Then I heard someone screaming. Then Eustace was in the hall. He gave me a candle and we ran to Grandfather's room."

"Did you see your cousin come into the hall?"

"Why—no. That is, the light was dim, you know—the night light that is left burning there in the hall—and I was listening, thinking of nothing else but those screams. I supposed he came from the library."

"But you didn't actually see him enter the hall?" persisted O'Leary.

"No," said March flatly and without any visible compunction.

"What do you mean, O'Leary?" asked Eustace unpleasantly. "Do you mean to doubt my word?"

"This is my business, Mr. Federie. I have to pursue it in my own fashion. You had been on the first floor, then, Miss March?"

A flare of crimson came into March's soft white cheeks and at once subsided.

"I had," she admitted, and added as though against

her will: "I was—troubled about something. I couldn't sleep. I came downstairs to—to get a glass of milk. But at the dining-room door I—changed my mind and decided to go back to my room and go to sleep. You know the rest."

"Why were you—troubled?" asked O'Leary gently.

I felt the child's muscles stiffen and even her lips were white.

"I don't—" the words were only a hoarse whisper, and she pressed her hand to her slim white throat and tried again—"I don't know. That is—I was troubled about—about Grandfather."

Lance O'Leary looked at her thoughtfully, and even to me it was obvious that her incoherent reply held a terror that the question had not warranted. Perhaps he decided the matter would keep until he could talk to her alone; perhaps from very humanity he forbore to harry the child further. At any rate, he went on coolly.

"About what time was that?"

"When I heard the shot? It must have been after two—about half-past two, I believe."

"What is your opinion as to that?" O'Leary turned to Eustace.

"It was probably about two-thirty," agreed Eustace lightly. He seemed in no way disturbed by March's direct repudiation of the one item in his own story. "I can't be sure, however."

"And you, Mr. Lonergan? What time would you say it was?"

"I haven't the least idea," growled young Lonergan. "I tell you I was asleep."

"Miss Keate?"

"It must have been close to two-thirty," I said. "At least, after we had talked a little and sent for the police, I looked at my watch and it was not quite three o'clock. I think that finding the body and rousing the house and all must have taken about half an hour."

He nodded, and having given March a breathing space returned to her.

"Just one more thing, Miss March; within half an hour after you discovered that Adolph Federie was dead, some errand took you out of the house. What was that errand?" He spoke in a voice that was even milder than usual, but March's eyes widened and grew dark, and I felt Kema looking at me reproachfully.

"Why, yes," replied March in a small, stifled tone. "Yes. I—I remembered that Konrad—that's the dog—was unchained. The policemen were on the way and Konrad is savage with strangers. I went to—to chain him."

"I see," said O'Leary gently. "And did you succeed in—chaining up the dog?"

"No," said March. She looked hunted. "No. He—I couldn't—make him come to me."

"You were wearing black satin bedroom slippers?"

"Yes."

"Were there red feather ornaments on the toes of those slippers?"

"Why—y-yes. Yes, there were."

"You lost one of the ornaments. *Do you know where you lost it?*" The last words were unwontedly sharp

A quick wave of fear stilled the girl's face and gave a pinched, blue look to her mouth and nostrils.

"No—no. I don't know," she said in a half whisper.

Lance O'Leary said nothing for a long moment or two, letting his eyes rest contemplatively on the girl's white face in the meanwhile. Then he seemed to decide whatever question he had been silently considering.

"Thank you, Miss March," he said briskly. "Mrs. Federie, if you don't feel equal to the strain of answering a few questions I can wait, but it will oblige me immensely if——"

Isobel brushed away O'Leary's cool gesture of courtesy. She was leaning indolently against the red plush back of the sofa, apparently quite relaxed and at ease, but her hands lay at her sides in what seemed to me a too deliberate repose.

"I understand perfectly," she said in that throaty, low voice that was somehow unmusical and colorless. "Ask me anything you like. You want to know at what time I last saw Adolph? About twelve, I think. We have been sharing his rooms in the back wing of the house—he has three rooms up there, bedroom, sitting room, and bath." She motioned toward the back of the house. "I had gone to bed early and was reading myself to sleep. He came in and we talked for about half an hour. Then he went back to the sitting room. I blew out the lamp and went to sleep. I supposed he had gone to sleep on the daybed in the sitting room. I did not awaken until I heard someone screaming. I supposed old Mr. Federie had died. I knew I could do nothing, so I did not go down to the tower room for

about half an hour. Then—when I did go down, Eustace told me." Her voice was marvelously steady; clearly Isobel had capacities that would bear investigation.

"You did not hear the sound of the shot, then?"

Isobel considered the question gravely, and her reply, when it came, sounded truthful.

"No. I was already awake. Had been for a moment or two when I heard Miss Keate scream, so the sound may have awakened me, although I was not conscious of it. A scream would have a piercing quality, while a heavier, duller sound would not penetrate far through these thick old walls and heavy doors."

O'Leary nodded, and I felt a queer respect for Isobel growing within me. While there was nothing about the woman that attracted me, still she was no fool. The quiet, grave way in which she was speaking would go a long way with a jury.

A jury! I caught myself up quickly, resolving to keep a tighter hold on my suspicions, and turned my attention back to O'Leary.

"You will pardon the inquiry, Mrs. Federie, but—were you and your husband on the best of terms?"

"No," said Isobel calmly. She must have expected some such question.

"Were there any particular matters of dissension?"

Isobel did hesitate here and took a quick breath. But:

"No. We were simply mismated. And Adolph never had enough money."

"Was he cruel to you?" said O'Leary softly, but with a fine edge to his quietly uttered words.

Isobel's reddish-brown eyes narrowed between her blackened lashes.

"It depends upon what you mean by cruelty," she said evenly. "If you mean did he thwart every desire I had, did he deny me any pleasures or interests of activities such as normal women have, did he drag me from one gambling rendezvous to another, did he humiliate me in every possible way—if you mean that, yes, he was cruel. Wickedly cruel. But if you mean did he beat me—abuse me—no." She paused and added in a measured deliberation: "He was afraid to touch me."

It was not nice to sit there and hear her saying such things in that calm, unmoved way, of her husband so recently and dreadfully dead. I think if her voice had trembled or broken or given any evidence of emotion it might not have sounded so ugly. But, as it was, her even, low tones going on and on so deliberately made my flesh crawl.

March at my side was whispering, "Isobel, Isobel," but no one heard her save myself, and I think she did not know she was speaking. Eustace stretched out a hand to Isobel and withdrew it without touching her. Grondal coughed, and Mittie Frisling sprang suddenly to her feet, and I was never sure just what happened in the space of a few seconds, during which Mittie's and Isobel's voices rose suddenly. There was a sound of tearing silk, a smart slap, a shriek from Mittie, and then Eustace was thrusting Mittie back into her chair, and Isobel was leaning forward, her eyes like smoldering red coals and her lips drawn back from her teeth. The thin sleeve of the frock she

wore had been torn from shoulder to wrist, exposing what might have been a lovely arm, but was now disfigured with purplish bruises between the elbow and shoulder.

"Look at that!" shrieked Mittie Frisling. A red blotch on her sallow cheek showed where Isobel's fingers had struck, but Mittie seemed unconscious of it. "Look! They fought last night. She wouldn't tell you. But I heard them. He struck her, and she said she'd be even with him."

"And I shan't forget what I owe you, Mittie," said Isobel, her low voice deliberately venomous.

"Ladies—ladies——" said the chief helplessly; he had advanced to O'Leary's side.

"Isobel—careful," said Eustace in a warning way. With a gentler manner than I had credited him with he drew the torn edges of thin silk together so that the ugly-looking arm was covered, though now that I knew the bruises were there I could trace their dark outline through the flimsy material.

Dimuck from his chair was muttering, "Never in my life! Never in my life!" Deke Lonergan was staring distastefully at Mittie, and March, her horrified eyes fixed on Isobel, was gripping my hand.

Lance O'Leary alone was unmoved.

"You have all been under a great nervous strain," he said briefly, and as if Mittie's actions were quite customary under such circumstances. "Just a few more questions, please. Mr. Dimuck, will you tell me your story of the night?"

"Certainly. Certainly. I was awakened by the sound of the shot. I rose at once, put on my bathrobe, and

came downstairs. I was delayed, owing to having to light a candle in my room, before venturing down the stairs. In the meantime I heard screams coming from the tower room. When I reached that room Eustace and Miss March, the nurse and Mr. Lonergan were all clustered about Adolph on the little tower stairway. It is dreadful—dreadful! Never in all my——"

"I believe you told me you were an old friend of Mr. Federie's?"

"Yes, yes. And in a sense, his business adviser. That is, he occasionally makes use of my advice as to market conditions. Yes, we are old friends."

"How is it that you are here now?"

"Mr. Federie asked me to come, just before his illness. When I arrived he was unable to talk to me. I have been waiting until he could speak. I don't know what he wished to see me about in particular, of course. Now that this highly unfortunate——"

"He wrote to you? May I see the letter, please?"

"Certainly. Certainly. It's upstairs, I think, in my bag. Or——" he was feeling with nimble precision into his pockets. "No, here it is. Just a brief message, you see."

O'Leary took the letter, glanced through it, and read it aloud as if to himself: "Dear Dimuck: Will you come down here within the next few days? Adolph is here. Yours, Jonas Federie."

"'Adolph is here,'" he repeated slowly. "Thank you, Mr. Dimuck." He returned the letter. "Can you tell us something of Adolph Federie? What was his—er—business?"

"He—" Mr. Dimuck cast a deprecating look toward

Isobel—"he had no business or profession. None that I know of, at least. I'm afraid I can tell you very little about him. He has not been here much in the last few years. However, I may say that it was my impression that he came home this time because—well, because he wanted money."

"He did," broke in Isobel coolly. "He always wanted money. This time he hoped to get some from his father. He was very much annoyed by his father's being ill."

Annoyed! Was it cleverness on Isobel's part, or was it honesty that was making Adolph Federie more despicable with every word she uttered?

Elihu Dimuck cleared his throat importantly; the big chair in which he was sitting combined with his heavy eyeglasses and faintly shocked manner to give him a magisterial air.

"Yes," he went on, quite as if Isobel had not spoken. "It was my impression that Adolph wanted money. Needed it rather desperately, perhaps. Poor fellow! Never happened before in all my——"

"Why was that your impression?"

The abrupt question seemed to discompose Mr. Dimuck. He rubbed his nose agitatedly and gave O'Leary a peevish look through the thick lenses of his eyeglasses.

"One thing and another. One thing and another."

"I've already told you——" began Isobel.

"Such as what?" prodded O'Leary, paying no attention to Isobel.

"Well, it is hard to say. His father's letter to me gave that impression. And I'm afraid Adolph seldom came home unless he did need money." Elihu Dimuck glanced

at Isobel, who nodded in a horribly matter-of-fact way. "I—it is not becoming to speak ill of the dead, but I—I fear Adolph did not lead the life he should have led." He looked at Isobel again as if in apology.

"Don't mind me," she said. "The things he did were not—becoming, either." There was a cruel little sneer in her tone as she used Dimuck's word.

"Mr. Dimuck is quite right," said March suddenly to O'Leary in a frozen little voice. "Uncle Adolph did not lead quite 'the life he should have led.'" She appeared to quote Dimuck's phrase with a kind of delicate distaste. "Also Uncle Adolph always wanted money. He tried to borrow of me no longer ago than—last night," she concluded with a cold scorn that was not pleasant, coming right on the heels of the man's terrible death.

"Did he say anything of the reasons for his need?" inquired O'Leary.

"No. I refused him as I have—at other times."

Eustace tossed his cigarette violently toward the fireplace; it fell on the hearth and Deke Lonergan pushed it into the fire with his foot.

"Don't you think we have aired the family's dirty linen enough now, March?" said Eustace cuttingly.

March's face flared into anger at once, and Elihu Dimuck held up a pink hand.

"These things are deplorable—deplorable, but this is not the time to conceal any matters that should be brought before this gentleman. This is a terrible thing, yes, a terrible thing——"

March interrupted him.

"Adolph Federie was not a member of the family to be proud of," she said distinctly, her stormy blue eyes

going from Eustace to O'Leary and back again. "He was weak, easily led, drank too much—gambled too much—" she paused as if to add significance to her last words, as she repeated them—"gambled too much. But he was his own worst enemy. I know of no one who could wish to—to kill——" She stopped suddenly as if at an unpleasant recollection and left her sentence hanging unfinished in the air.

"What is your theory—your explanation of his murder, then?" asked O'Leary.

Her air of stormy defiance had inexplicably collapsed.

"I don't know," she said. "I don't know."

"So you and Adolph Federie were not on good terms?"

"No!" she cried very distinctly. "I—hated him!" And as Eustace sprang to his feet at that with a violent gesture and, reaching her, stretched out his slender hand to grasp her shoulder, she twisted away from him, crying: "And so did you, Eustace! You know you did! You hated him, too!"

And in the curious hush that followed Isobel laughed!

It was a laugh of malicious, insolent, indecent amusement that, coming from the woman who had been Adolph's wife, actually made me shiver. Then Kema padded softly from the background and placed a wide, dark hand on Eustace's arm. His face, dark and furiously flushed, turned toward her and his hand dropped to his side.

"You quarrel," said Kema. "And there is death in the house." She was unexcited, rather detached and stolid. "Let him rest."

Eustace drew away from her and laughed gratingly.

"All right, Kema. Anything more, Mr.—Detective?"

O'Leary removed his clear gaze from the pencil stub that had apparently held it during the strange little contretemps.

"Why, yes—a number of things. You were surprised, of course, to find that Adolph Federie had been killed, Mr. Dimuck?"

Elihu Dimuck brought his fat pink hands together sharply.

"I was horrified! Horrified! Shocked beyond measure!"

"And you, Grondal." O'Leary turned briskly to the man. "What awakened you?"

"The bell, sir. I thought it might be that Mr. Federie had died." The man's face was as unprepossessing as ever, but his manner left nothing to be desired.

"Where do you sleep?"

"In the back of the L, sir, upstairs."

"That room in the southeast corner?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you come down by way of the front stairs?"

"No, sir. There's a flight of stairs for the servants' use that leads to the back entry, there back of the kitchen—but doubtless you know where it is. I came down by that stairway."

"And you saw or heard nothing unusual on the way?"

"No, sir, nothing," said Grondal, very positively and promptly. A shade too promptly. I had an extraordinary feeling that he had expected the question and had prepared his very definite answer. But, of course, every one of us must have expected detailed inquiry.

"Then you went directly to the sick room?"

"Yes, sir. I only stopped in the kitchen to light a lamp."

"Then you found your way along the back hall, upstairs, and down the back stairway without a light?"

"Why, yes, sir. I know this house like the palm of my own hand. But I thought an extra light might be needed in the sick room. You may have noticed that we do not have electrics."

"Yes," agreed O'Leary somewhat grimly. "I have noticed that."

"Yes, sir," said Grondal imperturbably. "While I was lighting the lamp Kema came into the kitchen. The bell connects in her room, too."

"I see." O'Leary's eyes went to Kema. She was standing at March's side, the folds of gray gingham hanging meekly, her wide hands on her hips—or where I supposed her hips to be—and her incurious yellow eyes on O'Leary.

"Did the bell arouse you?" he asked her.

"Yes. I was asleep. I heard the bell. I thought Mr. Federie was worse. I went downstairs and to the tower room. By the time I got there they were all standing around Mr. Adolph. He was on the stairway. I stayed there and watched them." The gold hoops at her ears caught light for a second. She spoke in an emotionless way that was almost unconcern.

"Were you shocked to find that murder had been done?"

She moved her vast shoulders in a kind of shrug.

"Yes. But death comes. What matter how?" Her

hands moved in a slight upward gesture that oddly conveyed a hint of the serene fatalism of the old, those whose eyes have seen much coming for the brief little space of man's life and much going into that immeasurable, incalculable realm of infinity.

Impressed in spite of myself, I twisted uneasily, and the little crisp rustle of my starched uniform brought me back to practicality. A man's life *was* important; it was at the very height of our finite scale of values. And at the other end of that silent house a man's life had been taken.

"Then you know nothing of it?" came O'Leary's voice with a sharper edge than was its custom.

"I? No," replied Kema impassively.

O'Leary studied the dark, secretive face for a long moment, then he took out a slim platinum watch, glanced at it, replaced it in his pocket, and looked about as if mentally checking up the members of the household.

"Now, Miss Frisling, may we have your story?"

"My *story!*" gulped Mittie Frisling. She had been extraordinarily quiet since her last bout with Isobel. The red streaks on her cheek still showed and her colorless eyes had taken on a brooding look, but with O'Leary's request terror licked once more across her face.

"You are a guest here?"

"Why, I—not exactly. That is, yes."

"You mean you are a guest, or are not?"

"I—I am." She brought out the reply hurriedly, with an uncertain side glance toward March, whose eyes were severe.

"Miss Federie's guest, are you?" inquired O'Leary with bland persistence.

"No," fluttered Mittie. "No. I——" She stuck momentarily, and O'Leary waited with an air of politeness that did not disguise to my mind his interest in knowing just why the question of Mittie Frisling's status in the house should agitate her so markedly.

"I was here when she came home," said Mittie, who, I was to discover, always found silence unendurable. "I was already here." She stuck again, twisting her pudgy hands in the bedraggled fringes of her kimono. Grondal coughed suddenly; the scar on his face was a dull red and he was staring fixedly at Mittie. She moistened her pale lips, shot him a helpless look, smoothed her kimono over her fat knees, swept us all with those light eyes, and burst into hurried, breathless words.

"I came on business. I came to see old Mr. Federie. He can't talk. He is sick. They've been telling me he can't talk for days. I am waiting for him to be better. I haven't done anything. Why do you question me? I know nothing of this. I was asleep when they knocked at the door of my bedroom. Before daylight, it was." She paused to take a panting breath. "I wouldn't answer."

"Why would you not answer, Miss Frisling?"

"Because I—" her eyes darted quick glances like the eyes of a hunted animal—"because I—was afraid."

"Why should you be afraid? You say you knew nothing of the trouble. Did you know Adolph Federie had been murdered?" His easy voice changed suddenly, becoming crisp and cold.

She flung both hands before her face and pressed her whole body backward against the chair. Her face was a sickly yellow and her lips like dead ashes.

"No. No. But I—I heard them talking outside the door."

"Did you hear the sound of the shot?"

"*No!*"

"Did you hear Miss Keate scream?"

"*No!*"

"How did you know Adolph Federie was shot?"

"I—I tell you, I heard them talking in the hall."

"What time did you retire to your room?"

"About—eleven, I think."

"You said that you overheard Adolph Federie and his—wife—quarreling. Was that true?"

"Yes. Yes. That is—I——"

"Where were you at the time?"

"I was going down to the kitchen to get some hot water for my hot-water bag—my room is as cold as a barn," she interpolated with another side glance at March. "I passed their door. I heard them; their voices were loud and angry. I—couldn't help hearing them."

"Did you hear what they said?"

Isobel leaned forward suddenly, fixing her hazy eyes upon Mittie.

"Yes, Mittie," she said silkily. "Do tell us what you heard."

"I heard you cry out when he struck you," said Mittie vindictively.

Isobel's features sharpened, but she smiled.

"But *words*, Mittie. Words that will interest the police. Can't you think up something more lurid? If

you didn't hear anything, why, make up something! Didn't you have your ear at the keyhole?"

"Isobel!" said Eustace again in a warning tone.

"I—well—I knew from the sound of the voices that they were quarreling. And I heard Isobel cry out when he struck her, and Adolph laughed. And then—" Mittie ceased to mumble and her light eyes fastened themselves in ugly triumph upon Isobel—"and then I *did* hear words. I heard Isobel say—" she paused and leaned forward, her voice sinking to an ugly, strained whisper—"'*I'll kill you for this!*' And she did."

There was a strange silence. Then Isobel laughed again, though her wide hands had gripped together as if she thought they were on Mittie's fat throat.

"Oh, Mittie, Mittie, can't you do better than that! That is too apt. You must be subtle, my dear. Subtle!" But the dabs of rouge on the woman's cheek bones stood out with hideous clearness.

"I did hear it. I can swear to it. That's what she said." She stopped to catch her breath, spent with the vehemence of her jerky sentences, and lifted both shaking hands to push the strings of hair from her face.

For a long moment no one spoke. The room had grown cold while we sat there. The fire had smoldered itself out, and the damp, mildewy smell that hung over the whole place, penetrating even the layers of dust that clung to the heavy curtains and carpets, seemed to rise more distinctly, permeating the very air we breathed. The dreary daylight came in reluctant gray streaks through the narrow windows. Our faces were without exception drawn and haggard and fearfully tired looking.

It seemed to me that I had lived in that house for years; that I was an intimate of the thick old walls and strange, yet curiously familiar, household.

Lance O'Leary's voice, when it came, had an edge of cold mercilessness; it was one of the rare occasions when he cast aside his mask of easy good humor, and one caught a glimpse of the relentless spirit that lay below it.

"Some one of you is lying," he said quite deliberately. "One of you shot Adolph Federie. This house was locked up like a vault. There was a man-killing dog guarding the place. I can see no possibility of an outsider making his way into the place, undetected, shooting a man—with apparently no purpose—and getting away without being seen. It lies among you." He paused. The faces before me look ghastlier. Mittie Frisling clutched at the arms of her chair and her lower jaw fell, but no one else moved. I knew what they felt, for even I, who knew myself to be innocent, felt exactly as if a hand had gripped my heart and was slowly and relentlessly pressing upon it. And if I felt that, what did that one feel who had a terrible secret hidden in his heart?

"You understand, of course, that this is only the beginning of the inquiry. I must ask you all to remain in the house until I permit you to leave. Unless, of course, you prefer to have warrants sworn out against you. Can we do that, chief, if necessary?"

I think the chief had not expected the abrupt question, for he started and had to shift an enormous mouthful of chewing gum before he could stammer:

"S-sure!"

"The inquest will be held to-morrow morning," went on O'Leary crisply. "We shall leave a small police guard about the place to attend to certain duties, so you need not be ill at ease." He placed the shabby little pencil in his pocket very carefully and turned away. I was one of the first to rise and start toward the hall. As I reached the door I turned for a glance backward.

Deke Lonergan was leaning over March, talking to her. Isobel sat without moving, staring at the carpet, a cigarette poised in her hand. Mittie had risen and was following me, taking short, hasty steps. Elihu Dimuck was getting fussily out of the large chair and kicking his feet a little to shake down his wrinkled trousers. Grondal was stirring the fire, and Kema had not moved. Then Eustace approached March; he was frowning and interrupted Lonergan, and I turned again and crossed the hall. Lance O'Leary was talking in a low voice to the chief of police, and as I passed he called to me:

"Miss Keate, I'll want to see you sometime to-day. You'll be here, of course?"

"Yes. I'll rest during the afternoon. Mr. O'Leary, if that murder was done by one of the people right here in the house and going to stay here, I—well, I want to leave. Why, there are only eight of them, nine including me—and I can't believe that one of them would—*murder!*"

"You've forgotten your patient," said O'Leary gravely. "He makes ten. And as for you, Miss Keate—" a faint smile flickered in his gray eyes—"as for you, wild horses couldn't drag you away, and you know it! By the way," he added as if at an afterthought; "did you

notice a peculiar thing about this affair? Usually the people implicated in murder all have alibis—or at least some of them. And in this business there is not a single alibi. No alibis," he repeated soberlv. "It should be an interesting case."

And he was perfectly right; it was interesting enough, in all conscience, but not the kind of entertainment I like. Indeed, there were moments in the dark days, upon which Adolph Federie's death launched us, when I had serious doubts as to the chance of ever again being in a position to be entertained by anything in the world!

CHAPTER VI

A ROSETTE OF CRIMSON FEATHERS

THE rest of the day passed quietly enough but very slowly, and the horror that had come upon Federie house during the night still lingered about the hushed old walls. If I had had my way I should have yanked down every curtain in the house and thrown the whole batch of them outdoors, for every time I passed a window or a curtained doorway I had an absurd but hideous feeling that hands might reach out from those heavy drapes. And once when a draft from somewhere billowed the green curtain over the tower-room doorway I caught myself on the verge of screaming.

The whole household showed a tendency to linger about the library, but so far as I knew they spoke little, picked up books and laid them down, looked out the windows, moved from one chair to another, and all the time eyed each other covertly. March wrote a few notes, Eustace sent a telegram or two to distant members of the family, Mittie worked on a beaded bag, raising her eyes every little while to send Isobel quick, furtive glances like a cat with a mouse, and Isobel brooded gracefully and did nothing. I should have thought that after a night that had drained us all of vitality they would have rested and tried to sleep. But no one did. Probably they felt the same need for company that I felt.

Somewhat to my dismay Genevieve appeared to have taken a liking to me and he followed me closely all day, sitting on the mantel in the tower room while I worked over my patient, watching me with inscrutable eyes whenever I picked up my knitting, and following on my heels every time an errand took me to another part of the house. I have never mistreated an animal and never shall, but I don't mind admitting that Genevieve's continual presence aroused brutal thoughts within me. Once, indeed, as he was sitting at my feet, following the progress of my long needles interestedly, the thought occurred to me that a quick and well-placed thrust with the toe of my shoe would be a pleasant diversion. But the thought had no sooner entered my head than Genevieve got up on his four gaunt legs, moved about three feet away, just out of reach, and sat down again, eying me reproachfully.

Considering the number of kittens that are placed in sacks and drowned, it seemed to me, then, and does yet, somewhat unnecessary that Genevieve had escaped an early fate.

Several times the doorbell jingled, and I think the callers were reporters, for no one got into the house, and once I entered the hall just as Grondal was closing the door. Through the window I saw a gentleman with a camera over his shoulder retreating toward the gate and even his back had a look of discomfiture. But somehow they got together a story, probably with the help of the police, for when the doctor came, shortly after a strained and silent lunch (during which the only words uttered constituted a timid request on the part of Mr. Dimuck for someone to please pass the salt) he carried

an extra in his pocket, that B——'s more enterprising newspaper had got out, with the ink still blurry on it. The doctor was inclined to be a little pettish as to my failure to telephone to him and explain matters.

"But my patient was all right," I said. "There was no need to call you."

"Patient all right! Good Lord! A murder committed right in the sick room, and the woman tells me that there was no need to call me. Besides, it must have been exciting."

"It was not," I said decidedly with an involuntary glance toward the tower stairway. He followed my eyes.

"Was that the place?" he asked with the liveliest interest, and was starting toward it when March pulled the curtain aside and paused in the doorway. She still wore the straight little frock of crimson wool; it had soft white silk cuffs and collar. Her hair lay in dark, misty waves over her head, with short little curls here and there; there were faint purple shadows under her eyes, but her chin was steady and firm and her gaze darkly blue.

"Good-morning, Doctor," she said gravely. "Grondal told me you had come. I am March Federie. Is Grandfather better?"

The young doctor gave her one long look.

"He will be better," he assured her. "We are doing our best for him."

"Thank you, Doctor. I—I am very anxious."

Her voice shook a little and Dr. Jay took her slim wrist for a moment in his practised hand, released it, and turned to his bag.

"Give her these two capsules in warm water, Miss Keate, and send her to bed."

"Oh, no! Not upstairs! Alone!" cried March, off the guard that she had so carefully maintained.

"Of course not," agreed the doctor soothingly. "Right over there on that couch. Miss Keate will be here in the room." He nodded toward the roomy old couch in the corner of the room, caught my eye, and flushed a little. "You can take your hours off just the same, Miss Keate. Can't you sleep right here in this fine big chair?"

Which only goes to show what blue eyes and youth do to an otherwise sensible man. Hours off, indeed! Right in the sick room!

"Very well," said March. "I'll just speak to Kema and be back."

As the curtain fell into place the doctor sighed.

"So that is March Federie," he said. "Well," he added somewhat wistfully, "I'm a married man, myself. Good-afternoon, Miss Keate. If anything more happens be sure to telephone to me."

"If anything more happens I shan't be here," I said firmly. "Good-afternoon, Doctor."

Thus it was that I spent the entire afternoon in the sick room, dozing occasionally, but for the most part lying back in the big chair, staring at the moisture that dripped down the windowpanes and trying to keep my thoughts from going over and over every detail of the ugly situation in which I found myself. I had pulled the old couch out from its corner, and March lay on it, quietly asleep, her slim figure childishly relaxed on the humpy green plush. The couch looked to be rather

comfortable, and I resolved to try it myself later on. But I did not. In fact, I never did lie on that couch, and there was a good and sufficient reason for it.

Grondal hovered about the tower room almost all the afternoon. I don't know whether it was devotion to our welfare or curiosity that kept him so constantly about, but, whatever his motive, hardly a quarter of an hour passed without his tiptoeing into the room, peering anxiously about, and stirring the fire or adjusting the window. Twice he awakened me out of a cat's nap and he looked shamefaced, and rightly, both times.

There was not a sound from the other rooms until about six o'clock. An early dusk had fallen, dark and cold and desolate. The shadows in the corners and around the bed curtains and up and down the tower stairway had gradually lengthened and darkened, and Grondal had just come into the room again, bearing, this time, two lighted lamps, when from the other end of the house, crashing through the dead silence, came suddenly a ripple of notes and then the eerie strains of music that I had heard Eustace playing the night before on the old piano.

March stirred at the sound, opened her eyes, and I reached for my cap and sat upright, yawning.

"For mercy's sake," I said. "What is that tune?"

March took a long breath.

"I've been asleep," she said drowsily. "Why, it's night."

"Six o'clock," I told her, and repeated my question: "What is that tune that Eustace is always playing?"

"I think it's called 'La Furiante'—I'm not sure. It's from some Bohemian composer. Eustace likes it."

"He has poor taste," I remarked with some acerbity. The thing was full of swift minors and shivering crescendos that made little chills run up and down my backbone. I like music, but I like a tune that *is* a tune, so to speak, and gets somewhere, and have never been much for these haunting moodish things that in their very perversity irritate me. Besides, there was something about the music coming from the other end of the house that, to my strained nerves, savored of menace and of evil triumphant.

"Don't be a fool," I said to myself, and did not know I had spoken aloud until March turned a startled face toward me. "Did you have a good sleep?" I inquired hurriedly.

She sat up slowly, swinging her slender knees around and passing a hand across her eyes.

"Y-yes," she said slowly, adding with a little shiver, "only I dreamed. Dreamed horribly." She stared down at the green plush of the couch. "Something about this couch."

I eyed the couch rather warily, but said in my most professionally cheerful voice:

"One usually feels uncomfortable under just a slight opiate. It's nearly dinner time, isn't it? I should like to get into a fresh uniform. Are you——" I hesitated, and she guessed my thought.

"Thanks for staying with me all afternoon," she said at once. "Go on to your room now, I'm perfectly all right. I'll stay here with Grandfather until you return. Don't hurry."

Eustace's playing grew louder as I approached the hall, but broke off suddenly, and I heard low voices from

the library. I met no one on the stairs, and as I climbed their dim length I was struck with the fact that it had been only some twenty-four hours since I had entered Federie house. I seemed to have known the place all my life.

It took only a few moments to freshen myself and don a clean uniform and cap. As I left the bedroom I looked up and down the long green corridor. The longest portion of it stretched to my left, and I took a few steps along it, walking more briskly as I advanced. Here and there candles were placed along the wall, shielded by old-fashioned reflectors, and their tiny flames wavered feebly. About midway the corridor was bisected by another passage which led apparently along the back wing of the house. Its floor was the only uncarpeted floor, save that of the kitchen, in the whole house, so far as I knew, and stretched coldly narrow between a wall of dormer windows on the north and several closed doors on the south. I passed it by, however, and remained in the main corridor, for I wished to find the room that lay directly over the tower room. And I brought up suddenly before a wide door that extended clear across the corridor. It was a heavy old door made of some dark wood that gleamed dully in the faint light.

I studied it for a moment or two before I reached out and gingerly tried the knob. It turned, but the door was locked.

Had not O'Leary said that the key was gone? Perhaps it had simply dropped from the lock to the floor. It was an idle chance, but I bent over. Owing to the

dimness of the light, I was obliged to get down on my knees and I was groping over the dusty carpet when a voice spoke suddenly over my shoulder.

"Lost something?"

It gave me a start, having heard no one approach; I twisted about on my knees.

"Y-yes," I said quite at random. "That is, I was looking for—for the back stairway."

"Well, you won't find it there." The figure turned so that the light fell on his face, and in the same instant I recognized O'Leary's voice. I rose, ignoring his offered hand, and brushed the dust from my white skirt.

"I suppose you were actually trying to get in that bedroom," he said severely; his voice was sober enough, but his eyes held just a flicker of amusement. "Well, it is still locked. And I wish I knew where the key is! By the way, Miss Keate, there is something on which I should like your opinion. Come this way."

A few steps back along the corridor and he flung open a door into a dark bedroom. At first I could see only a dim shape or two looming up in the little avenue of light that the opening of the door stretched through the room. Then there was a tiny click as O'Leary snapped the button of an electric torch he carried and the rays of light darted here and there under guidance from his hand. I saw a vast bed with a candlewick counterpane that was stiff with dust, an enormously tall wardrobe of a dark, varnished wood in the corner, a wide dresser with a marble top, a chair or two, an old washstand, faded red curtains, and heavy green carpet.

Lance O'Leary was bending over.

"Look here, Miss Keate." He turned the light at differing angles. "Have I got the light so you can see it?"

"See what?" I was bending, too, following his gaze along the carpet.

"The dust on the carpet. There's a perceptible layer of it and——"

"*Oh! I see.*"

Quite distinct on the film of dust were small footprints. The heels had made sharp indentations at short intervals, and the rounded impression of the ball of the foot was fairly distinct, too. Beside the small footprints were other blurs, larger.

"The big ones are mine," said O'Leary explanatorily. "The point is, Miss Keate, the footprints lead to the corner behind the big wardrobe, turn, and come back to the door. And in the corner I found—this."

"This" was a small but very efficient-looking revolver, which he held just at the edge of his pocket so I could catch the wicked blue gleam of the thing, and then let slip back again out of sight.

"It looked as if it had just been tossed there and left. But whoever left it there, took pains to wipe the finger-prints from it before leaving it."

I returned in fascination to those small footprints, so faint, so perishable, traced there in dust—and yet so dreadfully permanent and lasting.

"They are——" I began, and stopped. If he had not noticed it, there was no need in calling it to his attention. But being neither blind nor a fool he had noticed it, of course.

"Yes," he said. "They are a woman's footprints."

My thoughts flew back to those slim satin mules March had worn.

"The trouble is, however," said Lance O'Leary very slowly, "two women in this house wear the size shoe that fits these marks. Mittie Frisling crowds her foot into a high-heeled slipper that exactly fits over these impressions. And Mrs. Isobel Federie wears the same size; her foot isn't crowded, but I can't tell from these faint impressions whether they were made by the crowded slippers or those that are not."

"You are sure it is one of the two?"

"Oh, no. I'm sure of nothing—right now. But I've matched these footprints exactly with some rather shabby black satin slippers from Miss Frisling's room, and also, worse luck, with a pair of black velvet pumps—with, by the way, quite gorgeous rhinestone buckles—from Madam Isobel's room. And there you are. Now, then, do you credit either of the two women with the psychology to—shoot straight?"

I had expected him to say "murder," and the ending of the question came as a little shock to me and put the problem in a different light. I could well believe, after the ugly little scene of the morning, that either of them might shoot, but as for shooting straight——

"No," I said. "I should be more inclined to believe it of Isobel than of Mittie. Isobel is more secretive; she suggests concealed depths. And yet—her behavior this morning when she came into the tower room and Eustace told her of Adolph's death was that of an innocent person. She appeared to be profoundly shocked—not grieved, perhaps, but sincerely shocked."

"That was your impression, was it?" O'Leary's gray

eyes, dark now in the dusk of the green corridor, were fastened on mine as if to penetrate and absorb every fleeting thought and impression I had experienced during the previous night. "You may be right. But—the stage lost an actress in Madam Isobel. Did you notice how she discounted Mittie's story of her threat to kill Adolph before Mittie had told it? And as to Mittie—well, a woman capable of shameless desperation is capable of almost anything."

"H'mm!" I said brusquely. "If Mittie ever made up her mind to shoot she would shoot six times without stopping and not a single bullet would hit its mark."

"Still," said O'Leary dubiously, "there's a kind of feline craftiness and cunning about the woman. Well—I'll just close this door. The room is not in use; if it had been in use neither footprints nor revolver would have been there. Which strengthens my conviction that the murderer was one of the household, for who else would know that the room was unoccupied." He had closed the door, and we were walking slowly along the muffled corridor. "As to the revolver—one shot was fired from it and the bullet extracted from the body is of the same caliber. It's a small caliber, but deadly enough with careful aiming. It's possible that this revolver in my pocket is the one used to kill Adolph, you see—indeed, it is probable. And while, when I questioned them regarding it, both Mittie and Madam Isobel insisted that they were not near the bedroom back there, and knew nothing of any revolver—still—there are the footprints," he concluded enigmatically.

We had reached the uncarpeted passage that led

along the back wing of the house and I looked speculatively down it.

"Where are Adolph's rooms?" I asked.

"That door about midway down the hall leads into his sitting room. The next door beyond it leads to a small bedroom that adjoins the sitting room. A bathroom leads off the bedroom. It is one of those ridiculous, stuffy suites that were considered very fine some fifty years ago. Miss March's room is straight on down the main corridor, past the stairway and in the southwest corner of the house; it includes the second-story portion of the southwest tower. Dimuck's room is directly opposite Miss March's room. Miss Frisling's room is next to Dimuck's, this way. Then comes the trunk room, with a ladder and a trapdoor leading to the attic. Your room is there to the right, of course, just opposite the trunk-room door. Next to it is a bathroom and next to that"—he motioned to a door about six feet back of us—"is the room Eustace and Lonergan are using until —until we find the key to their original bedroom."

"Find the key," I repeated. "Do you think the—the murderer has that key? Why do you think the door was locked at all?"

"To throw dust in our eyes, I suppose," said O'Leary. "Or else because the murderer wanted to provide a means of approach to the tower room. There—there—don't be alarmed, Miss Keate. Let's go downstairs. You are shivering, These old houses are like cold, damp barns. And this business of candles and lamps is enough to give anybody the creeps. Why on earth didn't they install electricity? Look out for the steps. This candle is about as illuminating as—as the footprints in the dust."

A figure in clinging dark lace rounded the corner by the newel post below us and started upward. It was Isobel, her hair catching pale red gleams and her face haggard and sallow in the dim light. She shot us a veiled look from those curiously clouded eyes and moved a little aside as we met and passed.

She said nothing, but I felt that she was intensely aware of our presence and of our being together. As I turned at the foot of the stairway I looked upward. Her figure, suave and graciously curved, was outlined against the small circle of light cast by the candle above. She was mounting the steps with the lovely erectness of shoulders and deliberate, smooth swaying of hips and back and arms that is a lost art in this young generation.

The same thought, or something like it, must have entered Lance O'Leary's mind, for he said in a musing way as we crossed the hall toward the drawing rooms:

"She can't be more than—thirty-five, would you say? But she has the deliberate, studied charm of an older time. You feel that she would know how to manipulate a fan, for instance, or show off the most beautiful curves of her shoulders at a harp. It's just an atmosphere she carries, of course. As a matter of fact, she is likely an adept at poker, driving a motor car, and mixing a cocktail. Wonder why they didn't build more real doors downstairs! This is a queer old place; nothing but curtains over these doors—shutters—no decent lights—here we are."

I preceded him into the tower room.

March was still sitting there; I think her reverie had fallen into the events of the night past, for she turned too quickly as we entered, her face white and rigid

and her fingers widespread and taut upon the arms of the chair. She murmered something, rose, and crossed swiftly to the door. It had the effect of an escape.

"She doesn't like my looks," said Lance O'Leary. "Or possibly my conversation."

"Possibly your conversation," I agreed, going to the sickbed.

"Is Mr. Federie better?" asked O'Leary, watching me as I shook my thermometer vigorously before placing it between those distorted lips.

"I think there is some improvement."

"By the way, Miss Keate, did Adolph Federie wear a ring? From the mark left on his finger I should say it was a large ring with a heavy setting. Do you remember any such ring?"

Again the dubiously colored diamond winked at me from a soft clammy hand laid over mine.

"Yes. It was a diamond. Not a good stone, I think."

"It was not on his hand when I first viewed the body. Do you remember seeing it after he—was dead?"

I shivered. I would always be able to see again that huddled figure and clutching, outstretched fingers, but I could not recall the diamond's being on his hand.

"I can't be sure."

I began wringing out hot and cold packs, and Lance O'Leary watched me idly, talking in the meantime in a lightly conversational manner, as if he had just dropped in for tea.

"Well, so far as I can discover the people in this house are what they seem to be. Eustace and Deke Lonergan came down from O——, where Eustace maintains a law office of sorts, and Lonergan has some con-

nection with the Dekesmith and Lonergan Construction Company, which is largely owned by his father, who lives here in B——; it is a small concern, but still it handles some good-sized contracts. Eustace, by all accounts, does more dabbling in music than business and spends quite a lot of money. March Federie has been visiting a connection of the family in the South—an elderly cousin who wired somewhat perfunctory condolences this morning and has offered March a home in case old Mr. Federie dies. Adolph and his wife were apparently wanderers from city to city, enjoyed life when they got hold of some money, and came home when they had none. He had none too savory a reputation, but there's nothing definite that I can unearth against him—at least nothing that would present a motive for his death."

"It looks to me as though there were motives enough right here in the house," I interjected.

He gave me an unseeing look and went on. I felt as if he was not talking to me so much as he was thinking aloud. I took dry towels from the stack on the shelf of the bedside table, shook them out, arranged them carefully to protect the sheets and pillows from the wet packs, pulled the covers straight, glanced at my watch, and took a seat near O'Leary.

"Then Mittie Frisling," he was saying. "She has been living for years in a rather stuffy apartment in the city with her father, of whom I can discover nothing save that his name was Matthew Frisling, that he was at one time a notary public, and for the last ten or fifteen years of his life he did nothing. They lived a very quiet, retired life. The father died recently, and Mittie picked

up bag and baggage and moved out. Apparently she came here. Certainly she has been here for a number of weeks and had plenty of time to interview old Mr. Federie to her heart's content before he fell ill. Why she hangs around only she and, I suspect, Grondal can explain. Possibly Isobel knows; she seems to have known Mittie for some time. At any rate, here she is, and what claim she has on the Federies and what she hopes to accomplish I don't know—yet."

As he talked he had found a chair and settled himself in it, crossing his knees and leaning back rather wearily. The light from the table lamp in the center of the room fell mellowly upon him, casting his nose and fine mouth and well-cut chin into sharp relief, while the shade of the lamp made a shadow over the rest of his face so that I could see nothing of his eyes. I had not realized before how completely his gray eyes dominated his whole aspect. Seeing now just his mouth and chin and nose, and hearing his voice, gave me the most extraordinary feeling of listening to the voice of a kind of reasoning machine to which both Lance O'Leary and I were listening as audience.

In the little silence a log dropped suddenly in the ashes with a hissing sigh, and at the slight sound every nerve within me jumped. At once O'Leary turned, alert and keen.

"Have you had any rest this afternoon, Miss Keate?" he asked abruptly.

"Some. That is——" Briefly I explained the situation. I am not accustomed to people caring for my comfort, and it gave me the strangest little feeling of warmth to see his face darken angrily.

"You go to bed to-night and sleep," he said "I'll make them get another nurse to help you. You need rest. You've had a severe shock. Anyone but you would have been in hysterics long ago."

I wouldn't let him get another nurse, of course. Did he think I wanted someone else bothering around and further complicating matters! She'd very likely be the fluffy-haired type with whom Eustace could flirt! And, anyway, the case was mine, and I proposed that it should remain in my hands. Time was to come when I had reason to regret my decision, but there it was.

"Then there is Elihu Dimuck," resumed Lance O'Leary finally, leaning back again in his chair. I saw that his slender, well-kept hands were fumbling around in his pockets and expected that a stubby red pencil would be forthcoming, as sure enough it was, smooth and shining as any well-told rosary. With it rolling between his fingers he became brisker and less ruminative.

"He is an old acquaintance of Mr. Federie's and comes to visit him quite frequently. He owns some fine farming land about fifty miles south of here—quite a lot of it—keeps a large cash deposit at the bank upon which he draws every so often, but, according to his banker, does not spend it in riotous living. He is considered fairly wealthy in Stockville, where he lives, and is rated as being worth seven or eight hundred thousand. He lives quietly, is and always has been a bachelor, and the only scandal I could dig up about him had to do with his determined repulsing of a matrimonially inclined widow some years ago. His dealings with Mr. Federie appear to have been purely in an advisory

capacity, for I could find no record of any money changing hands. Yes, he seems to be just a fussy old maid of a fellow who hates trouble like a cat hates water."

"Why, I never thought of suspecting him!"

"Suspect everyone, Miss Keate, if you would discover guilt. Suspect the very walls themselves. Well—that leaves the servants, neither of whom seems guilty. They are not a handsome pair, it's true, but—" he stopped abruptly, cleared his throat, and went on in a smooth voice—"the inquest will be just a formal affair, I think. The coroner was out last night—I don't believe you saw him."

Grondal was crossing the room on such silent feet that it was only when he came within arm's reach of my chair that I understood why O'Leary had changed his subject so suddenly.

"Oh, Grondal," said O'Leary quietly.

"Yes, sir." Grondal was carrying a bunch of keys in his hand. Again he wore the threadbare livery, and O'Leary's gaze was puzzled as it rested on the faded mulberry velvet, almost bare of nap, and went on to the woolen socks and heavy brogues.

"I'll just lock the shutters, sir," went on Grondal respectfully, suiting the action to the word.

"Lock them every night, do you?" asked O'Leary without shifting his easy, relaxed position.

"Yes, sir. It is a custom with us."

"A rather wearisome job, isn't it?"

"No, sir. There are only a few, you see, that we open during the day. Many of the rooms are not in use now."

"You have quite heavy bolts on those shutters."

"Yes, sir. They are the same bolts that were put in

place when the house was built. They've served us well." He replaced the bunch of keys in his pocket and lowered the second window softly. "Did you want something, sir?"

"Have you been with the Federie family long?"

"A matter of some forty years. I started working for old Mr. Federie when I was a boy."

"You know a good deal about the family, then?"

"It is a family I'm proud to work for, sir," said Grondal quickly.

"No doubt," said O'Leary. "The tragedy last night must have affected you deeply."

"It did, sir. Though as to that, Mr. Adolph had not been much at home during recent years."

"He was not the only child?"

"Oh, no, sir. Old Mr. Federie had four sons. There was Mr. James, the oldest—he was Miss March's father—died when she was a child. And Mr. Charles—he came next. He—was a lot like Mr. Adolph if you understand what I mean, sir." He shook his head in a deprecating way. "He—er—disappeared some years ago. It was owing to a quarrel over cards, to tell the truth. Mr. Federie considered that he had disgraced the name and would not permit him to be buried in the family lot. Very sensitive to wrongdoing is Mr. Federie. Then there was Mr. Adolph, and the youngest was Mr. Eustace—our Mr. Eustace's father; he died of—well, he died of drink in this very house nearly thirty years ago and his wife followed him within the hour. It was the time of our Mr. Eustace's birth. They were—a bad lot. But old Mr. Federie has high hopes of Mr. Eustace, though, if I may say so, I believe Miss March is his favorite.

Dinner will be served at seven, Miss Keate. If you are in the house, Mr. O'Leary, Miss March hopes you will join the family at dinner."

The curtain had fallen into place behind Grondal and was quite still before O'Leary turned to me.

"'A bad lot,'" he quoted softly. "And 'Miss March is her grandfather's favorite.' Look here, Miss Keate."

He extended his hand, palm uppermost in the circle of light. In it lay a crushed, soft rosette of crimson ostrich feathers.

"I need not ask if you recognize it," he went on quietly.

"Where—did you find it?" I whispered.

"It was clutched in the dead man's hand. How it got there is a matter for conjecture."

CHAPTER VII

FOOTSTEPS AT NIGHT

THE crimson rosette from March's slipper found in the murdered man's hand!

With appalling swiftness I fitted the thing into the events of the previous night, and phrases of that sinister conversation returned to my memory with frightful clarity: "A Federie hand is born to fit the curve of a revolver"—"I still think there is some other way"—"It must be to-night."

"What is it, Miss Keate?"

"N-nothing," I replied jerkily, and repeated it. "Nothing. Nothing at all."

"I suppose you'll tell me in your own good time," commented O'Leary lazily. "But in the meantime I should like to have your assurance that, at least, I—have a clue to the knowledge you appear to be withholding."

I had forgotten that his clear eyes were hidden in the shadow above that straight mouth and that my own face was entirely in the light.

"You have that assurance," I said crisply.

"It is lucky that I know you, Miss Keate. Otherwise I should certainly suspect you of harboring guilty knowledge. The chief of police, by the way, suggested that you shot Adolph Federie, since you were right here in the room, you know. When pressed for a motive he—

suggested a love quarrel. There, there, now! Control yourself, dear lady! I made him see the error of his reasoning. In fact, I vouched for you. You may have shot Adolph Federie and successfully concealed both your motive and the revolver, but I can't believe it." His mouth was quite sober, and I longed to see his eyes. There was a note of humor in his voice, yet it was sober, too. Sober enough to make a cold little chill start up from the small of my back.

"Now, then, Miss Keate," went on O'Leary briskly, "I want you to tell me *every single thing* that has happened since your arrival at Federie house. What has been said and done and particularly your impressions of personalities. And tell me, too, in the most minute detail, of last night—where you sat, how the room looked, how the lamps were adjusted—of the shot, how it sounded, what you did, where you stood, how you looked at the body, how you got to the bell rope, what people said when they came into the room—*everything*. I know that you are a keen observer and I want those observations." He smiled in that engaging way he had.

"My impressions," I replied slowly, "are not the kind that make for pleasant thoughts and comfortable sleep. That is, I have a feeling of forces pulling against each other—of personalities struggling and clashing together. This whole, terrible house seems to be—" I hesitated and my voice dropped—"a sort of shell full of conflicting desires."

"I did not credit you with so much imagination," said O'Leary dryly. "Go on, please."

"It is intangible but very real, too," I said, fumbling a little for words. "Don't you understand?"

"I—well, yes. I do feel something of the kind. But I have to stick to material facts. It is one of the restrictions of my profession. No matter how many people wanted to kill Adolph Federie, still only one bullet reached its mark. And it is my duty to find the hand that aimed that revolver. There's a lot of scoffing at material evidence just now; a lot of laughing at finger-prints. But so long as we live in a material world we will have material clues. Of course, I'm not saying that a material clue always proves anything. I've got several—clues—on this case, but just now I'm more interested in the psychology of the crime. When we learn to govern the laws of psychology we will be able to govern crime and make of the criminal a decent——"

"Psychology, fiddlesticks," I interrupted crisply. "When we hear less talk of releasing repressed desires, and more talk of exercising decent self-control, then only will we have less crime. Psychology, indeed! A man sins because the devil is in him!"

O'Leary smiled faintly.

"And in the meantime, Miss Keate——" he hinted.

So discarding theories and turning to facts, I told him all that had happened since my arrival at Federie house, and since I have a good memory I think I omitted very little. The only thing I failed to tell him actually happened before my arrival at Federie house and was, of course, that incriminating conversation between March and Eustace, and I had the full approval of my conscience in omitting that. I even told him of stumbling over the little green elephant, of hunting for the bell rope, of Adolph's clammy hand laid over mine, of Dimuck's yellow bathrobe and his horrified cry:

"Who shot him!", of March's holding the lamp while Eustace examined the body—in short, of every smallest occurrence, trivial though it might seem.

O'Leary interrupted me rather sharply as I came to the examination we had made of the body.

"You say Eustace and Lonergan were bending over the body?"

"Yes."

"Then either of them could have placed the rosette in the dead man's hand if he wished to do so. Oh, I'm not saying that either of them did! But still if he had wanted to—that's why I say clues are treacherous things. Well, go on."

"Where is the toy elephant you spoke of?" asked O'Leary when I had finished my rather lengthy recital.

"There on the mantel."

He rose; the mantel was in the shadow, and after a moment's prowling through the clutter that crowded it O'Leary returned to the lamp, removed the shade, and as the light leaped to the mantel he surveyed it carefully.

"Everything else in the world is here," he said. "Junk galore, but—I don't see any elephant."

"It's green," I said without much interest. "Looks as if it might be jade. It's about four inches high." I glanced at my wrist watch—nearly seven o'clock. Another night would soon be upon me. "Mr. O'Leary, will there be any police in the house to-night? I—don't care to stay alone in this room all night." I glanced involuntarily over my shoulder; the tower stairway twisted out of sight in the shadows.

"Yes," said O'Leary briefly. "Grondal might sleep

there on the couch if you are nervous. I may be blind, but I don't see anything remotely resembling an elephant."

"Well, it is there. It is—" I rose, approached the mantel, and stared at the pieces loading it—"it's gone! Why, that's queer! It is only a little curio. Grondal said this noon that old Mr. Federie is attached to it. But it is just a toy."

"Just what did Grondal say?"

I told him the few sentences we had exchanged, while my eyes went fruitlessly about the mantel and the floor below it, seeking that little spot of vivid green.

"I came into the room, then, while you were talking," said O'Leary. "And both you and Grondal followed me to the library at once. No—Grondal waited to put fresh wood on the fire."

"Yes. And either I or March Federie has been in this room ever since you questioned us this morning, there in the library. And every soul in the house was in the library, and I was the first one to leave. And since then, as I say, either March or myself has been in this room ever since."

"But you were asleep this afternoon."

"Not soundly."

"H'm. Well, the important thing is that someone has thought enough of the thing to remove it. Did it look to be valuable?"

"It might be, for all I know," I replied uncertainly.

"Couldn't you tell by looking at the thing?" he said in a peevish way.

"My interests lie along pulses and thermometers," I

replied with some dignity. "I don't know a thing about little green elephants. Perhaps the Federies used it to cut their teeth on."

He gave me an annoyed look and turned away.

"It may mean nothing at all," he said. "I'm going into town. Is there a telephone in this house?"

"I believe so," I said, adding rather hurriedly: "You don't think anything will—will happen to-night, do you?"

"I'm leaving a couple of policemen," he said blandly. "And lightning seldom strikes twice in the same place, you know. Let Grondal sleep over there on the couch. Are you afraid?"

I have not Revolutionary ancestors for nothing. I stiffened.

"Certainly not," I lied, and wished he were not so easily convinced.

"I've some work to do in town," he went on. "I want to scare up some family history about these Federies, for one thing."

"Dinner is served," said Grondal sedately from the doorway.

O'Leary had not more than gone when I came upon the first of the blue beads. It happened this way.

Grondal had retired on the heels of his announcement and I changed the cold pack on my patient's head before I took a candle, lighted it at the fire, and followed. As I stepped through the doorway, pulling aside the green velvet curtain and letting it fall behind me in long, wavering lines, I recalled the falling of that curtain immediately after the sound of the shot that killed

Adolph Federie. I lifted the curtain again experimentally while the candle in my other hand cast a dim light over the small passage, reflecting against its faded green walls. Yes, the curtain had certainly been lifted and let fall by a hand, for no draft could move that heavy curtain in exactly that fashion. But by whose hand?

My gaze fell on a small nail that projected from the door casing and caught a glimpse of a wisp of blue thread, and I looked closer.

Depending on the thread and hidden by the casing was a dejected little cluster of blue beads!

There must have been five or six of the things, and the thread was broken at both ends, looking very much as if the nail had caught on the thread and pulled it loose from—*from Mittie Frisling's dress, of course!* The previous night she had worn a dress heavily decorated with blue beads exactly like these.

I stood there, looking at the telltale little cluster of blue beads for several moments before I recalled that dinner was waiting. Then I detached the thread, slipped beads and all into my pocket, and went on to the dining room.

The others were waiting, and I slipped hurriedly into my chair. Glancing around the long table, I experienced a distinct sense of shock. The men were again clothed in the most meticulous fashion, their shirt fronts gleaming white, their coats black and smooth. March wore again the crimson velvet gown with its extravagant silver ornaments. Isobel appeared again in the shining yellow taffeta, the emerald suspended at her soft throat and the bruises on her arm showing darkly through a heavy coating of liquid powder. And the blue beads on

Mittie Frisling's gown tinkled stealthily with every spoonful of soup she lifted to her lips.

Everything was the same, save for the place beside me. Grondal, with a complete lack of forethought, had left the chair in that vacant place. It was rather grisly, sitting beside that chair, with only a gleaming expanse of white linen where the night before there had been silver and china. All through the meal I caught furtive glances in that direction.

Through the soup I busied myself with trying to discover the place where one of the dangling festoons on Mittie's gown had been broken, and as Grondal removed the plates I found it, quite near the shoulder. The thread had evidently been snapped about the middle of the loop, for the remainder of the thread, denuded of beads, hung desolately among the other beaded loops. There had been about fifteen beads on it, I thought. I had only five or six in my pocket. The others had fallen somewhere; the woman must have left a trail of blue beads.

It was about this time that Mittie began to bridle and twist and cast me resentful looks, and I withdrew my gaze.

I don't believe a word was spoken during the whole meal, and I have never sat through a more unpleasant dinner. It was interminably long, in the first place, with Grondal putting on and removing rather sparse but very formal courses, Kema peering though the slot in the door of the pantry every now and then, in a way to freeze the blood in your veins, and Isobel glancing occasionally at the vacant place beside me in a natural and undisturbed way, quite as if Adolph were still

sitting there. This effect was so convincing that once I turned sharply to follow her gaze, expecting I don't know what. Of course, the chair was empty.

As the meal progressed the dead silence became more and more oppressive. Along toward dessert Konrad, somewhere outside, barked suddenly and loudly and Mittie gave a stifled little cry, March went white as a sheet, and Dimuck dropped his fork on the floor. And after a curiously still interval of about four or five seconds Grondal brought Dimuck another fork, his face expressionless, and March withdrew her eyes from the vacant place beside me. I suppose everyone at the table was thinking of the dog's bark during the dinner of the previous night, when Adolph had endeavored to tell his dog story.

After that the meal was even more unpleasant. The little, subdued clatter of silver grew louder and louder as the breathless, waiting hush deepened. It seemed to me that everyone around that table was clinging determinedly to the rôle he had chosen for himself. building up walls of silence and nonadmissions. Even their choosing, one and all, to dress exactly as they had dressed the night before, seemed to me to strengthen this effect. Their faces, secretive and fear ridden, were brought into sharp relief by the wavering lights of the tall candles on the table, and behind them, in the shadows, Grondal crossed and recrossed.

It was just as we were finishing the somewhat languid dessert of stewed prunes that the rather horrible thing happened.

All at once, from somewhere above our heads, breaking dully through the smothered silence, came the sound

of footsteps! One after another they fell, slow and deliberate, on the floor above our heads.

Every head jerked.

March gripped the table edge, her tense fingers wrinkling up the cloth, her face rigid. And all at once no one was eating and everyone was looking upward with strained, fearful eyes, and then darting swift looks all about the table. But the only vacant chair was Adolph's!

Still no one spoke. I think no one breathed for the long moment during which those footsteps went on slowly and with dreadful deliberation. They seemed to be falling on the bare floor of the corridor of the back wing, and the sound came from directly above us. Then, just as Isobel's hand went to her mouth and pressed frantically against her teeth, the footsteps broke into a quick, light run and fell suddenly into silence.

We were all standing; Eustace was thrusting back his chair with a swift motion and running from the room, followed by Deke Lonergan and then Elihu Dimuck, whose napkin, still clutched in his pink hand, floated back of him and disappeared into the drawing room. And simultaneously Grondal ran heavily along the carpet, past the table and out of the room in the wake of the other men.

And Mittie Frisling, leaning over the table, one hand planted in a plate of cake and the other spread wide on the tablecloth, her face a sickly green in the glow of the candles and her opaque eyes fixed on Adolph's chair, suddenly and dreadfully began to scream.

The screams cut in a high, thin thread of horror into the shadows and corners of the great old room before Isobel reached Mittie's side, thrust her ringed fingers

over Mittie's mouth, and held them there, while Mittie, her eyes never wavering from their fixed glare, twisted and pulled, but could not escape.

I stirred from the lethargy of terror that had held me, seized my goblet, and flung its contents full into Mittie's face.

It had the desired effect.

She caught her breath under the icy water, gasped, choked, and as Isobel released her groped for her napkin and dabbed futilely at the water that dripped from her hair and face.

"Shall we go into the library?" asked March in a question that was a command. Her face and lips were drained of color, but her voice was very tight and careful.

She turned and led the way, but instead of going toward the library she turned into the little passage and went to the tower room. Mittie, seeming rather dazed and still mopping at her face, followed March, and Isobel and I brought up the rear. I had the presence of mind to take a candle from the table and it cast a flickering light on the musty, green walls of the narrow passage and on Isobel's massed, reddish hair and her creamy back and arms.

Once in the tower room March poked at the fire until it blazed and then stood, slim and straight, before it; the folds of her gown touched to a bright glow under the light from the flames, her face still white, but her black eyebrows drawn sternly together. Isobel sank gracefully into an easy chair, the yellow taffeta whispering with every movement, her eyes veiled and one tense hand gripping the emerald at her throat. Mittie sat on the

couch, digging at her reddened eyes with the damp napkin and darting furtive glances above it, and I moved to the bed, my starched white uniform rattling a little as I bent over my patient. We must have made a strange picture.

It was a good fifteen minutes before the men came in, Eustace lifting the curtain as they filed into the room. A policeman, his badge shining against his blue coat, was the last one to enter.

"It was nothing," said Eustace, smiling easily as if to reassure us, but with an unfathomable look in his dark eyes. "There was a policeman upstairs in the main corridor all the time. He saw nothing at all."

"Did you search the house?" asked March.

"The whole place," Eustace assured her, his tone still light. "We even crawled up the ladder from the trunk room and had a look around the attic."

"I think that cook of yours was prowling around up there," said the policeman. "She likely saw me and dodged back down the kitchen stairs and is afraid to say so. At any rate, there's nothing to be alarmed about."

Kema? I accepted the explanation simply because it seemed the only rational one to accept, but I felt in my heart a kind of instinctive repudiation of it. And yet—the house was locked, the policeman had searched it—it must have been Kema.

Grondal brought coffee into the tower room and served it in small demi-tasse cups that looked like silver. The policeman accepted one, looked in a puzzled way at its delicate lines, lifted it suspiciously to his nose, and finally swallowed the coffee at one gulp. Shortly after that he disappeared.

The others remained in the tower room that entire evening. Whatever were their feelings toward each other, still a common terror bound them together, and a kind of fear-drugged inertia appeared to hold them in that room, above which twisted the darkening shadows of the tower stairway. And one of them knew the secret of that stairway. One pair of those furtively meeting eyes masked that secret.

It was not a nice thing to contemplate.

Little was said; a thing that marks my memory of those grisly days and nights in Federie house is the recollection of the strained, distrustful silences that fell whenever we were all together.

Eustace was the only restless one; he smoked innumerable cigarettes, fussed with the fire, walked over several times to stare at his grandfather's face, picked up my chart, and scanned it as carefully as if he understood any of it, and finally, in wandering about the room, he came upon an old violin case that lay on a cabinet across the room, blew a cloud of dust from the plush-covered case, opened it, and took out the violin.

The thing must have lain idle for an indefinite time, but there were still strings in it, and he played with it for some time, tightening the strings, tuning it, and finally drawing out the bow, tightening it also, and drawing it across the strings. At the first wail Genevieve, who had stalked into the room a few moments before, got up with a look of outrage and stalked out again, and March put up a protesting hand which Eustace did not see—or possibly saw and did not heed, for it seemed to me that very little escaped his narrow eyes. He persisted, dragging from the old violin a slurred tune that

gradually began to bear a grotesque resemblance to "La Furiante."

At one chromatic in a minor scale that fairly set my teeth on edge, Isobel tossed her cigarette into the fire, rose in one long sinuous motion, and stood for a moment facing us, her gleaming yellow taffeta falling gracefully about her body and the faulty emerald at her throat glittering hatefully.

"Stop that, Eustace!" she said, her voice sharp and shrill and her face a painted mask.

Elihu Dimuck, startled out of his reverie, struggled to his feet and Deke Lonergan took his eyes from March's profile and rose, too.

"I'm going to bed," announced Isobel abruptly, her voice resuming its customary smoothness. "Good-night."

Mittie Frisling rose also, looked about her in a hazy way like a sleepwalker, and followed Isobel, and one by one the others departed. It was quite as if a chord of fear and suspicion held them all together. Elihu Dimuck and Deke Lonergan both paused to ask whether Mr. Federie showed any improvement, and March stopped to ask if there were anything I needed. Eustace approached her as she stood beside me and passed his arm lightly around her waist, his fingers lingering caressingly on her bare wrist. She freed herself at once, said, "Good-night, Miss Keate," and walked toward the doorway where young Lonergan, his face dark and his mouth tight, was apparently waiting to light her through the dark passage.

"Do you think Grandfather will be better soon?" asked Eustace.

"I can't tell, I'm sure."

He surveyed his grandfather's face thoughtfully for a moment and then he, too, was gone, and I was alone with the scent of Isobel's cigarettes, the flickering light from the old lamps, the sick man, deaf and dumb and helpless on the bed, and in the three-sided corner of the room a narrow angular stairway that lost itself in ascending shadows.

And the green elephant was gone and the blue beads were in my pocket and the red rosette had been in the murdered man's hand. A colorful crime, I thought crazily, laughed shrilly, and at the sound pulled myself up short and went about my business.

But those slow, deliberate footsteps kept echoing in my thoughts.

Grondal came in after a little carrying more hot water and a blanket.

He put the water where it would keep fairly warm and dropped the blanket on the couch.

"Shall I just lie down over here, miss?"

"Yes. Go to sleep if you like. If I need you I'll call."

"Very well, miss."

Without any ado the man settled himself comfortably and, so far as I could see, went immediately to sleep. At least he closed his eyes, looking more villainous than ever, and began to breathe heavily.

To tell the truth, feeling as I did toward Grondal, it seemed to me that his presence offered a somewhat dubious protection. But, at the same time, the mere fact of another person being in the room did in a slight measure relieve the tension of nameless apprehension that possessed me.

Genevieve came into the room as I was taking a last pulse and mounted noiselessly to the mantel, contriving in his usual deft way not to disarrange any of the claptrap around him. I took off my cap, wound my watch, and sat down in a big chair, first turning it so that it faced the stairway. I had not lowered the flames in the two lamps, one on the bedside table and one on the table in the center of the room, and I studied the bright red roses on the large bowls of the lamps, their ornate brass standards, tarnished and greasy looking, and the tall glass chimneys that reared thinly above the shades which were decorated, too, in painted roses and finished around the bottoms with fringes of glass bangles that every now and then shivered faintly under some draft that managed, despite heavy curtains and shutters, to sift through the room.

Every time I roused to look around the room I found the same picture until I knew every detail familiarly: the lamps with their gaudy roses, the fire burning fitfully, Grondal's hawk nose emerging from the blanket against the background of dark panels that lined the tower stairway, and the gaunt cat hunched on the mantel, with his great tail sweeping around his toes and his shoulders and hips making tawny points of light.

In spite of the indefinable apprehensions that kept me restless and uneasy, the night passed quietly.

About midnight, I think, I fell into a cat's nap, but I am a light sleeper and roused at once when Grondal got up with his customary noiselessness and approached the fireplace. I had the strangest impression that he was moving very softly as if not to attract my attention, though he said nothing, arranged more wood

on the fire in a methodical way, and returned to the couch. I was still restless and a victim of the uncanny feeling of being under close but secret observation, and I would catch myself clutching the arms of my chair and leaning forward to peer, every nerve a-tingle, into the shadows lurking about the corners of the room and shrouding the tower stairway. And, indeed, later events proved that we were under surveillance most of that long night.

By three o'clock the fire had died down again and the water Grondal had brought was only lukewarm. Kema had promised to leave a fire in the kitchen range and a kettle of water on, so, overcoming a feeling of reluctance at the thought of traversing the silent, black rooms between the tower room and the kitchen, I took a candle and started out.

I accomplished the errand without mishap—if not without an exceedingly quaky feeling about my knees. Encumbered with the candle in one hand and steaming water in a pan in the other hand, I paused at the door of the tower room in order to negotiate the curtain without catastrophe.

My approach through the little passage must have been very quiet, for through the crack of the curtain I caught a glimpse of Grondal crouched on his knees before the wood box. I could only see his shoulders and bent head, but it seemed to me that he was examining something he held in his hands, turning and twisting it, and entirely absorbed in the thing, whatever it was.

Had I thought twice, I should have lingered there for a moment or two, but I was concerned only with the possibility of the water cooling before I could use it,

and I pushed the curtain aside with my elbow and entered the room.

And at my hurried entrance there was a shimmering flash of green from under Grondal's great yellow hands and he suddenly jerked out some wood, let it drop on the hearth, and was all at once busily engaged in building up the fire. Well, it needed it and I said nothing. But I watched him carefully as he returned to the couch and apparently fell again into a sound sleep.

And as I sterilized my needle, measured the adrenalin, swabbed a spot on my patient's resistless arm with alcohol, thrust the needle in, and pressed the tiny piston with my thumb, my thoughts were busy. I was sure that the small green elephant was in that wood box and I was equally sure that Grondal had taken the thing from its place on the mantel.

I revolved a number of possibilities in my mind, but could come to no satisfactory conclusion. The only thing I could be sure of was that the green elephant must have some kind of meaning. Mr. Federie had an attachment to the thing, so Grondal had said, and that reflection, in conjunction with my own statement as to finding the toy at the foot of the tower stairway immediately following the murder, must have inspired Grondal to at least a surmise as to its significance.

It certainly began to look as if the jade elephant had some bearing on the case. I did not know, of course, whether the thing had an intrinsic value or in some inconceivable fashion held a clue to the mystery, but in any case I was sure that I wanted that elephant.

And within fifteen minutes I had manufactured a

plausible excuse that took Grondal to the kitchen, had watched through the crack in the curtain until the gleam of his candle disappeared beyond the turn in the passage, had crossed the room swiftly and knelt at the wood box, felt a thrill of exultation when my groping fingers encountered that smooth, cold surface, and had extracted and hidden the green elephant, in what I fallaciously considered an inspired moment, in the case for the old violin. Eustace had let the case fall shut and had carelessly laid the violin across it; I lifted the violin, opened the case, deposited the tiny elephant within, and closed the case so that not a gleam of its translucent, shimmering green was visible. Then I replaced the violin at the careless angle at which Eustace had left it.

It was just as I returned to the bedside that I experienced again that strange and disturbing feeling of a presence near at hand. But the velvet curtains over the doorway hung straight and undisturbed and the tower stairway loomed, so far as I could see, emptily black.

Then Grondal was back, carrying the freshly filled hot-water bag as if it had been a tray and eying me and the wood box with a covertly suspicious air.

It was not long after that until streaks of dawn, gray and cold, began to filter into the room through the bolted shutters, the lamps began to pale, their flames garish amid the flat, silly roses, and Genevieve dropped lightly to the floor, stretched his front legs and then his back legs in a leisurely manner, yawned cavernously, and sauntered from the room, intent on some secret expedition of his own.

Presently Grondal roused himself, bundled his blanket over his arm, and went to the wood box. I watched him closely. I think he had intended to replenish the fire and in so doing withdraw the elephant from the wood box and conceal it under the folds of blanket. As his hand went into the wood box and found no elephant I saw his back stiffen and he hesitated for just a second or two. Then without further indication of inward disturbance he stacked some wood on the fire, rose, and left the room.

Half an hour later he brought me a breakfast tray. I met his eyes openly as I took it, but his were shadowed by those overhanging eyebrows and told me nothing.

But as I sat drinking the welcome, if somewhat thinly creamed, coffee, I came to two decisions. One was to guard that green elephant, willy-nilly, until I could give it to O'Leary.

And the other was that if, as I had told O'Leary, a man sinned because the devil was in him, then Grondal might well be that man, for it seemed to me that the marks of the cloven hoof were plain upon him.

CHAPTER VIII

A TRAIL OF BLUE BEADS

MARCH FEDERIE came into the room as I finished my breakfast. She looked white and weary, as if the night had held little peace for her. She bade me a languid good-morning and inquired immediately as to her grandfather's condition. I remember that I asked her to stay with him while I made a hurried trip to my room to don a clean uniform and freshen myself after the trying night. I hope it is no reflection upon my charity of mind to say that March was the only member of the household in whom I felt any degree of trust. And I felt that she might bear watching!

I made my errand to my room very brief. On the stairs I met Mittie Frisling. She looked haggard and afraid; her sallow face was colorless, and her eyes circled in great brownish rings. She would have detained me, but I replied briefly to her hasty inquiry as to old Mr. Federie's state and brushed past her.

Once back in the tower room, March having gone to breakfast, I went to the violin case and opened it. The jade elephant was still there, and I picked it up and examined the toy carefully. Even to my inexperienced eyes it was a lovely thing, with exquisite carving and color, but though I stared for some time at the delicate, shimmering green, the knowingly slanted eyes,

the fanlike ears, the tiny, ferocious trunk, it told me nothing, of course, and at the sound of someone approaching through the passage I returned it hurriedly to its hiding place.

It was only Kema, however, wanting to know if I had finished with my breakfast tray.

"Yes," I replied. "There it is. By the way, Kema, where were you during dinner last night?"

"In the kitchen," she answered at once, taking the tray between her broad, dark hands.

"All of the time?"

"Yes."

I think she did not relish my questions, for there was a look of veiled distrust on her stolid face and she began to edge toward the doorway. But I persisted.

"You were not upstairs during dinner?"

"No, miss. I was in the kitchen doing my work." She glanced rather suggestively toward the bed, as if I might do better to follow her example, and in another moment her enormous bulk had vanished.

If it had not been Kema whose footsteps we had heard, who, then, was it? Or—what?

I am a practical, matter-of-fact woman, but I don't mind admitting that my thoughts flew to Adolph's vacant chair with gruesome speed. And my hair prickled and gooseflesh came out on my arms and I cast a nervous glance toward the tower stairway.

Then I shrugged my shoulders impatiently and set to work with feverish zeal.

Half an hour later Grondal, his arms full of clean linen, came into the room again. As before, he assisted me in lifting my patient and changing the bed linen,

and there was a touch of grim irony in our joining in that peaceful task. But I recall that my hand shrunk back from any contact with his long, yellow fingers.

He gave the room only a cursory cleaning and did not even approach the violin, explaining as he worked that the detective in the gray suit had somehow arranged for the coroner's inquest to be held in the library, there in Federie house, and that he, Grondal, would have to hurry to get the library in order.

And about nine o'clock he came to the tower room to summon me.

"They are about to begin, miss, and Mr. O'Leary sent me for you."

"Is everyone else already there, Grondal? I don't want to leave my patient until the last minute."

"Yes, miss. Everyone but you."

Well, it seemed to me that since everyone in the house was in the library it would be safe enough to leave the elephant in its hiding place until the inquest was over. As I passed through the doorway, Grondal stepped aside and murmuring something unintelligible about adjusting the window, he entered the tower room. But if he meant to make a swift search for the elephant I forestalled his plan, for I simply stood there in the doorway and watched him putter around the windows and fireplace doing nothing in particular, until, giving me a black look, he joined me. And I saw to it that we walked together toward the library.

As Grondal had said, everyone was there. I was disappointed in not having seen Lance O'Leary previous to the inquest in order to tell him of the various things that had come before my attention since the evening

before. But, as I reflected, it would doubtless be as well to tell him after the inquest, for, after all, the inquest was more a matter of form than anything else and did not pretend to fix guilt.

An effort had been made to give the room a kind of official appearance, I suppose, for chairs were ranged in neat rows and the coroner, with O'Leary seated near him, sat facing the rest of us. A small table had been placed before him and he leaned on it rather wearily, surveying us coldly from pouched eyes that looked as if they had seen too much of human frailties. There was a sprinkling of spruce young gentlemen whom I took to be reporters and who, one and all, seemed to have more eyes for March and Isobel than for anything else in the room—a few others not so spruce whom I thought might be attached to police headquarters and who viewed proceedings with a sort of detached nonchalance, as if it was all in a day's work—a few blue-coated policemen, and the jury, a motley collection of gentlemen, who showed a very lively curiosity as to the matter at hand.

The rest of us sat in a group, and I wondered if my own face were as sharply apprehensive as those others.

The coroner's voice, thin and cold, caught my attention at once, and I listened with much interest to the testimony of one Dr. Hiller, the medical examiner. It was given rapidly and weighted down with technical terms which I, very likely, alone of the entire audience understood. He spoke so rapidly that more than half of it was not intelligible even to me, but there was a sentence that struck me as holding significance.

"—and thus owing to the angle at which the bullet

entered the heart," he continued rapidly, "it seems likely that the bullet was projected from a position slightly above the murdered man."

At this point the coroner interrupted to ask at what distance the shot was fired. The medical examiner's reply was wordy but, in spite of much reference to powder burns and velocity and explosive quantities, rather vague, and I received the impression that notwithstanding the accuracies of modern science there might be some doubt regarding the point.

And just then it occurred to me that if Adolph had been bending over the stair rail, for instance, a shot *from the doorway* of the tower room might have struck him at the same angle. And I was positive that Mittie Frisling had stood there, and the curtain had wavered into place again *after* the shot was fired.

Of course, Mittie's visit to the door of the tower room might have taken place hours or even days before Adolph's murder. And, too, there was the locked door of the bedroom above and the effect Deke Lonergan certainly gave of having some knowledge of that locked door.

There followed a discussion as to how the body lay when it was found, but I was inclined to think that that meant nothing. Much is made, in what little I have seen of crime detection, of the position of the body, but my experience as a nurse leads me to think that this matter may be overemphasized, owing to the involuntary muscular contractions that nearly always take place. However, the coroner asked me about it rather particularly during my testimony which followed that of the medical examiner. I had attended an inquest

once or twice before and had some idea of what was expected of me, and I flatter myself that I gave what evidence I had to give, merely a story of how and when and under what circumstances I had found the body of Adolph Federie, in a brief and concise manner. I guessed that O'Leary had kept his own counsel concerning the matter of the red rosette, as well as certain other matters, for the points touched upon during my testimony, as well as during those that followed, were practically the same points that O'Leary had covered during his own informal inquiry. And every member of the household stuck religiously to his original story. I don't know what the coroner thought of Mittie's testimony concerning Isobel's threat to kill Adolph, but the reporters scribbled furiously.

Altogether, though the inquest dragged out for some time, there was nothing new that came up. I was beginning to think of making my escape to the tower room, when all at once Eustace put his handkerchief over his nose, gurgled something in an embarrassed fashion, and was given permission to leave.

And before I realized what I was doing I was on my feet and following him, brushing aside an intercepting policeman. At the door I caught O'Leary's voice, explaining in soothing accents that Miss Keate was returning to her patient.

By the time I had reached the main hall Eustace had disappeared. Had he gone to the tower room, where the jade elephant was hidden?

I ran through the intervening rooms and, reaching the door of the tower room, stood there for a moment on the threshold, holding the green curtain aside and

searching the room with my eyes and panting. My patient lay on the bed, unseeing, unconcerned with the business of life, still breathing with slow, painful gasps. And there was no one else in the room.

I had won over Eustace, then, if his goal had been the tower room.

But when I approached the table on which lay the old violin my feeling of self-congratulation collapsed.

The violin lay on the table beside the case. The case was closed, but when I opened it I saw at once that the green elephant was gone!

It had been there when I accompanied Grondal to the library. Every member of the household had been in that room all the time intervening since I had left the tower room. Eustace had left the library but a moment ago, and I did not believe that he could have had time to reach the tower room, extract the toy from the violin case, even supposing he knew where it had been hidden, and escape before I reached the tower room.

But the elephant was indubitably gone. And Eustace was the only person who had left the library.

Was there some power of evil at work in that silent old house whose gifts transcended purely human ability?

Ashamed of my fancy, I shrugged away the absurd and highly unhappy thought. Human hands had lifted the violin, had opened the case and laid themselves upon the elephant. But it was true that something that was evil and dark and scheming was abroad in that hushed old house.

I did not return to the library, thinking that if I

were needed they would likely send for me. But I was not needed, and a little before lunch time O'Leary came into the room. He looked tired and dejected and sank wearily into an armchair.

"Nothing," he replied to my question. "Nothing that we did not already know. I am disappointed. Frequently during the inquest something crops up that is news—some flaw, some inconsistency in the stories told. But—" He paused and the weariness in his face gave place to a keenly alert look and he straightened up in his chair—"what is it, Miss Keate? Surely that gleam in your eyes has a meaning. What is it? News?"

"That's as may be," I said. "Here is the matter of the green elephant as it stands now, but whether it has anything to do with the case or not is another thing."

He listened with growing interest while I told him of the elephant, shook his head when I came to the disappointing close of my story, and walked over to the table to examine the case. He looked at the violin carefully, too.

"It is an old thing, isn't it? No fingerprints that I can see, but there must be some, of course. I'll see if we can get the fingerprints."

"You'll get mine," I said, none too pleased.

"I've no doubt we shall," he returned abstractedly. "Now for the case. Nothing here. And no elephant."

After a moment he returned to a chair.

"It does seem to me, Miss Keate," he said rather pettishly, "that you could have kept that elephant once you got your hands on it."

"Oh, doubtless," I remarked with some acerbity, "carrying it around in my pocket? Or in my hand, so

everyone could see it. And me—" I added bitterly—"likely being shot by somebody who wanted it!"

He was eying me dreamily, not at all affected by that possibility.

"Do you know," he said, "I shouldn't be at all surprised if that is what happened to Adolph Federie. He might have got hold of the elephant and was shot because—because he had it, by someone who also wanted the thing. You said it was there at the foot of the tower stairway when you found it first?"

I nodded.

"And the murderer, seeing he could not gain possession of the elephant after it had rolled from Adolph's dying hand, owing to the danger of your catching him in the act, as well as owing to the pressing need for his immediate escape, left the toy elephant and thought he could secure it at a later and less dangerous time."

"'He?' Do you think a man shot Adolph Federie?"

"I used the pronoun in a rhetorical sense," said O'Leary coldly. "Please follow the point at issue, Miss Keate."

"But," I objected, "that green elephant has been, I suppose, there on the mantel for anybody to take, absolutely unguarded. If anyone wanted it, he could have got hold of the thing a hundred times since Mr. Federie's illness."

"Providing—" Lance O'Leary's gray eyes became all at once very clear—"providing he knew what he wanted." He looked satisfied, as if he had come across a very leading clue, though for the life of me I couldn't see that matters were helped any. What did he mean?

I was on the point of asking when my eyes fell on my wrist watch and I reached for my thermometer.

"Anything else, Miss Keate?" asked O'Leary.

There were the blue beads, of course, and the strange footsteps we had heard on the bare corridor floor above us during dinner of the previous night. First I told him of the footsteps as dryly as I could while I took my patient's temperature. My voice was quite steady, I am sure, but when I had finished I found that I had put the wrong end of the thermometer in my patient's mouth.

O'Leary watched me as I withdrew the thermometer, shook it again vigorously, and placed it between Mr. Federie's open lips, right end up this time.

"So Kema says she was not upstairs at all during the meal," mused O'Leary. "And Grondal was in the pantry and followed the other men upstairs. You are sure that everyone but Kema and Grondal was at the table?"

"Certainly. That is, everyone but——" I stopped abruptly, annoyed at my half admission.

"Everyone but—Adolph, I suppose you were about to say. You amaze me, Miss Keate. Dead men can't walk."

"You might think otherwise if you stayed in this house overnight," I snapped. "And, in any case, my ears are good. And I heard footsteps! Of course, it might have been your policemen playing leapfrog."

As if in response to a cue the curtain over the doorway was thrust gingerly aside and a policeman, the same who had endeavored to reassure us about the trouble-

some footsteps, peered into the room, brightened up when he saw O'Leary, glanced toward the table as if to be sure it held no more demi-tasse cups, and, reassured, stepped into the room.

"What is it, O'Brien?" asked O'Leary.

"I was only wanting to know if me and Shafer was to be on duty here to-night, sir?"

"I think it likely," said O'Leary dryly. "You had the day off, hadn't you?"

"Yes, sir. The chief told me to talk to you, sir. But, Mr. O'Leary—" the man seemed to be struck with a fit of uneasiness—"Mr. O'Leary, sir, I was only wondering if—well—if two men was enough!" He blurted out the last words hurriedly and stood shifting from one foot to another, fumbling with his cap and eying the slender gray man before him with absurd anxiety.

"I think two are enough. Surely you aren't afraid?"

"Oh, no, sir. No, sir. Not afraid." O'Brien paused to swallow and his face looked none too happy. "Only —well, the truth is, Mr. O'Leary"— he leaned forward suddenly and spoke in a hoarse whisper— "this is a very devil of a house, sir. The Old Man himself is in it!"

O'Leary did not smile.

"Why do you say that?"

O'Brien gulped again.

"I don't know. I'll swear I don't know. I wish I did. If it was something I could lay my two hands on or give an honest whack with my club it would be all right. But—but there's a feeling. I've turned around a dozen times, thinking somebody was staring at me and—have

never seen a human eye. It's—it's—there's a feeling." He stuck, quite red but positive.

"By the way, O'Brien, what is this about footsteps, during dinner last night? Were you upstairs when it happened?"

The policeman's frank young face looked relieved.

"Oh, that was nothing, sir. Just a fancy, I think. Maybe them folks at the table heard something—the wind blowing in the trees, or somebody walking around in the kitchen—and one and all jumped at the idea it was footsteps up there on the second floor. I was upstairs at the time, sir, down there at the south end of the main corridor, patrolling the house as was ordered, and Shafer was outside making sure that all the doors and shutters was fastened. I was there in the hall when them two young fellows and the fat old duck with spectacles and this Grondal fellow all came tumbling up the stairs wanting to know who had been walking along the back hall and what not. We all ran from the stairway down the main corridor there and turned into the hall that runs along the back wing. But, of course, there was nobody there, sir. Nor in any of the bedrooms. We even took a peek in the attic. We agreed that it must have been that old heathen cook—you know, the old woman with the gold earrings. It satisfied them and the ladies. But between us, Mr. O'Leary, I think they just imagined them footsteps."

I could restrain myself no longer.

"Imagined it!" I snorted. "Imagined nothing! I've got ears and ordinary good sense. I tell you someone was walking up there."

Lance O'Leary stood, a slim alert figure.

"I'll just see what Kema has to say. Come with me, O'Brien."

"Wait, Mr. O'Leary, there is something else." He paused while I drew the blue beads from the pocket to which I had carefully transferred them when I changed my uniform, and O'Brien watched me, his mouth hanging open, while I explained how and where I had found them and from whose dress they had probably been torn.

For some reason or other the knowledge seemed to please O'Leary inordinately, for he made me repeat the whole thing, and when I added somewhat diffidently my theory that the shot might have been fired from the door of the tower room his eyes began to shine and his whole aspect took on that tense, alert look that I knew so well.

"Miss Keate, you are invaluable," he said. "I'll take the beads, please. Now, we'll investigate those ghostly footsteps."

Grondal, bringing at my request a tray with my lunch on it to the tower room, told me that the funeral was to be at three o'clock at a downtown funeral establishment. I thought it a very sensible arrangement in view of the existing circumstances.

Something after one o'clock, when I was beginning to look forward to a long sleep during my hours off which began at two, Lance O'Leary came into the room again. His carefully tailored gray suit, his smooth brown hair, the effect he gave of modern, well-groomed prosperity, seemed incongruous in that cluttered, smothered old house, with its air of decay, and its damp, stale atmosphere and, most of all, the feeling of grim,

secret hatred and contention that lurked in the very air we breathed.

He began to inquire more particularly about the footsteps we had heard and remarked finally, rather waspishly, that he'd be inclined to doubt the whole thing had I not been one of those who heard the sound. His manner was such that I did not know whether to be flattered or insulted.

"You see, Kema told me that *she* was upstairs walking along that hall and came down by way of the back stairway, thus avoiding the policeman and others. And when I asked her why she changed her mind about it, after telling you she had been in the kitchen all the time, she pretended she couldn't understand me. Now, then, to which of us is she lying? Probably to me, since she has time to think the matter over. In any case, her change of front is interesting."

"Do you think it possible that someone—some outsider—a thief or housebreaker—could have got into the house?"

He looked at me oddly.

"Anything is possible, Miss Keate. But consider—the police were all over the house yesterday, searched every nook and cranny, and found no one besides the members of the household. And we have had a guard on the place every moment since then. He would have to be endowed with supernatural powers to get in and out without being detected. And—though, as I say, almost anything is possible, still we have to stick to the natural and let the supernatural go by. O'Brien insists that he heard no footsteps; but, so far as that goes, he could have heard nothing, for these thick old carpets

muffle sounds. The only way in which you people could have heard the footsteps was by being, as you were, directly under the bare floor. Ah, there you are."

He turned as Grondal silently entered the room.

"You sent for me, sir?" asked Grondal.

"Yes." O'Leary surveyed the man thoughtfully for a moment, and when he spoke his words were so quiet and clear and yet so hard that they were like crystals dropping on stone. "The night Adolph Federie was shot you came down the back stairway after you heard the bell from this room. Who was the woman you passed—on the stairway, I think?"

The butler's face grew livid, the scar standing out distinctly. He ran his tongue over his lips.

"Who was it?" asked O'Leary again.

Grondal blinked; his eyebrows had come closer together so that I only caught a dark gleam from his eyes. The green velvet curtain a few feet back of him billowed lightly, as if in a draft.

"It was—Mittie Frisling," said the butler then, and at the same instant the curtain billowed again and I felt no current of air. Was something moving back of that curtain? In much less time than it takes to tell it I had pushed the butler to one side and drawn back the folds of green velvet. I was just in time to see Mittie Frisling vanish around the corner of the little passage. The one glimpse of her wispy back hair and bulging shoulders had been unmistakable.

"Mittie Frisling herself," I said to O'Leary, who had stepped quickly to my side.

At the words Grondal whirled to face me, and there was no denying the fact that the man was unpleasantly

affected, for his eyes had a trapped look and he turned them uneasily to O'Leary.

"I'm sorry she heard me," he said. "Miss Mittie has—a bad temper. Her father was that way, too."

"You knew her father, then?"

I think Grondal repented his half confidence.

"In a way, sir. He was a—an acquaintance of Mr. Federie's."

"He must have been something more than a mere acquaintance, since Miss Frisling came here to live immediately after her father's death."

"How did you——" Grondal stopped so suddenly that he almost choked and said: "Yes, sir."

"Why did you give the impression that Miss Frisling had been here only a few days, when in reality she has been living here for some weeks?"

"I felt that Mr. Federie would want me to protect—that is, to—to keep——" he stopped in midair, so to speak, and O'Leary after waiting a moment said crisply:

"To what?"

"I answered to the best of my ability, sir," said Grondal smoothly, recovering himself, and not another word regarding the reasons for Mittie Frisling foisting herself upon the household could O'Leary get from the old butler. I use the word butler, by the way, in a very broad sense, for Grondal was a kind of general factotum.

"Why did you refuse to tell me of passing Miss Frisling on the stairway the night of the murder?" asked O'Leary presently.

"I thought it best," replied Grondal in an unperturbed way.

O'Leary's eyes were suddenly a dark slate color, like the threatening gray of storm-laden clouds, but he is not a man to give vent to his emotions.

"Exactly where were you when you passed?"

"About the middle of the stairway, sir. My hand touched her bare arm in passing. It gave me—rather a start."

"She said nothing?"

"Sort of—gasped, sir. I think she was startled somewhat, also."

"It's quite likely she was," agreed O'Leary grimly. "How did you know it was Miss Frisling?"

Grondal hesitated.

"I hardly know, sir. But it wasn't Madam Isobel—I was sure of that because she uses a perfume that has a heavy and penetrating scent. And it wasn't Miss March because Miss March would not have been afraid and would not have scurried away and—well, I should have known Miss March. It was Miss Frisling, sir; I am sure of that."

"Another thing, Grondal"— O'Leary spoke sharply as the man turned toward the doorway as if to indicate that, so far as he was concerned, the interview was at an end—"what do you know of the green elephant?"

At the unexpected question Grondal stiffened, ran a quick tongue over his lips again, and his eyes darted from O'Leary to me and back to O'Leary again.

"Green elephant?" he said. "Oh, do you mean the little jade curio that belongs to Mr. Federie?"

"Certainly."

"Why—er—nothing, sir. Except that it is a little work of art that Mr. Federie is very fond of and that

it—seems to have disappeared." He looked at the mantel. "Someone must have taken it away."

Grondal did not falter.

"I couldn't say," he replied with barefaced deceit, and, though O'Leary questioned him adroitly for a moment or two, he could get nothing more from the man.

"There is nothing else you are holding back because you 'think it best'?" asked O'Leary finally, and Grondal flushed a slow, painful red, somewhat to my surprise, for I had supposed him entirely impervious.

"No, sir," he said at once. And it was not until much later that we knew how flatly he was lying.

After he had gone O'Leary turned to me.

"I'm willing to bet my new car—and it's a beauty, too—that this fellow could tell me a thing or two," he said disgustedly. "Well—I'll get it eventually, maybe."

"How did you know he passed Mittie Frisling on the back stairway?"

"Your precious blue beads, dear lady; look here." He drew cautiously from his pocket the dejected little cluster of beads I had given him, and three others, unstrung. "One of these—" he went on, pointing to the three small blue dots on his palm—"one of these was about halfway up the back stairs. This one had rolled into a crack in the floor of the corridor along the back wing upstairs—quite near the door of Adolph's sitting room, by the way. And the third—" he paused as if to give his following words more emphasis—"the third was in that vacant bedroom upstairs not more than

twelve inches from the spot where we found the revolver that killed Adolph Federie."

I shrank back a little, my eyes staring in dreadful fascination at those three innocent-looking blue beads. And in dismay I recalled that it was actually I who had set O'Leary on the trail of the beads. True, he would have found them sooner or later, in all likelihood, but still it occurred to me that if Mittie Frisling were convicted of this crime because of the evidence of those little blue beads I should probably never enjoy a peaceful night's sleep again.

"Don't feel badly, Miss Keate," admonished O'Leary, quite as if he knew the line my thoughts were taking. "These things must be. If Mittie Frisling is capable of committing this crime she is equally capable of suffering for it. That is one of the first lessons a criminal investigator must learn. Now, then, I've some things to do this afternoon. There'll be a man up to get the fingerprints off the old violin during the afternoon, and I shall be in again this evening. You'd better have Kema or Grondal stay with your patient during the afternoon while you take a rest. There are still a couple of policemen about the place, so you need not feel alarmed. Ah—how do you do, Doctor?"

Lance O'Leary departed as the doctor entered.

Dr. Jay looked after him admiringly.

"So that is Lance O'Leary," he said, a touch of awe in his voice. "I didn't think he was so young. Say, he's a good-looking fellow, isn't he? Wonder who's his tailor. I had him all doped out as a stocky, thickset fellow with a cigar and plug hat. Do you know, Nurse," he went on, turning to his patient, "I always thought I'd like

to be a detective—carry guns, chase down clues, trap the villain, cover yourself with glory! And instead I carry a stethoscope, am routed out at all hours of the night—it's a hell of a life if you ask me." He broke off abruptly. "Where's the chart? How's everything? Looks like our patient is going to make a go of it."

Kema promised readily to sit with old Mr. Federie while I rested. She had not intended to go to the funeral, she told me impassively, hinting that her duty was to the living. A commendable resolution, which I should have admired more whole-heartedly had I been sure that she had had nothing to do with Adolph's taking off. But I was sure of that concerning none of the household, and the only things I had against Kema were her remarkable stolidity and the calm she had displayed in the matter.

Once upstairs in my own room I plucked Genevieve from the bed, where he had made himself comfortable on the soft folds of my black silk kimono, and deposited him in the corridor. I hated to touch the creature, and the feel of his coarse fur clung to my fingers disagreeably, and the more vigorously I shook the kimono, the more closely a few tawny hairs stuck to it.

From my window I watched the funeral party leave, straggling in twos and threes toward the tall gate beyond which were two taxis waiting, their bodies making bright spots of yellow amid the surrounding grays and browns of the dreary world.

Isobel went first; she had a small black cloche pulled low over her eyes and wore a shabby but opulent-looking mink cape. Even at a distance she appeared

to maintain an elegant, fine-lady appearance which, I suspected, no amount of poverty or trouble could ever quite subdue.

The day had turned very cold, with the damp chilliness that penetrates one's very bones, and March, too, was wrapped in fur—a soft gray squirrel coat that looked new and smart; she, too, wore a small dark hat and loose white gloves that gleamed coldly as she laid her hand for a moment on the latch of the gate and then withdrew it as Lonergan opened the door of the nearest taxi. He managed to get in beside her, and Eustace, looking exaggeratedly fashionable beside Elihu Dimuck's sedately clothed presence, was forced to take the second taxi. He and Dimuck had to wait a moment or two for Mittie Frisling, who came scuttling down the path, feathers flying from her hat and fringes emerging from under a hideously checked purple coat. Grondal followed her and sat in front with the chauffeur, and the two cars started slowly off along the muddy road.

It seemed strange to me that Lonergan should have gone; probably it was in an effort to accompany March rather than to show any respect for the dead man. What was Lonergan doing in that house, anyway? His friendship for Eustace was not, so far as I could see, of a nature to warrant either his presence in the house at such a time or his anxiety as to old Mr. Federie's state of health.

I relaxed at once and deliciously; it was the first time since my coming to Federie house that I had felt at ease—and I might add it was also the last time. I decided drowsily that my ease was due to the fact that

the warring, contentious elements were out of the house. Out of the house and away—to attend the funeral of a man whom *one of them had killed!*

This brought me sitting upright, staring into the pressing gray shadows about me, and effectually robbed me of any feeling of ease. The murderer must be one of those seven people who had gone, ostensibly in sorrow and grief, to make a last gesture of respect to Adolph Federie—or Kema.

Before I could go to sleep, after that, I arose and propped a small chair firmly under the doorknob.

But I believe I had not slept more than an hour when I awoke suddenly, every nerve in my body tingling, my heart nearly leaping out of my mouth, and a cold perspiration on the backs of my hands.

Muffled a little, but yet clear, a sound was coming from below. Someone was playing the piano, touching the tinkling old keys with practised hands. And it was the tune, faint but horribly clear, that was Eustace's favorite—"La Furiante."

I don't know how long I waited as if frozen, listening breathlessly to those weird minors, the thudding, beating bass notes surging threateningly under the wailing, weeping, furious chromatics. It was a devilish thing and stirred me in spite of myself.

But the thing that finally brought me to my feet was the recollection that Eustace was not in the house.

With my own eyes I had seen him leave!

CHAPTER IX

THE THIRD NIGHT

IN A moment I found myself, wrapped in my black kimono and without shoes, slipping cautiously into the green corridor. Away down at the south end of the hall, past March's room, I could see a bulky shape in a blue coat silhouetted against the window. The policeman seemed intent on watching something outside and in no way disturbed by such an innocent-seeming thing as a little music. I walked softly, and it pleased me as well that he did not turn.

But as I reached the stairway, without any warning at all the music broke off in the middle of a phrase. There was no crash, no discordant note, no final chord. It simply stopped as suddenly and inexplicably as it had begun, leaving the strain of music suspended.

It was so unexpected that I hesitated for possibly fifteen heart beats, one hand clutching my kimono about me and the other pressed against my mouth as if to keep my heart from leaping out.

Not a sound came from below.

A small inner voice urged me to call the policeman, but I disregarded that caution and instead descended the stairs alone, cautiously but swiftly. There was not a soul in the entrance hall, and I hurried around the

corner of the stairs. The curtain over the library door was already pushed back on its great brass rings and pole and I could see the whole room.

And there was no one to be seen!

It gave me an unpleasant little shock, although in my heart I had expected nothing less.

What fingers, then, had touched the yellow keys on the old piano, whose dark polished lines loomed up majestically at the end of the silent room?

It was then that I made what I afterward realized to be a rash and hasty decision. I would search the whole house!

And I did.

I peeked first into the tower room, but my patient was in no need of attention and Kema appeared to be dozing in her chair.

In some twenty minutes I had finished my search, even including the store closets off the kitchen entry, the servants' rooms, the several vacant bedrooms, the trunk room, Adolph's suite, and, in fact, the whole house except the attic and the locked bedroom above the tower room. But I was richer only in the knowledge that it was a musty, dusty, old-fashioned house, poorly ventilated, wretchedly lighted, and remarkably clumsy in its out-dated elegance. There was not even a cellar, and coal and wood were stored in a kind of shed not far from the back door.

As I did not wish to be interrupted I had walked very lightly during my peregrinations of the upper hall, and the policeman did not so much as turn his head, which, though it was what I wanted at the moment, did not incline me favorably toward the policeman. It did

not seem to me to add anything to our safety to have a policeman about who was, to all practical purposes, stone deaf.

However, as I came out of March's room, the door of which was not six feet from him, the door creaked, he gave a sudden start and whirled.

"'Tis the Evil One himself!" He gasped, crossed himself, looked closer, muttered something under his breath that was not devout, and approached me.

"What are you doing?" he demanded roughly.

By this time I had recalled my unconventional attire, and on putting a modest hand to my hair I encountered the curlers about which I had wrapped portions of my front hair. They were rather long and protruded stiffly in two prongs above my temples, which, combined with the flowing black lines of my kimono—well, at any rate, the policeman's frightened remark was not flattering.

"I was looking for the murderer," I snapped. "And for all the good you are doing, standing there mooning out of the window, we could all be murdered in our beds."

Walking on mv stockinged heels with as much dignity as I could muster I approached and entered my room. He called something after me, but I clicked the door on his voice, which was plaintive rather than apologetic.

I looked at myself thoughtfully in the mirror for a moment or two before I crawled into bed once more. I had gained nothing for my pains and had nearly ruined a new pair of silk stockings, for they had collected an amazing amount of dust besides getting

snagged on the clasp of an open traveling bag in Mittie Frisling's room.

As I dropped off to sleep I reflected drowsily that the attic and the locked bedroom were the only places I had not searched, and that if a ghost wanted to take refuge in either place he was welcome to do so and I should be the last to interfere.

But the diabolic tune of "La Furiante" troubled my dreams and I awoke tired and oppressed with a sense of dread.

It was close to six o'clock when I went downstairs again, somewhat refreshed by a too-cool bath and a spotless and unwrinkled uniform whose white, starched folds rustled soothingly to my ears.

"La Furiante" met me as I reached the hall, but it was actually Eustace at the piano this time; I glanced into the library to make sure. On the piano stood a cocktail shaker, the only modern note in the house, and an empty glass stood beside it. Isobel sat near by, still in her hat, holding another glass between her large, jeweled fingers. At a window stood Deke Lonergan; the very set of his shoulders was inimical, and his crisp blond hair caught lights from the hanging lamp above him.

In the light of more leisurely reasoning it seemed to me that Eustace had probably detached himself from the funeral party for some reason and had returned to the house. But upon my discreet inquiry of March, I found that Eustace had been with the others the whole time, and I wished I had not asked!

There was no change in my patient's condition, and Kema had followed the directions I had given her with scrupulous care.

Dinner was a horrible meal, with Mittie Frisling sniffling now and then and dabbing at her swollen eyes—which, if what I half believed of her were true, was the very height of hypocrisy—Isobel indecently unconcerned and eating with a healthy appetite, Elihu Dimuck peering at each dish in his nearsighted way and bearing himself in a gingerly reserved manner as if contact with the others might contaminate him, Deke Lonergan saying nothing, Eustace smoking continually, and March a still, white little statue. It was a horrible meal, as I say, but still nothing untoward occurred, if we are to except the depression and the heavy silence—a silence that, somehow, was charged with unnamable meaning and that held us all in its portentous grip.

Something to my disapproval they took coffee in the tower room again, but, after all, their presence could not disturb my patient, so I said nothing. That thick silence still enfolded us; it was as if no one dared speak. I was glad when, quite early, Isobel made a motion to leave. The others followed, still in silence, only their eyes alive and shooting furtive, uneasy looks at each other and all about the old room.

March lingered to bid me good-night in her gracious way.

More than once during the preceding hour I had seen her eyes go toward the mantel, and as the others were straggling out of the room she said in a low voice:

"Have you seen a small green elephant? It is a curio that Grandfather usually keeps there on the mantel."

At a momentary loss for a reply I hesitated, and she continued slowly:

"He always said it was to be mine in case of his death.

He was attached to the thing and—particularly wanted me to have it. He has said many times that it is to go to me. Or rather that, in case of his death, I was to take it immediately." She was looking at me thoughtfully, and as if she were a little puzzled by the urgency of her grandfather's wish. "To-night I happened to notice that the elephant was gone. It is just a little thing, about so high." She measured with her firm young hands. "Have you seen it, Miss Keate?"

"Yes," I said. "It was there on the mantel. But it seems to have disappeared. I don't know what happened to it." Which was true enough, in all conscience!

"Disappeared!" she repeated. Her blue eyes grew steadily darker and the firm lines of her mouth and chin began to show under the soft white flesh. "Disappeared! Why, then——"

"Coming, March?" said Eustace from the doorway. "I'll light you through the passage."

She hesitated, gave me a look that held something beseeching and anxious in it, stepped under Eustace's arm and the folds of green velvet, and I could hear the low, diminishing murmur of their voices.

Shortly after that Lance O'Leary came in. He looked tired, less coolly invincible and more humanly young and worried than was his custom. He dropped into a chair, passed his hands over his face in a weary gesture, and then stretched them out toward the fire.

"This is a barn of a house," he said disgustedly. "No earthly good to anybody, built like this! Away out there in the back entry is the craziest old telephone I ever saw. I don't know how the telephone company came to overlook it. The cook says that old Mr. Federie con-

sented to have it installed years ago only to enable her to order groceries. No furnace, no lights—nothing but curtains and haircloth horrors for furniture." He shivered. "This place has got on my nerves a little to-night."

"I thought a detective had no nerves," I commented, a bit maliciously.

"We are nothing but nerves," said he. "Especially when—when we can't accomplish anything. I'm not getting the right—slant on this thing. There's something I have missed. The clue to the problem—is right in my hands. I feel that it is. But I can't—get the right combination." He made a restless, seeking motion with his hands, his sensitive fingers stretched out as if groping for invisible currents. "And that isn't all," he continued with a somber expression that I had never seen on his face before. "I feel a sort of premonition of—of danger. As if—as if there's more to come." He stopped abruptly, gave me a glance that was half defiant and half ashamed, and suddenly, as if a cloak had dropped over him, he was the Lance O'Leary I knew, his eyes clear and yet impenetrable, his countenance quiet.

"I have something to tell you," I began somewhat diffidently. "While the others were at the funeral this afternoon, I heard—that is, I thought I heard Eustace playing the piano. It couldn't have been Eustace because he was at the funeral, but it was that tune that he always plays."

Lance O'Leary was leaning back in his chair, his eyes half closed but singularly keen.

"Explain yourself, Miss Keate."

I did, of course, so far as I could, but could reply little enough to his sharp questions.

"You are sure you didn't dream all this," he suggested, and upon my justly indignant denial he stared for some moments into the flames without making any comment.

"There is one possibility," he said slowly as if lost in thought. "And that, if true, would be—amazing," he concluded in a hushed voice, and rose to stand with his back to the fire.

"The wind is rising," he said in an abruptly matter-of-fact way. "I don't like the way it is whistling around the house."

I didn't like the wind myself and said so at once.

"It rattles these old shutters till they sound like—like bare dead bones rattling against each other." I had not expected to say just that and the words coming from my own lips surprised me.

He caught the expression on my face, I suppose, and smiled a bit wryly.

"There your subconscious expresses itself, Miss Keate. Do you want me to stay here to-night?"

"Do you think—anything will happen?"

"No. No. But, of course, we can be sure of nothing. We could take a thousand precautions and still——" He did not finish his sentence but shrugged lightly.

"I am not afraid," I said slowly. "There are still policemen here?"

"Yes. One upstairs and one down, with instructions to keep a constant patrol of the house."

"And Grondal will sleep on the couch as he did last night?"

He nodded.

"Well, I don't know that I have any reason to be more frightened than anyone else——"

"I'm willing to bet that the others have got their doors locked and bolted," interrupted O'Leary, adding somewhat grimly: "I'm sure I should have."

"That is the trouble," I said. "There is no door to lock down here and, besides, it happened right over there on the tower stairway! But last night was peaceful enough," I concluded airily with an ease that I did not feel. "I'll telephone to you if I do not like the looks of things."

"Very well. By the way, Miss Keate, I wish you would—er—keep your eyes open to any keys that are lying around unguarded. The key to that bedroom above is still gone and looking for the thing in this house would be like looking for a needle in a haystack. You see whoever has that key——" He stopped and I whispered:

"Is the murderer?"

"Well, it is possible," said O'Leary cautiously. He looked about the room. "Did the fingerprint man get here this afternoon?"

"I don't know."

He crossed to the violin, scrutinized it carefully, and seemed satisfied.

"Not that the fingerprints will be apt to tell me much," he murmured in a disgruntled way. "Lord, Miss Keate, I wish I had no feelings! There's something, a kind of impalpable foreboding that makes me want to—to shout a warning!" He stared gloomily at the fire, and I went to my instrument case and shook out a

couple of tablets from the bottle of soda bicarbonates that I always carry.

"It is probably your stomach," I said coolly, though I felt very much the same thing myself. "Take these tablets and you will feel better."

"I did have a pastry at dinner," he admitted, eying the tablets in the faintly resentful manner that comes over a man with the approach of a medicine-armed and resolute woman. "How do you take them? In water or just swallow them?"

Without waiting for water he swallowed them rapidly, one after the other. I think they stuck a little going down, being rather large, for he swallowed several times in a labored way and gave me an ungrateful look as he said good-night.

Grondal must have met him in the passage, for the butler came in at once, blanket over his arm and Genevieve at his heels. But the slight comfort that his presence gave me was marred by the untimely reflection that Grondal was as apt to be the murderer as any.

I endeavored to console myself by the thought that, at least, during the previous night he had offered no evidence of violent intentions. And Genevieve, for once, curled up on the mantel and went to sleep like a Christian tabby cat.

But with silence in the room, the moaning of the trees, the rattling onslaughts of the wind against the old shutters, and the various creaks and rustles and sighs that come at night upon an old house that has seen much of life and death, all combined to set my nerves on edge and keep my eyes traveling around and around

the old room, lingering in shrinking fascination on the angles of the tower stairway. The panels below it gleamed dully, and at last I allowed myself deliberately to follow with my eyes the narrow steps of the stairway, step by step, the slender banister at one side and the faded green wall of the tower on the other. Beyond the second turn the stairs were lost in shadows and the slender railing vanished beyond the ceiling.

It was not more than ten-thirty, I think, when I settled into the big chair at the bedside, and at one o'clock I was still alertly wide awake and alive to every night sound, every creak of old woodwork, every sigh of the fire, every rustle of forgotten drafts.

I stirred then. My patient's pulse, always erratic, had dropped, which meant a stimulant and that at once.

The water on the fender was barely warm, and I was obliged again to go to the kitchen for boiling water. The errand was no pleasanter than that of the previous night. If anything, it was worse, for the murmuring and sighing of the wind made the great dark rooms and billowing curtains seem fearfully alive and cognizant of my intrusion. My little candle flickered feebly in the drafts and cast crawling shadows, and by the time I had reached the kitchen and turned up the wick in the lighted lamp Kema had left on the table, my knees shook, and my hands were as cold as ice.

The water on the stove was not quite boiling, so I took off one of the lids of the old-fashioned range, stirred up the fire, and set the kettle directly over the blaze. And in the little pause, while I waited, all at once I heard footsteps in the entry back of the kitchen, then a sub-

dued buzz that sounded rather like a quiet and ladylike coffee grinder, and someone spoke in a cautiously lowered voice; there was a moment's silence and then the murmur was repeated.

I tiptoed to the door and put my ear to the keyhole just in time to hear that brief phrase repeated a third time.

"Main 2662, please."

It was someone at the telephone, of course, and the coffee-grinder sound was caused by the turning of the old-fashioned crank affair that signaled to central.

"Father?" went on the voice in carefully guarded accents. "Yes—yes. I'm still here. They won't let me leave. No, I haven't got it yet."

There was a long, listening pause. I was sure that the speaker was Deke Lonergan, and all my curiosity regarding that sullen young man returned as I applied my eyes with no success, for the entry was completely dark, and then my ear with more success, to the keyhole.

All at once Deke Lonergan gave a sort of groan.

"That's bad," he said. "All right, then. I'll have the money by morning. I'll do anything to get it. *Anything!*"

There was a kind of hot desperation in the last word. He clicked up the receiver, and after a little I heard him walking along the entry to the back stairway. He seemed to be attempting to go quietly, but he stumbled a little on the bottom step, I think, and I could hear the treads creaking.

The water bubbling merrily on the stove recalled me

to the business at hand, and I hurried back through the shadowy rooms, administered the necessary adrenalin, and thought of nothing but my patient's heart reaction for the next hour. Then, reassured, I let my mind wander to Deke Lonergan. What money? And how did he propose to get it by morning?

I puzzled over those questions for some time, but, of course, could come to no explanation regarding it—which failure, by the way, was to give me considerable chagrin later on, for the explanation was so simple, so obvious, that it seemed impossible that I should not have grasped it.

The fire had sunk to smoldering, sulky ashes by this time; the moaning and wailing of the wind through the evergreens had died suddenly to a somewhat ominous calm, and the lamps were burning a little low. I was conscious of the increasing dimness in the room before I realized the cause of it; probably in the excitement of the day Grondal had forgotten to fill the lamps with oil. With the abrupt ceasing of the winds, all the little night sounds of the house stopped, too, and there was a silence not unlike that heavy, moveless stillness of death.

I must rouse myself, I knew—shake myself from the curious lethargy that held me, replenish the fire, call Grondal to fill the lamps.

But a singular sensation of waiting that had all at once pervaded the hushed old walls possessed me also, and I sat stiffly, as if frozen, my tongue feeling large and clumsy, and my forehead and the backs of my hands were suddenly moist. The last flame in the fireplace succumbed to the crowding ashes, the lamps burned

lower, and just as one of them sent up a sudden wisp of odorous black smoke a board creaked in the room over my head.

It creaked and creaked again.

Someone was walking in that locked room above!

My heart was thudding so heavily that I could scarcely hear, but I strained my ears and I was certain that I heard, pressing lightly and stealthily on the old flooring above, the sound of cautious feet.

What was prowling up there?

And all at once Genevieve rose lithely to his full gaunt height, fastened his shining eyes on the stairway, and began to twitch his tail nervously from side to side.

I think the very extremity of my terror served to clear my head. At any rate, I got cautiously to my feet and crossed the room to Grondal's couch, so carefully that not even a fold of my starched skirt rustled, and put one hand on his arm and the other on his mouth.

He awoke at once, and though he jerked away from my detaining hands, still he did not cry out. I suppose the terror in my face told him something, for I said nothing, but simply pointed overhead. And as if to explain me there came again that cautious, furtive sound.

Grondal rose, taking care to ease himself off the couch so that the old springs would not twang, and turned at once to the tower stairway.

Was the man going up those stairs?

That is exactly what he did. I shall never forget standing there as if paralyzed, watching him go, step by step, lithe and silent as any panther, around the first turn—then step by step past the place where Adolph Federie died, on beyond the second turn, and so,

as I craned my neck to follow him with my terrified gaze, gradually out of sight, his face first and then his rounded shoulders and body. The last thing I saw fully was one dangling yellow hand.

And he did not come back!

CHAPTER X

THE STRANGE USE OF A VIOLIN STRING

For long moments I stood there waiting and listening as if my life were at stake. But, so far as I could tell, there was no movement in the room above.

The lamps burned lower and were smoking now in good earnest, and I knew that I must see to them—get other lamps or light candles. There was still not a breath of wind and not a sound to be heard. Even Genevieve seemed frozen to a gaunt yellow statue with two fiery eyes that reflected lights from the dying lamps.

Gradually panic was overwhelming me. It did not come all at once, but slowly and dreadfully.

Something had happened in the room above. Why did not Grondal return? Was it because he—*could* not?

And suddenly Genevieve leaped to the floor and, with his bushy tail and gaunt body low to the floor, slunk swiftly to the curtained doorway and disappeared, and the last remnant of courage I possessed was shattered.

Lance O'Leary had told me to telephone to him in case of need. I gave one last glance up that dark stairway and started toward the doorway, thrusting the curtain aside with shaking hands. In the dark passage I began to run; I stumbled at the turn and fell against the wall and somehow kept on. In the dining room

there were chilly streaks of moonlight coming through the cracks in the curtains and looking like cold, dead fingers reaching out to clutch at me. The room beyond those faint streaks was blacker.

Somewhere was the door into the butler's pantry. My shaking hands groped in the blackness, met a panel, and pushed. It gave a little and, swinging the door wide, I entered the pantry. The door closed behind me and I felt for the shelves and table that would guide me to the kitchen door. There had been shadows in the dining room; here it was completely dark save for the faint penciling of light under the door to the kitchen.

And, as I started toward that door, from somewhere in the surrounding blackness came a slight sound.

It wasn't a rustle; it was just a breath of sound. I stopped dead still, stricken by a dreadful conviction. Someone was in that dark pantry with me!

And suddenly my outstretched hand touched something that moved. It felt rough like heavy cloth; it moved away, and my touch met bare flesh and fingers for a fleeting fraction of a second.

Then there was a sudden, bold rush of motion, the door into the dining room swung, I caught the barest glimpse of a black bulk of shadow between me and the pale streaks of moonlight, and the door closed again, and I was left in that black void, trying to scream through a throat that seemed paralyzed.

It was stark panic that sent me stumbling through the pantry and into the kitchen, where the fire glowed redly through the open draft of the fire box and the lamp on the table burned dimly.

Somehow I found the telephone in the back entry

beyond the kitchen. And even then I could not remember O'Leary's telephone number and could only gasp in response to central's bored inquiry: "Police—police!"

My teeth were chattering so that I could scarcely reply to the masculine voice that after æons of time came through the instrument, but I did manage to insist upon Lance O'Leary's being told that he was wanted at Federie house. It was after I hung up the receiver that I remembered that there were already two policemen somewhere in the old house. But a sixth sense assured me that I had done wisely.

My hand was still clutching the receiver when without warning an electric torch was flashed full in my face.

"Was that you at the telephone?" demanded a voice beyond the bright circle of light. "What do you want the police for? Why didn't you call me?"

It was one of the two policemen, of course.

"There is something—" my voice emerged as only a hoarse whisper and I tried again—"there's something the matter. In the tower room. Where have you been?"

"Hey, there, miss, don't go to fainting."

"I'm not fainting, you fool. In the tower room. There was somebody upstairs. Grondal went up and he didn't —" my voice broke in what was almost a sob—"he didn't come back. *Hurry!*"

The glare from the electric torch made the shelves in the pantry, the vast table, and many chairs in the dining room all loom up with ghostly distinctness. We said nothing as we ran. In the narrow passage I fell behind, and as he thrust the green curtain upward I stood on tiptoe to peer around his shoulder.

The room was dimly lighted, the lamps smoking furiously and filling the room with the rank, suffocating smell of burning wicks. And over on the green couch, directly under the tower stairway whose railing gleamed darkly, a figure was hunched.

"There he is," said the policeman, stepping aside tc let me pass. "You just got scared."

I was staring past the smoking lamps at the hunched figure there on the green couch. It was Grondal—and yet—and yet—— Slowly, one step at a time, I advanced.

The figure on the couch did not move.

I shot a glance at the policeman who was following me. His face was a sickly green and his breath was whistling between his teeth and his eyes were bulging.

I went on until I was within a yard of that curiously stolid figure. I stopped, then put out my hand, reached closer, and bent to force myself to look.

"It is Grondal," I heard myself saying in a still voice. "It is Grondal and he is dead. He has been strangled. With a—a violin string."

Then all at once I felt hideously sick and dizzy, things began to circle giddily about me, blending together, and the floor opened to swallow me.

The next thing I was conscious of was the sound of many voices, oddly blurred and all talking at once. The flickering of lights hurt my eyes as I tried to lift my heavy lids.

Someone was saying over and over again in a high-pitched voice: "Who did it? Who did it?" and with the words I remembered what had happened.

I opened my eyes again. Someone must have shoved

me into a chair and I was lying uncomfortably across the arm of it; my neck was cramped and I sat upright. Many lights, candles, and lamps were casting competing flares of light that threw the whole room into sharp relief. The excited voices were coming from a cluster of kimonos and bathrobes and blue coats over there under the tower stairway. Beyond them the green plush foot of the old couch, with a blanket huddled on it, protruded significantly. Eustace and Lonergan and Dimuck were there, all three firing questions at the policeman. Isobel was leaning past Dimuck's shoulder; she clutched a bright Chinese shawl over her nightgown and had thrust her red hair wildly back of her ears. A second policeman was there, too, and he and the one who had, with me, found the body were arguing heatedly as to what should be done. Mittie Frisling was hovering over the fire, sniffling and wringing her hands, and March was kneeling on the floor at her grandfather's side, holding one of his helpless hands in both her own, and shivering violently, her face as white as the counterpane.

Kema came into the room, carrying a pitcher of water; she gave me an unconcerned glance, though I think I needed as much attention as anyone, and went to March, making her drink some of the water.

I rose, crossed to the bedside table, helped myself to a drink of water, straightened my cap, and felt better.

By that time the policemen seemed to have come to some conclusion, for, after a peremptory word to the men, they hurried from the room.

"Why didn't they go up the tower stairs!" I cried. "That is where the murderer was! In the room above."

"What do you mean?" asked Eustace quickly.

"I heard him. I'm sure I heard him."

Then as everyone stared blankly at me I added: "And I'm going up to see that room!" I looked dubiously at the three men. "Mr. Dimuck, will you go with me?"

He shrunk back a little at my abrupt question, pulling his yellow bathrobe more tightly about him and blinking stupidly.

"I'll go with you," offered Isobel, unexpectedly.

I shook my head. I did not want Isobel. I could not trust the woman.

In the little pause Mr. Dimuck appeared to have grasped my purpose.

"Surely," he said. "Surely. I'll go with you. You feel that there may be something in that room? Or someone hiding?"

"There *was* someone," I said. "But I don't suppose he is there now," I added with a touch of scorn as the Dimuck man withered a little. "And, anyway, I want to see that bedroom."

"Oh, Miss Keate," breathed March, continuing in a firmer tone: "I'll go with you, too."

"No, you won't!" cried Eustace rudely. "If that old maid wants to take a chance with her life she can, but you aren't going to!"

Deke Lonergan, who had been sitting in a sort of dazed way on the foot of the couch, glanced at the grim figure hunched there, shuddered, and got up.

"It won't matter if we just—straighten him out—and put a sheet or something over him, will it, Eustace?" he said uneasily. "I—well, I can't stand seeing him like that. It makes me sort of—sick. I'll go with you, Miss Keate."

"No," I said with decision. "You and the head of the house—" I indicated Eustace with as contemptuous a gesture as I could contrive—"you and the head of the house stay here. There is no danger so long as we stay together. You see"—I looked very slowly and deliberately about the room, lingering at every pair of eyes—"one of us right here in this room killed Grondal. No outsider could get in the house," I went on coolly, unheeding Mittie's strangled scream, and Isobel's suddenly glittering eyes, and March's still white face. "And since we are all here there can be no one in the room above. So, you see, there is no danger."

March was standing.

"Miss Keate," she said in a voice of stifled horror, "do you know what you are saying?"

Eustace was approaching me, his brightly striped pajamas incredibly gay in that somber, ugly room, with the garish lights flaring from everywhere, and the haggard white faces, and the secretive curtains and the narrow tower stairway—and the grotesquely huddled figure on the couch behind him.

"You are out of your mind," he said, a very devil of rage in his even, restrained tone.

"Nonsense," I retorted crisply. "Don't think you can frighten me, young man. And it is no news that one of you is the murderer. You know very well you have been thinking it every waking second of the last two days. You can't see how you watch each other, but *I* can see it. How you speculate—Is that the one? Did he do it? Did she? Was hers the hand that held the revolver? And now you'll think—whose hand knotted that violin string?" My voice was shaking and I stopped.

"The woman is mad," muttered Isobel. Her large fingers were groping absently over the mantel; whether for cigarettes or to find some missile to hurl at me I did not know. At any rate, she kept her strange eyes, fury in their hazy depths, fastened on mine.

"*She was in the room!*" screamed Mittie suddenly, pointing a vicious forefinger at me. "She was in the room when Adolph was killed. And she was in the room when Grondal was killed. She did it!"

"You may consider yourself discharged, Miss Keate," said Eustace, his voice smooth and low and very deadly.

"Discharged, fiddlesticks!" I snapped. "It takes a better man than you to——"

"*Eustace!*" March's voice cut into my words. "*You forget yourself! Is this your place!*"

Dark red surged into Eustace's face, quite as if he had been lashed by a whip.

"My place is certainly to protect you from this crazy woman's charges," he said sullenly, his dark eyes slits of malice.

"When I need your protection I will ask for it," said March very deliberately; her blue eyes were like swords and her black brows were straight and implacable. "Miss Keate stays, of course. And, Miss Keate, if you and Mr. Dimuck wish to examine the room above, do so, by all means. I—" she paused to sweep the faces before her with a coldly scornful look—"I will see to it that no one leaves this room while you are gone."

Eustace stepped aside to let me pass, his manner partaking of that of a whipped dog that yet shows his teeth; I believe it was the first time I had seen him without his mask of debonair sophistication.

Dimuck followed me—reluctantly, I think. He had said nothing during the ugly little scene, but now as we started up those narrow steps he began to mumble in disjointed exclamations of a mingled disapproval and shocked distaste.

I could feel the eyes of those in the room below watching us steadily as we mounted the narrow steps and rounded the first sharp turn. I stepped gingerly past the spot where Adolph's body had lain and came to the second turn. The remaining steps looked very dark as they went past the area that was lighted from the lamps in the room below.

"Will someone hand me a lamp?" I asked, leaning over the banister.

Lonergan passed a lamp to Dimuck, and as its wavering light fell on the steps yet before me I took a long breath and went on, feeling, in spite of myself, that there might be something waiting there at the head of the stairs to clutch at me as I emerged from the stair well.

The stairway ended in a small room that looked like a neglected study. There were bookshelves along the wall and a railing straight across the room dividing the tower well from the room; I glanced over the railing and could see the green couch with its dreadful burden and the top of Deke Lonergan's head.

It was a bare little room, and I motioned to Elihu Dimuck to precede me into the bedroom adjoining. He did so, holding the lamp very high so that his bald head caught glistening highlights and his thick eyeglasses winked. I think he did not relish the expedition, for his face had lost its round pinkness and his cheeks looked like shriveled apples.

The bedroom in which we found ourselves was a long room, running clear back to the east wall, and our lamp made only a feeble effort to combat with its shadows. It was not so cluttered with furniture that we could not see at a glance that there was no one in the room. I knew, of course, that there could be no one, since everyone in the house was accounted for, but nevertheless I looked in the tall wardrobes, two of them, and under the high old bed that was still tossed with bedclothing as when Lonergan had sprung out of it following the shot that killed Adolph. Mr. Dimuck gave me a curious look as I motioned him to hold the light while I peered under the bed, but he said nothing.

To a detective the room might be full of clues, but, though I was positive that the murderer of Grondal had been in that room within the hour, I saw nothing to indicate his presence. I walked slowly back to the bare, marble-topped table that stood in the center of the room and leaned upon it with my hands, staring at the door that led to the corridor of the second floor. Its broad, dark panels stared back at me blankly.

Dimuck set the lamp on the table beside me and walked over to the door.

"I wonder if it is still locked," he said.

Just as he spoke I moved a little away from the lamp chimney, whose light was flaring in my eyes, and somehow, in moving my hand along the top of the table, I caught it on something sharp that looked like a tiny splinter of broken glass. I withdrew my hand hastily to examine the jagged inch-long scratch and thus did not realize that the Dimuck man had taken the glass

doorknob in both fat hands and was shaking and turning it vigorously.

"It's still locked——"

"Stop that!" I interrupted sharply, taking my hand from my mouth. "Take your hands off that!"

He let his hands drop and looked at me in dismay.

"Why, what is the matter? What have I done?"

"What haven't you done, you idiot!" I cried irritatedly. "You have destroyed the fingerprints on that doorknob. That's what you've done. If there were any there," I added to myself, pausing to suck the bleeding place on my hand again.

"Did you hurt yourself?" he asked, courteously overlooking the "idiot."

"Just a scratch. Of course, you have left a beautiful set of your own fingerprints for the police to find."

"*My own!*"

I dare say I am small-minded, but I did enjoy his discomfiture.

"My own fingerprints!" he exclaimed, looking in mingled horror and dismay at the doorknob opposite. "Dear me! Dear me! My dear Miss Keate, do you suppose they'll think I did it?"

"I'm sure I don't know," I said dryly.

"Ah, Miss Keate. I thought I'd find you here. What is the matter with your hand?" It was Lance O'Leary, of course, advancing from the tower stairway.

"I scratched it on something here on the table." I glanced vaguely at the mottled gray and white, and Elihu Dimuck burst into a shower of apologies anent the doorknob.

O'Leary listened barely long enough to understand what was troubling the man; then he interrupted curtly:

"I understand. Will you go downstairs, please, Mr. Dimuck, and send O'Brien up here? No, stay here, Miss Keate. I want to talk to you." As Dimuck's agitated yellow bathrobe disappeared down the tower stairway, O'Leary resumed:

"Tell me all about it, Miss Keate, and if you ever cut quick corners in your life, do so now."

And I did. That is to say, I told him the story of the night, including Lonergan's conversation over the telephone, my conviction that I had passed someone in the butler's pantry when I was hurrying to call him, O'Leary, and of course Grondal's ascent into the room in which we stood and the reason for it, and I think the telling of the whole thing did not take more than five minutes' time.

O'Leary stood there quietly while I talked; he rapped out a question now and then or nodded impatiently; his gray eyes shone with a kind of phosphorescent gleam and his fingers tapped the table lightly.

"All right, Miss Keate, thanks. You'd better go down now and put some iodine on that hand of yours. Where was it you scratched it? Oh, I see."

I was glad enough to have an excuse to leave and did so at once. On the tower stairway I passed a policeman, O'Brien, who was ascending. He moved aside to let me pass, and I had to put my foot directly on a darkish stain on the stair carpet where Adolph's body had pressed.

The hour or so that followed was like the aftermath

of a horrible nightmare. My patient's condition was unchanged, and it seemed strange to me that he, there in the room where the things happened, should know nothing, first of his son's violent death and then of the equally ugly death of his old servant.

Everyone remained in the tower room; I did not know whether it was owing to their fear of being alone or to my own furious arraignment of them. Policemen came and went hurriedly; O'Leary came down the stairway and bent for some time over Grondal's body, and we sat, a silent, huddled group, watching the subdued bustle that took place before the ambulance came and orderlies in white duck came again into the room. As they walked slowly toward the curtained doorway, carrying a stretcher between them, I wondered if other thoughts echoed mine. Two bodies had already gone from the tower room. Would there be a third?

Kema broke the rather dreadful stillness that held us as the green velvet dropped slowly into place and the sound of the slow, measured footsteps ceased.

"I'll make some coffee," she said in a calm way, billowing to her feet.

"That is right," agreed March. "And—Kema!"

The old woman turned to face her young mistress; her coarse black hair shone and her yellow eyes were inscrutable as ever between the dangling gold hoops at her ears.

"Yes, Miss March."

"Oh—nothing," said March lamely, but a glance of—well, it was undoubtedly significant, but of what I couldn't guess, passed between them, and Kema nodded once, quite as if she understood March's unspoken words and was gone.

Some fifteen minutes later she was back, steaming coffee on a tray. I was standing beside March as Kema offered her coffee. The old cook leaned very close to the girl, and I'm sure she said something that sounded like: "It is all right."

As I say, it sounded like that, and certainly March seemed to be oddly relieved at the assurance, for she took a long breath and leaned against the back of her chair and began to look less like a blood-drained little ghost.

About six o'clock O'Leary returned to the tower room and began to question us, more sternly this time, and hurriedly, and with less consideration for our feelings. This, too, was something like the affair of Adolph's death, so recently passed and yet unsolved, and gave me a peculiar sense of repetition. However, I think, if anything, the matter of Grondal's death was more horrible, for it brought home to us the unpleasant fact that there was still an active menace haunting the old house. If, in order to accomplish unnamable ends the deaths of Adolph and Grondal had been necessary, who could say what would be next? Or rather, who would be next?

It was not a nice thought.

It was impossible that one of that tense still circle was guilty. And yet—one of them must be!

Our furtive looks at each other, the ugly speculation that lay back of every pair of meeting eyes, our haggard faces, our startled motions when a log slipped in the hearth, or Isobel flicked ashes from her cigarette, or Dimuck cleared his throat, or old Kema padded in and out of the room—all gave witness to the fear we had of each other. One does not as a rule connect crime, and

ugly, sordid crime, at that, with one's nearest associates—with the people who live in the same house, eat at the same table, share the same daily routine with one's self. And I may as well state here and now that there is nothing more aptly calculated to make the stoutest hearted shake in his boots!

Was it young Lonergan, sitting there not more than five feet from me, staring with moody eyes at the fire? Certainly it might have been, for his conduct needed explanation. Was it Eustace, lolling at ease on the green couch, with a callous disregard for what it had so lately held that would have done credit to a Borgia? Was it Elihu Dimuck fidgeting politely in a straight chair, crossing and recrossing his knees, rubbing his nose, passing a white handkerchief over and over his bald, shining head?

Or was it Isobel, curled now in an easy chair, her bare feet drawn up under the gaudy folds of the Chinese shawl, her streaked hair in a disheveled mop, her cheek bones sharp without the softening outline that her hair usually offered, her eyes clouded, and a perpetual cigarette between her lips, that were pallid now without their usual red salve? She had the capacity for it, if nothing else.

My eyes went on to Mittie. She was huddled bunchily under a beflowered cotton crêpe kimono that had seen better days and did not adequately conceal her shapeless figure, her hair hung in wisps, and her light eyes were staring from brown pockets and looked distracted. At the moment, her appearance was such as to make almost any act of desperation seem quite conceivable.

March was standing beside Mittie; she was straight

and white and very grave; she had not the look of a criminal, but she had resolution and there was always the scarlet rosette.

Or it might even be Kema who was squatting comfortably on the floor. There was a latent savagery in that dark, inscrutable face, though for what purpose she should set out on a career of violence was beyond my understanding.

I believe that they had been expecting O'Leary to return and make some kind of informal inquiry, although no one stirred when he returned. But at the end of some thirty minutes it appeared that everyone save myself had been peacefully and innocently asleep in his bed when the murder occurred, and only two things of any interest developed. One was that Deke Lonergan said nothing of his midnight trip to the telephone and the conversation that took place. And the other was the unexpected tale that Mittie, who was questioned last, told.

"I was asleep. The police whistle woke me, and as soon as I heard it blowing so shrill and loud all through the house I knew that something terrible had happened," she said. "I jumped out of bed and ran into the corridor. And I know that Eustace was not in his room, as he said he was, because I saw him come out of the trunk room!"

Eustace moved at that, shot her a malevolent look, and turned to O'Leary.

"It is perfectly true," he said. "I preferred not to tell you because, well—I have as much regard for my own skin as the next man, and it doesn't sound any too good for me! But, of course, you would tell if you

could, Mittie." He paused—to collect himself, I thought. "It was this way. I awoke possibly ten minutes before the murder was discovered—that is, before we heard the police whistle. I thought I heard voices in the bedroom above this one. So I slipped out of bed and into the corridor and went to the door—the door that was supposed to be locked." He paused again.

"Go on," said O'Leary.

"Well, I did hear voices, very low—just a sort of repressed jumble of words. Whoever was in there—I could tell there were two of them—seemed to be quarreling, and the only words I heard distinctly sounded like 'I will have the money.' I'm not sure, but that is what it sounded like. I think they began to fight. I could hear the sound of a struggle and then a heavy, dull noise and —gasps."

Mittie squealed and O'Leary asked dryly:

"And you made no effort to enter the room—stop the trouble?"

"Yes, I did. Naturally I waited a moment or two while I listened. I wanted to—get my bearings. And—I don't suppose you will believe it, but it is true—I had my hand on the doorknob and the door was unlocked. I was on the point of entering the room when something made me glance over my shoulder, down the hall, and I saw——" He cleared his throat and looked ill at ease. "You will not believe it, but I saw a shadowy sort of figure moving down near the head of the stairs. It seemed to be running and vanished into the trunk room before you could wink. I didn't stop to think. There was something about the way the thing was running that—well—I left the door and ran after it and

into the trunk room. It was black as tar in there and I couldn't hear a sound. But I kept on waiting, thinking I'd hear it moving about or—something. And after what seemed a long while I heard the police whistle and ran out." He shot another wicked look at Mittie.

"Who was in the corridor when you came out of the trunk room?"

"Mittie Frisling, at first. We started for the stairway. Then Dimuck and Deke were at our heels and then Isobel and March. We all hurried helter-skelter down the stairs and to this room."

"Then if one of them had preceded you into the trunk room you might not have seen him come out and into the corridor with the others?"

"No," said Eustace reluctantly. "But someone in the corridor surely did."

It appeared, however, that no one had, and I didn't know whether O'Leary believed Eustace's highly colored story or not. I could tell nothing from his tone or aspect.

"About how long were you in the trunk room?"

"I thought it was about ten minutes. I can't be sure. I wasn't exactly—easy, you know. I had no idea as to whom I had followed into that room, or what he might do."

"'He?'" queried O'Leary gently.

"You mean, was it a man or woman?" Eustace spread his delicate fingers helplessly. "I haven't the least idea. It was just a—running shadow. The corridor up there is very dark, you know. Only a candle or two to light it. The old gentleman—" he cast the face on the bed a disrespectful look—"that is, Grandfather, would

never permit any modern improvements. He seems to distrust them. Perhaps you've noticed that we have no electricity."

"Yes, I have noticed that," said O'Leary. "You are sure it was ten minutes that you waited there in the trunk room?"

"No, I'm not sure of anything. It might have been only three or four minutes. I was—well, I was—scared."

"Could you identify the voices in the bedroom?"

"No," said Eustace decidedly. "Never in the world."

"You are very positive about that," commented O'Leary softly. "Could you tell whether they were the voices of two men or two women—or a man and a woman?"

"Well"—— Eustace hesitated. To make his lie sound more plausible, I thought acidly to myself. "It was my impression that both voices belonged to men. But one of them might have been a woman's voice. A woman who was excited or frightened. It was that voice that said 'I will have the money.' And I suppose, of course, that the other voice was—Grondal's."

There was a curious little hush. I glanced about me. If Eustace were telling the truth one of the strained white masks that were our faces covered a fearful secret. Was any face more desperately intent on Eustace's words than another? My eyes went from one to another, half in eagerness, half in dread, lest I should surprise an ugly secret. But each was haggard, fearing, pale—and completely unfathomable.

"You did not rouse Mr. Lonergan when you got out of bed?" inquired O'Leary.

"No," replied Eustace smoothly. "You see, Deke

was sleeping in the room across the hall. There was a vacant bedroom there, and he decided last night to use it and not to share my room."

"Eustace snores," remarked Deke suddenly and flatly without taking his eyes from the carpet.

Eustace looked faintly embarrassed at this, which was a source of mean gratification on my part, and Isobel smiled thinly.

"Then you are sure that the bedroom above this one was, at that time, unlocked?"

"Positive," said Eustace, regaining his customary aplomb.

"And while you were in the trunk room anyone could have come into the corridor from that room, locked the door behind him, and made his escape without your seeing him?"

"I suppose so."

"How long were you gone from the room, Miss Keats?"

"Why, I—it's hard to say. Possibly ten minutes."

"Long enough for the struggle, of which Mr. Federie tells us, to take place, for Grondal to be killed, and the murderer to escape through the bedroom upstairs?"

"Y-Yes. I think so."

"You heard nothing, no sounds of a struggle, before you went to the telephone?"

"Not a sound."

"Then it all took place, apparently, after you had left this room and before you returned to it. The murderer, whoever it is, had luck on his side this time." O'Leary paused, his clear gray eyes shining with a strangely lucent look as if they saw far beyond ordinary

limits. "*This* time," he repeated slowly and gently enough, but his voice had an undercurrent that was icy cold and implacable.

For a long moment there was silence in the room. Then Lance O'Leary rose, looked at his watch, and spoke in a matter-of-fact way.

"That is all—now. You will all want to rest and have breakfast. There will be an inquest at eight o'clock. That gives you two hours. I shall have to ask that no one leave the place until I permit you to do so."

The dismissal was plain, to be sure, but scarcely peremptory enough to warrant the hurried way in which they, one and all, made for the door. It savored of a release; the room wasn't cheerful, of course, but I had the impression that it was O'Leary they wanted to escape rather than the ghost-ridden room.

"There is something I want to tell you," said March, halting the others with an imperative hand. "I have decided not to find another manservant until—until this trouble is over with. I think a stranger or two would only complicate matters." She glanced at O'Leary who nodded approvingly.

"Nonsense, March!" cried Eustace. "I'll send right away to an employment agency. We'd better get a man and an extra maid. I'll see to it."

"I said *I* had decided," said March in a tone that made no doubt of the matter. "And in the meantime—we will share Grondal's work between us. That is, *you* will share his work."

There was an instant's pause.

"And what will you do, March?" asked Isobel silkily.

"I shall see to it that the work is done," returned March, and meant it. And she quelled the little storm of protest that arose with as supremely insolent assurance as that of any pirate captain.

I smiled a little, as they finally straggled through the doorway, and Mittie Frisling's half-hearted grumbles died away in the distance. But the smile left my lips as I turned again to see the gloomy room, the lamps and candles pale and sickly in the dreary streaks of daylight. Two of the lamps had gone out—the two that had smoked so furiously—and the strong odor of burning oil wicks still lingered in the room. And there was no Grondal to clean the lamps and unlock and open the shutters.

Over there on the green couch I could still see, and always shall be able to see, a dreadful vision of the hunched, silent figure that did not move or speak.

CHAPTER XI

TWICE DEAD

LANCE O'LEARY was standing near the couch, looking thoughtfully at its faded, puffy, green plush upholstery.

"Mr. O'Leary," I began without preamble, "I want a good electric torch, a big one, and two policemen in this room to-night. Either that or I and my patient go to the hospital. This thing has gone too far."

"You shall have them, Miss Keate," he said at once. "I'll give you a revolver, too."

"Oh, I don't want a revolver." I shrank back from the ugly thing he was already holding out toward me. "I'm more afraid of the revolver than—that is, I'd prefer a good, stout stove poker. And I'll stay, of course. I have never yet left anything unfinished."

He smiled but said nothing, and I watched him poise the revolver on his palm and look at it contemplatively for a long moment before I asked the question that was trembling on my mouth.

"Have you found anything? Do you know who did it?"

"Well," he said slowly, "I have made a little progress." He spoke in the cordial, friendly way he used toward me, which always made me feel as if we were friends of long standing. As, indeed, we were. "A little

progress. It is a strange case, though, Miss Keate. You see, I feel sure that Adolph Federie and Grondal each met his death for the same reason and thus presumably by the same agencies. And Grondal—was killed twice."

"Twice! Why—why, what do you mean?"

"Twice," he repeated. "Somehow he received a blow over the heart that, according to our medical examiner, was sufficient to kill him almost at once. And yet within apparently the same ten minutes he was strangled with a violin string. Now, then, were there two people intent upon his death? Or did the same man who struck the first blow follow Grondal when he staggered downstairs to drop, dying, on the couch, and, fearful that death might not result, twist the violin string about his neck to make sure?"

"You say the 'man' who struck the first blow?"

"Yes, although it might not have been a man. Eustace seems to think it was a woman. It was a heavy blow such as might have been made by—" he glanced about him—"by a very heavy pair of fire tongs, for instance, or, better, a flatiron. He could even have fallen or been pushed, if with sufficient force, against a corner of—that mantel, for instance, if it were lower and received such a blow. It probably took place during the struggle Eustace told of. Of course, that was only the first, hurried report of our medical examiner. A later one may throw a clearer light on it. By the way, who plays the violin?"

"Eustace. At least I have not heard anyone else."

O'Leary walked over to the table and looked thoughtfully at the old violin.

"One string is gone."

I thought rapidly back to the night when Eustace had tuned the thing.

"There were four strings on it when Eustace played it. The night we heard the footsteps while we were eating. I distinctly remember Eustace tuning it. I thought he would never get it right and I remember the four notes."

"Then it is a possibility that the string came from here," commented O'Leary. "A weapon chosen on the spur of the moment. Well, if you can tell me who took the string—but, of course, you can't."

"Mr. O'Leary, have you no clue at all?" I asked desperately.

"Yes. I have a clue." He smiled wearily. "You gave it to me. But as to where it will lead I have only a small hint. Find me the possessor of the key to that upstairs room, Miss Keate. And find me——" He stopped abruptly, as if struck by a sudden thought, and presently continued soberly: "It is a bad business. I've got to worry the thing out some way. There is always a reason. A motivating force somewhere." He paused again, frowning a little. "Of course, you'll remember that Mittie Frisling heard Grondal tell of meeting her on the stairway the night Adolph was killed. But I scarcely think she would choke him with a violin string on account of that."

"He was worried, though, when he found that she had overheard him," I protested. "And Eustace said it might have been a woman up there with Grondal."

"And Eustace also said that the person who was there with Grondal said, 'I will have the money.' Did it

strike you as being very similar to Lonergan's promise over the telephone?"

"Oh. I—why, yes, of course." The connection was clear once O'Leary had pointed it out. Too clear. I rather liked young Lonergan in spite of his sulks.

"Worth considering, at least," said O'Leary. "Don't worry about the inquest. It will be of necessity merely a formality." With a little nod of farewell he walked to the door. There was something gone from the usual alert ease of his walk and in its place a less buoyant look of steadiness and of dogged purpose. It is difficult to think of slender, quick-moving Lance O'Leary as being dogged, but there it was nevertheless, as if his task grew more difficult and more distasteful with every hour.

The morning passed rapidly.

Autos came and went busily—police cars, reporters, and many curious sightseers who splashed along the muddy road to stare and point through the tall iron gate with morbid satisfaction. And eight or ten boys, newsboys and street urchins, I suppose, perched along the top of the brick wall staring through the fog with ghoulish delight and looking like wet, draggled little sparrows until a policeman ordered them away.

Once Eustace let loose a fury upon several reporters who got into the house, which sent them scurrying, intrepid though they are, as a class, for besides his temper, which was ugly enough, Eustace unleashed Konrad. Only a fool or an idiot would linger in the neighborhood of such a dog as Konrad, and reporters are neither. This drew a protest from March; Isobel, happening into the hall, had her say in the matter; Mittie came galloping from the library to fling hysterical insults in Isobel's

direction, and before I could reach the upper hall—I was going upstairs for fresh bed linen—Dimuck and Kema and Lonergan had turned up and they were all embroiled in one of those sudden, bitterly passionate outbursts that characterized the strange household.

I ascended the steps rather slowly, as becomes one of my age and weight, and heard the whole thing which ended only when March, her voice like a whiplash, ordered them all back to work.

The inquest was, as O'Leary had predicted, a formality; this fact did not prevent it, however, from being a very unpleasant formality, and I was relieved when it was over and it had been decided, with what struck me as rather marked expedition, that Jem Grondal had come to his death at the hands of a person or persons unknown.

The doctor was waiting for me when I returned to the tower room after the inquest. He had heard the news as, according to him, all B—— was ringing with talk of the two murders, and he was bursting with questions. Old Mr. Federie was distinctly better, he said, but I think it was only his very lively curiosity that kept him from ordering me and my patient to the safe confines of the hospital. The doctor lingered for some time, but a telephone call finally came for him from St. Ann's and he tore himself away.

The rest of the day following Grondal's death is characterized in my memory by several events, chief of which is, of course, my ill-advised trip to the attic and what came of it.

After the doctor left I lingered in the tower room, caring for my patient and straightening the disordered

room. It seemed very strange not to see Grondal going and coming with his antiquated carpet sweeper and duster, and when Eustace came in with an armload of wood, with Lonergan trailing after him, picking up the numerous pieces of wood that fell, and carrying a little broom with which he swept the hearth—and swept it most untidily, I must say—I found that I actually missed Grondal with his dark face and scar. He had made himself an important part of the household, an almost indispensable figure, and I began to feel that in suspecting the man I had cruelly misjudged him.

His death, too, had appreciably narrowed the range of suspects. And it was in thinking of these suspects that an amazing possibility occurred to me. It was equally amazing that it had not occurred to me sooner.

Was it possible that there was someone hiding in that great old house? Someone who had managed thus far to evade detection by ourselves and by the police?

I don't know whether this alarming idea was simply in answer to the need for a logical explanation of the ugly tangle, or whether it had been growing in my subconscious mind ever since the episode of the footsteps. At any rate, there it was, and I considered it cautiously and, I hoped, reasonably.

There were, first, those mysterious and unacknowledged footsteps. I did not for a moment believe that Kema had told O'Leary the truth when she said she herself had been upstairs, walking on the bare floor of that back corridor, for when she had talked to me I had been positive that she had not lied. Then there was that diabolical music coming from the library the day when everyone save Kema, my patient, and me had been at

Adolph's funeral. I had certainly not touched the piano, it could not have been my patient, I was equally sure that Kema was not thus gifted, and I did not even consider the policemen, one of whom had been under my eyes at the time. True, it strained credulity a little to take it for granted that some intruder—a professional thief, though he had apparently stolen nothing, or perhaps some unknown Federie enemy—should happen to choose to play the tune that was Eustace's favorite, and to play it with the same wickedly sympathetic touch that Eustace used, but I shrugged away from that line of thought.

There was, too, the matter of the vanishing toy elephant; this theory would explain its disappearance from the violin case at a time when everyone in the house had been under my very eyes. If such a secret intruder were actually in and about that old house, where assuredly there must be a multitude of hiding places, was he there with the connivance of another member of the household? And who *could* such an intruder be?

The question of his possible identity was highly problematical, and I did not try to guess its answer. But I knew that if there were such a person he must have had some help in getting in and out of the place, locked and guarded as it was. And immediately certain things occurred to me—the dog's barking at dinner that first night and March's agitation; and the second night Konrad had barked, too, just at dinner time again, which would be the best time in the world for someone to make an unobserved entrance into the house. March's surreptitious errand through the storm the night of Adolph's murder—had that been to lead someone past

the furious dog and to a hiding place outside the house which she knew would soon be searched? And Kema—why, of course, Kema was in the secret! Had she not covered March's flight by lying most villainously to the police? And had she not denied her presence on the second floor, the night we had heard someone walking there along the bare corridor and later, doubtless apprised by March of the need, had told O'Leary that she herself had walked there above our heads. Kema, whose tread was as noiseless and stealthy as any wildcat's!

Well, it was a fantastic idea, of course, in view of the fact that the whole house had been under police guard for some two days and nights and presumably thoroughly and completely searched. But I reminded myself that the truth is often unlikely, and by two o'clock, when March came to the tower room and offered to stay with her grandfather while I took my hours off, I was in a fever of impatience to prove or disprove the amazing possibility.

"I don't mind staying in the room," said March as I politely protested. "I am not afraid to be alone. And, anyway, there has been a very large policeman dogging my footsteps all day. I am sure he is somewhere within hailing distance." Her words were a bit flippant, but I think it was only a manner assumed to hide her horror and distress. There were faint purple shadows under her eyes, and she started nervously at every sound.

As I reached for the electric torch O'Leary had left for me on the table she clutched suddenly at my arm.

"If—if I could keep from seeing them! Grondal all huddled over there on that couch. And—and Uncle

Adolph on the stairway! It's his eyes. Uncle Adolph's! I keep seeing them. All the time." She twisted around to cast a shuddering look toward the couch and the angular stairway and all at once flung both hands to her eyes, pressing them hard against her face as if to shut out the fearful memory that haunted her. She stood there, shaking and trembling and drawing long, tremulous breaths

"Don't!" I said sharply, taking her cold little hands from her face and holding them firmly. "You are the only one in the house who can keep things going. Without you it would be a madhouse. You've got to keep up."

I think my words might have sounded more convincing had not Eustace's voice returned to my ears, saying with that faintly ironic inflection: "A Federie hand is born to fit the curve of a revolver," and "You afraid!"

But she stopped shivering and lifted her head; the taut lines of her mouth and chin and the terrible anxiety that lay in her darkly blue eyes were not nice to see in so young a face.

"You are right," she said, a touch of pride in her tone, though it was cold and even and joyless enough, too. "One must take these responsibilities. I am the head of the house while Grandfather is ill."

The hint of a bygone feudal age impressed me a little in its very inconsistency. There the child stood in her slim, smart little dress, her slender legs graceful under suave silk hose, her dark short hair in misty little curls and waves that were so soft you wanted to touch them with your hand as you do a baby's hair, and with a stern mouth announced that "one must take these re-

sponsibilities." What kind of family were these Federies?

"Don't wait, Miss Keate," went on March, keeping tight hold on her voice. "I am all right. It is only that—*that* happening to someone you know, someone in the family—and right here in the house where I have lived all my life——" She stopped abruptly, as if she dared say no more, and her eyes flickered nervously toward the stairway. Then she moved her head with an impatient little movement as if to tear her eyes and thoughts from that dread destination, and moved to a chair near her grandfather.

Well, for my part, I thought that almost anything that was sufficiently dark and evil might happen in that grim, muffled old house, but it did not become me to say so, and after giving March a few directions as to the care of my patient I took a firm grip on the flashlight and departed. As I pushed through the curtained doorway I collided forcibly with a policeman who must have been standing directly behind the curtain. He was inclined to be somewhat peevish about it, wanting to know in injured accents why I didn't look where I was going. He was standing on one foot, massaging the toes of the other as he spoke.

At the sound of the little commotion March came to the door, and the policeman, looking at once embarrassed and resentful, followed me across one of the drawing rooms. At the door of the second one I glanced back just in time to see his substantial bulk tiptoeing stealthily around the door into the little passage again.

In the entrance hall I came upon Mittie Frisling, something, I think, to her discomfiture, for she was doubled up with her knees and elbows on the floor and

her head down, squinting in an effort to see under the great walnut chest that stood against the north wall. Her slippers with their run-over heels had slipped back and the heels of her stockings needed mending. She did not hear me until I was within three feet of her when she looked around rather wildly and sneezed several times.

"I was looking for something," she said, pushing the hair away from her face with two very dusty hands.

I regarded her coldly and went on. As I was ascending the stairs I glanced over the railing, and it gave me a little start to see one of the green curtains over a doorway opposite move slightly and Isobel's face appear in the space like a painted mask. She was watching Mittie with a kind of savage, stealthy ferocity and did not see me at all.

As that day and the next wore away I was to perceive that everyone in the house seemed to be "looking for something," for I never saw such a frenzy of restless runnings-about and searchings and secretive expeditions into closed rooms as went on in that house. But of that, later.

I did not pause to consider that if my theory were correct I was undertaking a very dangerous mission. I did think once of waiting for O'Leary's counsel, but decided against it. I am willing now to admit that I acted hastily, but that is my nature.

Without any hesitancy I took my way to the trunk room.

There were two reasons why I chose the trunk room: it led to the attic and I had not entered it the day of Adolph's funeral when I had explored the rest of the

house. If the house had had a basement I should have started there, but it had none.

Furthermore, Eustace had said that he had seen someone enter the trunk room during the previous night, and while I did not wholly credit Eustace's tale, still there were little marks of truth about it.

I happened to look at my watch as I stood for a moment at the door, getting up my courage to enter. It was exactly ten minutes after two. And I did not emerge from that room until after six o'clock!

It still gives me cold chills to think of how and where I spent the intervening hours.

I took good care that no one should see me enter the room, a fact that I was to regret later on. And when I had whisked inside the door and closed it behind me I pressed the little button on the electric torch and turned the gleam of the light here and there.

It was a large room, high ceilinged, dark, and shadowy, with roughly plastered walls, but the name "trunk room" was only a fiction, for so far as I could see there was not a trunk in the whole room. Instead it was crowded with a heterogeneous collection of rubbish such as accumulates in an old house. There were plenty of nooks and corners where someone might lie concealed, but I decided to take a look in the attic before my courage, which had begun to dwindle the moment the stale, moldy smell of the place met my nostrils, had entirely ebbed away.

The steps that led to the attic were not prepossessing, being nothing more than a kind of ladder with flat, narrow steps instead of rounds, and not a sign of a railing other than the side pieces. I did not like the

looks of it; neither did I like the looks of the dark opening into the attic. But I turned the light once more about the room, advanced to the sinister-looking affair, and started resolutely upward, clutching the side of the ladder with one hand and holding the flashlight, which was heavy and substantial, in the other. It seemed a long time before I reached the opening above, but I finally did and stopped there with my feet on the ladder and my eyes just above the floor of the attic.

Fortunately, or rather unfortunately as it proved, the trapdoor of the opening was pulled back on its hinges and held by a rope which was fastened to a hook in a near-by studding. The rays of the light revealed none too promising a sight, but I went on, crawling with some difficulty through the opening before I really took stock of the situation.

The house was bad, but the attic was worse. Far worse!

It was an enormous place, stretching away in three different directions, into very dark shadows. It was not wholly floored, and there were loose planks leading out toward the massive black outlines of chimneys here and there, and tiny gray windows at the far ends of the place. Long cobwebs, hung with the dust of years, clung to the beams and gave the place a ghostly, wraith-like appearance, and there was a dankly musty odor that suggested mildew and decay and was most unpleasant.

I stood there for a time, turning the light here and there about the cavernous blackness and staring wildly into the shadows that its gleam scarcely penetrated. All at once some small black creature darted from a

corner and began swooping in swift circles about my head, making glancing shadows among the thin rays from the light which completed my demoralization. My courage didn't ebb away; it was simply gone and I was desperately and horribly afraid. My knees were weak, my hands and face felt damp and cold, and my heart was racing furiously, its rapid thuds seeming loud in that hushed place.

There was a claptrap of broken-legged tables, chairs with sagging springs, old lamps festooned with dust and cobwebs, and such things as gather in the attic of an old house. Quite near me was a piano stool upholstered in faded red plush; it was of the type that screws around, which pianists of thirty years back used to twirl with much éclat before they sat down to render musical selections. It was the nearest thing at hand, so I sat down upon it, feeling actually as if my knees could not hold me upright another moment. The bat, for such I judged the circling thing above me to be, bothered me and I ducked my head nervously every time it swooped past me and wondered when the creature would dart into my hair and tangle itself there, as I've always been told is its nefarious habit.

I tried to take longer breaths, but my heart pounded as furiously as ever, and it occurred to me that if the murderer were concealed behind one of those great chimneys he might suddenly step out and confront me. Or, worse, he might even now be crawling stealthily toward me, ready to spring. And with the thought I felt something crawling on my wrist, looked down and saw an enormous spider with furry legs. I sprang to my feet with a stifled scream and brushed wildly at the thing

with the flashlight. I broke the crystal of my watch and the button on the light slipped, leaving me in impenetrable darkness, and I stumbled, catching at the top of the piano stool as I fell.

And I found the elephant!

Yes, I did.

It was hidden under the torn plush of the stool, and when my groping fingers touched its smooth, cold surface and followed its delicate outlines to the ears and curled-back trunk, I knew immediately what I had found. The piano stool had seemed extraordinarily lumpy, I recalled dazedly, when I sat on it, but I was then in no frame of mind to note such a thing as mere discomfort. Somehow, in clutching at the stool, my fingers had found the long rent in the upholstery, encountered the elephant's polished surface, and—there it was.

At once I comprehended the importance of what I had literally stumbled upon, and simultaneously I perceived the danger of my position. I was afraid to turn on the flashlight again and thus illumine myself, and my only desire was to escape. The opening into the room below was near me, and it was an easy matter to find it.

Now it has always been difficult for me to descend a ladder, particularly to get started. Darkness and fright confused me a little, too, and what with feeling into the darkness below me with my foot for the first step and being quite sure that something would reach either up from the trunk room to clutch my foot, or down from the attic to choke me, and with holding the flashlight in one hand and the cold little elephant in the other,

and with trying to balance myself on the narrow little steps—what with all that it is no wonder the thing happened, though, to this day, I don't know just how it came about.

But all at once, without the least warning, the trapdoor came down. It was only owing to the fact that I had lowered my head in a fruitless effort to peer into the blackness below me that I escaped being brained then and there. The door made quite a thud as it hit and clouds of dust must have risen, for I had difficulty in breathing. But the really terrible thing was that somehow in its descent it had caught a fold of my dress and held it fast.

And there I was.

I transferred the elephant to my teeth and pulled and tugged and pushed, but could neither lift the trapdoor nor release my uniform. And it was no use trying to tear the garment as it was one of a new set I had recently had made of the firmest cloth, warranted to wear. I was held as in a vise in the most awkward position in the world.

Suppose I should lose my balance on the ladder and dangle in mid-air suspended by that outrageously solid uniform! Suppose there was someone hiding in the black void below me! Suppose no one missed me and I hung there a prisoner for hours above that stifling, ghostly room! Below that still ghostlier attic! A hundred such suppositions surged through my mind before all at once I stopped trying to free myself and froze into immobility, straining my ears to listen as if my life depended upon what I should hear.

From somewhere below me in that black void came the sound of a cautious, stealthy movement!

It is no exaggeration to say that the blood fairly curdled in my veins, for that is exactly what it feels like, and is due, I suppose, to your heart seeming to stop.

It came again—an unmistakable rustle and sound of something moving in the corner just below me.

And in a very frenzy of cold terror my hand grasped the flashlight tighter and hurled it in the direction of that cautious sound!

I had acted instinctively and the instant the flashlight left my hand I knew that I had made a mistake. Especially as there was a kind of thud and then dead silence.

What was there? Who was it? Was he waiting till I felt secure enough to descend the ladder? Did he know I was a prisoner there? Was it one of the family? Was it the mysterious intruder I had expected to discover? Why did he make no further sound? Had I managed to strike him with the flashlight?

It is true that I have usually a good aim, especially with a fly swatter, but still I did not think that in the dark my impulsively chosen weapon could have hit its mark.

But, above all, what could I do?

After æons of time, during which no further sound came from the corner below me, I struggled out of my uniform. It was the only thing to do and I did it coldbloodedly; it was buttoned from hem to collar, else it would have been impossible.

Then, free from the trapdoor, I debated whether or

not to make a sudden dash for the door into the corridor. If the thing, whatever it was, had been in the far corner of the room, I should have risked it, but, as it was, he could reach the foot of the ladder before I could do so. That is, if he were not knocked senseless by the heavy flashlight, and I considered it highly improbable that the thing had come near him.

After a period of time that might have been shorter than it seemed I turned very cautiously around and sat down on one of the steps—if you can call it sitting. And, believe it or not, I sat there for three mortal hours! Cramped, cold, numb. Afraid to go down and afraid to go up. Alternately afraid I had killed the thing below me and afraid I had not!

Three hours of sitting on a ladder under such circumstances is a hideous ordeal, and a woman of less than an iron constitution must have toppled over at the end of the first hour. But it is surprising to what lengths of endurance we can go under the pressure of grim necessity.

During the last hour or so I began to feel that if the thing below me were actually the murderer of Adolph Federie and Grondal, I would almost rather risk a sudden death than be overtaken by a lingering one, as I certainly should be if I sat on that ladder much longer. I remember that I had figured out a quite touching scene to take place when they found my lifeless body, with the green elephant clutched in my cold hand, showing that I had been faithful to the last. And I was glad that I was wearing my best crêpe de Chine underslip.

It was just then that without warning the door into

the corridor opened. The faint light streaming into the shadows had silhouetted against it a broad, squat figure.

"Kema! Kema!" I cried. My voice was hoarse and cracked.

She made a quick motion as if to close the door, and I cried again, hoping as I did so that the thing that lay below me had no revolver: "Kema, wait! Open the door! Call the police!"

She uttered an exclamation, which I lost in my attempt to scramble down the ladder. Somehow I managed to stumble on numb feet to the corridor.

Someone was approaching us down the green gloom of the corridor from a half-open bedroom door; it was Elihu Dimuck and he hurried his steps as he saw me.

"Call the police," I kept repeating. "There's someone in that room. Call the police!"

"What is it? What has happened?" cried Elihu Dimuck, and Isobel coming from the head of the stairway paused to survey me with a gleam of insolent amusement in her eyes. Behind the lace drapery of the gown she wore I saw Kema's dark arm reach out stealthily and close the door to the trunk room.

"What on earth!" said Isobel. "Really, Miss Keate, did you—forget your dress?"

"Get the police," I insisted, uneasily conscious of my petticoat, and then became aware of a curious silence. All three of them, Elihu Dimuck and Kema and Isobel, were looking steadily at the green elephant in my hand!

Well, it was a good ten minutes before the two policemen, whom Mr. Dimuck finally summoned, searched the trunk room and presumably the attic. They found nothing. I think they did not even believe

my story and had the impression that they made only a half-hearted search of the place, attributing the whole affair to my nerves. Nerves, indeed!

I remember that I retreated with some dignity, under their somewhat curious gaze, to my own room. I groped for matches, lighted the lamp, and stared at the little elephant which I still clutched firmly in one hand. I turned and twisted it. But again I was baffled by its green smoothness. The very simplicity and triviality of the thing defeated me. It was like shaking a doll and demanding that it babble secrets of life. The only thing I knew certainly was that it must have some meaning.

Perhaps if I had had longer to examine the elephant—but I did not have much time. I must hurry to dress and go downstairs. I must find O'Leary.

I met my face in the mirror and laughed wildly.

My hair hung in wisps about my grimy face, my cap perched perilously over one ear, I was streaked with dust and perspiration, several gray cobwebs floated eerily from my hair, and my best petticoat was all barred and blotched with dust.

It was no wonder the policemen had given such half-hearted credence to my story, for if any woman ever looked entirely demented I did at that moment.

I laughed again rather hysterically.

A fine-looking corpse I should have made, I must say!

CHAPTER XII

A MATTER OF HISTORY

On going downstairs I wrapped the green elephant securely in the scarf I was knitting and sallied forth with the roll of orange wool under my arm. I took the roll of wool to dinner with me, too, and kept it on my lap during the entire meal.

I suppose that meal was as uncomfortable as all the other meals in that gloomy dining room, but I was hungry and tired and I concentrated on the food. Isobel served, slapping things down with an air of insolent nonchalance calculated, I think, to irritate March, and slipping into her place between courses and having to be asked to remove the plates. At dessert she balked entirely.

"It is stewed prunes again," she said languidly. She rose and trailed out of the room, murmuring over her creamy shoulder as she went: "If any of you want stewed prunes you can go and get them yourself."

Mittie, it appeared, did want them and got them and created a little diversion by choking on a prune seed and having to be patted on the back. I did the patting and, having no love for Mittie, may have patted rather vigorously. At any rate, the prune seed flew out with an explosive little pop and landed on Eustace's plate. His face darkened in a flash; he threw down his napkin,

shoved back his chair so forcefully that it crashed over, flung out a word or two that I shall not repeat, and left the room without even a glance of apology toward March.

March's eyes flashed from under stormy eyebrows; Elihu Dimuck made a deprecatory gesture with his two pink hands, and Deke Lonergan laughed. It was a hearty, ringing laugh of purest delight and quite astonished me, for it was the first time I had ever seen the man cast aside his cloak of sulky brooding. March gave him a curious look and lowered her satin-smooth eyelids slowly and deliberately, and he leaned toward her suddenly, blond hair catching highlights from the tall candles, and gray eyes darkly intent as he said something I could not hear distinctly.

Not caring myself for prunes I left the dining room, going by way of the little passage toward the tower room.

I walked along rather slowly, holding the roll of knitting under one arm, thinking of Eustace's vile temper and having no premonition of danger. I was just passing the curtained door into the drawing room off the passage and was about to turn into the tower room when without an instant's warning the green velvet curtain over the drawing room doorway was flung over my head and shoulders and twisted there. I struggled violently, but the roll of knitting was dragged from my grip and I was left alone, pulling at the curtain and trying to scream through its stifling folds.

It was over and done with in a quick moment or two, and it couldn't have taken me more than a few seconds to extricate myself from the enveloping folds of velvet.

Apparently no one had heard the struggle and my stifled cries. The passage and the drawing room were dark, and I ran to the tower room, seized a lamp, and hurried back. By the time I held the lamp high in one hand and under its light objects in the drawing room took on shape there was no one there. But in the middle of the floor, bright against the dull carpet, lay a spot of brilliant orange wool.

I picked it up; the needles were dangling, stitches had been pulled out, and a long thread of orange yarn went almost to the opposite door and back again in a long, raveled thread. But the green elephant was gone.

Again!

Twice I had had the thing in my hand and twice it had been taken from me. The first time I had been careless, it is true, but at that time I did not comprehend the importance of the toy. And this time I had not been careless.

There was no use sounding an alarm, for any one of that household might conceivably have taken the thing. Feeling singularly disorganized, I retreated to the tower room where I soothed my shattered self-esteem by picking up stitches in my knitting, thought very bitter thoughts, and gradually resumed control over my shaking nerves.

It was there that Lance O'Leary found me some thirty minutes later. He gave me one look, sat down, folded his arms, stretched out his feet to the fire, and said severely:

"What is all this the policeman upstairs has been telling me? Come, now, Sarah Keate—just what have you been up to?"

Nothing loath, I told him the whole story, and when I finished he was sitting bolt upright in his chair, surveying me with a look that held mingled awe and apprehension.

"You are a dangerous woman," he said. "You are an active peril. But may I touch you for luck?" He reached over and lightly touched my hand.

"Luck!" I said scornfully. "Luck? When I've had that silly curio in my very hands and not only failed to find anything of importance about the toy but actually permitted myself to be robbed of it?"

"Luck because you are still here, alive and uninjured," he said very gravely.

"Then you think the man in the trunk room might have been the murderer?" My heart quickened.

"At any rate, there was someone there who took good care that he shouldn't be seen. Though, of course, he might have been as frightened as you were. You think it was some outsider, no one of the household?"

"Well—" I hesitated—"my theory was that it was some intruder. Not a thief, perhaps, for nothing apparently has been stolen except the green elephant, but some—intruder. That is what I started out to prove, if I could. And when I stumbled onto the elephant itself in the attic and knew that someone was in the trunk room I just took it for granted that I was right. But, of course, I'm certain only that it couldn't have been Kema or Isobel or Mr. Dimuck. And another thing, whoever was there took good care not to be found by the policemen, but they did not make a very thorough search. I think they didn't wholly believe my story, and I dare say it does sound improbable."

"Not if they knew you as I do," murmured Lance O'Leary. "Then Kema and Isobel and Dimuck all knew that you had found the elephant?" He rose and started toward the door. "I'll be back in a few moments, Miss Keate."

And it was not more than a quarter of an hour before he was back in the tower room, an enigmatic look on his face.

"For once everybody has a perfect alibi. They seem to have all taken a fancy for the tower room here, and between four and five o'clock this afternoon every one of them were here having tea, which Kema served. And between four and five o'clock this afternoon you were—sitting on a ladder. Also, to-night when the green elephant was taken from you—and you are lucky that you weren't strangled in the process—at that time everyone save Isobel and Eustace were in the dining room. So either Eustace or Isobel took the elephant or—the fellow you thought was in the trunk room. I hope you'll not think I'm blaming you when I say that you carried it rather obviously—obviously, I mean, to anyone who knew you had the thing."

"At least I did find it!" I remarked waspishly, and O'Leary smiled.

"You did, Miss Keate."

"Then you believe that there is an outsider about the place? What on earth is his purpose?"

"It is just possible," assented O'Leary. "But if I knew the motive of these crimes I should have the criminal in my hands. If there is anyone hiding about the place, it is with Miss March's assistance; that is why I have had her watched so closely. Of course, I

might have had out twenty men or so; there must be countless hiding places about the house, and it would take that many men, I think, to lay our hands on the gentleman. Finesse is better than force, as a rule."

"H'm! I must say, I think it would be better to search for the man and lock him up at once."

"On what grounds, Miss Keate?" inquired O'Leary gently. "And, anyway, there may be no such person. Can you be absolutely sure that he was below the ladder there in the trunk room during those hours when you heard no sound or stir?"

"I certainly am sure," I snapped. "I should have seen him open the door to the corridor if he had done so. I should have heard his first move."

"You didn't close your eyes from weariness, for instance? It was very dark, you said—if there happened to be no light in the corridor, couldn't he have got to the door and out without your seeing him?"

"No," I said positively. "He could not. Its being dark didn't affect my ears, and I could have heard a pin drop."

O'Leary sat down, drawing the worn pencil from a pocket and beginning to roll it between his slender, well-cared-for fingers.

"There are things about this business that I can't—can't get a grip on. The night Grondal was killed I had a kind of feeling of danger, but there was nothing definite. Lightning seldom strikes twice in the same place, and I had nothing to warrant my saying to the chief, 'Here, I want a whole detachment of men at the Federie place to-night; my nerves tell me that something may happen.' You see, Miss Keate, it is an affair that is a little

out of the ordinary. Usually in criminal investigation the crimes occur within circles that are criminal circles, or that touch criminal circles. Tips come to us. We can lay our hands on men who can tell us things. And usually the issues at stake can be discovered. But this business is entirely different. It appears to be wholly within a family connection. And I cannot discover the motive. Unless I found a hint of it this afternoon." He passed his hands over his face with a wearied gesture.

"Do you suppose, Miss Keate, the time ever comes in a man's life when he can look back on a completed task and see that he has made no mistakes?"

"It has been only a day or two," I said dryly. "What do you expect? Some of these cases drag out for months. What was it you discovered this afternoon?"

"In the first place, I found that the tradesmen—grocers, butchers, and all—that deal with Mr. Federie are always paid in cash. Never by check. Grondal, it appears, went around every month with a pocketful of silver and bills and paid everything, taking receipts. This looked strange, and pursuing the matter I found that there is not a bank in the city that has ever done business with the Federies. And that, furthermore, the only deed on record that shows the Federie name is the abstract for this house, made out in 1880 in the name of Deborah Federie—that was old Mr. Federie's wife, I found—and it was transferred at the time of her death to March Federie, who was then exactly six years old. As a family they are singularly obscure; this old house, the manner in which it is furnished and all would lead one to think that years ago they were of some importance. But I could discover nothing of interest

about them even from the old-timers here in B——, until I went to old Miss Van Guilder."

He paused, looking at me inquiringly. I knew old Miss Van Guilder as everyone in B—— knew her; she was an eccentric old lady whose memory was surprisingly clear and whose chief interest lay in the historical foundations of B—— where her father had been an early judge.

"Even she knew nothing of the Federies that we did not know. But she did unearth some old newspapers, and among them I found a singular reference to the Federie house. I didn't dare clip it, for she was watching me sharply, but I copied it. It seems to have been made in the robustly jocular spirit employed by the early newspapers in this part of the country. Listen to this: 'The magnificent new Federie mansion is nearing completion. We have been told that masks and pistols will be discarded during meals. Verily the wages of sin is wealth. Travelers are warned to take other than the Aufengartner Road.' And it was dated February 9, 1880."

"What does it mean? Let me see it!" I read with my own eyes the rather amazing item, copied in O'Leary's neat handwriting. "Why—it sounds very much as if they were—*thieves!*"

O'Leary nodded, gray eyes faintly amused.

"Highwaymen, bandits, whatever you want to call them. Editors were free with their words in those gallant days, and I rather believe this gentleman was speaking the truth. I trust it was only a coincidence that he died suddenly within the next month, according to a later notice I found." He eyed the face of old Mr.

Federie. It looked flushed, of course, but the slight distortion of mouth was disappearing and the features were rugged and fine against the white pillow. "Can you imagine him, Miss Keate, sallying forth in the dark of night, masked and armed, and ordering wayfarers to 'Stand and deliver!'"

Well, I could imagine it readily enough as I looked at his indomitable eyebrows and domineering chin and nose. While I had had strange patients I never before had an ex-highwayman and I hope it is no reflection on my character to say that I regarded him with the liveliest interest from that moment on.

"But even if we are to accept this defunct editor's words as truth and concede that the Federies were bandits, and add to this the fact that they pay their bills in cash which argues a supply of money somewhere about the house—then what do we have? Nothing. Someone might be determined to get hold of that money and in the doing so must needs murder two men. But it isn't reasonable. Adolph had no money. Grondal had none. This silly elephant isn't reasonable, either. I have learned more about art in the last few days than I ever knew in my life before, and there's nothing I can discover that would lead me to think that the curio is in itself valuable. I've read, talked to jewelers, the curator of the museum, and every collector in B——, and I've come to the conclusion that if the elephant is really jade it is fairly valuable as a piece of art, but by no means of a value to cause a man to commit murder for its possession. No, it must have another meaning."

"March said it was to belong to her after her grandfather's death," I said thoughtfully. "She has been

inquiring for it. And I caught Mittie Frisling down on her knees in the hall, looking under that big walnut chest. Of course, she might not have been looking for the elephant. But, Mr. O'Leary, what about the man who is hiding in the house? Aren't you going to arrest him? It seems to me we are all in danger so long as he is left at large."

"Always assuming that there is such a person. There, there, Miss Keate! Don't look so indignant. Just trust me for another day or so. I have things to do that—take a little time. And I'll tell you this: You, yourself, gave me the only real clues I have."

He would say nothing more on the subject, and though I racked my memory I could not recall any occurrence which seemed to hold a particular or clinching significance.

"In assuming that both murders were committed by the same person and for the same motive, I believe that I am correct. And I think that the solution of the affair lies right here in this old house. Oh, I don't mean any hidden stairway or secret panels or anything of the kind," he interpolated with a half smile, as I supposed I looked the curiosity that I certainly felt. "I mean among the rather curious members of the household. I shall not say family, for that would exclude Mr. Dimuck and Miss Frisling and Kema and young Lonergan. At various times during the last day or two I have questioned the people in the house, separately and collectively, and I think that almost every single one of them has lied to me in some degree. Yes, even your Miss March—oh, you need not try to conceal your partiality for her, Miss Keate—even your Miss

March is concealing something, though she evades an out-and-out lie with a dexterity that does credit to her lawless ancestry. The lies have been almost as interesting as the truth, but from now on I'm going to have the truth. And Mittie Frisling is the first who's going to come across," he concluded somewhat flippantly.

"I shall bring her in here to talk, Miss Keate, if that is all right."

I nodded perhaps a bit enthusiastically, for he smiled a little as he left the room.

While waiting for them to return I busied myself with my patient. I have often thought how fortunate it was, in view of the startling developments of the case, that my patient required as little care as he did; had it been pneumonia, for instance, or a surgical case or one of heart disease or, in fact, almost any other affliction, I could scarcely have left his side. But, as to that, later events proved that had he been conscious at least some of the trouble would not have taken place.

His condition was improving. I remember that as I stood there with my fingers on his pulse I looked idly at his hand—a rather nice hand, wrinkled with age and with prominent veins and tendons, but well shaped and the hand of a man who knows his mind. How many times had it held a menacing revolver, or looted travelers' pocketbooks? "The Federie hand is born to fit the curve of a revolver." If this were true Eustace had spoken with justice.

It all fitted in rather well. The magnificent house, the labored respectability when once the Federie before me had decided to take to more lawful ways, the books, the pictures, the knickknacks, all evidences of what was

called refinement in those strenuously artificial days. The old man's stern bringing up of his sons, his refusal to countenance their misdeeds, his feudal rule of family, natural in one who had controlled a bandit gang, and his rigid clinging to the formalities and ceremonies of what constituted his idea of a respectable life—all this was what one would expect. "Defense mechanism," I thought wisely to myself.

The days when the Federie house must have been built were lawless ones in our part of the country if tales of those early times can be believed. Of what moonlight expeditions could this man, whose wrist I held, tell? What flurries of horses' hoofs, shots in the night, shrieks and oaths from overturned stagecoaches, gold and silver and jewels glimmering in the starlight! "Masks and pistols will be discarded during meals," the departed editor had said with grim sarcasm. And "travelers are warned to take other than Aufengartner Road."

I had to take the man's pulse three times before I could be sure I had counted it with due attention. I was changing the ice pack when Mittie was ushered into the room. She gave me an unpleasant look from her light eyes, but took the chair O'Leary offered her without demur.

"Now, then, Miss Frisling, I'll have the truth, please," he began without preamble. There was a certain steely edge in his quiet voice that sounded forbidding. "Look at me, please. You stood behind that green curtain over the door the night Adolph Federie was shot. You saw him fall. You turned and ran through the back of the house and up the back stairway. You hurried along the corridor of the back wing, turned

into the main corridor, and dodged into the vacant bedroom near at hand to avoid meeting anyone in the hall as you would have if you had continued down the hall to your own room. You left a revolver in that room! *You shot Adolph Federie!*"

At his first words Mittie had turned an ugly greenish yellow, and as his inexorable voice went on her fat hands began to writhe in her lap and her light eyes grew wild with panic.

"I didn't!" she cried hoarsely. "I didn't."

"You did. You stood back of the curtain. You saw Adolph on the stairway over there. You raised the revolver and——"

Mittie began to shriek.

"I did not! I did not! Grondal told you that! I heard him!" She half rose from her chair, her head thrusting forward and her eyes glittering. Then she sank back with a cowering movement. "Oh, I did stand there back of the curtain. But *I* didn't shoot him. It was someone from up there. From the tower stairway. I saw him fall. He—he clutched at the air. The elephant rolled down the stairs. And Adolph fell. And rolled a step or two. He—he clutched at the air, I tell you." She was shuddering and panting, now, and Lance O'Leary, with a curious look on his face, watched her carefully.

"Why were you standing there at the curtain?" he said presently when she had quieted a little.

"Because I—I wanted to find out if Mr. Federie was really sick and not able to speak. He had promised me—something. And then they said he was sick. I watched the nurse. I thought I would wait till I thought she was

asleep and then I would slip into the room and speak to Mr. Federie. And I saw Adolph come down the tower stairway; he came very cautiously, a step at a time. The nurse didn't hear him; her face was in the shadow and I couldn't see it. Adolph went to the mantel and looked at everything there and finally picked up a little green elephant that stood there. He looked at it under the lamplight for a moment or two and then he did something to it—I don't know what. It looked like he was unscrewing something about it, for I could see his elbow move. Then he had a little piece of white paper in his hand and he bent over, there under the lamp, and seemed to read it."

"Just where did he stand?"

"There, by that table."

"So he could be seen from the top of the stairway," murmured O'Leary rather absently. "Go on, Miss Frisling."

My interest had quickened, if that were possible, at the mention of the green elephant, and I stole a look at Lance O'Leary. He was leaning forward, his eyes shining with that strangely lucent look, his whole being intent on the words that came in rushing, spasmodic little bursts from Mittie's pale mouth.

"And then all at once he sort of—jumped and looked upward toward the second landing of the tower stairway. And I think he put the little paper back inside the elephant and screwed the thing together again. I couldn't see very well because he turned so that he stood with his back to the lamp. And then he walked back to the stairway so quietly I could not hear a sound. And it was just as he reached the turn of the stairway

that—that—I can't tell it! *I can't tell it!* I've seen it ever since. Over and over. But it was Isobel. I know it was Isobel!"

Again O'Leary waited until Mittie had stopped beating her hands on her fat knees and had taken a limp handkerchief from her bosom and was dabbing at her eyes.

"How long have you known Isobel?"

"Since Adolph married her. He was too good for her."

"How long have you known the Federies?"

She held her handkerchief suspended while she shot him a swift look in which a new alarm seemed to leap.

"A—long time."

"The truth, Miss Frisling."

"Since—since I was a child."

"What were your father's relations to Mr. Federie, that you have a claim on him?"

"A—a claim? Why—why, he was just a friend."

"How old was your father when he died?"

"Up—up in the seventies."

"You have doubtless heard him tell tales of his youth in this part of the country. How he belonged to——"

Mittie jumped up. I think she knew what was coming.

"So was Mr. Federie," she cried incoherently. "And the Federies took almost all the money when the—the gang broke up. And they have still got it. My father was one of them, but you can't do anything to *me! I* haven't anything. When Mr. Federie dissolved them, he took almost all the money. He said he was the leader and it belonged rightfully to him. But he always supported my father. And—and me."

"So upon your father's death you felt justified in coming to old Mr. Federie here to—blackmail him?"

"I only wanted what was mine."

"It never occurred to you that your threats were empty? That it would have been impossible after fifty years to find witnesses or evidence that could convince any court in the country?"

"I only wanted what was rightfully mine," she repeated, adding spitefully, "The Federies have always thought they were so much! That March with her high and mighty ways! And they were no better than the rest of us. All robbers! And March is the granddaughter of—a *thief!*"

"Let's say highwayman, Miss Frisling. After all, it is half a century past. By the way, are there any other surviving members of the gang?"

"Only Mr. Federie," said Mittie. "Since Grondal—died."

"Does the present generation of the Federie family know its history?"

"You mean March and Eustace? I think Eustace had a hint of it from Adolph. But I'm sure that March does not know it—*yet.*" There was an ugly satisfaction in the threat of the last word.

"You knew Adolph Federie—rather well?"

Slowly the ugly look died out of her queer, light eyes.

"Yes," she said slowly. She sat down again and her puffy fingers began to fold and refold a bit of her dress. "Yes. I knew him. Rather well."

"When was that?"

"Years ago. He used to come to see my father. And—and me. Then all at once he married Isobel. We were

not even invited to the wedding." Her voice was torpid, almost stupid, as if any glow of resentment had burned out long ago. But she still hated Isobel!

"We were never invited to this house. Not since I can remember, and that is——" She left the point of her age untouched and went on: "I never saw March Federie until she came home a few days ago. I came here when Father died. Adolph and Isobel came, too. Adolph—didn't remember me." Her flat voice stopped rather oddly, without a period or a note of finality. Her whole frowsy, inept life, its fires banked with brooding, was summed up in the dull, emotionless words: "Adolph didn't remember me."

And she had seen him die. She had seen his hand clutch futilely into the air.

One of his hands had got March's red rosette in its frenzied clutch.

CHAPTER XIII

A BEAD BOX

"GRONDAL, of course, knew the whole thing?" said O'Leary.

"Yes," replied Mittie simply, her dull eyes on the fire.

"And what were you looking for this morning that you thought might be under the chest in the hall?"

She did not look at me.

"The little green elephant, of course. Adolph had it in his hand when he was shot. I think—" she wrinkled her forehead in a puzzled way—"I think everyone else is looking for it, too. But I couldn't find it. Anywhere."

"Why did you think everyone is looking for it?"

She shrugged lifelessly.

"They are looking for something," she said, and stopped.

"You saw no one on the tower stairway above Adolph? Think, Miss Frisling. A hand—the revolver—the shadow of a—skirt?"

She shook her head.

"I saw nothing but Adolph. Isobel must have been above him, out of sight on the stairway. It was all so sudden, so unexpected. One instant Adolph was there, walking up the steps. The next——" She shuddered and covered her face with her hands.

The green curtain wavered and lifted; Eustace cast a quick, sharp glance about the room and entered.

"Good-evening, O'Leary," he said. "Ah, Miss Keate, how is Grandfather?"

"A little better, I think."

He looked thoughtfully at me, his dark eyes secretive.

"Is there a chance that he will recover his speech soon?"

"Why, yes, I think so. But we cannot know definitely when—or even if he will do so."

"I hope you'll remember to call me at once, Miss Keate, when there is a change for the better. It is most important. And, by the way, Nurse, there was a little green elephant on the mantel when you came. It has been missing for a day or two. It was of no particular value in itself, but—Grandfather is attached to it. I should like to find it. He may want it when he recovers consciousness. It was a little jade trinket. Do you know anything of it?"

"No," I said flatly, avoiding O'Leary's eyes. And, as far as that goes, I did not know anything of it at the moment. The thought struck me that Eustace himself might have taken it from me; it would be like him to try to cover his possession of the elephant with an inquiry such as this.

"If you should happen to find the elephant, give it to me at once." He spoke in the distantly polite manner he would have used toward a maidservant and crossed to a chair, sitting down casually and asking O'Leary how the investigation was going. In a moment or two Isobel drifted into the room with Elihu Dimuck and presently March came in also and sat down beside me. After a

little Mittie rose, left the room, and returned with the little tin box in which she kept her beads, and I idly watched her fingers weaving glittering black beads, the four small knitting needles catching dull gleams of light. Gradually her hands ceased trembling.

Deke Lonergan came to the tower room, too, lounging to a chair near March. He seemed engrossed in his own problems, though, and said nothing until Genevieve stalked gauntly into the room and, in misplaced affection, jumped to Lonergan's knee. And then he only uttered a startled and disgusted exclamation and thrust the cat violently to the floor.

A policeman coming to the door interrupted the somewhat desultory conversation that was going on between Eustace and Dimuck with an occasional word from O'Leary, who seemed to prefer listening to them to talking himself. The policeman's eyes sought O'Leary's and he held a white something under one arm.

"Nothing, sir," he said, as if giving a report. "Nothing but this." He extended the white something, holding it gingerly by the tips of his fingers.

It was my own uniform. His eyes shifted to me and became suspicious and faintly reproachful.

"I found this, too, sir," he added, holding out O'Leary's flashlight. "They both was in that room."

"I'll speak to you in a moment, O'Brien," cut in O'Leary's voice. He gave me a glance that held a gleam of amusement as he crossed the room. I could hear a low murmur of voices as he and O'Brien walked away through the passage.

It was a long evening, with little said, and the air of tense restraint that hovered over the whole house

made itself manifest in the long silences. It was quite as if any sudden word would release all the surging, pent-up emotions that were held in reserve and set them into fierce, clashing turmoil.

I knit rapidly, the little click-click of my needles carrying on a sort of duel with the subdued tinkle of Mittie's beads. It was about ten o'clock, I think, that I ran out of yarn and went to my own room for a new skein. I took a candle and walked circumspectly through the gloomy rooms and corridor and I listened every second for any untoward sound. When I opened the door of my room I stood there quite motionless for a moment or two, staring with all my eyes at the amazing disorder that, since I left the room just before dinner, had overtaken my neatly arranged possessions.

For the room had been thoroughly and completely ransacked. Its entire contents were flung recklessly about—fresh uniforms tossed in a heap on the floor, and a bottle of lavender water on the bureau was on its side, with the liquid meandering gayly over the top of the bureau. It only goes to show the state of mind I had reached when I admit that I did not even set that bottle upright, and the next day I found quite a red spot on my hand where the hot wax had dripped from the candle.

I turned and marched downstairs again; I did not remember the yarn until I had reached the tower room, where the others were sitting as if they had not moved a muscle since I had gone. O'Leary was not present and, of course, I did not mention the matter. It was clear to me, however, that someone had been seeking the green elephant, probably before it had

been taken from me, for naturally there would have been no need to search for it afterward. My thoughts went from one to another of that still, restrained group sitting about the fire and waiting for my patient to speak. But I might say here and now that my wildest speculations did not even approach the truth!

Along toward eleven o'clock they rose by unspoken consent and started away. Lance O'Leary came into the room again as they were leaving.

"I suppose I need not advise you people to—er—lock the doors of your bedrooms at night?" He spoke in the easy tone in which he would wish them pleasant dreams.

There was an instant's pause. Then Isobel said harshly:

"Lord, no!"

O'Leary stood aside to let the singular little procession file past him.

"I am going to stay here in the tower room to-night, Miss Keate," said O'Leary.

My spirits lifted at once; I had been dreading the long, dark hours of the night to come.

He eyed me contemplatively for a moment before he added in the most casual way in the world:

"I had better tell you that I—I believe you are in grave danger."

"*I!*"

"You."

"But—I don't know anything about this business!"

"You had the elephant."

"I have it no longer. But my room, some time after I left it between six and seven o'clock this evening, was searched from carpet to ceiling." I waited for his

comment in some trepidation. No one likes to be told that he is in grave danger, especially when it seems to be true.

"I didn't expect it quite so soon," said O'Leary quietly after a moment. "And only Kema, Dimuck, and Madam Isobel knew that you had the elephant —*and* our—what shall we call him?—the man in the trunk room. Of course—Eustace may have guessed that you knew something of it. Well, this proves that at least two people are determined to find the elephant."

"Why? I don't understand. I thought that my room was likely searched before the elephant was taken from me."

He looked at me impatiently.

"You went almost directly to dinner, leaving your room at about a quarter to seven. From six-thirty till dinner time Miss March and Madam Isobel, Eustace, Dimuck, and Deke Lonergan were together in the library, and Kema was in the kitchen preparing the meal. You were all together during dinner and immediately afterward the elephant was taken from you. No one of the household had had a chance to search your room until *after* the green elephant was out of your possession. Still it was searched."

"Oh," I said rather flatly.

He sat down, relaxing into an attitude of thoughtful musing.

"But don't be unduly alarmed, Miss Keate; just keep your eyes open. As I say, I shall stay overnight and will be right here in the room. So that is the secret of the green elephant, and the paper it contains is so

important that Adolph Federie was shot rather than be permitted to have it in his possession. Adolph must have stumbled onto it; old Mr. Federie's partiality for the elephant would draw his attention to it."

"Do you think Isobel shot him?" I asked in a small voice. There were cold little shivers traveling up and down my spine; if Adolph had been killed because he had the elephant—why not I? True, I had not had the wit to discover its secret, but the murderer would not know that.

O'Leary shrugged.

"Time will tell. Time and a good bit of drudgery. I wish my work were as magically swift and simple as it is made out to be. You see, Miss Keate, there is a difference between the discovering of the guilty man and the securing of evidence that will convict. And I want to secure evidence that will result in conviction, not in acquittal on legal grounds. I don't mind telling you that"—he lowered his voice so that I barely heard the whispered words—"I might even make an arrest right now, but it would be based for the most part on supposition and I must have definite evidence." He paused and added thoughtfully: "Definite evidence."

I longed to ask the identity of the person whom he would arrest on supposition, but reflected that had he wanted me to know he would have told me.

"But why did not the person who shot Adolph take the green elephant?" I asked after a moment's thought. "Perhaps it was Isobel, after all. Perhaps the green elephant had nothing to do with it."

"But, on the other hand, Miss Keate, suppose he was

shot because he had the elephant and had read the paper it contained. Mittie says the elephant dropped and rolled down the stairs. The murderer would not have dared follow it and secure it, knowing that you were here in the room and that the shot would rouse you. He probably figured that the curio had remained in safety on the mantel for several days, ever since Mr. Federie's illness began, and that few, if any, knew of the significance of the thing. Hence it would be a simple matter to slip into the room sometime later and take the elephant."

"I wish old Mr. Federie could speak," I said. "He knows the secret the elephant holds."

O'Leary nodded.

"Doubtless. But even then we might not secure the —evidence to convict."

"I never thought of the thing being hollow," I remarked in chagrin. "But there is nothing about it to suggest such a thing. You can't see the mark where it opens—unless—it might be in the folds of skin around the neck and under those big, fanlike ears."

"We'll see when we get our hands on it again, Miss Keate," said O'Leary briefly. "Find me the elephant again, Miss Keate. And find me Adolph's diamond. And find me the key to the bedroom upstairs."

It was purely coincidence that just as he spoke the flame in the lamp started to smoke. I moved hastily to adjust the wick and my sudden gesture upset Mittie's bead box which she had forgotten and left on the table.

Hundreds of shiny little beads showered to the floor; they must have been three inches deep in the little box. The box went, too, face downward. I bent to pick it

up. And, as I lifted the box, there on the little heap of beads lay a key.

"Here it is," I said nonchalantly, and to my own surprise, for the words came out of my mouth entirely without volition on my part.

And the astounding thing about it was that it did prove to be the key to the locked bedroom just above our heads. O'Leary had leaped up the tower stairway, tried it in the lock, and was back again triumphant before I had finished picking up the beads, which Genevieve was nosing tentatively.

"What did I say about you a little while ago?" inquired O'Leary jubilantly.

"You said I was a dangerous woman," I said dryly. "You said I was an active peril."

"I take it all back," he said. "I eat my words. You are a marvelous woman. You really do have the most extraordinary way of——"

"Did I leave my bead box here?" interrupted Mittie's voice inquiringly. She advanced slowly into the room. Her colorless hair was in curl papers and she wore a draggled crêpe kimono. I might say, here and now, that one of my most vivid memories of Federie house has to do with the varied and peculiar negligees in which its inmates appeared; as the thing went on I even wondered why they undressed at all, for there was only one night during which we were undisturbed.

O'Leary neatly palmed the key, and I replied to Mittie's question.

"Here it is," I said. "I knocked it over. There were quite a lot of beads in it and I don't know whether I got all of them back again in the box or not."

She looked anxiously at the box and stirred the contents with her forefinger.

"Miss Frisling," said O'Leary sternly. "In this box was the key to the locked bedroom upstairs. How did it get there? How long have you had it? Did you lock that door?"

Fortunately I had not quite relinquished my hold on the bead box, else I should have had to help pick them up again. Her hands fell slowly as she stared at the key he held before her; she moistened her pale lips and her light eyes looked rather wild.

"In—in my bead box?"

"Yes."

"You—found it *there?*"

"Certainly. Explain it, Miss Frisling."

She shook her head slowly.

"I didn't know it was there. I don't know how long it has been there. I've left the box everywhere—on the library table and, oh, just any place where I was working with my beads. I don't know anything about that key, Mr. O'Leary. Really I don't."

And though he questioned her closely she reiterated her denial and at last he let her go, though I don't know whether or not he was convinced of the truth of her statement.

"At any rate, we have the key," he said as the green curtain fell into place behind Mittie's pudgy figure. "Whether Mittie has had it all along, or whether the same hand put it there that put the violin string around Grondal's neck and for the same purpose—to detract suspicion from the murderer—in any case we do have the key."

My thoughts went back to the horror of the previous night.

"Poor Grondal," I said soberly. "Did they discover what he actually died of?"

"Yes. The blow over his heart killed him and that blow must have been a lucky accident for the person who was struggling with him, for Grondal, despite his age, was a strong man. Our medical examiner thinks that Grondal staggered down the tower stairway and collapsed on the couch. The murderer stole down the stairs after him, saw his helpless condition and slipped the violin string in a noose about his neck in order both to help—finish the job—and to complicate matters. The murderer must have been wholly desperate in his need to stop Grondal's mouth forever, otherwise he would not have taken such a chance. At any second you might have returned to the tower room."

"And all that time I was getting to the kitchen and trying to telephone. He worked fast."

"Yes. The whole thing, struggle and all, took only a few moments."

"If I had remained in the room I might have saved Grondal. I might have given him something——"

"Stop, Miss Keate. You did exactly right. You could not have saved him. Come here, closer to the fire. You are shivering. You must try to rest as much as possible during the night. I may need your help to-morrow."

"My help? What do you mean?"

But though I was all eagerness he would not explain. We talked for some time of the different aspects of the case, but, though O'Leary may have seen his way clear, to me the affair was wholly baffling. There seemed to

be clues enough, certainly, but they pointed in widely different directions, and I did not think that everyone in the house had banded together for the purpose of doing away with Adolph, unpopular though he was, and poor old Grondal.

Feeling secure in O'Leary's presence, and less disturbed by Genevieve's green stare from the mantel than I had ever been, I dozed off finally, rousing when necessary to care for my patient, whose condition, by the way, was steadily improving. Once when I glanced across the room O'Leary was sitting at the table, head bent thoughtfully over a piece of paper, and once he was coming quietly down the tower stairway, pausing to lean over the railing above the couch. The sight set me to shuddering violently, and I heaped the fire with wood and stirred it till the flames leaped furiously and nearly scorched myself in an effort to get warm.

"By the way," said Lance O'Leary, breaking into my none too cheerful thoughts. "Your uniform is in your room upstairs. And here is the electric torch again. But I must warn you that O'Brien regards you with the darkest foreboding. It is easy to see what he thinks of females who leave their dresses dangling from ceilings."

He chuckled a little and held out his slender hands to the blaze. And it was just then, without any warning at all, that a scream arose from somewhere in the old house.

It was a horrible, high-pitched scream that rose and rose, piercing the dank old walls and muffling curtains in a fearful crescendo of stark terror.

It rose and fell and rose again, and then O'Leary was bounding up the tower stairway and I after him,

through the little room at the head of the stairs, through the deserted bedroom and, as O'Leary unlocked the door with swift fingers, into the upper corridor.

A candle or two was burning dimly along its green length. Doors were opening, matches were sputtering, and other voices were rising. And in the middle of the corridor, down by the main stairs, stood a bunchy figure. We sped toward it. It was Mittie Frisling, her curl papers making grotesque shadows and her hands writhing together, still screaming. Isobel joined us, I think, at the intersection of the back hall; at any rate, she was at my elbow when we got to Mittie. Others were crowding around, too, a couple of policemen running up the stairs, Eustace and Lonergan and March and Dimuck, and above the pandemonium of excited voices Mittie kept on screaming. Her eyes were screwed tight shut as if she dared not open them, but she was apparently unhurt, and it was March finally who put a glass of water to her lips. Mittie began mechanically to drink and choke and drink again, and we presently got intelligible words from her.

And I must say they were rather extraordinary. For the first thing she said when she opened her eyes and looked at us was:

"*I saw Adolph Federie!*"

There was an element of quite terrible conviction in her voice.

My hair stirred at its roots and I cast a swift glance up and down the green gloom of the long corridor. Involuntarily we all moved a little closer together and a kind of shudder went over the whole group.

"*You—did—not!*" I said jerkily. "You—couldn't have!"

"I did. He was standing right there." She pointed to Elihu Dimuck, who moved rather hurriedly to one side. "He stood right there. I saw him just as plain as I see you."

"Come now, Miss Frisling, you are over-tired—hysterical," suggested O'Leary; his voice was very quiet but too well controlled.

"I did see him," persisted Mittie. "I saw Adolph Federie. I came out of my room. I was going to the bathroom to get a drink. See, there's the glass." She pointed and, sure enough, on the floor near by was a broken tumbler. "And just as I got here he *appeared.* Just appeared. Right there at the head of the stairs. And then I shut my eyes and started to scream. But I *saw* Adolph Federie."

Again there was that terrible conviction in her voice. It held us all for a silent moment. O'Brien happened to be facing me across the little circle about Mittie, and as I saw his dropped jaw and staring eyes a wild little quiver of mirth ran over me and was gone. And at that instant Konrad, outside, began to bark long, deep-throated barks that we heard distinctly through the walls between.

The sound produced rather astonishing results. O'Leary hurled a sharp word or two at the policemen which sent them running heavily down the corridor, and March went dead white, turned as if to follow the policemen, faltered for a fraction of a second, and without a word or a sound dropped flat to the floor.

Deke was at her side three feet in advance of Eustace and he gathered her up in his arms and lifted her and simply stood there, his face as white as hers, while he called her name over and over again in frantic anxiety. Eustace paused, his outstretched arms falling slowly to his side and his eyes narrowing viciously, and I stared at March's bare feet, slim and pink and childish looking, dangling there below the dark silk folds of her dressing gown and thought stupidly that the girl would take her death of cold, running about the drafty old house without slippers.

Then as I roused myself and started toward them to tell Deke to take her to her room, March's eyelids fluttered and opened and Deke Lonergan, his heart in his eyes and himself utterly oblivious of our presence, bent his head suddenly and pressed his mouth against March's and held it there.

Well, it was quite a kiss.

It lasted a long time and made me feel quite warm and tingly just watching it. Mittie thrust her face past my shoulder to stare avidly at the two; Isobel shrunk back a little, her face all at once pinched and old; Elihu Dimuck clucked suddenly rather like a startled hen, and the sound seemed to rouse Eustace from the cold fury that had gripped him.

He took a single step forward.

"Suppose you leave that, Lonergan," he said in a cold voice that was as deadly as the sharp edge of steel. "Can you walk, March? I'll take you to your room."

Lonergan lifted his tousled blond head. His whole face had changed; it was gay, triumphant, and his eyes were brilliant.

He tightened his hold on March.

"I'll take her," he said calmly, though his breath was uneven.

But March would have none of either of them. In a flash she had regained her air of command and, though Deke Lonergan set her on her feet with as tender care as if she were a young baby, she surveyed us all with a deliberate, imperious blue gaze that held nothing of emotion or embarrassment. However, her lips were very red and soft and looked exactly like crushed rose petals.

I sighed a bit regretfully as, with her habitual air of authority, March advised Mittie to return to her room and go to sleep and intimated that the rest of us would do well to do likewise; I should have liked to see the tender little scene repeated. But O'Leary had vanished; Eustace, his dark eyes still venomous, stuck at March's elbow as she walked to the door of her own room, and I recalled my patient and high time I did so, left alone in the tower room. As I passed Deke Lonergan I looked sharply at him; he was soberer now, but still exultant. He looked straight at me.

"She kissed back," he said dazedly. I think he had not the faintest idea that he was speaking aloud. "What do you think of that! She kissed back!" Then he blinked, looked at me with seeing eyes, became annoyed and rather embarrassed, and whirled away.

I made my way unmolested back to the tower room, found that all was well, and sat down to consider the situation.

Love-making and a ghost!

It could not have been a ghost, of course; Mittie had

only had a nightmare. And yet—the conviction in her voice, the terror in her screams returned to me, and by the time O'Leary came back to the room I was sitting as stiff and cold as a ramrod, whatever that is, staring at the forbidding shadows of the angular tower stairway and simply quaking like jelly in my inside.

He was noncommittal to my inquiries and said little, simply sat and stared into the fire with grave eyes and an uncommonly intent expression on his face.

The rest of the night passed quietly enough. Dawn found my patient decidedly better, Lance O'Leary as calm and unruffled as the summer sea, and myself feeling the need for a good night's rest. I don't mind admitting that I have reached an age where peace and a certain amount of tranquillity are rather necessary to my disposition and looks, to say nothing of my digestion. It is true that I have a somewhat snappish disposition and nothing to boast of in the way of looks, but I do value my digestion.

As I say, Lance O'Leary looked as if he had just stepped out of a bandbox, and there was a kind of alert decision about him that led me to think that perhaps his night's cogitations had borne fruit. I remember that before leaving he questioned me again and at some length regarding Adolph's death, going over and over every phase of it, and wanting to know such minute details as how Adolph was lying, exactly where I found the elephant, and every little frightened exclamation of suggestion that was made when the others came into the room and saw the body.

He wound up by handing me a revolver.

"Take this, please, Miss Keate. I want you to do

something for me. You know how to fire it, don't you?"

"I dare say I could find out," I remarked, holding the cold thing gingerly. "Do you pull this?"

"Yes, but don't do it!" he cried, skipping nimbly to one side. He caught my hand and turned the thing so that its nose, or whatever you call it, pointed downward. He gave me a curious look that was dubious and respectful at the same time. "I don't know whether I can trust her with this or not," he said doubtfully as if to himself. "Promise me this, Miss Keate, do not fire it under any circumstances unless I tell you to do so. And, when you do fire it, be sure to point at the floor."

"Very well," I promised readily, for I had not the least desire just then to experiment with it.

He still eyed me a little doubtfully, looking, indeed, rather shaken for some reason or another and putting a hand on his stomach as if to be sure it was still there.

"Mr. O'Leary, sir," said O'Brien from the doorway, and at O'Leary's nod he entered.

"Yes, O'Brien."

"Me and Shafer was arguing about your orders, sir. I said that you told us to leave the back door unlocked and unguarded during the day and to watch the rest of the house like our necks depended on it, but make no arrests. Wasn't that right?"

"Exactly."

"Yes, sir. Yes, sir. That's what I said all along, but Shafer said it was against reason. That you said——" His eyes wandered to me, he gave a violent start and, to my astonishment, began to lift his arms toward the ceiling. "My God, sir! Do you see what that woman's got!"

O'Leary turned, looked at the revolver which I possibly held in an awkward way, and sprang toward me.

"Didn't I tell you to point it at the floor?" he demanded with much vehemence. "That's all right, O'Brien. I gave it to her myself."

O'Brien lowered his hands slowly, eying me with a look of extreme disfavor.

"Yes, sir," he said submissively, and retreated with long steps in which there was a hint of haste. Once in the passage, he thrust his head back through the opening in the curtains.

"All I can say, sir," he remarked in a kind of explosive way, as if the words would come out in spite of himself, "all I can say is you're taking your life in your hands." He gave me another dark look and vanished.

"What time is breakfast, Miss Keate?" asked O'Leary soberly, though his clear gray eyes were sparkling.

"Usually about eight."

He looked at his watch.

"Now, then, at exactly seven minutes after eight I want you to aim that revolver at the floor and pull the trigger once."

"Very well. Perhaps I had better set my watch with yours. I broke the crystal yesterday when a spider got on my arm, there in that attic, and it may not have kept good time since."

"'She broke the crystal,' she says coolly, 'when a spider got on her arm in the attic,'" remarked O'Leary softly as if to himself. "You win, Miss Keate. Say, did you ever play poker?"

"Yes," I replied absently, winding my watch. "To

entertain a patient I once had. He grew tired of playing it, though, almost at once. He said he didn't own any oil wells. Did you say seven minutes after eight?"

He did not reply at once, for he was surveying me rather strangely, and I was obliged to repeat my question.

"Er—yes. Yes," he said, clearing his throat. "How much did you win from him?" he added curiously.

Someone running through the passage thrust the curtain aside and burst into the room. It was Deke Lonergan, his top coat over his arm and his hat in one hand.

"Look here, O'Leary, I've got to go. I've got to leave this place. I can't stay here any longer."

"Why do you have to leave?" asked O'Leary, stern at once.

"I've got to go!" repeated young Lonergan as if he were quite beside himself. "I can't stay here. You must tell that policeman to let me out."

"Why?"

"None of your damn' business!" blurted Lonergan, flushing suddenly with anger.

"There you are, my young fellow!" It was O'Brien again, pounding to Lonergan's side. He grasped his arm. "This guy was after walking out the front door, bold as brass. What'll I do with him?"

"Let me go!" Deke Lonergan suddenly twisted away from O'Brien, and all at once there was a scrambled mêlée of coats and arms and legs which ended as quickly as it began. O'Leary, his eyes calm and his face bland as usual, was standing between them, O'Brien was touching gently a red blotch on his cheek, and Lonergan was adjusting his tie and glowering from

one eye—the other eye had suddenly assumed a pinkish-purple look and was rapidly beginning to swell.

"If you can't explain to me why you want to leave, you can stay here," said O'Leary.

"Hell," remarked young Lonergan disgustedly. "I've had enough of this. I'm going to get out. And you can't keep me from doing it!"

"Oh, is that so!" said O'Brien, prolonging the vowels unpleasantly.

"Yes, that's so!" snapped Deke Lonergan.

"That will do, O'Brien," interrupted O'Leary sharply. "And, as for you, Mr. Lonergan—you will stay here. No one leaves this house. Your reason for wishing to leave may be important, but there are few things more important than murder."

With an unintelligible growl Lonergan swooped up his coat and hat from where they had fallen on the floor, gave the hat a bitter look, for someone had stepped exactly on its crown, and hurled himself out of the room. He was followed hotly by O'Brien.

"At seven minutes after eight, Miss Keate," said O'Leary again. "And be sure to aim at the floor. A few bullet holes more or less won't hurt this old place."

Left alone I found plenty to do and decided to go to breakfast after I had carried out O'Leary's request. But it happened that at exactly five minutes after eight March herself brought in a tray with my breakfast on it, saying she thought I might be too busy to come to the dining room and the coffee was getting cold.

Unfortunately she lingered, and I was obliged to pick up the revolver and put my finger on the trigger

and carefully aim it at a spot on the floor where I thought any havoc it made would not show much, conscious all the time of her rapidly growing nervousness. She started to speak a time or two, but stopped herself, while I kept my eyes on my watch and at seven minutes after eight I pulled the trigger.

The thing made a horrible racket and startled me so that I forgot to remove my finger, and somehow it shot six times without stopping. Then it stopped, and I laid it rather dazedly on the table, while March took her hands from her ears and looked at me very strangely and others came pouring into the room through the passage, and altogether there was quite a hullabaloo.

"I shot it accidentally," I replied to Eustace's sharp inquiry, not daring to take my eyes from the gun for more than a second at a time, for I felt that it might begin going again.

"Accidentally!" said March in a queer voice, and stopped again.

Just then O'Leary walked into the room, looked about him with barely a tinge of satisfaction in his face, took the revolver in his hand, and said lightly:

"Accidents will happen. But no harm is done, so I'd advise you to get back to your breakfast."

When they had gone the aggravating man said merely: "Thanks, Miss Keate," and walked away, which, in the face of my bursting curiosity, was almost endurable.

CHAPTER XIV

CHARLES FEDERIE

FIVE minutes later Lance O'Leary put his head through the doorway again to say in a low voice:

"By the way, Miss Keate, since your patient is better it will do no harm to give his family reason to hope for the best." He paused and added: "And to indicate that he may speak within twenty-four hours."

He uttered the "twenty-four hours" in a significant tone, and while I did not understand his motive I did not doubt that it was good. So a few moments later, when Eustace and Isobel stopped into the tower room to inquire as to old Mr. Federie's condition, I assured them blandly that he would soon be able to speak.

"Probably during the night," I added, getting into the spirit of the thing.

I told Elihu Dimuck, who fairly haunted the tower room all day and who took more of my time than I could spare with fretting about his anxiety to get back to his business, the same thing, and also Kema who came in with hot water and a newspaper. She took my volunteered statement with her usual impassivity, informed me that Mr. O'Leary had sent the newspaper to me, and padded silently out of the room.

I unfolded the newspaper and found that for the first time that week the Federie affair was not in headlines,

for blazoned across the front pages were the words "Construction Company Fails," and below in smaller type "Dekesmith and Lonergan Go to Wall."

That was surely the construction company that was largely owned by Deke Lonergan's father! I read the details eagerly, but could gather little from it beyond the salient fact of failure. This, then, must be the reason for Deke Lonergan's anxiety to leave the house. It explained, too, the conversation with his father over the telephone, that I had overheard. But—*how* had he expected to secure the money that his father evidently needed rather desperately? Had he wanted to get money from my patient? Or had he some claim on the Federies?

Well, O'Leary had doubtless come to some conclusion about it, for he would not have sent the paper to me had he not already seen it. I folded it up again as the doctor, earlier than usual, came into the room. He agreed that Mr. Federie's condition was much better, changed the orders, asked a number of totally irrelevant questions about the progress the police were making, and went away after remarking somewhat tartly that it was all right for nurses to keep quiet about their patients' affairs, but there was no need to be so close mouthed about crime which was common property.

I watched my patient that day with more close attention than had been necessary previous to that, having my lunch sent in to me and refusing to take my hours off. Elihu Dimuck shared my watch most of the long day, sitting near the fire in a chair that creaked every time he moved, fretting and fidgeting, whenever I would listen to him, about getting back to his business, and watching my patient with anxiety. The others

seemed no less anxious, for March and Eustace and Isobel kept coming into the room to ask a question or two about Mr. Federie, give him long looks, and wander restlessly about the room, and Mittie huddled over her beads in a corner, and even Lance O'Leary seemed to hover in the neighborhood of the tower room, though at the time, I am glad to say, I did not understand the reason for the rather solicitous attention he gave the room.

By late afternoon, however, they had all drifted away, and as the shadows deepened I began to feel—not nervous, you understand, nor frightened, but decidedly ill at ease. Finally, as I found that my hands were beginning to shake so that I could scarcely hold my knitting needles and my eyes kept going fearfully to the darkening gloom of the angular tower stairway, I decided that the silence and the atmosphere of breathless waiting that seemed to enfold that whole gloomy room were not conducive to quiet nerves and that I might relieve the tension that possessed me if I could find something to read. Accordingly I called Kema, asked her to sit beside the bed and call me if my patient stirred, and took my way to the library. The house seemed all at once deserted, although as I passed through the hall a figure darted suddenly out of sight into the back drawing room. I think it was Isobel but couldn't make sure, and I wondered what she was doing and what they were all doing that the house should seem so silent, so muffled, and yet, strangely, not empty. Rather it was packed to the brim with a kind of impalpable hush of suspense that was definite enough, too.

No one was in the long library, and I glanced along the tiers of books that lined the walls. There were all kinds of books, most of them worn, and I walked slowly along, searching for something that would soothe my tattered nerves. Some of the shelves showed gaping spaces as if someone had been searching the spaces back of the books, and in the tower alcove were stacked the withdrawn books in helter-skelter heaps. I was glancing through these scattered heaps when I was aware that someone had entered the library. It was shadowy there in the alcove, for the shutters were closed over the windows that lined it, and I was concealed by the folds of dingy green velvet that divided the alcove from the rest of the room. I peered through the crack between curtain and wall.

March and young Lonergan were standing in the center of the room, and as I watched they walked slowly toward a divan that stood with its back to the alcove and sat down. Their very first words were such that I—well, I just stayed where I was and I have no apology to make!

"I love you, March," said Deke Lonergan rather hoarsely. "I'm plain mad about you. And I haven't got a cent. The company has failed and it's—my fault." He ended on a sort of groan. He had turned toward her, and the eye that I could see was swollen almost shut and entirely purple, which did not look romantic.

"Deke, does Eustace owe you money?" asked March quite as if it were her business to know and love and loving could wait.

"Well—yes," admitted Deke.

"How much?" The girl's voice was as crisply incisive as if she were conducting a business conference, and I was quite positive that he was holding both her hands and looking very tender out of his good eye.

"A—good deal," he replied evasively.

"Why on earth did you loan it to him?" she asked with a sort of desperate exasperation.

Deke shrugged.

"You know Eustace when he wants anything. I was a fool, of course. I've learned my lesson. But it's too late."

"It's never too late," said March in a shade softer voice. "What did he do with it?"

"Speculated—and lost," said Deke tersely, adding with something like surprise: "You've got the most beautiful eyes. Especially when you look like that."

Upon which I think March closed her eyes, for he leaned over and kissed first her eyes and then her lips—long, lingering kisses. Their warmth must have penetrated March's steely calm, for suddenly she twisted away from Deke and sat facing him. I could see her delicate white profile.

"Oh, Deke, Deke!" she said with a sudden sob. "I've done something terrible. I didn't mean to do it. I didn't know what it meant."

"What do you mean? Don't talk like that, darling. Tell me."

"I mean—these murders!" She brought out the word with tremulous fierceness. "It is all—my fault!"

"March, you don't know what you are saying. Stop it!" He looked horrified, as well he might, and put both hands on her shoulders and shook her slightly.

"If I could only tell you," said March. "But I can't. I promised."

"March, I—" he swallowed hard—"I saw you. I saw you go through the bedroom up there, where I was sleeping with Eustace. Only I wasn't asleep and I saw you. You had—a little candle in your hand and you went down the tower stairway. I—I saw you, March."

She nodded. "I thought you were asleep."

"But, March, why didn't you come back for so long?"

"Why, Deke, I wasn't there more than three minutes. I—" she faltered momentarily and continued—"I was worried about something. So I slipped through your room and down a few steps of the tower stairway so I could see into the room below. But I just stayed a few moments on the stairway and then came back as quietly as I could."

He shook his head.

"Tell me the truth, March. I love you."

"I am telling you the truth. You just didn't know it when I came back through your room. I had blown out the candle on the stairway so the nurse wouldn't see me and wonder what I was doing there. So I had to creep back through your room in the dark. You simply didn't hear me, Deke. And I didn't want you to hear me, of course."

"But, March"—Lonergan's voice was miserable but dogged. "I *did* hear you. But it was an hour or so later. I had gone to sleep, thinking you had gone on down the tower stairway and upstairs again by way of the main stairway. Then the sound of the shot awoke me and—

I heard you come back through my room, *after the shot was fired!*"

It was unfortunate that just then I sneezed. I felt it coming and seized the dusty curtain near me to stifle it, but it was no use. It was a healthy, hearty sneeze, and the two on the divan jumped to their feet and turned startled faces toward the alcove.

With as much nonchalance as I could contrive I picked up a book, walked coolly out of the alcove and toward the door. I did not even glance at the two, but dare say they felt as discomposed as I, which was a comfort.

The hall was gloomy and deserted, but in the first drawing room Isobel stood at a curio cabinet. The glass door hung open, and she was taking up various sea shells and little china figures and rock paper weights. She whirled with a startled exclamation as I entered the room and, seeing who it was, reached forward to clutch my arm. Through the muslin of my uniform I could feel the hot grip of her wide fingers, and their long nails glittered.

"Look here, Nurse," she said, "is that old man going to get well?"

"I hope so, I'm sure," I replied brusquely, trying to pull away.

But she strengthened her grip.

"Soon?" Her high cheek bones and curved nose shone whitely in the semitwilight of the room. "He's got to make some provision for me before he dies. Will he be able to speak soon?"

"Probably," I replied coldly, and pulled away from her. There was suddenly something repellent about the

woman—her heavy perfume that struggled with the odor of stale cigarette smoke, her rouges, her lip salves, her white powders, and her trailing laces. Beneath the artificial poses, what was the real Isobel?

Kema rose as I entered the tower room. It was odd that despite Kema's heathenish appearance she had a sensible, matter-of-fact way that I liked.

"He'll talk soon," she said in an unconcerned way. "Likely before morning."

It was not a question; it was merely a statement of fact, and I agreed readily. After lighting a lamp or two and locking the shutters she padded away, and the gloom and terrors of the room closed in on me again. I poked the fire and opened my book, resolving to put March's half confession to Deke out of my mind until I saw O'Leary. The first sentence my eyes fell on brought me sitting upright in my chair with my skin crawling. I looked at the title; it was *The Red Death*, and I simply stuffed that book under the wood in the box, and for all I know it is there yet. Only a decent respect for other people's property kept it out of the fire.

Things were no better after that, and Eustace entering the room with his silently graceful step and Genevieve trailing at his heels gave me quite a start, for I had been watching the tower stairway and did not hear Eustace until he was at my elbow.

"How is Grandfather?" he asked abruptly.

"It's a pity you couldn't let a body know you were about," I said waspishly, settling my cap securely on my head again as I sank back into my chair. "He's better."

Eustace walked to the bed and stood there looking at his grandfather's sternly modeled face.

"Will he be able to talk soon?" he inquired. He reached over with an oddly solicitous gesture and pulled the counterpane straight. His hand lingered on it for a moment.

"Probably before morning," I replied. Was that the hand that had knotted that violin string and pulled it?

"To-night," he said thoughtfully. "You haven't found that curio I spoke of? The little jade elephant?"

I shook my head.

"It was to come to me on Grandfather's death," he said clearly. "Call me if Grandfather becomes conscious."

As I followed with my eyes his departing figure, certain suspicions crystallized in my mind. There was not, so far as I could see, a shred of evidence against the man, but could he have been the motivating force back of the tragedies, all along? With my own ears I had heard him urge March to undertake something that she had been most reluctant to do.

Perhaps I had made a mistake in concealing my knowledge of that episode from O'Leary. Yes, decidedly I had.

As if in answer to my thought the green curtain wavered and Lance O'Leary, his gray figure poised and alert, held back the curtain for March to enter.

"Miss Keate is in my confidence," said O'Leary as if continuing a conversation. "And I think we will not be interrupted here. Sit down, Miss March. Here." He drew a chair out into the room, and as March sat the

mellow glow from the lamp on the table showed a tired young face, troubled and pale, with the little flush that Deke Lonergan's kisses had brought quite gone.

"Now, Miss March, please trust me. Who is the man you have been hiding in the house?"

I think she had not expected the question, for she gave a start that bore witness to the truth of O'Leary's implied statement. Her eyes, meeting O'Leary's, were incredibly blue under those lifted black eyebrows and her extravagant black lashes were wide apart.

"What—do you mean?" she asked in a voice that strove to be steady.

"Your father and Eustace's father and Adolph Federie all lie in the Federie lot at the cemetery," said O'Leary meditatively. "But Charles Federie—— Has Charles turned up after having presumably filled a gambler's grave for some fifteen years?"

The girl shrank back a little at the name, but said nothing.

"You may as well tell me the truth," went on O'Leary. "I'm sure it is Charles. Grondal implied that he was dead, but I have been able to find no records substantiating the notion. He resembles Adolph, doesn't he?"

And as March yet said nothing, just sat there looking at O'Leary, with her face white and blank and a kind of pinched look around her nose, O'Leary repeated sharply:

"Does he look like Adolph?"

"Y—yes," said March, moving her lips stiffly. There was a faint blue line around them.

"I was sure of it last night, though it is nothing

unusual for brothers to look alike," remarked O'Leary in the quietly conversational manner that has produced such astonishing results. "So Mittie Frisling actually caught a glimpse of Charles last night, instead of—Adolph's ghost. Where has Charles been hiding?"

"In the attic and trunk room. There were quilts in an old box and Kema managed to give him meals."

"How did he escape the police?"

"He hid in the stables—up in the hay loft. He knows the whole place, every twist and turn, of course. He said it was easy." A ghost of a smile touched her lips and vanished. "How did you know this?" she cried suddenly as a sort of anguished alarm came into her face. "Have you got him?"

O'Leary did not appear to hear her inquiry.

"You may as well tell me the whole thing, Miss March. How long has he been here?"

"Ever since the day before Uncle Adolph was killed—the day the nurse came. I let him into the house that night. I promised not to tell that he was here. He was very anxious to see and talk to Grandfather. I had to tell Kema, of course. I—I felt it my duty to let him come."

"And when Adolph was shot you immediately went to warn Charles?"

"I had to get him out of the house. He had said that it was imperative that no one should know of his presence, at least until he and—and Grandfather had been reconciled."

"And—you feared he had shot his brother?"

March's hands went up before her face.

"I—didn't know," she whispered huskily. "Charles

had been away so long. How could I know? But he is a Federie, and I stood in Grandfather's place."

"You wanted him to escape justice?" asked O'Leary sternly.

"I don't know what I wanted," said March wearily. "I didn't want to let him into the house at all without Grandfather's knowledge, but Charles insisted. He said he must be here in the house in case Grandfather recovered consciousness before he died. I hate them all," she burst out suddenly. "All they want is Grandfather's money. They are all scheming and twisting and working. Why, they are even trying to keep the little green elephant away from me."

"Why?"

She shrugged.

"Because Grandfather left it to me, I suppose—or will leave it to me if he—goes. They think it means something. I don't know what."

"Do you know what paper the green elephant holds?"

"Paper?" She looked at him in a puzzled way. "I didn't know there was a paper in it—it might be Grandfather's will."

There was a short silence.

"Have you been worried about Charles's presence here in the house?" asked O'Leary after he had rolled the shabby little pencil he carried up and down through his fingers twice.

She flung out her hands and took a long breath.

"I haven't had a peaceful moment. Even that first night before Adolph was shot I—I couldn't sleep. I kept wandering about the house trying to keep Charles from—disturbing Grandfather. I didn't know—what

he might do." She added the last words in a frightened whisper.

There was another short silence; my thoughts were whirling with surmises, for the positive fact of a man hiding about the old place, in conjunction with his turning out to be Charles Federie, presented matters in an entirely new light. One was obliged to rearrange the puzzle to fit this new factor. I believe O'Leary was doing the same thing, for he said contemplatively:

"The dog didn't know Charles, of course, and barked every time he saw him. And the night Adolph was shot you yourself, Miss March, held the dog while Charles escaped."

She nodded lifelessly.

"Your grandfather keeps quite a sum of money somewhere in the house, does he not?"

"Why, yes, I believe he does. It is one of his peculiar ways."

"You don't know where he keeps it?"

"No."

"Or why he keeps it here instead of in a bank?"

"No. He never liked me to question him about things."

"Thank you, Miss March, that is all now."

She rose and turned to me.

"Is Grandfather really better, Miss Keate?"

"Yes."

"Do you think he will speak soon, within a few hours?"

"Very likely."

She gave the face on the pillows a long, affectionate look before she walked swiftly out of the room, her dark

head high and her slender shoulders straight. I think the child was relieved to have shared some of the load of anxiety she had been carrying.

"Well, Miss Keate," said O'Leary with none of the jubilance that I should have expected. "The thing isn't over yet."

"So it was Charles Federie all the time!" I exclaimed incredulously.

"Why, of course," said Lance O'Leary as if I should have known it long ago. "Who else would it be?"

At that moment I recalled my decision to tell O'Leary of the conversation I had overheard between Eustace and March before I had even entered the gloomy walls of Federie house. I cleared my throat uncomfortably and began. When I had finished O'Leary said nothing, and after waiting a moment or two I resolved to make a clean breast of it and went on to tell him of Lonergan's talk with March not an hour ago. My voice dragged more miserably with every word, for it seemed to me that I was closing the net around March tighter and tighter. And I couldn't believe she was guilty.

"It is the money young Lonergan wanted, of course," said O'Leary finally. "I wonder how he proposed to get it——"

"Is Mr. O'Leary here?" It was Mittie who interrupted him. She was blinking a little in her effort to see past the circle of light made by the lamp into O'Leary's face. She advanced into the room, glanced over her shoulder with an indescribably conspiratorial look, and did not stop until she reached O'Leary. He rose, and she drew close to him, thrusting her sallow, puffy face up into his.

"I've got Adolph's diamond," she cried in an excited eagerness. One fat hand was clenched, and she opened it, looking with rather ugly pleasure from its palm to O'Leary's face and back again.

I moved closer. Sure enough, sparkling in the light was the large, dubiously clouded diamond which I had last seen on Adolph's clammy hand.

"It was his," she repeated sharply. "I knew it at once. And where do you think it was?"

She leaned still closer to O'Leary so that he drew back involuntarily from her hot breath.

"Isobel—" she was panting a little now in an excitement that was not nice to see—"Isobel had it all along. I found it in her powder box. See, there's powder still on it." She rubbed it once or twice against her dress and then looked at it again. "It was Isobel who killed Adolph."

CHAPTER XV

BAITED!

"At it again, Mittie?" asked a lazy voice from the doorway. Isobel stood there, one hand on her hip, surveying us with insolent amusement. After an instant or two she walked slowly into the room, her pliant body swaying in the fashion so peculiarly her own.

"What is it now?" she asked O'Leary.

I think he did not like Isobel, or, rather, it might be that he—well, at any rate, he always seemed to be a little on his guard when she was near him, a little less human and more dryly machine-like.

"This diamond," he said in an expressionless way. "Was it your husband's?"

A kind of curtain came down over her dreamy eyes, but she answered readily:

"It was. Where did you find it, Mittie?"

"In your powder box! Where you hid it!" Mittie whirled to face Isobel, and her whole fattish person seemed to quiver and bristle with triumphant malice.

"What were you doing there?" Isobel's voice was harsh and her eyes ugly. "Let me catch you again in my room, Mittie, and I'll wring your fat neck. Just like that!" She gave a sudden and extremely lifelike twist of her large hands and Mittie turned green.

"Just a moment, please," cut in O'Leary's voice,

forestalling the imminent exchange of recriminations. "This is Adolph's ring, then. It was gone from his finger at the time of his death. Will you tell me, please, just how it happened that you have it?"

"Is it so unusual for a wife—a widow," she corrected herself deliberately without the slightest change of expression, "to have a ring of her husband's in her possession?"

O'Leary said nothing, and under his steady eyes she broke the little waiting silence and went on:

"He left it in my room that night, just an hour or so before he was shot. He—well, I had a little money, scarcely enough to quarrel about, but I wanted to keep it. He needed money right away to pay some gambling debts. His father keeps money somewhere in the house, but Adolph didn't know where, and his father couldn't speak. So he insisted on taking my money. I finally agreed to let him have it the next day—it's in the bank—and he pretended it was to be only a loan and gave me that ring as security."

She plucked the ring out of O'Leary's fingers and looked at it, smiling with her painted mouth alone.

"The diamond is like Adolph, glittering but valueless." With a rather horrible gesture of disdain she simply opened her fingers, let the ring drop where it would, and turned and walked out of the room.

O'Leary made no effort to stop her, and Mittie scrambled for the ring where it lay on the carpet, found it, and scuttled after Isobel. I have often wondered what she did with the diamond. It was all she ever had of Adolph, and it was paste.

Eustace and Mr. Dimuck must have met her in the

passage, for they came into the room immediately upon her exit.

"Look here, O'Leary," began Eustace in the arrogant way that was habitual with him. "I think, and Dimuck agrees with me, that you have had plenty of time to unravel this affair. Just what have you accomplished?"

"Suppose we sit down and talk the matter over," suggested O'Leary whom Eustace's arrogance did not seem to affect. I was interested to note that O'Leary's eye had taken on that lucent, clear look that always made me feel he could see through me, clear to my bones, like an X ray.

"There are a few things you can tell me about, Mr. Federie, that might help matters—expedite them a little."

Eustace's eyes flickered warily, but he sat down.

"Certainly," he said. "Certainly."

"Why did you insist that your cousin March was on the main stairs coming down when you ran into the lower hall immediately following the sound of the shot that killed Adolph Federie? She was actually in the main hall downstairs."

Eustace spread his fingers in a cynical little gesture.

"She ought not to have been there at such a time," he said lightly. "Noblesse oblige. She is a Federie; I didn't want it known that she was wandering about the house just then. She could have shot him as well as anyone."

"Is that what you urged her to do, during the afternoon before the murder? You were with her down by the little bridge south of the house."

Eustace stared at O'Leary for a moment, his narrow, dark eyes impenetrable.

"I don't know what you mean," he said finally. "I urged her to do nothing of the kind."

"She didn't want to," said O'Leary, making use of what I had told him. "But under pressure she finally consented."

"I don't know what you mean," repeated Eustace. "Who told you all that?"

O'Leary shrugged.

"It would be wiser to explain."

"I have nothing to explain." Eustace was growing angry. "That is all a lie. Was she actually talking with someone down there? Promising something? Who was with her?"

"Then tell me this," said O'Leary. "What were you really doing so late in the library the night Adolph was shot? The book that was on the arm of the chair and that you said you were reading so interestedly was titled *Fashions in Bead Work*. You were not sitting up until three o'clock in the morning through your interest in bead work."

Eustace hesitated. His fingers groped in his pocket, he drew out a cigarette case, extracted a cigarette, after offering them to O'Leary and Mr. Dimuck, and lighted it slowly. After a preliminary puff or two he decided to answer.

"Well, I may as well tell you. You probably know already. The fact is, Grandfather has always had a dislike for banks, and has kept quite a sum of money here in the house. He was a rich man and—I need not go into the reasons for his feeling as he did. I am not

supposed to know, myself, but Adolph told me all about it one time. Grandfather was always close mouthed about such things, and I have no idea where the money is. No one knows, unless it is March, and when Grandfather became ill we were faced with the knowledge that the chances were that he would die without telling where the money is. Which would leave us in a nice fix! Anyway, that night I was searching along the shelves back of the books, thinking there might be some sort of cupboard affair. Oh, there are no secret passages or anything like that in the house. I know every crook and cranny of the whole place. But—I don't know where the money is. And there must be a considerable sum. It is cash, I think, which makes it a dangerous business."

"Did you need money for your own purposes?" asked O'Leary softly.

Eustace flushed a quick, dark red.

"If I did it is none of your business."

"How do you expect to pay back the money Deke Lonergan loaned you?"

"Has he been blabbing? I might have expected it. I suppose he told a great tale. Well, I'm sorry his father failed, but it wasn't my fault. And I tried to get the money for Deke, but you see how things were. If Grandfather dies"—he cast a rather callous look toward the bed—"I'll inherit something, I suppose, though the bulk of it will go to March. That is, if Grandfather becomes conscious and clear minded enough to tell us where the money is."

"Is your grandfather such a wealthy man?"

Eustace flung the half-smoked cigarette into the fire,

got up, and stood with his back to the mantel, facing O'Leary.

"From the way you've been snooping around, Mr. Detective, I'd say you already know the answer to that. Grandfather was the head of the Federie—er—highwaymen some fifty years ago. They were rather notorious in their day. It was an outlaw gang who made themselves rich in a number of ways that won't bear inspection. My great-grandfather was the leader of them; he died suddenly—of pneumonia and in his bed, which must have surprised him—and Grandfather, who was then about my age, took by far the lion's share of the plunder, dissolved the gang, built him this house, married a wife of irreproachable ancestry, bought books and pictures"—Eustace glanced mockingly at the atrocity in oils across the room—"and settled down to a life of respectability. But naturally his family had little to do with their neighbors—or perhaps I should put it the other way around, for the neighbors took the initiative. But years passed, B—— grew to a city, the Federie name was entirely forgotten, and we have never mingled much with other people. My grandfather was never a man to talk of his business affairs, but from what Adolph told me and from what I have seen of the easy way he digs up money for March or Adolph I believe that he has quite a sum of cash here in the house. Don't you agree with me, Dimuck?"

Dimuck gave a nervous little cough.

"This is not entirely news to me," he assured O'Leary. "But it was nothing to me how or where my client, Mr. Federie, secured his money. He seems to have plenty, however."

"Just what do you do for him, Mr. Dimuck? You speak of him as your client; just what does that mean?"

Mr. Dimuck coughed again.

"In an advisory capacity, as I have told you, Mr. O'Leary. In an advisory capacity purely. Occasionally Mr. Federie likes to take a little flutter at the stock market, and I, if I may say so, usually watch the markets, though I never invest. Mr. Federie was a very conservative buyer. I have known him for some time. I respect him highly. Yes. Respect him highly. Indeed, I may say that I have a personal regard for him."

"You still have no idea as to what particular business he had in mind when he asked you to come here?"

"I didn't have at the time, Mr. O'Leary. Not at the time. But since these deplorable—these highly deplorable things have happened I have begun to think that possibly Adolph wanted more money than it was convenient for Mr. Federie to give him. At least Mr. Federie might have had some unusually heavy call upon his resources. Yes, something unusually heavy and urgent."

Lance O'Leary, who had been rolling and twisting that obnoxious little stub of pencil between his fingers, drew a piece of paper from his pocket and scribbled something on it which he passed to Dimuck.

Eustace watched uneasily, and Dimuck himself looked rather surprised, but he took the paper and held it nearer his eyes. He looked rather blank, however, as if he did not quite follow O'Leary's intention. Then he handed it back to O'Leary.

"I quite agree," he said rather uncertainly.

"Just what was that?" asked Eustace in a brittle tone.

"Nothing of much consequence," said O'Leary. "Well, Mr. Federie is so much better that the doctor and nurse promise we shall learn from his own lips the answers to any questions and that within a few hours. Did you not say by morning, Miss Keate?"

I came to myself with a little start.

"Yes, yes. We expect him to be able to speak by morning," I said hurriedly.

"Fine." Elihu Dimuck got to his feet and rubbed his pink hands together. "Fine. That is good news, Miss Keate." He beamed approvingly upon me and his heavy eyeglasses winked cheerfully.

"That is all now, thank you, gentlemen," said O'Leary so firmly that they seemed to forget they had come to question him and must have been a little surprised to find themselves outside the tower room and in the passage. O'Leary waited until the muffled sound of their footsteps had quite ceased and then walked across the room, lifted the curtain, and peered along the narrow passage. Satisfied, I suppose, that it was empty, he returned to me. I did not see that anything of any particular meaning had occurred during the little interview just past, but O'Leary's clear eyes were shining brightly and he wore a kind of hair-trigger alertness that aroused my curiosity.

"It will be before morning, Miss Keate. Before morning, I'm sure. Did you notice how Eustace stayed away from the green elephant?" He paused, his eyes going rapidly here and there about the room.

"Decks are cleared for action," he said presently.

"And if you'll just help me, Miss Keate! But there is a considerable touch of danger about what I'm going to ask you to do." He eyed me soberly. "And yet, if I was not sure that I could protect you, I shouldn't ask you to do it. Can you—do you place sufficient confidence in—my judgment?"

"What is it you want me to do?" I asked bluntly, preferring not to commit myself.

"It is this—" his voice was low and vibrant with a subdued excitement—"it is this: First, I want you to complain of being very sleepy at dinner to-night. I dare say it will not come hard, for you've not had much rest lately. Give the impression that you are apt to fall into a heavy, sound sleep by midnight."

"That will not be difficult," I said grimly. "What else?"

"Then when you return to this room I want you to sit in that chair by the bed with your back to the wall so you can see the tower stairway and the door to the passage——"

I interrupted him.

"See here, are you expecting someone to come down that tower stairway? Because if so, I won't——"

"I'll be right here, close at hand, in such a case," he said hastily, and with a promptness that would have been more reassuring had he not glanced somewhat anxiously toward the tower stairway as he spoke and lowered his voice to a barely audible whisper.

"Sit there," he continued, still whispering. "Sit there until about half-past twelve. Isn't that the time you usually get hot water for your hypodermic—or your packs or whatever you call them? You needn't

expect anything, I think, until after that. Then very quietly blow out the lamp by the bed and turn down the wick of the lamp on the table here in the middle of the room. And you yourself stand over there at the other side of the bed. There is room to conceal yourself behind the shadow of the curtain of the bed. Take this police whistle and keep it in your hand and—can't you arrange the curtain so it will conceal you and yet you can see into the room?"

He was around the bed in an instant, pulling and arranging the stuffy curtains that hung from the canopy of the great, old-fashioned bed. Unsanitary things that I had wanted to yank down at my first glimpse of them!

"But is someone—do you expect the murderer to—to——" I stuck.

"I do," said O'Leary, with blood-curdling nonchalance. "And, when he comes, wait. Wait till he bends over the bed. Then whistle."

"*What!*"

"Now that your patient is about to recover, Miss Keate, he is in more danger than he ever was."

"But, Mr. O'Leary, if that is true you must guard him. I can let you take no risks."

"If I did not feel perfectly sure that I should be able to protect both of you, do you think I would undertake such a plan?" asked O'Leary sternly.

Well, I didn't think so, of course, but at the same time the very thought of the vigil the man was thrusting upon me and the responsibility of my patient's welfare that would be mine made cold shivers start up from the small of my back.

"Surely you don't think that Charles Federie would —murder his own father?" I whispered in horror.

"I don't know," said O'Leary. "A desperate man will do anything to protect himself and carry out plans he has begun so cold-bloodedly. And what we know of Charles Federie is certainly not to his credit."

"Aren't you going to arrest Charles Federie at once?" I demanded tartly, little liking the idea of the man being permitted to roam at large over the house.

Lance O'Leary shrugged his shoulder.

"Miss Keate, can you tell me one scrap of evidence —not suspicion but real evidence, that we have against Charles?"

"His behavior is not that of an innocent person!"

"True. But can you point to anyone in the whole household whose behavior has been entirely that of an innocent person?"

As to that I could not. I suspected everyone in the house except March, and had I followed logic rather than impulse I should have suspected her more than any of them. Which only shows to what a pass I had come during those dark days in Federie house, for I am not naturally a suspicious person. Having nothing to conceal, myself, I do not suspect others of concealment.

"I am confident that neither you nor your patient will come to any harm," said O'Leary. "You see, Miss Keate, the secret that the jade elephant holds, whether it is the clue to where the Federie fortune is hidden or something else, is a secret that is known to Mr. Federie, for he put it there. March only knows that there is some

value to the elephant. Mittie Frisling knows that Adolph had it in his hands when he was shot and it has disappeared. Adolph found what that secret was and met his death almost within the moment of his discovery. Grondal, I think, learned that secret, too, and likely admitted it, which was his own death signal. Whoever killed those two men knows that with Mr. Federie's being able to speak his own death sentence will be pronounced."

"Suppose it holds only Mr. Federie's will and that March does not benefit. Will you hold her responsible for these murders?" I objected.

O'Leary smiled faintly and shook his head.

"There is something else, Miss Keate. Such a will would never have caused all this. Of course, I can't be entirely sure that I am right, but—well, I'm willing to take a chance on it. Besides—well, we shall see."

He gave a quick glance about the room.

"All right, Miss Keate. Don't be uneasy, for I shall be close at hand." And with that he was gone, leaving me in the gloomy room with the tower stairway twisting into the shadows, a sick man whose life was threatened on the bed, and a cold little whistle in my hand for my sole protection.

"Don't be uneasy," indeed! It was all very well to say, but how could I help being uneasy! My knees were shaky already and I felt exactly as if I had swallowed a brick, and the night had not even begun.

I had no inclination to eat, but when a policeman—it was O'Brien again—appeared at the door of the tower room saying that Mr. O'Leary had sent him to stay with my patient while I ate my dinner I was re-

minded of O'Leary's request and made my way to the dining room.

That dinner was a rather ghostly replica of my first dinner in Federie house. It was merely accident, I suppose, that March wore the crimson velvet gown again, and the silver ornament in her soft dark hair, and Isobel her yellow taffeta, and Mittie tinkled with blue beads. And there were Eustace and Lonergan and shiny Mr. Dimuck in their customary black and white—Eustace debonair and sleek, Lonergan easy and young, with eager eyes on March, and Elihu Dimuck fumbling nearsightedly with his silver and looking more glisteningly rotund than ever in his formal dress coat with its tails dangling and his waistcoat wrinkled across the front.

The tall candles wavered, Kema padded softly here and there, the place beside me was vacant, and Grondal, with his faded livery and ceremonious airs, was gone forever. March sat straight and stern at the head of the table, Mittie fidgeted and fretted but ate voraciously, the wind outside was rising a little, and once Konrad barked and barked again.

"Charles is crossing the yard," I thought to myself, and March met my eyes coldly and went on with her salad, though her lips were a white line and the purple shadows under her eyes were distinct against her white cheeks.

And all about us rose the great silent house, with its secrets and its terrors. What would the night bring forth?

Genevieve, stalking through the room, sat down beside me. He chose exactly the spot where Adolph's

chair had been and stared at me. I found I had salted vigorously a slice of baked ham on my plate and had poured mayonnaise on some creamed potatoes. I rose.

"I am very sleepy and tired," I said. "I must get some rest. I don't see how I can stay awake during the night to care for my patient."

"Would you like me to stay in the room, Miss Keate," asked Mr. Dimuck, rather half-heartedly, it seemed to me.

"I will stay with you," volunteered March at once.

"No, no," I refused hurriedly. "You see I expect him to recover consciousness at any moment."

Knowing what I knew, it was rather dreadful to see the faces that turned toward me at those words. It was as if their masks slipped a little and the selfish desires of each came boldly into their naked faces.

It was March, though, who spoke.

"You said you expected him to be able to speak soon, did you not, Miss Keate?"

"Yes." My voice was husky. Was I leading one of those people to a last fearful penalty? But there was Charles—was he near at hand, in the pantry perhaps, so he could hear my words? "Yes," I repeated more distinctly.

The masks were back again now, and the desires hidden and furtive.

"During the night?" asked Isobel.

"Yes," I said again and, stifling a desire to take to my heels and run, I walked out of the room, feeling all the way the concentrated gaze of that rigidly silent cluster around the long table.

I did not know that Genevieve had followed me until

I reached the door of the tower room, when he brushed purringly against my ankles and, as I pushed him away, leaped to the table, sniffed curiously at the old violin case that still lay there, and finally sat down and looked about him with a coolly proprietorial air that drew a startled word or two from O'Brien, who had watched him with distaste.

I think O'Brien was glad to leave, for he looked very unhappy and took his way out of the room with what I considered uncalled-for expedition.

It seemed ominous to me that that night no one came to the tower room. Not even Kema, who had taken over some of Grondal's duties despite March's ultimatum, came near.

Once from the library came the muffled, eerie strains of "La Furiante," but it broke off abruptly after only a few bars, and dead silence came down again upon the ugly old house.

I knit resolutely. The flames flickered and cast glancing shadows, the wind rattled the shutters, the sick man stirred a little once or twice, and about eleven o'clock I found that I had purled three whole stripes instead of knit one and purl one alternately as I should have done. In some disgust I rolled up the wool and laid it on a chair. But as to that, what with keeping my eyes on my patient, the green curtain, and the gloomy stairway simultaneously—which sounds impossible but can be done by one in the state of mind that I was in—what with all that, it is a wonder that I didn't knit the whole thing into knots.

Feeling, of course, that my first duty lay to my patient, I gave him assiduous care, but there was not

much I could do for him. I am bound to say that as the night wore slowly on I liked O'Leary's plan less and less And I did not fancy the thick, palpitant silence.

By midnight I was as nervous as a witch, my heart jumping to my throat every time the wind shook the shutters or some old board creaked. And once when Genevieve yawned suddenly and stretched himself I had to press my hand over my teeth to keep from screaming before I traced the sound of the little rustle. When I rose to lower the wick in the lamp on the table, as O'Leary had directed me, my hands were like ice and shaking so that I turned the wick too far down and it sent up a black wisp of smoke before I could adjust it.

Then I approached the bedside table, took a long breath and a last look around the room, felt in my pocket to be sure I had the police whistle, and blew out the flame in the lamp that stood there.

This left the room almost completely in darkness, for the faint light on the old center table was barely enough to give the furniture dim outlines and make a spot of light on the table, which thereafter diminished steadily until the corners of the room and the tower stairway and the curtain over the doorway were almost lost in blackness.

By the time I had reached the farther side of the bed and was squeezing myself into a hiding place back of the bed curtain I was in a cold chill of stark terror.

But for a long time nothing at all happened, and the room was as still as death itself.

My fears, however, did not quiet themselves; they grew worse with every second. And it was with my heart

nearly leaping out of my mouth that I saw that a shadow over near the doorway was moving.

The whistle was at my lips before I noted that the moving shadow made no effort to approach the bed, but simply remained in the denser shadows behind a great chair. O'Leary had said wait, and I waited. But I held the whistle poised at my lips.

More fear-laden seconds ticked away, and the shadow back of the chair did not move again. I had begun to wonder if my eyes had deceived me when a slight rustle from the other end of the room brought me staring in the direction, straining my ears for a repetition of that sound.

I heard it again.

And I froze in a very paralysis of panic.

Cautiously, with infinite stealth, someone was descending the tower stairway!

CHAPTER XVI

THE JADE ELEPHANT

WHO was it?

Was it O'Leary?

Did a fold of my white dress show from beyond the curtain? No.

Was the watcher across the room also aware that someone was creeping down the tower stairway?

Down another step and another. Only the soft pressure of feet on that padded carpet, the subdued creak now and then of the old timber, the hushed, barely perceptible breath of motion gave evidence of that slow descent.

At last there was a pause, and then a darker shadow emerged from the gloom surrounding the stairway, loomed up noiselessly between me and the dim lamp, bulked blackly against the red coals in the fireplace, and *was approaching the bed!*

The whistle was at my dry lips.

Another cautious step and another. I wondered if my heart beats could be heard and drew a cautious breath of air into my bursting lungs.

Another step. The shadow was near the bed. It was bending slowly. And all at once that other shadow had flung itself forward and was blended in a furious strug-

gle with the figure already there, and I was blowing the police whistle with all my pent-up force, and its shrill notes were cutting through every curtain and thick wall in the old house, and pandemonium was let loose in the tower room.

Lights, shouts, policemen crowding, people pouring into the room—all this I was only vaguely conscious of, for I was staring across that expanse of white counterpane.

There were three figures struggling there instead of two. One was O'Leary and one was Elihu Dimuck and one was——Policemen shouldering into the mass were thrusting them apart and I caught a glimpse of a face that made me grasp the curtains for support and stand there shaking, for in the glancing lights it looked as if Adolph Federie had returned to the tower room!

But it was Charles Federie, of course. I realized that even as a burly policeman pulled him aside, thrust quick hands up and down his body, and then linked an arm securely through his captive's arm.

"Good." It was O'Leary's voice, panting but keen as a knife. He was putting something long and slender that caught a sharp highlight as it vanished in an inside pocket. "Turn up the light over there, Murphy. Light that other lamp, Shafer. O'Brien, let the others come into the room. Miss Keate, are you all right?"

"Y-yes," I said in a small voice. Somehow I reached a chair and sat down, keeping my eyes on Charles Federie. I comprehended only vaguely that March was at my side, crying over and over again in a stricken way: "Why did you do it? Why did you do it?" and that Elihu Dimuck's eyes were nearly popping out from

their sockets and that Mittie and Eustace and Lonergan and Kema were there, too.

Charles Federie, his dark face and pouched eyes defiant, faced us with a policeman hanging on each arm.

Isobel thrust her way suddenly through the crowd and broke the momentary spell, for she came close to Charles, stared wildly into his face, touched his face with the tips of stiffly outstretched fingers, and said at last in a still voice that held as much horror as awe:

"*It's Charles Federie.*"

No one spoke, and Isobel turned toward us, her eyes going helplessly from one to another until she came to O'Leary.

"It's Charles Federie," she repeated in that dazed way. "And he's been dead fifteen years."

And at that Mittie began to scream, Kema padded forward and took March's hand in her broad, brown clasp, and Deke Lonergan sat down suddenly on the foot of the bed and said fervently: "Well, I'll be damned!"

O'Leary's clear voice dominated.

"Sit down here, Mrs. Federie. And you here, Miss March. We may as well have it out now. We can put the whole thing in a nutshell in a few moments, I think. Miss Frisling, will you stop that screaming!"

The sharp rudeness of the request seemed to bring Mittie to herself, for she gulped and subsided. I realized that my mouth was hanging open, closed it with a snap, and walked on somewhat unsteady feet to the bed. My patient was untouched and unharmed, but I remained there, my fingers on his pulse.

"To begin at the beginning," said O'Leary, "Charles

Federie wasn't any more dead than I am. He found it convenient, however, to get out of the country some fifteen years ago and did not see fit to discourage the report of his death. Is that right?"

"Quite right," agreed Charles Federie. At the sound of his voice I gasped, for it was easy and suave and arrogant and so like Eustace's voice that I had to look to be sure it was not Eustace speaking.

"You came here finally, hearing that your father was in poor health, with your mind made up to secure as much money from him as possible. You were only afraid that he would leave a will so that you would get nothing. Your father, of course, thought you were dead."

"Exactly," said Charles Federie. He spoke coolly, but his eyes were going warily from O'Leary to the police and around the room.

"Wait!" cried March. "It is all my fault, Mr. O'Leary."

"You let him into the house," said O'Leary. "And you have not had an easy moment since."

"Oh, I haven't!" cried March. "Not an instant. Since I met him outdoors the afternoon before Adolph was shot. I was out walking, and he came up to me and told me who he was; I knew he was telling the truth, of course, for he is like Eustace and Adolph and all the Federies. He persuaded me to let him into the house that night. And I did. But I tried to watch him. I even slipped through Eustace's bedroom up there and came a few steps down the tower stairway for fear Charles had come into the room and would—annoy Grandfather—try to talk to him. I didn't know that it would

make no difference to Grandfather." She cast a sad little glance toward the insensible figure on the bed.

"That is where you lost your crimson rosette off your slipper," said O'Leary, but did not tell her where he had found it. I suppose she never knew that Adolph's dying hand had clutched it from the step where it had fallen. And O'Leary had not seen fit to question her directly about his discovery of the rosette; what a waste my anxiety had been!

"March," cried Deke Lonergan. "What a blind fool I was! Can you forgive me? Remember, I've been half out of my mind with worry over the money I threw away. And I saw you go through the room, you know, and I did not know that you had returned, for I didn't hear you. And when I heard someone slipping so quietly through the room after the shot was fired and locking the door into the upstairs corridor I—well, I just jumped to the conclusion that it was you. I didn't know why you were there, but I wasn't going to tell——"

"You certainly were blind," interrupted O'Leary. "Adolph and—his murderer both went through that room and down the tower stairway and you slept, I suppose, through it all."

"Go on, O'Leary," said Eustace nervously. "Let's have the rest of it." So far, he had not spoken to his newly returned relative, although he had scarcely taken his eyes from his uncle's dark face.

"Very well," agreed O'Leary. "Adolph Federie was shot because he took a small green elephant from the mantel, here, where Mr. Federie liked to keep it. I might mention that upon the disappearance of the

elephant later on everyone in the house became convinced that it held the secret they longed to know, and they all started looking for it. But the secret it holds is not, I think, the one you expect." His eyes went from Eustace to Isobel and included Mittie. "Adolph managed to open the elephant and read the paper it contains. Will you give me the elephant, please?" He addressed Charles Federie.

O'Brien's hand was in Charles Federie's coat pocket. There was a brief struggle and O'Brien held a bit of green toward O'Leary.

"Here it is, sir."

It was curious to note the startled little hush as O'Leary took the jade elephant into his hand. Everyone was leaning forward, staring at the spot of vivid green, and a queer kind of sigh went over the room.

O'Leary balanced the thing on his palm.

"A pretty toy," he said slowly. "To hold a man's life."

There was an electric silence. Then:

"Open it," said Isobel harshly.

"Not yet," said O'Leary. "I'll tell you first what happened. Then I will prove it. The murderer of Adolph Federie escaped. Grondal knew that there was money in the house, was fearful lest his master die without divulging the secret of its hiding place, had looked everywhere for a clue as to where it was hidden, and heard Miss Keate mention that she had found the little green elephant at the foot of the stairway immediately following Adolph's death. This drew his attention to the elephant; he took the thing and, I think, succeeded

in opening it and reading the paper it held. But Miss Keate recovered the elephant and hid it in the violin case over there. From there, too, it disappeared."

Charles interrupted.

"I took it," he said coolly. "I was on the tower stairway when the nurse hid it. I saw her. In fact, I—well, I watched this room most of the time."

On the tower stairway! Then he had the key, of course, to the bedroom above.

"I thought you had it," I said, addressing Eustace. "You left the inquest so hurriedly that I——"

"You followed me," said Eustace grimly. "I wanted a look at this room when no one was here to watch, but you followed too quickly. I had to give up when I saw you coming."

"The green elephant was recovered again by Miss Keate," went on O'Leary.

"Do you know you nearly brained me with that flashlight?" interrupted Charles Federie, giving me a look of displeasure that was still a little respectful. "It caught me squarely on the head. I had to stay behind a box in the corner for hours. I thought you were a policeman until Kema opened the door of the trunk room. And I had to make a quick getaway to the attic. But the police didn't find me."

"I told you he was there," I said to O'Brien, enjoying my triumph.

"That is how you knew, then, that Miss Keate had the elephant again?" asked O'Leary.

Charles Federie nodded.

"It was easy enough to get hold of it again. Once I discovered it was gone, I guessed, of course, that she had

it and waited till she came from dinner. There wasn't much that I missed in the house. But I got tangled up in the yarn it was wrapped in and she nearly caught me."

So it was Charles Federie who had wrapped me in the curtain and wrenched the elephant from my clasp; I liked Charles Federie accordingly.

"But in the meanwhile Grondal was killed," resumed O'Leary. "Killed for knowing too much. For meeting the murderer in that upstairs room. For telling the murderer what he knew. The two struggled; Grondal, luckily for the murderer, was thrust somehow against the corner of a marble-topped table up there." He motioned to the bedroom above the tower room. "He staggered down the tower stairs and collapsed on the couch and the murderer slipped down the stairway after him and tied a violin string around his neck to make sure that what Grondal knew was safe—forever. It sounds like a feminine crime."

Mittie shrieked, but O'Leary did not pause in his grim recital.

"The murderer made sure that there would be no revival for Grondal."

Charles Federie again tried to jerk away from the policemen and did not succeed.

"Why don't you open the elephant?" he asked O'Leary. "The head of the thing unscrews."

Lance O'Leary gave him a long look. He held the green elephant balanced on his hand. Someone near me caught his breath sharply.

"Open it?" asked O'Leary softly. The fingers of the other hand caressed the shimmering green lightly. A policeman back of me stirred and felt for something in

his hip pocket. The room was all at once stifling, and it was difficult to breathe. We were all looking breathlessly at that spot of vivid, clear green.

"Open the elephant?" asked O'Leary. "Very well." His voice became sharp and clear. "Shafer—O'Brien." His eyes flashed from one to another of the bluecoats about us. Then he whirled, his gray figure electric, his hand flinging outward. "Make your arrest!"

There was a sudden whirl of rapidly moving figures, screams, outcries, a confused blending of voices and questions and a furious struggle going on before my eyes. I blinked, took a step or two forward, trying to see past the blue backs, and then as they fell back I think I screamed, too. I couldn't have helped it.

For there between Shafer and O'Brien was Elihu Dimuck, writhing and pulling at the glittering handcuffs that bound him to the policemen, his spectacles gone, his face distorted and livid with rage and fear, and a gibbering stream of black curses coming from the mouth.

"Hey! Stop that!" O'Brien shook his club in Dimuck's face. "Another word out of you and you'll find out how this feels."

"It does no good to struggle," advised O'Leary, regarding the man curiously.

"*It was you!*" cried March. She was leaning forward, her eyes like twin swords until she closed them. She put out her hands blindly.

"Here, dear. Don't look at him." Lonergan had her in his arms, her face pressed against his shoulder.

I stared at Elihu Dimuck. It was the first time I had seen him without the broadly benevolent eyeglasses,

and I was amazed at the difference in his appearance. His eyes were shrewd, cruel, greedy, and were darting now from one to another of us with the beady, vicious look of a cornered rat.

"You can't prove it," he said in a hoarse whisper. "You can't prove it."

"Ah, but I can." O'Leary revealed an unsuspected flair for the dramatic. "Before I open this elephant, before we know the secret that brought two deaths, I'll tell you how I know that this man is guilty. The night that Adolph Federie was killed Dimuck came to the tower room and said before anyone had told him what had happened: 'Who shot him?' and Adolph Federie was lying on the stairway on his face, in such a position that it was impossible for anyone to know that he had been shot at all. For all Dimuck ought to have known the man was only sick or had died from natural causes. But he said at once: 'Who shot him?' That was enough to interest me in the man, especially after he said that the sound of the shot awakened him. The revolver was of a small caliber; with Miss Keate's help I experimented and found that in his bedroom at the far end of the house *he could not have heard the shot.* Then, I found four different fingerprints on the old violin. There were Miss Keate's, Eustace's, Charles Federie's—oh, yes, we had those from the china doorknob on the kitchen door long ago—and Elihu Dimuck's. Then, after Grondal's death, he took pains to destroy the fingerprints on the knob of the bedroom door upstairs, which he must have forgotten in his haste to get away after he had twisted the violin string about Grondal's throat; as a rule he was very cautious about fingerprints. I was

convinced, however, when Miss Keate cut her hand. She cut her hand on a small sliver of glass on the table upstairs. And the glass proved to be a broken bit of a lens for spectacles. With the help of various oculists and a good deal of time, I traced that bit of glass and found it was exactly like the lenses in the spectacles with which I discovered Elihu Dimuck had recently been fitted. But apparently Elihu Dimuck's spectacles had not been broken, for he was still wearing them. He had been refitted quite recently, though, so it was not unreasonable to suspect that he yet had his former pair of spectacles, those he had previously worn, before he got the new pair. If he had broken his new pair, he could have gone directly to his room, taken out the old spectacles, which, by the way, no longer helped his vision, put them on, hidden the broken pair, and come downstairs at the sound of the police whistle which by that time was ringing through the house. He must have considered it fortunate that he had the old pair with him, although he could not see so well through them, which, of course, was his reason for being refitted."

A thought flashed over him.

"That is why you wrote that note!" I cried.

Lance O'Leary nodded.

"Yes. I was convinced when, first, I handed Dimuck a note saying: 'Where are your broken eyeglasses?' Had he been able to read it, it would have given him quite a shock, but he could not even read it. Then I found the broken pair hidden under the carpet in his bedroom. That was your greatest mistake, Dimuck. Go and get them, will you, Murphy; they are under the carpet, hidden in the straw padding, near the right-hand side of

the foot of the bed. I left them there so Dimuck would not know that they were found."

Dimuck was still sawing at the handcuffs.

"You can't prove anything," he reiterated. "You can't prove anything."

"There is only one thing I am curious about," said O'Leary quietly. "How did you get that revolver over in the corner of the vacant bedroom upstairs without entering the room yourself?"

Dimuck smiled; it was an ugly smile.

"I threw it!" he said with a grisly touch of triumph in his voice. "Had you there, didn't I! I simply opened that door, rubbed the fingerprints off the revolver with my handkerchief, and threw it." A look of terror came into his face. "No, I didn't! No, I didn't! You can't prove anything."

"You've confessed, you fool," said O'Leary in a tone as near savagery as I've ever known him to use.

Charles Federie laughed.

"You're a smart man, O'Leary. Open the elephant."

"Yes." Isobel was leaning forward, her hands clutching the back of a chair and her eyes on the elephant. "Open it."

"Very well," said O'Leary again. "And we'll see whether or not I am right."

I think the sight of his slender fingers turning the tiny green head maddened Dimuck, for he gave a strangled yell and surged desperately at the handcuffs, and there was a moment of struggle before he was standing fairly quiet again.

"The head turns backward," said Charles Federie. "Take hold of the ears."

No one seemed to breathe while O'Leary's fingers turned and turned and finally the head and body of the green elephant parted. A bit of white showed against the green; I believe that O'Leary's fingers shook a little as he withdrew the small piece of paper, opened it, and glanced at the written lines.

"Listen to this: 'This is to acknowledge and affirm that all properties held by me and registered in my name as undersigned are actually the properties of Jonas Federie. In return for the use of my name in this way I am to receive a yearly salary which is to be deducted each year from the income of these properties, and it to be agreed upon each year between me and said Jonas Federie. All deeds and mortgages are in safety box number 287 of the Savings Trust Bank of B——. At the moment of recording this instrument all properties will revert to the owner.' Signed 'Elihu Dimuck.'"

There was a moment's silence. Then O'Leary added: "This is witnessed by Matthew Frisling, a notary public, and Jem Grondal. And both witnesses are dead. It was a golden opportunity for Elihu Dimuck. Short and to the point as the agreement is, it is perfectly legal and binding."

Charles Federie cleared his throat.

"My father always felt that some legal difficulty might arise if he kept his money and property in his own name. He always felt there was danger, I suppose. Father managed his farms, did all his business through the medium of Elihu Dimuck's name. Dimuck's ownership would never have been questioned if he had succeeded in destroying that paper."

Murphy entered, shouldering his way to O'Leary.

"There's them spectacles, sir," he said.

I stared at the spectacles O'Leary held in his hands; the gold rims were intact, but only a few raggedly sharp bits of glass remained. Even that way the gold rims were broad and substantial and ineffably benign. And what greed, what cruelty, what sordid, ugly crime they had concealed!

"The money, by the way, that is supposedly kept in the house," said O'Leary, "consists of a couple of thousand dollars in bills. It is in a small trunk under Mr. Federie's bed; a hiding place so simple I dare say you never thought of searching it. Mr. Federie is too good a business man to leave a fortune in cash hidden in the house, delightful though the idea is. And, Mr. Lonergan, I have no doubt that Mr. Federie will return to you the money Eustace borrowed and lost, thereby causing you such anxiety. You annoyed me, you know. I could not at once fit you into the puzzle."

"If it's any comfort to you, you annoyed me," retorted Deke Lonergan.

Genevieve, who had been washing his face vigorously during the whole time, jumped down suddenly and stalked out of the room; there was a kind of righteous finality about the very angle of his tail, as if he had done his duty well and was ready to turn to other matters.

"But the key to the bedroom upstairs," I said suddenly. "It was in Mittie's bead box; who put it there?"

"There must have been two keys," said O'Leary, eying Charles Federie. "Dimuck had one. He must have thought it an excellent idea to lock young Lonergan into the bedroom above the tower stairway and retain the key in order to give himself access to the tower room

and the green elephant. Then when he grew afraid that he would catch him with the key he placed it in the bead box merely to complicate matters for us. And probably Mr. Charles Federie has an old key to that room."

Charles Federie nodded.

"Here it is in my pocket," he said. "That room upstairs had been mine. Mine and your father's, March, for we were the oldest. And when I left home suddenly the key was in my pocket and—and I've always kept it. By the way, I suppose there is no chance of keeping my presence here a secret?" he asked O'Leary doubtfully, and as O'Leary shook his head Charles turned regretfully to March. "I'm afraid you may have to stand a revival of some old—er—scandal."

"Was it you who played the piano the day of Adolph's funeral?" I asked suddenly.

He nodded, smiling a little.

"I didn't know, then, that I had hit on Eustace's favorite tune. And you nearly got me there in the butler's pantry when Grondal was killed."

"That was a fortunate meeting for you," said O'Leary. "She touched the roughly woven material of your coat at exactly the time the murder took place. And since the others were all—er—in pajamas or bathrobes when they came downstairs, I thought it likely that was you. That is, after I became convinced of your presence—and of your innocence."

Charles laughed.

"I expected the nurse to raise an alarm. I hurried up the main stairway, and Eustace followed me into the

trunk room—which was also in the nature of an alibi for me, I suppose."

"Then Dimuck knew all along that the paper was in the elephant?" inquired Eustace.

"How about it, Dimuck?" asked O'Leary.

"I didn't know where it was until—Adolph——" Dimuck stopped.

"But you thought it was somewhere close to Mr. Federie," said O'Leary. "And you watched. And you followed Adolph through the bedroom up there and down the tower stairway to where you could see into the room. Adolph was doubtless looking for a clue as to where the money he thought was in the house was hidden. And when he happened onto the secret of the elephant you guessed what he had found. You knew at once where to find the paper. And that Adolph must die for his knowledge if you were to succeed in your scheme."

"Did Grondal know that this paper existed? You said he witnessed it," persisted Eustace.

"I think he witnessed only the signatures," said O'Leary. "Is that right, Dimuck?" And as the man made a sullen gesture of assent O'Leary continued: "But Grondal, too, was looking for some clue to the fortune you all supposed to be hidden in the house—not for himself, likely, but for the family. When he happened upon the knowledge the elephant contained and came upon Dimuck in the room above to which supposedly only the murderer had the key, he taxed Dimuck with his new knowledge. The two quarreled, Dimuck saying boldly that he would have the money.

And you knew, didn't you, Dimuck, that you must kill Grondal, too? *Answer me!*"

"Y-yes. If I confess—will you make things easier for me?" His ratlike eyes were ugly.

"You have confessed," said O'Leary again.

There was a sudden stir and a muffled stammer of words from the bed. I turned quickly. For the first time old Mr. Federie was looking at me with intelligence in his blue eyes.

"Who—are—you?" He spoke slowly and with labored thickness of tongue.

"Grandfather!" March was kneeling at the bedside.

"March," he said. "M-March—" the words came slowly and with great effort—"the green—the green——"

"Yes, dear. The green elephant? Here it is. It is safe."

O'Leary stepped quickly to her side and placed it in the old man's wrinkled hand.

"Telephone for the doctor," I said hurriedly to Kema. "Hurry. It is Main 2336."

Well, that is about all. I remember the doctor's arriving in the cold gray dawn and, after he had pronounced my patient out of immediate danger, his almost ghoulish interest in the events of the night. I remember Kema's bringing coffee and how gloriously commonplace and welcome its fragrance and stimulating heat were. I remember the clattering patrol wagon, and how March and I met each other's gaze and shuddered as it drove away from the gate, and how Mittie watched from a window with her nose flat against the glass, and how Isobel sat, superbly at ease in her night-

gown and Chinese shawl, and smoked and stared into the fire. And how Lonergan would scarcely leave March's side, and how Eustace and Charles talked and questioned O'Leary over and over again.

And I remember, too, and shall never forget, how gloomy was the tower stairway, and how somberly the green couch loomed in the stairway's morose shadows.

It must have been seven o'clock in the morning before they left me again in the tower room. And as the green curtain fell behind Isobel, who was the last to drift away, O'Leary returned and flung himself into a chair, sighing deeply.

"Well," he said in a dull voice, "your patient is going to get well, and the thing is done."

"The thing is done," I repeated after him. Another day was at hand. I reached one hand to my cap and tucked in straying locks of hair.

"You do not seem hilariously triumphant," I commented.

"I am not." Lance O'Leary's aspect was unutterably weary. "Mine is a terrible profession. Without imagination I would be no good; with it I am too—sensible of what I have done."

"The man was a murderer. He deserved to be caught," I reminded him sternly.

"Yes." He sat thoughtfully silent for a moment or two. Then he shrugged. "Well—anyway, the thing is over."

"Was Dimuck actually intending to kill old Mr. Federie?" I asked, whispering so as not to arouse my patient who had fallen into his first natural sleep. "And was it he that searched my room last night?"

Lance O'Leary nodded wearily.

"Look here." An ugly-looking knife lay in his hand; it glittered evilly. "He dropped this when I got him there by the bed. Wicked-looking thing, isn't it? I spared Miss March the sight of it."

"But how did Charles Federie happen in the room to-night?"

"He came through the door; I was watching him. He admits that after reading that paper he suspected something of the kind. And Charles did not want his father to die. At least, until he had made some arrangement by which Charles would inherit."

"But why didn't Charles come forward as soon as he read that paper and knew how Dimuck would benefit by Mr. Federie's death?"

O'Leary glanced irritatedly at me.

"Charles didn't have the clues we had, remember. To-night I left the bedroom door up there unlocked, baited the trap for Dimuck, and watched from the passage. You watched from back of the curtain at the bed, and Charles from across the room when Dimuck came down the tower stairway. He was desperate, as I knew he would be, else he would not have taken the chance. It meant more than the property that old Mr. Federie should never speak."

Lance O'Leary sighed again, slipped the knife back under his coat, and rose.

"I should like to be able to thank you properly, Sarah Keate," he began.

But I brushed away his thanks, and finally he walked slowly to the doorway and turned there; his slight figure and intent face were poised for a moment

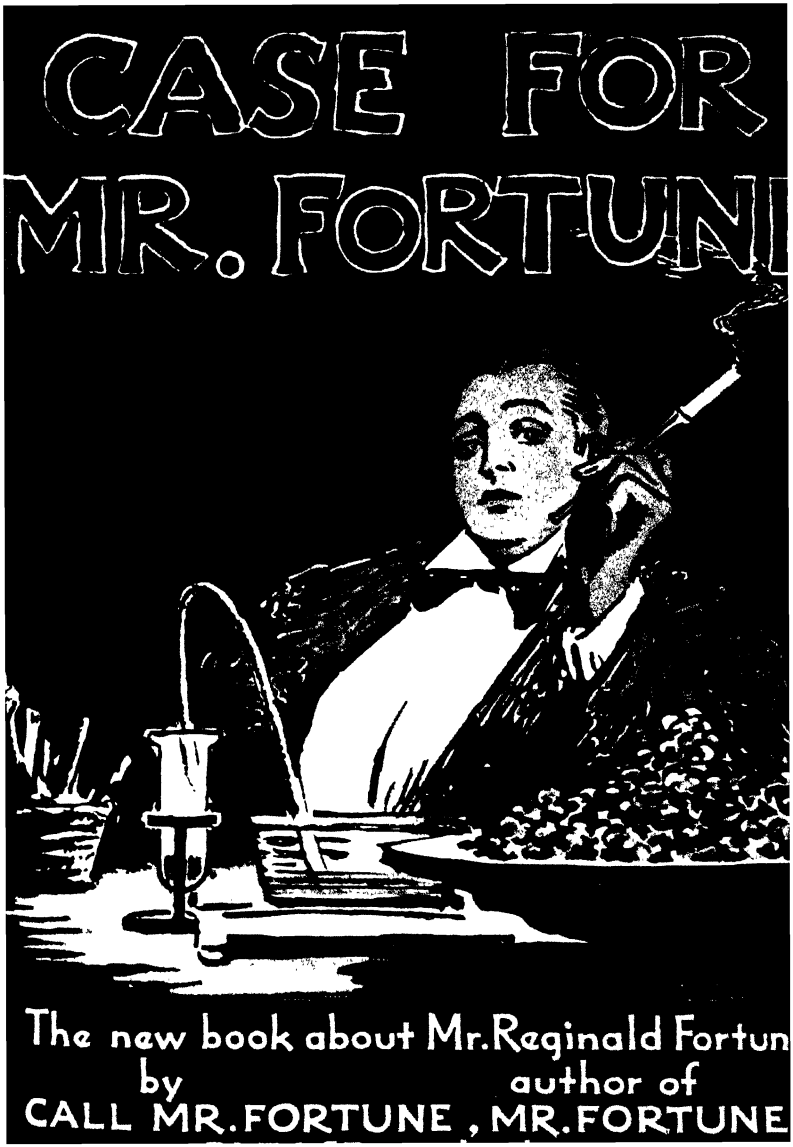
against that green background, while his clear eyes lingered on the old room with its secretive curtains and twisting tower stairway. There was something fateful about that silent moment, something curiously significant; then he turned with a little gesture of farewell, and the green curtain fell slowly into place. And all around me lay again the secrets of Federie house.

Well, as I say, that is about all. I found Mr. Federie a lively and entertaining patient, especially after he became reconciled with Charles. But after his recovery I went back to the hospital and have never, since the Federie case, taken a case in a private home. There are no musty curtains and twisting tower stairways here!

I saw something of the Federies and a great deal of Lance O'Leary during the trial, which was a long-drawn-out affair. Not long ago I nursed Lance O'Leary through an appendectomy, and during his convalescence we reconstructed the Federie case with such success that the training nurses refused to enter the room and the head doctor himself came to remonstrate.

"That is all right," said Lance O'Leary. "You may think that Miss Keate is a good nurse, but she is a better detective. The next time I get stuck on a case I am going to send for her."

Which was absurd, of course.


CASE FOR
MR. FORTUNE
The new book about Mr. Reginald Fortun
by
author of
CALL MR. FORTUNE, MR. FORTUNE

THE GREEK PLAY AND THE LITTLE DOG

From CASE FOR MR. FORTUNE
By H. C. Bailey

H. C. BAILEY HAS WRITTEN THE FOLLOWING BOOKS ABOUT THE EXPLOITS OF MR. REGINALD FORTUNE:

Case for Mr. Fortune
Call Mr. Fortune
Mr. Fortune's Practice
Mr. Fortune's Trials
Mr. Fortune, Please
Mr. Fortune Speaking
Mr. Fortune Explains

TO BE ISSUED SHORTLY:

Mr. Fortune Wonders

AND TWO DETECTIVE NOVELS FEATURING MR. JOSHUA CLUNK:

The Red Castle Mystery
The Garston Murder Case

THESE two cases are taken from the work of the years in which Mr. Fortune had established his position as the medical expert and general scientific adviser of the

English Criminal Investigation Department. In them will be found different but characteristic examples of his mature methods.

Mr. Fortune himself is of the opinion that his success is due first to the humble, scientific temper of his mind, which insists upon considering all facts, however small, incoherent, or inconvenient, and secondly to his perfect harmony with the feelings of the natural man. He has disputed the claim of an English Prime Minister to be "the chief of common men."

Some of his friends—and enemies—say that he relies upon an abnormal power of feeling the emotions and intentions of other people. This he repudiates with indignation, protesting that he is merely rational, inferring states of mind from the evidence of facts, and distinguished only by his power of faith in evidence.

What he would modestly admit is an absolute confidence in his own judgment and a determination to act on it quite ruthlessly. And this he considers the most simply human side of his happy temperament.

THE GREEK PLAY

MR. FORTUNE was concentrated on an investigation. In this state of mind, he is not aware of time or persons. He was in his garden. Some of the long experiments in producing his ideal sweet pea flowered about him in colours of the freshness of his own innocent complexion. He sniffed delicately, he sniffed profoundly. The sweet pea of his dreams was to give him the rich waved grace of the moderns with the deeper fragrance of the old. And his round face became wistful.

On this sorrow came the voice of a person of great personality. His black Persian, Darius, sat down on the lawn, gazed with large golden eyes, and announced that instant attention was required. Reggie awoke and came hastily. Darius lay on his back and stretched, exhibiting a stomach for homage. It was rubbed respectfully. Darius sang a small song, curled up on the hand and killed it, rose, walked away with his tail in the air. "Darlin'," Reggie murmured to his swaggering hinder end.

"My dear child!" he was rebuked. Mrs. Fortune came towards him.

"Oh, Peter!" Reggie blinked at her. She was dressed not for gardening, but for a garden party, in something filmy that revealed her adorably and shimmered apple-green and gold. He looked down at his crumpled grey flannel, and again at her and with alarm.

"You are, you really are," he murmured.

"Why aren't you dressed?" said Mrs. Fortune severely.

"I am. For this world. I didn't know we were going to heaven."

"You're not. You're going to Logate. Run away and make yourself respectable."

Reggie groaned. "Black coat?"

"Yes, dear. Full fig. Run. You've only half an hour for lunch and all."

But under pressure he can be very quick and neat. He sat down in the clothes of ceremony before she had finished her fish. He gave his whole mind to that, salmon trout in mayonnaise. He stopped and turned to the parlourmaid. "Tell Elise that chives in a fish salad are an error." He tasted the wine. "And you've got the Carbonnieux too cold."

"Don't be peevish, child," Mrs. Fortune smiled.

"I'm not. Only alert. The faculties have been aroused. And earnest." He proceeded swiftly by way of lamb in aspic to a soufflé. "Ah! Tell Elise that all is forgiven. And a few strawberries, please." He dealt with them; he was drinking his coffee while the soufflé still occupied Mrs. Fortune. "Why are we going to Logate, Joan?" he murmured.

"To see a Greek play, dear."

"My only aunt!" Reggie gazed at her. "What is Logate, Joan?"

"My dear child! Logate School. The girls' school. You know all about it."

"Do I?" Reggie said plaintively. "Fancy knowin' all about a girls' school! Well, well. Why did you marry that kind of man?"

Mrs. Fortune stood up. "You're not amusing." She looked down at him. "This is merely futile. It's no use being innocent to me, my child. You won't be let off. I told you ages ago we were going to the play at Logate."

"P'r'aps I wasn't listening, dear," Reggie sighed.

"Probably not. But you always hear," said she. "Come along, Reginald."

And he went. He did in fact know something about Logate. Everybody does. It is one of the more magnificent of those schools which were founded last century when the wild hope that girls might be educated first dazzled England. From the private adventure of a determined woman it grew into an established institution, with governors and endowments, and drew to its walls the daughters of people of importance. He knew also that his wife had acquaintance among those fortunate maidens, and he remembered with painful clearness that she had talked of an invitation to some festivity there. Her desire to take him into social crowds is the only tragic element in their married life.

He lay back in the car and contemplated her; an occupation always comfortung. "Well, well," he murmured. "What is this play, Joan?"

"The Antigone."

"Oh, ah! When I was at Oxford a dear old don told me that nobody was educated who hadn't read the Antigone. So I did. In translation. And these young things are doing it in Greek! Well, well. The advance of women."

"They haven't done one in Greek before. That's the new classical mistress. Nan says she's a tiger."

Reggie's eyelids drooped. "Is that so?" he murmured. "Nan. Who is Nan?"

"You know. My young godchild, Nan Bundy. We're really going to see her."

"And very nice too," Reggie murmured. "Nice legs. Is she Antigone?"

Mrs. Fortune laughed. "Heavens, no! How could she?"

"Nohow. Contrariwise. Would that matter?"

"It is a glorious part," Mrs. Fortune sighed. She was herself the Rosalind of men's dreams before she decided to be a wife.

"Yes. Yes. Resolute young woman. And we're going to see a schoolgirl play it."

"Nan says she's wonderfully good," said Mrs. Fortune. "It's a girl called Nora Brown." Reggie's eyes were nearly closed, but he continued to look at her. "Of course, she's not likely to get near it. But still Antigone ought to be a girl—it's like Juliet; you want a girl and a great actress too—and nobody is both at once. But sometimes a girl is wonderful." She began to talk about acting. This is most unusual. And Reggie ceased to look at her. His mind played with a doubt whether it was the Greek play that he was being taken to see. But he did not say so. He has been married some time.

Logate School is established in a vast house in a park. Both were originally constructed for an eighteenth-century profiteer. The park keeps unspoilt its artificial lake, its delusive vistas, its sham ruins, its copied statues and temples.

The house has a huge portico to disguise the obvious fact that its front door is at the back. They went into what had been a good hall before its proportions were destroyed. Logate is much organized. The guests who enter there abandon freedom and walk in a straight and narrow path under continual orders from the staff.

"Oh, my hat!" Reggie muttered. "Joan! I want to go home." And they were passed into the presence of the head mistress and it was announced that they were Mr. and Mrs. Fortune.

He raised frightened eyes and saw a small, intense woman. Her set smile of welcome flickered. "Mr. Fortune?" she repeated. "How do you do?" It seemed that he caused her some surprise, some curiosity, if such a woman could be curious about a man.

"Do you know our chairman?" She passed him on to

the Bishop of Lanchester. That plump and crimson prelate gurgled slightly and took pains to be affable. He made a mild joke about Mrs. Fortune being too young, oh, far too young, to have a daughter at Logate. He obviously desired to know who had sent Reggie an invitation. "Not a daughter, but a goddaughter," said Mrs. Fortune. "So we feel quite parental about Logate." The Bishop said it was very natural, the Bishop said he was delighted, and they were taken with ceremony to the terraced lawns which made a theatre for the play, they were set in the seats of the mighty. Reggie looked sideways at his wife. "Why do they love us so?" he murmured. "This is very alarmin', Joan."

"The penalty of fame, dear. Be a brave little man." She began to talk to the mistress presiding over that block of seats.

Reggie gazed about him. The lawns were cut like broad steps out of the slope on the top of which behind them the great house stood. Each lawn had its rows of chairs. At the foot of the slope on an open space between banks of rhododendrons a stage was built, with the front of a Greek palace for scenery. On either side and beyond the park displayed its green vistas set with sham antiquities—here a ruined Gothic tower, there a classic temple.

Mrs. Fortune compelled him into her conversation with the mistress, who was delivering a lecture on the play: "Terribly sad, you see. Quite dreadful. Of course, it's very grand. Some people feel it's not nice for girls. The theme, you see—a girl defying the law and killing herself. You're meant to think she's a martyr to her own sense of right. An immortal protest, of course. But perhaps it is unsettling for girls."

"You think so?" Reggie murmured.

Mrs. Fortune was indignant. "It's a noble play! I can't imagine it could do anybody harm."

"Especially in Greek," Reggie murmured. "Do girls get Greek plays on their nerves? I was only a boy."

"Girls are so serious," said the mistress. "So earnest. One has to be very careful." She gave them copies of the play and fussed on to somebody else.

"Curious symptoms," Reggie mumbled.

"Why?" Mrs. Fortune turned to him. "What are you thinking of?"

"Vague suggestions of collective hysteria; or getting the general wind up. As you say—why?"

"I suppose it's first-night nervousness."

"Yes. I wonder. Yes. Well, well, what exactly did Antigone do?" He opened the book of the words. "Oh, ah! She was told not to bury her brother because he died fighting against her city, and she went and did it. So the king shut her up in a tomb and she said it was hard she couldn't have the life of other girls, but she'd done her duty and she hanged herself."

"Don't, Reggie. It's grand."

"I know. I'm not feelin' facetious, Joan." He looked about him and his round face was grave and plaintive, like an earnest child's.

Important parents and the governing body filled the seats about them. The head mistress and the Bishop, side by side, glanced at them and leaned over to say amiable nothings. And the play began.

Antigone was on the stage, a girl not more than common tall, slim as a boy in her Greek dress, not pretty beside the buxom fairness of her sister, Ismene. But she held the eye, she had dignity, she was desperately earnest, and the other only a girl in fancy dress. Her dark face was individual, a face to remember, proud, wistful, with a brow and a chin.

It is a quiet scene, to show Antigone as a girl who believes that she has a duty—to break the law. This Antigone

was very quiet. But when she had gone, when the chorus were doing physical exercises in front of the stage and chanting a hymn to dawn, Reggie murmured: "Yes, she looks like somebody."

Mrs. Fortune was gravely interested. "She's feeling it, poor child. Did you notice the sister? Little pig!"

"Yes, missing a bit, wasn't she?"

"Missing! She was deliberately spoiling it. Playing as jealous as could be."

The bullying King Creon, a robust damsel who wore her beard with a swagger and spoke in a shout, came on to hear that Antigone had buried her dead and defied him, and she was brought prisoner before him to declare she obeyed "unwritten laws, eternal in the heavens." Her voice rang clear, she had a good gesture.

"She is rather out of the way, what?" Reggie murmured. "Know her again, wouldn't you?"

"Very sincere and natural," Mrs. Fortune frowned a little. "Passionate, yes." Ismene returned to be companion of her sister's fate. She was very nice and pretty about it. She made a mess of Antigone's lovely dignity.

The chorus chanted the great ode to love as if it were a cheery hymn, and Antigone came to say her farewell to light and life. She looked desperate enough. Her voice throbbed. She was feeling the agony. "Unwept and unfriended"—she stopped, she held out her arms and let them fall, she looked up to the sky. And the raucous voice of the prompter rattled out the next line.

"Ah!" Mrs. Fortune flushed. "How ghastly!" But the prompter gave the words again and the chorus giggled. Antigone was shattered. She went on with her speech in a hurry. She had no more reality. She was a girl saying a lesson and caring for nothing but to get to the end. "Behold me, what things at the hands of what men I suffer." She was gone.

"Oh, that was a shame," Mrs. Fortune whispered, her hand on Reggie's. "She was being rather fine."

"Yes. Yes. As you say." Reggie looked at her with closing eyes.

The chorus, very brisk and lively, chanted that she came of a noble family, but Fate's everlasting hands availed to reach her, and a messenger came and described how in her tomb prison he "saw the maiden hanged. about her neck some shred of linen served her for a noose," and the chorus remarked that to be happy one must be wise, and marched off.

The audience began to chatter and move. Reggie was in no hurry. The head mistress and the Bishop stopped in passing. "A great play," said the Bishop.

"Oh, yes. Yes. And a very interestin' performance," Reggie murmured.

"I thought Antigone did wonderfully," said Mrs. Fortune.

"I am afraid she found it rather difficult." The head mistress lingered. "But she has ability."

"Yes. Strikin' child. Yes," Reggie murmured.

"Very hard for her." The head mistress looked at him keenly. "Do you know Miss Hopkins perhaps?"

"Is that the prompter?" said Mrs. Fortune with some ferocity.

"Oh, dear, no." The head mistress frowned. "That was Miss Evans, who has always produced our plays. Miss Hopkins has just taken charge of the classical side. She persuaded us to attempt a Greek tragedy. She has worked night and day for this performance."

"She found an Antigone," said Mrs. Fortune.

The head mistress slowly followed her bishop. But Reggie sat still, watching with dreamy eyes the rest of the governing body depart. "Well, well," he sighed, and turned

to his wife with a smile. "And now, Joan—what was I brought here for?"

Her eyes met his large and solemn. "Nan Bundy asked us."

"Yes. You told me so. I also believe it. What exactly did she say?"

"Do you think there's something wrong here?"

"My dear girl! Oh, my dear girl, I've been thinkin' somebody thought so ever since we left home."

"And now?" she said eagerly.

"And now I think hysteria's catchin'. Don't you catch it, Joan. What did the sinful child say?"

"She said, 'Do bring the Cherub.'"

"Nobody respects me," Reggie sighed. "Is that all?"

"No. She said it again in a postscript, 'Do bring the Cherub. Things are being perfectly foul and I want to tell him.'"

"Oh, my aunt!" Reggie moaned. "More nerves."

"The letter did sound like nerves. But that isn't like Nan."

"No. No. She's more like an ice. Say strawberry Melba. Well, well, let's find the minx."

"She was in the chorus," said Mrs. Fortune.

They went down to the level turf about the stage where proud parents were waiting for their daughters to emerge from the dressing tent behind the rhododendrons. The pretty Ismene came out of it with a large woman who had been handsome in a florid way. The woman was in a hurry, but Ismene chattered past. "Oh, Miss Evans, isn't she impossible? . . . But, Miss Evans . . ."

"Well, well. So that's the assertive prompter." Reggie watched her with dreamy curiosity.

"I should like to box her ears," said Mrs. Fortune.

Miss Evans had to be introduced to Ismene's mamma. She spared time to be gushing. Then she hurried away

towards the house. Reggie continued to watch her. She passed into the crowd on the terrace. She was talking to some of the governors. She vanished.

"Oh, you lambs!" A buxom young person of vivid colour rushed upon them. "Bless you! Wasn't it the putrid limit? Poor old Nobs."

"Referrin' to Antigone, Miss Bundy?" Reggie inquired.

"Yes, Mr. Fortune," said she demurely. "Oh, Cherub, you are a darling to come. Angel face!"

"Thankin' you for these kind words—why am I brought to your maiden revels?"

"Well, I ask you! Wasn't it absolutely foul? Half of them rotting her and the Evanly one braying at her. Hoppy's furious. Poor old Nobs, she's wishing she was dead."

"Poor girl," Mrs. Fortune sighed. "I think she did wonderfully, Nan. Could I speak to her? I'd like to tell her so."

"You're a dear; she doesn't want to speak to anybody just now. She's in the tent still. Wants to get alone. She's like that when she's down."

"Yes. Yes. This show bein' a kind of climax. Now we'll begin at the beginning, Nan. Who is Antigone that Miss Evans and friends crab her?"

Nan stared at him. "Golly!" she said. "You're awfully clever. Yes, that is the beginning. I say, let's come out of the mob." She took them away to a stone seat in a hollow of the green slope, remote, and commanding wide spaces of loveliness from the lake to the temple above. "Shan't have anybody sneaking here."

"Oh! That's the state of society," Reggie murmured.

"We're a happy family, I don't think," said Miss Bundy. "Look here, you know the sort of shop this is. Absolutely it. Nobody wanted unless Father's somebody. That went all right. Things were very jolly when I came five years ago. Nothing mattered but the games, and they

were top-hole. Then the old head went and we got this woman. She's a highbrow. Her strong suit is ideals. She's always blethering about the old noble purpose of Logate's to raise the standard of woman's capacity. Well, of course that sort of thing got people's backs up frightfully."

"Miss Bundy has no use for an intellectual head?"

"I don't mind, bless you. The woman's not bad, if she wouldn't preach. We wanted a change. The place was jolly slack. But naturally people hated it. Talked all sorts of rot. There was a yarn the mistresses were frightfully sick she got the job—thought one of themselves ought to have had it—the Evanly one was favourite. Somebody put it about the governors wouldn't back her up. But she carried on and went on stiffening things. And then she brought in scholarship girls. You know—entrance scholarships open to anybody. We'd never had that before. Six a year. She caught some rum fish. Clever kids from nowhere, looking like nothing on earth, didn't want to do anything but sap. That didn't make a happy home. Of course, they got treated like absolute outsiders, and some of the mistresses backed 'em and some gave 'em jip, specially the Evanly one. Then the Head brought in a new mistress or two of her own sort and Hoppy. Hoppy's a tiger. She's classics. That put the Evanly one's nose right out of joint. The Evanly one had always run the idea that a little classics was classy, being her subject, so she got the smart set."

"Miss Evans likes the aristocracy?" Reggie murmured.

"She's a priceless snob," said Miss Bundy. "If a girl has a title somewhere or there's money about, the Evanly one's all over her. Well, in comes Hoppy and takes the top classics away from her. More trouble. The slackers have a rotten time and so there's the smart set against Hoppy and fawning round good Evans. Like that fatty Edith—you saw her—Ismene."

"Yes. Yes. Flaccid type," Reggie yawned. "Thyroid

trouble perhaps. When were you coming to Antigone?"

"Poor old Nobs! She's a scholarship girl. Wouldn't think it, would you? I'm sorry—I'm a snob myself. But I mean she don't look the usual book grub."

"No. No. Not a grub. She might have a brain."

"She looks someone quite unusual," said Mrs. Fortune. "It's a fine face, Nan."

"Not one of the undistinguished proletariat. No," Reggie murmured. "By the way—to reach at last the beginning—who is she? What's her name, for instance?"

Nan said "Hush!" And her eyes directed his to Antigone. The girl had changed out of her Greek dress to the school uniform—grey serge tunic, white blouse and tie in the Logate white and grey colours—an austere garb which on that day of festival nobody else was wearing. Nan called out, "I say, Nobs, old thing!" The girl looked, frowned, and hurried on into the loneliness of the park. "Sorry," said Nan. "She's like that when she's upset. Can't bear anybody. And I'm by way of being a pal."

Reggie watched her. She seemed to have a determined purpose. "Often upset, is she?"

"She's had a rotten time. She's poor."

"Oh, yes. Hence the uniform—when the rest of you are in purple and fine linen."

"Of course, she's got other clothes—but nothing nice—just like her to wear the school rags on a show day. Sort of defiance. She's like that. You see, the other scholarship girls—well, they've got people of sorts, but Nobs came from a village school."

"Is that so?" Reggie murmured: he was still watching the determined march of Antigone. "From the village school straight to the exclusive and expensive Logate. Well, well!"

"Oh, she did. She's a wonder. There was a mistress who got keen on her and coached her and she took the first

schol. She's not a bit like what you'd think, either. She's jolly good at games, and awfully decent. But she's had a beastly time. Just because she's specially poor and nobody. We are a lot of snobs. The Evanly one's had a particular down on her lately. Only Hoppy's kind of taken her up. Hoppy don't make favourites, but if you can do anything she shoves you along. Well, you saw what happened to-day —that was pretty ghastly, wasn't it? That's the way things are. Now you know why I wanted you to come, Cherub." She took Reggie's hand for a swift moment.

Antigone had vanished in the hollows of the park where the portico of the temple shimmered grey. Reggie turned and gazed at Miss Bundy. "My dear girl! Oh, my dear girl!" he sighed.

"I wrote about it to Father and he said it was like a school story——"

"Yes. Yes. So it is, you know. The persecuted heroine has only got to save somebody's life and you'll all live happily ever after."

"You don't believe that," said Nan; and her frank eyes challenged him.

"You think not? Why wouldn't I?"

"You can see there's something wrong with the jolly old place."

"Oh, yes. Yes. That is indicated."

"Well, you can make people take notice. You can do things."

"My dear girl! Oh, my dear girl!" Reggie moaned again. "Not me, no. They never let me do anything till everything's happened. By the way—reachin' finally the beginning—what is her name?"

"Nora—Nora Brown. She hasn't got any people. An aunt or something brought her up. In a cottage."

A short sturdy young woman came out of the tent in the rhododendrons and stood looking all ways.

"That's Hoppy," said Nan. "Like to speak to her?"

Reggie said "Help!" Behind her horn spectacles Miss Hopkins looked very brisk and strenuous.

She saw Nan and made for her and called her sharply, asking if Nora had been seen.

"She came out some time ago. I say, Miss Hopkins—I want to introduce you. This is Mr. Fortune—and Mrs. Fortune. My godmother, you know. They were awfully interested in the play."

"How do you do? I'm sorry it wasn't more successful," said Miss Hopkins. "Where did Nora go, Nan?"

"I think I can show you," said Reggie. "Allow me. This way." He walked on, and Miss Hopkins, having no choice, went with him. He stepped out.

Nan made a comical face at Mrs. Fortune. "Snubs to us." They followed some way behind.

Miss Hopkins was saying, "I've no doubt I can find her."

"I hope so," Reggie murmured, and went on with her.

Miss Hopkins looked at him keenly. "Are you the Mr. Fortune?"

"Yes. The one you mean. Yes. Any objection?"

"Not the least. Were you asked to come here?"

"By Nan Bundy. Not professionally. Any reason why I should be?"

"I don't know," said Miss Hopkins. "You seem rather interested in finding Nora Brown."

"And you," Reggie murmured.

"If you saw the play you can guess why. She was upset. I don't like her going off alone."

"No. No. That was my view. What do you know about her?"

"If you've been talking to Nan you know all that I know."

"But you thought I might have been called in professionally. What for?"

"I don't understand detective work, Mr. Fortune."

"Nobody does," Reggie murmured. "Nobody can. You never know what you're looking for, so you have to look for everything." He stopped. He looked about him. "I lost her somewhere here. Takin' one thing with another, I should say she went into that place." He pointed to the temple. "Let's see."

It was a small bad copy of a Doric temple in wood painted to look like stone. They stood under the portico. Lacking windows, the interior was dark. "Oh, Heaven!" Miss Hopkins gasped. Reggie ran in.

Nora's body hung swaying from a beam. Her school tie was knotted about her neck, knotted again to one of the hooks in the beam from which lamps had hung. Under her feet a bench was overturned.

He set that up again, he held her body in one arm and cut the tie and laid her on the ground. . . .

"Is she dead?" Miss Hopkins whispered.

"Not yet. Not quite." He took off his coat, he began to work at the processes of artificial respiration. "There's a bad chance. Have you got a school hospital or anything? With doctor complete? Good. Run away and find her. Say Mr. Fortune's lookin' after a girl who's had an accident and wants her here quick. Don't tell anyone else. Then warn the hospital to have hot-water bottles and a mustard plaster ready. Hurry!" He laboured on with rhythmic movements and called, "Joan!"

She was already watching him, she and Nan.

"Go and bring the car."

"Oh, let me—I'll run," Nan cried.

"You stay here," said Reggie.

"Can't I do something? Can't I do anything? It's so dreadful."

"You can rub her legs," Reggie grunted, and worked on. . . .

Miss Hopkins came back panting. "Dr. Headley, Mr. Fortune."

Reggie turned his sweating face and saw a gaunt businesslike woman. "Heard all about it?"

"Miss Hopkins told me how you found her." Dr. Headley knelt beside the girl. "She's far gone."

"Yes. Yes. I came late. My error. I didn't think of this."

Dr. Headley stared at him. "How could you? You didn't know her, did you?"

"Know nothing about her," Reggie grunted.

"She's a very clever girl. Very highly strung. I'm afraid she's not been happy here."

"You're not surprised, what?" Reggie glanced at her.

"Poor child," said Dr. Headley.

"Yes. Yes. That's better," Reggie murmured. "You carry on now." He wiped his face and watched. . . . "Steady." He bent again over the girl. . . . "Yes. Keep going. I think so. Yes. I think so. She's coming." . . .

"Oh, Cherub!" Nan gasped. "Is it really—will she be all right?"

"It'll be a fight for her," Reggie said gently. "I'll fight, Nan."

Mrs. Fortune laid her hand on his shoulder. They looked at each other. "You——" she said with a sigh of content.

Reggie touched the hand. "Well, Doctor—my car's here. We'll get her to hospital. I think I'd better do a venesection." They wrapped the girl in a rug and laid her in the big car. "Oh, Miss Hopkins—you'll have to tell your head mistress—say Mr. Fortune has taken charge and considers it a grave case. Nan! Hop up by Joan and show her the best way to your hospital. Just a moment." He went again into the temple, looked round it with searching eyes, stood on the bench and cut down the remains of the tie. "All right." The car glided away with him. . . .

Some time afterwards he came out of the hospital and Miss Hopkins and Nan met him eagerly. "She's doing as well as she could," he said.

Mrs. Fortune came and put her arm round Nan. "You'll see the head mistress, Mr. Fortune?" Miss Hopkins asked.

"Oh, yes. Yes. I'm going to. You might tell her, would you?" He turned away, he contemplated with dreamy eyes the expanse of the park, and Miss Hopkins stared at him and departed. "I say, Nan," he murmured. "Take Joan and give her some tea." He wandered away, but not to the house. He had the air of a man strolling aimlessly; in time he reached the temple, and then, drifting still more casually, he went over the turf about it, in and out among trees and shrubs and so towards the house by a corkscrew route, and once he stopped for some time and was much interested in a clump of hawthorns.

The last of the visitors were departing. From their talk he learnt that they had been told Antigone had met with an accident. He went into the hall. A few of the staff were there, getting rid of the lingerers. Miss Hopkins met him. "Come to the head mistress's room, please."

"Oh, my hat!" Reggie smiled. "Sounds as if I were going to be swished."

Miss Hopkins did not approve of this frivolity. She marched ahead of him. The ample form of Miss Evans swept upon them. "Is that Mr. Fortune? Pray forgive me, how is poor Nora?"

Reggie spread out his hands. "Not a nice case," he murmured.

"Such a dreadful thing," said Miss Evans.

The head mistress had the Bishop in her room, and other pompous men. "Oh. Oh, I should like to speak to you alone," Reggie said plaintively.

"These gentlemen are members of the governing body," the head mistress explained.

"Well, well!" Reggie murmured, and contemplated them with benign curiosity.

The Bishop cleared his throat. "I am sure Mr. Fortune will understand that we are gravely concerned as a body—a terrible affair for the school."

"Yes. And for the girl," Reggie murmured.

"Quite. Quite. I feel that most deeply. We all feel it." He proceeded to introduce them—General Cutts, Lord Stourmouth, Sir Ingram Stow.

The head mistress interrupted. "How is Nora, Mr. Fortune?"

"I can promise you nothing," Reggie said slowly.

The head mistress put her hand to her brow and sighed. "Poor child, poor child."

"Dear me," said the Bishop. "Her condition is serious?"

"Oh, yes. Yes. Quite serious."

Sir Ingram Stow leaned forward. "You understand, Mr. Fortune, we're asking you for your opinion, an expert medical opinion: is the child likely to recover?"

Reggie looked at him with closing eyes. "I've given you my opinion. It's not a case in which I can promise anything."

"You're not very definite, sir," said the General.

"No. I'm not feeling definite," Reggie murmured.

"I suppose you can tell us if the girl will return to consciousness." The General glared.

"Oh, she has. And gone to sleep. Why did you want to know?"

"Naturally, we want to know," the General cried. "Are you being frank with us, sir? We want to know if the girl has given any reason for her attempt to commit suicide. We have a right to know."

"She hasn't. I didn't ask her. You won't be able to ask

her. What happened and why it happened will be a matter for the police. Is that quite frank?"

"What, sir? You propose to inform the police? Then let me tell you, sir, I protest—in the strongest way I protest. It would be a most irresponsible and reckless abuse of your professional position. A scandalous interference which I should resent by every means in my power. We should all resent it."

"Would you really?" Reggie murmured. He surveyed them with curiosity. "You'd better not."

Lord Stourmouth, a little dry man, opened his mouth for the first time, and he said, "You're talking nonsense, Cutts."

The Bishop cleared his throat. "I am bound to say, I feel you are wrong, General."

"Pray allow me," Sir Ingram Stow stood up, a tall and handsome person making the most of himself. "Our first thought must be for the interests of the school. That is what influences the General."

"It's our duty, sir, our duty," the General gobbled.

"I feel that deeply. Now we must all see that to call in the police would be disastrous to the school. The publicity would be hideous. The school could never recover from such a scandal. We are also bound to consider the interests of this unhappy girl. Nothing could be more cruel than to make her or her memory the subject of a police investigation. I'm afraid, Stourmouth, you don't realize the suggestions, the insinuations about her which would be inevitable. It would be a cruel wrong to inflict—and without any reason. What happened is not in doubt. She was found by her own mistress hanging there in the temple."

"Did you really think you could hush it up?" Reggie murmured.

"I have made no such suggestion, Mr. Fortune. It is obvious that an inquest must follow her death. That can-

not be avoided and none of us would wish to avoid it. There is nothing to conceal. But I protest in the strongest manner against calling in the police to turn it into a sensational case."

"So do I, begad! Making a scandal of it," the General cried. "Make the place a byword. Getting the school in all the papers. That's what comes of taking these scholarship girls. But I won't have it, sir. I'll see the Chief Constable myself."

"Don't worry. He knows all about it," said Reggie. "I telephoned from the hospital. Also to Scotland Yard."

The General glared at him. "Confounded impertinence!"

"You think so?" Reggie murmured. "Well, well." He turned to the head mistress. "I'll see Nora before I go," he said gently. "And Dr. Headley has my telephone number." He held out his hand. "I'm seeing this through."

"Thank you very much." Her eyes met his.

"Good-night, gentlemen." He looked them over. "Nora is not to be seen. There'll be a policeman at the hospital." He went out.

Stourmouth followed him. "Just a word, Mr. Fortune." He took Reggie into a little lobby where the hats of the governors hung. "You know you're right, of course. So do I. Cutts is an ass and Stow is a snob."

"Yes. Not quite a home of peace, Logate," Reggie murmured. He contemplated the hats with grave interest. And Stow and Cutts came in a hurry to seize theirs. Reggie stood aside and watched them depart. He gazed dreamily at Stourmouth. "Yes. That's one of the factors. Good night." . . .

When he came out of the hospital Nan was waiting with Mrs. Fortune in the car. She jumped down to meet him. "What, Nan?" he smiled. "You don't have to worry any more."

"Oh, Cherub——"

"Yes. My show now. You've done rather well. But you've done your bit. Go and sleep. You can."

The car carried him away. He lit a cigar and slid low in his corner. "Reggie, was that true?" said Mrs. Fortune.

"Oh, yes. Yes. The girl's comin' through. But I don't want it advertised just yet. She didn't hang herself."

"Ah, thank God!"

"Cause for satisfaction. Yes. They might have maddened her into suicide. Possibly that was in somebody's nice mind. Then it would have been a very difficult case."

Mrs. Fortune shuddered. "But what a devilish thing! Has she told you who did it?"

"She doesn't know. I don't know. That's one of the problems."

"One!" Mrs. Fortune cried.

Reggie looked at her with the large bewildered eyes of a child. "Only one, yes," he said plaintively. "By the way—two men comin' to dinner—the Chief Constable and Bell—I rang up Elise."

Mrs. Fortune laughed. "Martha!" she said and made a face at him. It is a term of abuse employed for his careful interest in domestic affairs. "Do I dine with you?"

"My only aunt! Please. I don't want to talk shop. I want my nice dinner. You're a necessary element, Joan."

"Pig," said she. "Essentially pig."

To the surprise of the Chief Constable of the county, an earnest, zealous official, they talked at dinner of roses and wine, of shoes and ships and sealing wax, of cabbages and kings. When Mrs. Fortune was gone and the cigars were lit, Reggie turned to the bewildered man. "Very nice of you to come over. Rather a complex case. Going to work out nasty. I thought you'd like to have it all before

you at the start. This is what we've got." And he gave a sketch of his adventures at Logate.

The Chief Constable shook a sage head. "Shocking affair, however you take it. Quite right, Mr. Fortune, we can't overlook it. But you know in my experience adolescent girls do very queer things. And these clever ones are the most uncertain. I should have said myself it looked like a plain case of attempted suicide. She thought everybody was persecuting her and the play put it into her head to hang herself. Just the way these tragedies do happen with young women."

"Yes. That's what you're meant to think. I daresay that's the way it was meant to happen. Quite an ingenious mind workin' at Logate."

"Looks a bit too natural to me," said Bell. "They put on a play in which a girl hangs herself, and the girl who takes the part goes and does it quick. I'd work the case over before I passed it for suicide."

"Certainly we shall have to investigate," said the Chief Constable. "But I've no doubt myself any jury would say it was attempted suicide."

"Oh, no. No. If it gets to a jury, I shall be givin' evidence. And I shall say it was attempted murder. The girl has two bruises on her head, one at the back, that's the larger—one on her brow. She couldn't have made them hanging herself. The inference is she was struck from behind and she fell. When she came to herself in hospital, the only sensible thing she said was, 'Who hit me?' That is one of the problems."

"Murder? At Logate? It's one of the best girls' schools in the country." The Chief Constable was horrified. "You might say it's a girls' Eton."

"Yes. You might. That's an interesting factor. These things do happen in the best society. But not often."

"You say who did it is one of the problems, Mr. For-

tune," Bell grinned. "It's the whole problem, isn't it?"

"For police purposes, yes. For the girl, no. And speakin' scientifically, it's a minor matter. The main problem bein' —why was it done?"

"Motive, eh?" said the Chief Constable. "Take it as suicide, you've got that plain enough. But taking it as murder, the motive's a puzzle. You make out there's been a lot of feeling at Logate against the scholarship girls concentrated on this one. Do you mean to say some of the other girls tried to murder her?"

"Oh, no. No. But thus two further problems are suggested. Who did start the trouble at Logate? And who is Nora Brown? Providin' us with lines of inquiry."

"About the school——" said the Chief Constable anxiously. "It isn't quite fair to talk about starting the trouble. There has been friction at Logate and it dates from the coming of this head mistress. Not her fault, I daresay. You know what big schools are. A new head comes. There are people who think somebody else ought to have had the job. The new head makes changes. More people get discontented and annoyed. And so on. It's very common."

Reggie blew smoke rings. "Yes. Quite. Yes. So some people wanted another woman head mistress. Who would they be?"

"Well, you know there was a strong feeling that one of the mistresses who'd been at Logate some time ought to have had the appointment."

"I see. Yes. Which one?"

"I couldn't give you a name." The Chief Constable was embarrassed. "You're not suggesting one of the mistresses would murder the girl? If you'll excuse my saying so, Mr. Fortune, I don't think you ought to have that kind of idea about Logate. All the mistresses are ladies."

Bell grunted. "Have you found that makes much difference, sir? I haven't."

The Chief Constable was shocked. "Well, I don't agree. But leaving out that—why on earth should one of the mistresses want to murder one of the girls? It's a mad idea."

"I daresay a mistress often wants to," Reggie smiled. "But it is unusual for her to try. Motive inadequate, as you say."

"I don't see anything like a motive myself," said Bell. "You can't always get to a reasonable motive. This is the kind of case I wouldn't expect one. The evidence is, there's a lot of bad blood in this girl's school—grievances and quarrelling and persecution. Given all that, you'll often find a woman run mad."

"Kind of hysteria, you mean?" the Chief Constable said. "Well, I suppose that's possible. You'll pardon me, Mr. Fortune, I can't help thinking it's not so certain we need look beyond the poor girl herself. An hysterical young woman meaning suicide often tries to make it look like murder."

"Sometimes. Yes. Ever tried to hit yourself hard behind the ear? Not easy, even in hysterics. I'm afraid you can't turn it into suicide. Do you know anyone on the governing body?"

The Chief Constable stared. "I know General Cutts."

"Yes. So he indicated. And Sir Ingram Stow?"

"I've met Stow. Why?"

"Well, they want to hush it up, you know."

"Mr. Fortune, you don't suggest that I——"

"Oh, no. No. You couldn't, anyway. But it wouldn't look well to play into their hands. What do you know about 'em?"

"General Cutts was my commanding officer, sir."

"You have my sympathy. And Stow?"

"I've merely met him. He's of a good old family, a rich man, a very pleasant fellow. Why do you ask all this?"

"Well, you know, it seemed to me that Cutts and Stow don't love the other governors. I suppose they were against this new head mistress, they were against the respectable and exclusive Logate takin' scholarship girls, and specially they're against this girl Nora Brown. That is, they've been backin' the trouble in the school."

"I can't let that pass, Mr. Fortune. Of course, it's well known General Cutts is opposed to the new policy at Logate and Sir Ingram Stow has supported him."

"Oh! You knew that," said Reggie sharply. "You didn't tell us. Rather a pity, isn't it?"

"I don't understand you, Mr. Fortune. There is no secret about their opinions. They're gentlemen of the highest reputation."

"Everybody always is in this kind of case," Bell grunted. "These are gentlemen and the mistresses are ladies. All the same, a girl nearly got murdered among 'em."

"But this is preposterous," the Chief Constable cried.

"Oh, no. No. Summary of facts by Superintendent Bell. Let's expand it. These two gentlemen have been behind the trouble in the school which produced the persecution of Nora Brown. Somebody attempts to murder her and they try to prevent inquiry into the case. And the attempt wasn't wholly feminine. What do you know about that?" He held out a specimen box containing a small piece of black fluff.

The Chief Constable gaped. "Came off a silk hat, what?" said Bell.

"Yes. It came off a silk hat. Onto a hawthorn bough by the temple where I found it. With a man's footprints adjacent. Also the blow which knocked Nora out was beyond a woman's strength. Assistance of a man in the crime is strongly indicated."

"And a gentleman," Bell grinned.

"But it's bewildering," the Chief Constable gasped. "Surely, Mr. Fortune, you can't believe these gentlemen would murder a girl because of their opinions on school policy. The idea is crazy!"

"Oh, yes. Yes. Quite. To keep poor girls out of Logate by murderin' one who got in—that isn't a business proposition. But a man did try to murder her and these men are tryin' to hush it up. And when you kindly assisted in our first line of inquiry, who started the trouble at Logate leadin' to the persecution of Nora, you put us onto these same men. That was very helpful of you." He smiled at the scared Chief Constable. "Convergin' evidence, isn't it?"

"It's very strange," the Chief Constable stammered. "But the connection—what connection is there between the change of policy at Logate and this girl? She didn't come till lately."

"Till after the trouble began. Yes. The inference is, they started the trouble for other reasons, but when Nora Brown got into the school they found they had special reasons for turning it against her. Hence the persecution. Possibly with hopes of her suicide. In other words, Nora Brown is somebody who had to be murdered for her own sake."

The Chief Constable rubbed his brow. "I can't believe the General—I'd answer for him absolutely——"

"Yes. I should say he's merely an ass," Reggie murmured.

"You suspect Stow, then? But what possible reason?"

"I haven't the slightest idea," said Reggie.

The Chief Constable stared at him pathetically. "Of course, there must be an investigation, a thorough investigation. What would you like me to do?"

"Nothing. And do it carefully. Leave your man on

guard over Nora. The woman doctor's all right. But a policeman is a good scarecrow for criminals. You might have some plain-clothes men watchin' to see if Stow comes to the school or has anybody go from the school to him. I'll attend to Miss Brown senior."

"Senior?" The Chief Constable gaped.

"Yes. The hypothetical aunt. Followin' the second line of inquiry, who is Nora Brown? Well, this being thus, that's all. You'll want to be goin'. Many thanks." He got rid of an unhappy man.

Bell filled a pipe and cocked an eyebrow. "Told him a lot, didn't you, sir? You talk about converging evidence. I'd say you haven't got any evidence to take to a jury."

"Not much. No." Reggie pulled out of his pocket the tie by which the girl was hanged. "What do you think of that?"

Bell turned it over. "Good knots, sailor's knots."

"Yes. Stow was in the navy. I looked him up."

Bell grunted. "Well, that's another pointer. But it's not much, is it? Looks like one of those cases where you feel sure but you can't put the man in the dock. Clever fellow."

"I wonder," Reggie murmured. "Very ingenious mind somewhere."

"If you hadn't been at this school to-day, the girl would have been cut down dead; nobody would have thought of anything but suicide. Stow would have had a nice quiet little inquest and been on velvet."

"Yes. That is so," Reggie smiled. "But I don't think he's feeling on velvet to-night."

"I don't know. I don't see where you're going to get your evidence, even now."

Reggie stood up. "The hypothetical aunt, my Bell."

"That's all very well. You may find some connection with Stow. You may find a motive for him killing the girl. But that don't make evidence he tried."

"My little ray of sunshine." Reggie contemplated him with affection. "Are we downhearted? No. We've saved the girl. Come to bed. We'll seek Aunt bright and early."

So early in the morning they drove away to the cottage of Miss Brown. It stood sixty miles from Logate and far from anywhere, in a flat and lonely country, a small cottage, at the end of a small village, looking from the outside homely and well kept. To their knocking at the door no answer came. Bell strode off to the nearest neighbours. He was told that they didn't know nothing but they thought Miss Brown was gone away. A motorcar did come to her place the night afore and she went off in it and they never see her come back.

Superintendent Bell becomes annoyed when he meets attempts to frustrate his investigations. "Somebody's been very quick." He frowned at Reggie. "What's the game?"

"Somebody's got the wind up," Reggie smiled.

"Do you think Stow's made away with her?"

"It could be," Reggie murmured. "She knows something we mustn't know."

"That don't make sense to my mind. This woman's been living here with the girl; brought her up; let her go to Logate. And it's only when she gets there Stow meddles with her. Why did he wait?"

"Yes. Why did he? Interestin' question. You'd better ask Miss Brown."

"I'm going to have a job to find her."

"Oh, my dear chap! What about the advertised resources of our highly organized police force?"

"I'll set 'em to work," Bell frowned.

"Yes. Yes. You make 'em find out where she's gone," Reggie smiled. "I want to know where she came from."

He left Bell working the telephone in the village post office. He went to call on the village school.

He found the mistress who had coached Nora for her scholarship, a worn and weary woman, but of a quick intelligence. She would tell him nothing till he told her what had happened to the girl. Then all she knew and all she thought was laid before him. She had always considered Nora a girl of uncommon ability and character; she had never heard of any relations, friends, enemies, anybody who took an interest in her. Miss Brown was an ordinary woman, rather dull, rather reserved, kind enough in a stolid way. She came to the village when Nora was a baby, a year old or less. Nobody knew where from. Miss Brown kept much to herself; having money enough to live on, considered herself above the village people. She had not wanted Nora to go to Logate, but gave way.

"I see. Yes." Reggie smiled. "You forced her hand."

"I'd have done anything to give the child her chance," the mistress said fiercely. "I told her so."

"Yes. Did she know anything about Logate?"

"She'd never heard of it. She only objected because she thought it was what she called a school for the gentry."

"I see. And what was Miss Brown? Not gentry?"

"Oh, dear, no. She'd been a hospital nurse, I believe. I heard her say once she'd been trained at Exeter."

"Is that so?" Over Reggie's face came a slow benign smile. "And her age?"

"I couldn't say. Forty—fifty. I have a photograph of her with Nora. You can form your own opinion. That was taken five years ago."

Reggie studied a photograph of a neat woman with fat and stolid face. "Splendid," he murmured. "Yes. Say forty plus now. At the Exeter hospital twenty plus years back. What's her colouring?"

"Oh, fair, florid, blue eyes and brown hair."

"Thanks very much. I may take the photograph?"

"You'll let me have it back? It's the only one I have of Nora at that age."

"Yes. Charmin' child. She is still. Yes. You shall have it safe. Thanks very much. Nora's had a good friend." He held out his hand.

"You're working for her, aren't you?" There were tears in the tired eyes.

"I'm for her," said Reggie gently. "Good-bye. I shall remember you". . . .

Some days afterwards the Chief of the Criminal Investigation Department saw in the personal column of the morning papers this advertisement:

> DEWES: Any person having knowledge of Mrs. Veronica Dewes, who died at Beton, Devon, January 1915, is desired to inform the Criminal Investigation Department, Scotland Yard.

He was not pleased. He was making trouble about it in the Department when his telephone rang.

"Is that Lomas? Fortune speaking. From Beton, Devon. Good-morning. Seen the papers?"

"Good Gad!" Lomas groaned. "I might have known it was you."

"You might. Yes. Didn't you? Dear, dear. Never at your brightest in the morning. Any news of the vanished Miss Brown?"

"Bell thinks she's sailed for Canada. He's wirelessing the ship. If it is the woman, we'll have her held on the other side."

"Good. And Stow?"

"Stow hasn't run. He's at his place in the country.

We can't find any evidence he went to her cottage. He was out driving his own car that night. What's this new hare you've started?"

"Not new. No. Same old hare. Miss Brown. After training in the Exeter hospital Miss Brown became district nurse at this charmin' place. Mrs. Dewes was living here. Young wife of a man said to have been killed in the war. In 1914 she had a baby, christened Veronica. Miss Brown nursed her. In 1915 she died, Miss Brown still nursing her. Baby also died. Cause of death in the register pneumonia for both. Doctor who gave the certificate is dead. Shortly after these deaths, Miss Brown vanished from Beton."

"Queer story. So you want to find the relations of Mrs. Dewes? We'll look the man up in the casualty lists."

"Yes. I want to know who they were. I also want an exhumation order."

"What? Good Gad! For bodies buried fourteen years? You can't make out anything now, can you?"

"It depends what I find."

"You suspect foul play?"

"Oh, yes. Yes. Something wrong. Put it through."

"It's very unusual."

"My only aunt!" the telephone moaned. "Here am I livin' in a fishermen's pub, and you talk about what's usual. Get on with it."

But official objections might have delayed that order long if General Blaker had not called at Scotland Yard. It was some time before he interested Lomas. He had to explain why Jimmy Dewes was the best subaltern a man ever had and how he was killed at Le Cateau. But then he became relevant. Jimmy was the son of old Colonel Dewes and married without his father's consent and the old man wouldn't allow him a penny—didn't believe in early marriages for soldiers—poor old man, never thought there was a world war coming to kill all the lads off. Mrs. Dewes

was a charming girl, dear creature, but the old man wouldn't look at her. So, naturally, when Jimmy was killed she was too proud to go to the old fellow—carried on as she could, till she died, poor thing, she and her baby, first winter of the war. Probably pined away when her man was gone—too many of 'em did. There was old Dewes left without a soul of his name. He didn't last long.

"What became of his money?" said Lomas.

"Oh, he made no will—it went to the next of kin, a young cousin, a baronet. Stow the name is—Ingram Stow." . . .

Under a red Devon cliff Reggie lay watching the sea. The girl child who delivered the telegrams of Beton came to him. He read this message:

> You win. Instructing county police. Arrange with them.
> Lomas.

He scrambled to his feet and made for the village telephone.

When the sun came over the cliff in the morning men began to dig into one of the nameless mounds in the little churchyard. They found the mother's coffin and the baby's lying side by side, and the tarnished plates. "All right. Carry on." He walked slowly away.

Some hours later he came out of the mortuary in Exeter and strolled to the railway station. The Cornish express roared through, the slip carriage from it slid to the platform and Lomas jumped out. "My dear old thing," Reggie beamed at him. "All ready for you. Come along."

"Has it gone all right?"

"Oh, yes. Yes. Very nice and neat."

Reggie put him into a taxi and said to the driver, "The mortuary."

"Good Gad!" Lomas gasped. "You don't want to show me——"

"Oh, yes. You'd better have a look."

"My dear fellow! I can't help you with this sort of thing."

"Not help, no. I've finished. There's nothing to be done with the mother. We can hope she died a natural death. But the baby—well, it's very interesting."

Lomas shuddered. "The baby didn't?"

"No. No. That is indicated."

They came to the mortuary and Reggie led him in. The woman's coffin was covered. In the baby's lay something wrapped in a shroud. Reggie beckoned to an attendant. "Unroll that again." It was lifted out and from the shroud came a pillow case. "There's the baby. A feather pillow with a few stones for makeweight. See? The baby didn't die. Miss Brown wasn't wholly inhuman. So we can hope the mother died by nature."

"Good Gad!" said Lomas. "I suppose that's what you had in your head all the time."

"Yes. Yes." Over Reggie's face came a slow benign smile. "That was the workin' hypothesis. Well, well. Now we can get on."

They went back to their cab. "Lunch is indicated. A grave but placid lunch. You'll want to wind up the case with the police down here. Then we'll go back and deal with Stow."

"It's not so easy to deal with Stow," Lomas frowned. "This doesn't make evidence that he tried to murder the girl at Logate. What have we got? It was his interest as the next heir to old Dewes to have this woman and her baby dead. The probability is he tried to arrange something with Miss Brown."

"Oh, yes. Yes. I should say she told him the baby was dead, hadn't the heart to kill it, but took the price for its

death. She retired on that and brought the girl up. Thus making the best of both worlds. Then the child turned out clever and the village school mistress took her up and got her into Logate. Miss Brown not knowin' enough to object. Thus Stow found a girl looking like the Dewes family in Logate and called Brown. That must have hit him hard. If anybody came along who knew the Dewes, there'd be questions. She's a strikin' child. I suppose he looked up Miss Brown and decided he had to get rid of the girl. And he made a very good try."

"That's all very well. No doubt that's how it all happened. There's a very good chance of proving the girl heiress to the Dewes estate and showing Stow up. What do you think of the evidence for a criminal charge against him? If we can catch this Miss Brown and frighten her into telling the truth, we might make something of the fraud of the baby's death. But for the attempt to murder the girl at Logate, we're where we were. No case."

"Yes. As you say," Reggie murmured. "No case. But we might ask him about it. Very interestin'."

"Oh, I'll ask him," said Lomas. "But he's in touch with Logate. He must know we've got nothing more there. If you think he'll give himself away, you're hopeful."

"Yes. Perhaps you're right," Reggie sighed. "A sad world."

So they went to lunch and when Lomas had settled his business with the police took a train for Logate's county town. Reggie nearly missed it. He explained that he had been writing letters.

That evening they conferred with the Chief Constable, and having laid the case before that amazed man, arranged with him to drive over in the morning and interrogate Stow in his own house. When they were leaving, "By the way," said Reggie, "have you kept your men watching Stow?"

"Watched his house night and day, Mr. Fortune. And Logate. Made nothing of it. He's seen none of the school people. He's kept very quiet. Of course, he must know the girl's doing well and that would scare him. I have rather wondered he didn't try to bolt when he got that Miss Brown out of the country."

Reggie looked at him with dreamy eyes. "Yes. That's interestin', isn't it? Good-night."

The Chief Constable's car came to their hotel while they were still at an early breakfast. "Come on, Lomas." Reggie pushed back his chair. "All is best though oft we doubt—you're much better without that coffee. I wonder where they got it." And Lomas groaned and followed.

The Chief Constable was brisk. "'Morning. 'Morning. I thought we'd better lose no time. Seen the papers, Mr. Lomas?"

"I'm not awake yet," Lomas mumbled.

"They've got onto it. Look." And Lomas read:

EXHUMATION IN DEVON

In the little fishing village of Beton on the Devonshire coast an exhumation was made yesterday by order of the Home Office. Two coffins were removed to Exeter. It is understood that a sensational discovery was made. Further developments in a case in another part of the country are expected.

"That's as good as a straight tip to Sir Ingram Stow, isn't it?" said the Chief Constable. "If he's read that he'll be off."

"You think so?" Reggie murmured. "You've still got a man watching his house."

"I have, Mr. Fortune. And I sent off another on a motorbike as soon as I read this."

"Then that is that," Reggie sighed.

Lomas looked at him without affection, but his round face had a dreamy calm.

By Stow's gate a motorcyclist tinkering with his machine waved them on. They came to the house, a big new place built onto an old one. "Been using the Dewes money," Lomas frowned.

They were told by an aggrieved butler that Sir Ingram was still at breakfast. "He will see me at once," said Lomas. They were put into the library and he came.

He was visibly a weaker man than he had been at Logate. He had shrunken, he was pale. He greeted the Chief Constable with a show of joviality; he was shy of Reggie, anxiously civil to Lomas. "I must suppose you've come on business, sir. I'm quite at your orders. What can I do?"

"You'd better sit down," said Lomas. "I want to hear your account of your actions on the day Nora Brown was hanged at Logate."

"My actions?" Stow laughed. "I had no actions, so to speak. I went to Logate to see the play, saw it, went back to the schoolhouse and was talking there till we heard the poor child had hanged herself."

"Oh, no. No." Reggie said. "That's not our information. The evidence is you went to the temple. You found the girl there. You struck her behind the ear and knocked her out. You took off her tie and hanged her. Then you went back to the schoolhouse and talked."

"The evidence?" Stow gasped. "She's told you that?"

"She?" said Reggie, and he laughed. "Didn't you think she would?"

"It's a lie!" Stow cried.

"Oh! She is lying? Which she do you mean?" He leaned forward, watching the man's fear with smiling curiosity.

"The girl, of course." Stow licked his lips. "I don't understand."

"There's more evidence than the girl's," said Reggie. "You know that. Do you choose to tell your story?"

Stow looked at him white and shaking. "What do you mean, my story? I don't know what you've heard. I——"

But Reggie was not listening. There was the sound of a car outside. He made for the window. He watched a moment and turned quickly. "Here she is," he said with a chuckle and hurried out.

He came back grasping the arm of a large woman. She was red. She was protesting incoherently. She was Miss Evans.

"Oh, yes. Yes." Reggie's placid voice cut across hers. "Much obliged to you. We wanted you. He says it wasn't his idea at all."

Stow huddled in his chair. "I swear it wasn't," he muttered. "She thought of it like that. She said——"

"Ah, you hound!" the woman cried. She plucked at her bag, she pulled out a pistol and fired into his face. As she turned the pistol on herself, they flung themselves upon her. . . .

"And that is that," Reggie sighed, watching the car drive her away to gaol. "One of my neater cases, Lomas, old thing." He lit a cigar. "We couldn't have hanged Stow. Now we've got 'em both. I daresay the late Stow told the truth in the end. I expect she put him up to the hanging. Feminine insight about it."

"No doubt she did," Lomas agreed. "That's why she shot when the fellow rounded on her."

"It could be. Yes. I should say she was mad at losing what she played for. Always being frustrated."

"What do you mean?"

"That she wasn't going to be Lady Stow. When he wanted to get at the girl he had this disgruntled woman ready to be used. But she wouldn't do murder for nothing.

Sort of woman who'd stood out for the top price. Marriage. I should say it was because she thought that was right off, she put a pistol in her bag when she came to call."

"But what brought her this morning?"

"My dear chap! Oh, my dear chap!" Reggie smiled. "She reads the papers."

"Good Gad! That cursed paragraph." Lomas stared at him. "That was you, of course."

"Yes. Yes. I thought it might draw her," Reggie murmured. "It did, didn't it? Quite a neat case."

THE LITTLE DOG

THE LITTLE DOG

It was late in July. Kept in London by his wife's duties to society, Mr. Fortune was evading his share of them. With nothing on him but drill trousers and a silk shirt he sat in the library and gave a performance of his marionette theatre. The play was *Tannhäuser*, a new and original comedy by Reginald Fortune, music, when he remembered to whistle it, by Wagner. There were no spectators: a condition which he finds necessary to the finest dramatic art.

But the parlourmaid came in and stood in dumb rapture. He was not pleased. "Go away, Edith. I am out. You know that. Nobody can say when I'll ever be in again."

"Mr. Lomas, sir," said Edith.

"Oh, very well, then," Reggie groaned, and the Chief of the Criminal Investigation Department was brought up.

He smiled. "My dear Reginald! Birthday present? Did you get a teddy bear, too?"

Reggie caused the marionette Elizabeth to be rude. "And I quite agree with her," he said bitterly, and emerged from behind the theatre. "Don't sit down like that. You're not wanted."

Lomas settled into his chair. "Did you get my message?"

"No. Somebody had some sense."

"I thought there was a muddle. They were going to tell you when you came in."

"I'm not in," Reggie moaned. "Can't you see that?"

"It's the affair at Fingbourne," said Lomas cheerfully.

"They've asked for you." He lit a cigarette. "You must have seen it in the papers this morning. Son of a local bigwig, Admiral Basset, found drowned in a locked boathouse under strange circumstances: which means his legs were tied together."

"I didn't read the papers," Reggie protested. "I am busy. Is that all?"

"The Chief Constable simply asked if you could go down and advise him of the cause of death."

"Well, well!" Reggie murmured. "Very flatterin'. But odd. Cause of death wouldn't seem to be the problem. The local practitioner can tell whether the fellow was drowned or not. If there's anything fishy about how he was drowned the Chief Constable ought to want some of your men on it."

"Quite." Lomas smiled. "I told him you were not a detective, Reginald. He said that was quite understood. He didn't want a detective, only expert advice."

"Man of tact, what?" Reggie smiled.

"Oh, he's a silly ass. But you can see his trouble. Son of county family dies mysteriously, there'll be all sorts of blether down there and pressure on him to do this, that, and the other with the case. He wants to protect himself by taking Mr. Fortune's opinion."

"Yes. You said he was a silly ass," Reggie murmured. "Lots of tact about today. However. I'd better go down. There are points. I should have been taken to a party tonight." He smiled. "Two parties."

Fingbourne is in the Midlands, in Daneshire, a county of rich pasture and orchards and sleepy rivers. Late that night Reggie's car brought him to Daneford, the ancient county town, and in the morning he introduced himself to the Chief Constable.

Colonel Chute was a little person with a manner of military precision and a mind less definite. From a long bom-

bardment of his talk the only clear idea to be obtained was that Colonel Chute was shocked such a thing should have happened to Admiral Basset. "Oh, yes. Yes. But it's his son who's dead, isn't it?" said Reggie plaintively.

"His son Arthur, sir, his first wife's son," Colonel Chute corrected, and rapped out the history of the Basset family from early times. Bassets had been at Fingbourne before the Conqueror—or Adam. They had always been of the utmost importance in Daneshire. Admiral Basset was a younger son—it was a strange thing, younger sons had often reigned at Fingbourne—people were quite superstitious about it—the Chief Constable wasn't made that way himself—but no shirking it, here was a younger son coming into the estate again. Call it fate if you like.

"No, thanks. I'd rather not," Reggie murmured. "What happened to the Admiral's elder brother?"

But the Chief Constable was not made to give direct answers. He had to explain that as the younger son the Admiral had naturally gone into the navy—elder brother always a bold horseman—broke his spine hunting—the Admiral would not leave the navy—till he had his flag. Then he settled down at Fingbourne—no better-managed estate in the country—active in county affairs, too—man of the right spirit—pity not more of 'em——

"Yes. Yes. Revertin' to this boy that's died," Reggie murmured. "Did you happen to know him?"

The Chief Constable shied from that question, too. The Admiral married first while a young officer—wife wasn't a Daneshire girl—died, leaving him a boy—the young fellow who got himself drowned. The Admiral married again after he settled down—one of the Lakenhams—charming woman—make a fine pair—not a pleasanter house in the county.

"And there's another son?" said Reggie.

"Shocking affair, this is," said the Chief Constable.

"Damme, sir, they're the last people in the world who ought to have such a thing in the family. The Admiral and Mrs. Basset and their jolly little boy! Everybody wants to make things easy for them, of course, but do your best with it, it's cruel."

"Yes. I think so. What did you want me to do with it?" said Reggie.

"Just giving you the facts," said the Chief Constable. "This young fellow, Arthur—father was at sea—rather brought himself up, know what I mean? Not much of a Basset—took after his mother, perhaps—dreamy lad—what I call windy—and then this mess."

"Quite a mess. Yes," Reggie murmured. "And you want me to tell you if he was drowned?"

"I wanted the best opinion, sir. You see how important it is to have the thing quite clear—now if you're prepared to see the body . . ." He bustled, he telephoned, he barked for his car.

And Reggie wondered whether to classify him as less a fool than he seemed or even more.

There were two doctors at the mortuary, aged men, the family doctor of the Bassets, the surgeon of the county police. They mingled disapproval of Reggie, nervousness, and a desire to lecture. Nobody likes lectures less. They discovered that. . . .

He stood over the dead body. It had been a slight lad whose brow was large for the frail face below: a face which must have looked pleasant in life despite its weakness: in death it was drawn and strained as by painful effort. . . .

Reggie made an end of his examination and turned to the two doctors and contemplated them. "You have formed your opinion, Mr. Fortune?" the family doctor said anxiously.

"Yes. He was drowned," Reggie murmured. "He went into the water alive and without serious injury."

"Quite so," the police surgeon approved. "I'm glad to be confirmed by your judgment, of course. But I found it a perfectly clear case myself."

"Yes. Yes. Omitting the fundamental question: how was he drowned."

"My dear sir! You saw the mark of the cord on his legs. He was found with his ankles tied tight together. It's quite obvious he committed suicide."

"I saw the mark. Yes. It could be. Also marks on his hands. Skin off the knuckles. However. Where is the cord?" The police surgeon produced a piece of stout blind cord. It had been cut, and a knot was still in it. "This is the original? Ordinary reef knot. Yes. Who found him?"

"He was actually found by Bowes, Admiral Basset's man," said the family doctor. "A most trustworthy man, Mr. Fortune. They sent for me at once. When I arrived the poor boy was half in, half out of the water on the landing stage, as if he had struggled to get out and failed."

"Oh." Reggie gazed at him with large eyes. "I wasn't told that."

"Well, there's no mystery about it," said the police surgeon. "You could have had the facts if you chose. Everyone knows them. But you don't need them for your opinion. He was drowned. That he actually died while struggling to get out doesn't alter that. I suppose you know it's not uncommon?"

"It is uncommon. It can happen. Very uncommon in a case of suicide."

"There are reported cases, Mr. Fortune."

"Oh, yes," Reggie smiled. "You've looked it up? Very proper. You felt a little uncomfortable?"

"Not at all." The police surgeon frowned. "I verify my conclusions, Mr. Fortune. What happened is quite clear. The poor boy decided to commit suicide, tied his legs and flung himself into the river. When he felt himself drowning

he repented and tried to get out. Not to speak ill of the dead, it's just what I should have expected from Arthur Basset. Weak, unstable creature he always was."

"Dear me, you shouldn't say that," the family doctor lamented. "You shouldn't speak so, really you shouldn't."

Reggie contemplated the police surgeon with dislike. "That's the theory. I see. Well, well." He turned to the family doctor. "I shall have to see this boathouse, you know.

"Well, you won't want me," said the police surgeon. "I'll see the Coroner, Grove." He made off.

"Swift, isn't he?" Reggie smiled. "What have you been thinkin' about it, Doctor?"

"Really, I'm afraid I can only come to his conclusion, Mr. Fortune." Grove looked at him nervously.

As they came into the courtyard of the mortuary, a man of police pattern in plain clothes joined them. "Mr. Fortune?" he said with a stare. "I'm Inspector Horne, in charge of this Basset case."

"How do you do?" Reggie smiled and held out his hand, and Dr. Grove said in a hurry that he was just taking Mr. Fortune out to Fingbourne.

Inspector Horne scowled. "Going to see the Admiral, eh?"

"No. The boathouse," Reggie murmured.

"Are you?" Horne directed his scowl at Dr. Grove. "How are you going to get in? It's locked."

"Dear me, I hadn't thought of that," Grove cried. "I'm sure the Admiral——"

"Don't you worry. I've got a key. Run you out in my car, Mr. Fortune," said Horne with a jerk of his thumb at a two-seater.

"Thanks very much. But I want Dr. Grove, too."

"Oh, all right," Horne grunted. "After you, Doctor."

Fingbourne House, the home of the Bassets, stands in

a park of ancient trees and modern coverts of rhododendron. From the house the ground slopes down to a winding river. Dr. Grove explained that they could take the car across the park; the Admiral would not mind. "Good of him," Reggie mumbled. The car was turned onto the turf and they stopped above a boathouse of Victorian rusticity, stone-built and thatched, covered in ivy. An upper room had a balcony over the river.

Inspector Horne arrived and without a word strode to the door and opened it. Reggie stopped on the threshold and looked at the door and the lock and at the door again.

The boathouse was of naval neatness within. On the stone floor was a sculling boat; on racks above, two canoes and sculls. Another sculling boat and a punt floated in a little dock. A spotless stair led to the upper room. "Very nice and tidy," Reggie murmured. "Just like this when you were called in, Doctor?"

"Really, I should think just the same," said Grove uneasily.

"No sign of a struggle, eh?" Horne growled.

"Not the least. Everything was quite in order." Grove moved slowly on. "Of course there was a good deal of water splashed onto the landing place by the poor boy's body."

"Oh, yes. A lot of water?" said Reggie.

"Well, really, Mr. Fortune, there was water, that's all I could say."

The landing place was a wooden staging built out over the water, bound with rope along the edge. "Where was he when you found him?"

"Just there—lying half upon it or rather less."

Reggie frowned. He stroked and felt the wood and the rope-bound edge. He lay down and pulled up a sleeve and felt along underneath the planks. When he stood up again

he looked with plaintive eyes at Dr. Grove. "I wonder," he murmured.

"I don't understand, Mr. Fortune?"

"His hands. How did he scratch his hands?"

"Oh, you mean those marks on the back. Why, really, such a slight abrasion, it couldn't be significant."

"On the back of his hands?" Reggie moaned.

"Well, the skin was hardly broken, was it? So slight a thing might have been done in his struggles to get out, striking out blindly, poor lad; it may have been done before he fell in. So easy to skin one's knuckles, isn't it?"

"Yes. Many ways. Yes," Reggie murmured. "Well, well!" He looked about him with troubled, melancholy eyes; he gazed at the landing stage and he shivered.

"It is a terrible affair," said Grove.

"Yes. See him there dying, can't you?" Reggie drew deep breath. "Trying to live. My God, if we could see his mind!"

"God forgive him!" said Grove.

Slowly Reggie turned away from the landing stage to contemplate Dr. Grove. "I suppose we can do no more, Mr. Fortune?" Grove said.

"This place," Reggie glanced round—"it's absolutely as you found it? Nothing was lying about?"

"I saw nothing at all."

"Well, well! That's all, then," Reggie sighed. "I mustn't keep you. The inspector will give me a lift."

"Er—good-bye, then—good-bye." Grove was disturbed but anxious to go.

Inspector Horne frowned at Reggie. "Not satisfied, eh? Well, I don't blame you."

Reggie did not answer. He examined the sculls, the paddles of the canoes, the punt poles. Again he looked about the place with sad, bewildered eyes.

He went upstairs. There was sunshine there. A pleasant room, with deck chairs and cane chairs and cushions, and immaculately clean. He wandered about, looking in every corner and under cushions. He found nothing but a pocket volume of Shelley. "Ah, that's his, no doubt," said Horne with contempt. "He was that sort of chap." Reggie turned the pages. The book had been much read.

"Well, well!" he sighed, and put it down and gazed at the Inspector. "Anything occur to you?"

"There isn't anything, is there? And what's that prove? Time enough to clear up thorough before I came along."

"Yes. There would be. Yes. What about the key? The boy was locked in the place when they found him. Where was the key he got in with?"

"Ah!" Horne grinned. "Now you're asking. They say it wasn't in the door. It wasn't in his pockets, either. Of course he could have chucked it in the river. I don't call that likely myself. If he meant suicide he might lock himself in. But why should he throw the key away?"

"No answer indicated. Quite queer. Another little point: no remains of cord anywhere. Yet he only used as much as was necessary. No long ends. He might have measured his ankles beforehand and brought just the right amount. But that also is queer."

"Yes, you've got something there," Horne said with respect. "That's the stuff to give a jury. Hallo! What's this?" Voices came from below.

Two men had come to the boathouse, a square man of middle age in the kind of blue serge clothes which look like a uniform but are not, a large and handsome youth in plus-fours and a school tie.

"Upstairs there!" the elder man called in a naval voice.

As Horne appeared, the younger one said: "Oh, it's you, Inspector. All right. Only wanted to know who had got the place open. I thought you'd finished here."

"You can take it I'm a long way off finished," Horne growled.

"What, found something new?"

"It's not my duty to tell you what I've found."

"Right you are. Carry on." The two walked away.

Horne looked at Reggie. "Now what are they browsing round here for? That's Lieutenant Crendon, Admiral Basset's nephew, and Bowes, the Admiral's man."

"Oh. The investigator who discovered the body." Reggie looked after the two with pensive curiosity. "You know all about him?"

"I've put him through it, give you my word," Horne said. "Told his tale straight enough, but he's close. A sailor, you know. He was the Admiral's coxswain or something in the navy. Now they've got so folks say you can't tell which is the Admiral and which is his man."

"And the nephew? Does he live with 'em?"

"Not permanent. He's in the army. Just got his commission. Stays here on and off."

"Well, well! Anything else you'd like to show me?" Horne frowned and pondered and shook his head. "Go back, then, what?"

Horne nodded, put his key in the door, waited for Reggie to go out, locked it, and went on to his car. But Reggie stayed by the door staring at it, stooped to look closer, turned with a sudden start and scanned the ground. Slowly, looking down, he walked to the car and they drove away.

After some time Horne spoke. "Looks ugly to me. How about you?"

"I wonder," Reggie murmured.

"I'm going to have it out with 'em," Horne snorted. "Basset and all."

"Oh, yes. Yes. No choice," Reggie murmured, and when

they came to his hotel Inspector Horne shook hands fiercely.

Reggie lay on the hard couch of his sitting room, smoking with closed eyes—his uncanny habit in meditation—when the Chief Constable was announced.

"Got back, then? Thought you'd have come round to me. Our doctor tells me you quite agree the boy was simply drowned—nothing else possible, of course—didn't find anything fresh out at Fingbourne?"

"No, I didn't find anything."

"Well, you've been very kind, Mr. Fortune—wanted to ask you—could you stay over till tomorrow—like to get your evidence in at the inquest—out at Fingbourne, of course—won't keep you long—I'll warn the Coroner—send a car round for you in the morning."

The village hall at Fingbourne was already full when Reggie came to the seats kept for witnesses.

He was slow, he was dreamy, but his round pink face had the wistful curiosity of a child as he looked at the mixture of village folk and opulent folk in the crowd, at the Chief Constable and Inspector Horne sitting uncomfortably together, at a solitary solicitor, at Crendon in quiet talk with an elder man who must be the Admiral, at the wooden face of Bowes beside him.

The Coroner, a solemn ancient, made a fuss of the formalities and a speech about realizing the sad tragedy, and the Admiral was called into the box.

He had no likeness to the dead boy: not much brow to his heavy face, ample jaw: the lines of it stood out hard and dark.

The Coroner purred over him. He jerked an impatient bow and answered the smooth questions sharply. Arthur had gone out after breakfast alone; in his usual spirits; he did not come back to lunch; later on Bowes went down to see if he was in the boathouse, as he often took a book

there and forgot the time reading; Bowes came back and reported the boy was dead. There had been no trouble of any kind to account for it.

The Coroner was bound to ask—in a voice of sympathetic apology—if the young man had ever given reason to fear he might commit suicide. "I don't know how to answer that, sir," the Admiral said. "I had never thought of such a thing. But the boy was always emotional. He had moods and fancies. I believe he meant to do his duty. But he couldn't control his mind. He lost himself in books."

"Ah! I understand he was something of a poet?" the Coroner said, and looked at the jury.

"He was always reading poetry. I have found a book in his room with a lot of poetry in his writing. Some seems to be his own. Some is copied out from books. I'm told one piece is by Chatterton——"

"A poet who committed suicide, gentlemen," the Coroner informed the jury.

"And there is some Greek: about death, I'm informed."

Bowes handed up the book: the Coroner turned the pages and passed it down to the Vicar of Fingbourne, who was foreman of the jury. "Perhaps you can help us, sir?"

The Vicar put on his glasses. "Dear me, dear me," he sighed, and shook his head. "This passage is from a tragedy. I may translate it thus: 'Not to be born is the happiest lot of all. And the next by far is to go most quickly to that bourne whence no traveller returns.'" He dropped his voice.

"I need not ask you anything more, Admiral," said the Coroner.

But Inspector Horne started up. "By your leave, sir. We want to know if the Admiral was on good terms with the boy. As an elder son, was he giving satisfaction?"

The Admiral's face darkened and he glared at the Inspector. "I have no complaint of him, sir," he growled.

"Question's an impertinence." His solicitor half rose and thought better of it.

"I know my duty, sir." Horne was pleased. "Who told Bowes to look for the boy in the boathouse?"

The solicitor boomed out an objection. "Quite so, quite so," the Coroner said quickly. "This is most irregular, Inspector. Bowes will be called. Thank you, Admiral."

Bowes took his place. It had been his own idea, going to look for Mr. Arthur, being as he was often dreaming down there over the river. The finding of the boy was told. And again, in spite of muttered orders from the Chief Constable, Horne got on his feet. "You found the door locked. Any key in it?" Bowes shook his head. "You say the boy was locked in but the key had been taken away?" Bowes knew nothing about the key. Mr. Arthur might have thrown it in the river himself. "You found him half out of the water, as if he'd been trying to get out, not as if he wanted to drown himself."

"Half out he was," said Bowes.

"Ah! Any sign of someone else being there?" Bowes saw naught. "Did you find the rest of the cord? Any ends about?" No, Bowes saw naught.

Then came the family doctor. While he made out his nervous evidence, the Chief Constable was whispering fast and furiously to Inspector Horne.

The Coroner called Mr. Fortune.

Reggie was deliberate, minute, and long. As his level voice described the state of the dead boy's body, he watched the father. At first the Admiral sat with bent head; before the end he was staring at Reggie and his eyes glared a fierce anxiety. Reggie stopped and there was a moment's silence. "Thank you, Mr. Fortune," the Coroner spoke. "That is very full and clear. The conclusion from your evidence is the boy was drowned and by his own act?"

"I have found no evidence to justify any other conclusion," said Reggie slowly.

The solicitor stood up. "Your opinion is that he tied his legs and threw himself into the river?"

"I have no evidence for any other explanation."

"As to the position in which he was found—does it prove he was trying to save himself?"

"That is indicated."

"But such an effort is quite compatible with an original intention to commit suicide?"

"Oh, yes. Yes. Obviously. There are recorded cases, too."

Horne started up. "What, sir, of a man dying by drowning when he had got himself half out of the water?"

"Yes. There are cases," Reggie murmured.

"You don't see anything queer about this case?"

Reggie waited a minute before he answered. "Speakin' medically,"—he paused again—"I should say there was nothing."

"What about the missing key and the cord?" Horne cried.

"Mr. Fortune is a medical expert, Inspector," said the Coroner severely. "We shall have more medical evidence, gentlemen. Thank you, Mr. Fortune." He called the police surgeon.

But Reggie did not wait to hear that important man. Unostentatious but swift, he slipped through the crowded court to find his chauffeur Sam smoking a cigarette with other chauffeurs. "All over a'ready, sir?" Sam asked by way of apology.

"Oh, no. No. Now we're going to begin. Same like Mr. Snodgrass." Reggie got into the car and drove himself. By the gate through which Dr. Grove had brought him he turned into the park. "The Admiral don't mind me going across the turf," he muttered, and he laughed. But the

sound of that laugh made Sam look at him curiously. He stopped rather farther from the boathouse than Dr. Grove had stopped. He walked on, stooping, looking at the ground.

The path which came across the park to the boathouse was only a band of shorter, paler grass, but as it came down to the river some damp places were set with stones. Reggie went to the boathouse and studied the shut door; some small scratches on the grey oak interested him; most of them were near the ground and close to the door post, one or two, separate and faint, higher up about the middle. He measured the distance roughly and turned back to the patch of stones close by. Among them was a patch of yellow earth. "One big one or several little ones," he mumbled, considered a moment, and walked back along the path, counting his paces, then turned off onto the longer grass. He was some time moving methodically to and fro before he came upon a stone. It had a yellow stain of earth on it, no other mark, but farther on some flatness showed on the long grass. There lay another stone. On that was a clot of dried blood. Some of the grass tufts beyond were dark and stuck together. He followed a trail of blood: not much had fallen in any place, but the line could be made out.

It led him to one of the coverts of rhododendron. He stopped and held up a finger to the attentive Sam, and Sam arrived at the double. "Got something, sir?"

"Just stand by." Reggie lay down and looked under the rhododendron boughs, half rose and worked his way into the thicket.

Something growled faintly. In the half dark he saw a glimmer of white, a small dog who had dragged himself into hiding to die and found it a long business. A wire-haired terrier: no collar on him. Reggie knelt down. "Poor

little dog, good little dog!" he murmured, and delicately handled the dirty blood-stained body. There was a snarl, a dry mouth tried to bite. "All right, old man." Reggie gathered him up carefully and, going backwards, forced his way out through the bushes.

"My gum!" Sam came to look. "'E ain't been 'alf done in. There's a dirty swine's trick."

"Get him some water. Down to the river. Fill your cap." Reggie walked away to the car.

When Sam came back the dog was laid on a folded rug on Reggie's knee. Seeing the water, he whimpered and tried to struggle to it, lapped greedily and dropped his head with a sigh. "Pore little beggar," Sam gazed at him. "Nice little dawg, too. Blinking shame."

"Oh, get on, get on!" Reggie cried.

"Right back, sir?"

"Straight on to the first chemist's. And you're not driving a hearse."

"Very good, sir." Sam was affronted. The car surged over Admiral Basset's turf.

"You have a private lock-up for the car, haven't you?"

"That's right." Sam was haughty but curious. He had to ask, "What for exactly?"

"To nurse the dog," Reggie murmured.

The car stopped at the chemist's and Reggie put the dog down in his seat as he got out. An unhappy head lifted, looked after the vanishing friend, and whined. When Reggie came back and took him up again he licked hands, and the stump of a tail made a show of wagging. . . .

They were a long time in the garage. "'E takes it good, don't 'e?" Sam said at the door. "Kind o' grateful. That gets you in a dawg. I'll stay with 'im a bit."

Reggie strolled away to the Post Office and put through a trunk call. The Chief of the Criminal Investigation

Department was at a Buckingham Palace garden party. "All right. Don't alarm the King," said Reggie, and dictated a message.

That night, having seen the patient take nourishment with feeble eagerness, he was in his room smoking a large and thoughtful pipe when Inspector Horne broke upon him. "I didn't hardly expect to find you here still, Mr. Fortune."

"Pleasant surprise, what?" Reggie gazed at him dreamily. "Pleasure seems to be mine."

Horne sat and scowled at him. "You let me down proper, didn't you? Leading me on with that talk about the cord and a queer case. As good as told me to work on it as a murder. Of course I thought you'd back me up. Fair made a fool of me. Look what they've done with it." He thrust the Daneford evening paper on Reggie. "You didn't bother to stay for the end."

"Suicide—temporary insanity—deep sympathy with the family." Reggie looked down the report. "Yes. They were obviously going to say that."

"That's all very fine. It's going to play the devil with me. The Chief Constable's given me a rare old dressing down already. I'll have all the bigwigs here with their knives into me. You put me onto it and then let it flop and left me to stand the racket. Oh, it's a great game! I wish you luck, Mr. Fortune." Horne started up.

Reggie waggled a hand at him. "Sit down again. I'm not going." He rang the bell and ordered whisky and soda while Inspector Horne glowered at him.

"Do you mean you're still on the case?"

"Speakin' officially, I've done with it. Speakin' unofficially, I don't leave a case like this. I'm staying in Daneford." The fluids were brought and Horne sullenly consented to drink.

The next morning he accompanied Reggie to Arthur

Basset's funeral. It was a ceremony of pomp and much attended. When the family mourners were gone, while the county people were going, Reggie lingered by the churchyard gate. Bowes made his way out and they jostled. Reggie turned and stared.

"Beg pardon, sir." Bowes drew back. His face was stolid, as it had been in the witness box. He stood waiting for Reggie and Horne to go ahead of him and sucked his teeth.

They passed on. "That bein' thus, my inspector," Reggie smiled, "you'd better lunch in the local pub. There ought to be talk."

"They won't talk to me," said Horne.

Reggie moaned gently. "Then you talk to them. Goodbye."

When he came into his hotel, a gentleman at ease in the lounge was much impressed. "Reginald!" he said in a soft and penetrating voice. "Topper and tails!" He rose and contemplated them with reverence. "How beautiful!"

"What have you come for?" said Reggie bitterly. "I didn't ask for you. Come to my room."

"I am not worthy," Lomas chuckled.

"I know you're not. Not alive. I'll wear 'em at your funeral." He reached his room, put the hat on the table and stared at it malignantly. "Yes. I'll wear that hat. And with pleasure." He glowered at Lomas.

"My dear fellow! Why this malice? And why the splendour?"

"It's my own coat," said Reggie plaintively. "I phoned for it yesterday. But the hat's a local product." He felt his head with tender sympathy. "Very brachycephalic, the Daneshire population. Curious phenomenon. However." Again he glowered at Lomas. "How I hate you!"

"Quite," Lomas chuckled. "But otherwise you are obscure, Reginald. Why the splendour?"

"It's a mad case," Reggie moaned. "I told you, I've been to a funeral." He dropped into the biggest chair.

"What, young Basset's funeral?"

"Yes. I haven't killed anybody else. Not yet, Lomas."

"I am relieved to hear it." Lomas lit a cigarette. "You were getting quite incalculable. Resuming the inquiry, Reginald—why the funeral?"

"To take Inspector Horne. A demonstration. To parade myself with Inspector Horne: showin' him and me still in action."

"Horne: that's the fellow who was told off by the Coroner?"

"Yes. Almost wholly without brain. But with something not himself that makes for righteousness. A dolt of sound instincts and the awful obstinacy thereof. These are the men that try the soul, Lomas."

"Then why Horne?" said Lomas.

"Oh, my hat! I don't know why he is. Part of the grim mystery of existence. But as he is, we have to make do with him. Hence me still here: hence my appeal for a man of modest intelligence. And then you come down yourself. Life is very hard."

"You remain obscure, Reginald. Why are you still here? Why do you want one of my men on the case? By your own evidence it was suicide and you got the verdict you asked for."

"Oh, my hat!" Reggie moaned. "And that's what you made of it! Didn't anything else occur to the professional mind?"

Lomas smiled. "Well, yes, several things. That fellow Horne had some queer points which were hustled out of the way. Obviously there is a desire that something or other shouldn't come out. The lad seems to have been a queer fish, and the father is an old naval man and county squire. Might drive each other wild. Of course the county

would sympathize with papa and help him keep things out of the papers."

"Yes. That is indicated. I'd rather sympathize with the boy. It's he who's gone down, Lomas."

"Poor devil!" Lomas nodded. "He may have been whipped into it. But after all, you made it suicide yourself, Reginald."

"I said I had no evidence for any other explanation. I was bound to say so. I hadn't. But I have now, Lomas. The boy was murdered."

"Good Gad!" Lomas stared at him.

"Come and have a look." Reggie took him to the garage.

Therein Sam sat on the footboard of the car, smoking and rubbing the head of a small dog who had a leg in splints and a bandage about his body. The dog saw Reggie and whimpered and wriggled and wagged his tail. He was given a hand, licked it, nibbled it. "Doing fine, ain't 'e, sir?" said Sam.

"Splendid dog," Reggie lingered over him. "Come and be kissed, Lomas." Lomas said it was a good fellow and gave a hand, but the dog turned his head away and looked anxious worship at Reggie. "All friends, old man," said Reggie. Lomas was accepted with one small, swift lick.

Reggie took leave of the dog, and they went back to the room in the hotel. "And that's your evidence?" said Lomas.

"Yes. Absolutely conclusive," Reggie murmured, and dropped into a chair.

Lomas lit another cigarette. "You mean the dog was there?

"Not at the murder. No. He was tryin' to be. He did his best."

"I suppose he has told you so?" said Lomas patiently.

"Him and things. Yes."

"What the dog said: it isn't evidence, Reginald." Lomas smiled.

Reggie's eyes darkened. "If he could speak! We should know the inside of these people then." He sat up with a jerk. "No, Lomas, dear. Dogs can't talk—as your intelligence has perceived. But what they do, what's done to 'em—*that* talks. There was no evidence of anything but suicide. But suicide requires that the boy was alone and unassisted when he killed himself. The professional mind accepts that?"

"Not quite," Lomas objected. "Not absolutely. He might have killed himself in spite of efforts to stop him. Or another person present might not have known what he was up to till it was all over."

"He tied his legs in spite of efforts to stop him? He did it and jumped into the water without the other fellow noticing? And the other fellow couldn't save him though there were boats there afloat? Yes. It could be. But you wouldn't call it likely."

"I agree. The other person would have a lot to explain."

"Yes, I think so. The other person thought so, too. He has eliminated himself with ease. And you remember, on the evidence at the inquest, the boy was actually trying to get out when he died. Makin' the failure of the other person to save him still more awkward."

Lomas nodded. "I noticed he was found half out. That impressed me."

"Everybody had to notice it," Reggie moaned. "That's why they brought me down. They wanted a good opinion it might be suicide all the same. And I had to say so. However. Even at the inquest there were those other queer points. Disappearance of the key; absence of any remains of cord. I put Horne up to all that, but the fool didn't know how to use it. ."

"A suicide will do very odd things," Lomas objected.

"The cord and the key are no evidence anyone else was in it."

"Not proof. No. That's why I couldn't do anything. But suggestive. That's why I went to the boathouse again. I thought there were marks on the door. I found scratches such as a dog would make trying to get in." And he told of the tracking of the dog. "Hind leg broken, two ribs, flesh wounds. Been lying there some days. Now you see what happened."

"Good Gad!" Lomas gasped. "I do not."

"My dear fellow! Oh, my dear fellow! While Arthur Basset was being drowned, the dog came to the door and made a row. The other person couldn't have attention drawn to the boathouse at this delicate moment, tried to drive the dog off and, failing, stoned him. Awkward situation. He had Arthur on his hands, and the dog. That's why he couldn't make sure of the dog. When he was sure of Arthur the dog had vanished. Very awkward. He daren't stay to look. Hence the evidence of the dog survives. See?"

"It's very ingenious," said Lomas.

"Yes, I think so," Reggie murmured.

Lomas meditated. "You've made out a strong presumption somebody else was there. But it's not a proof, Reginald. What do you mean to do?"

"I mean to find the somebody else."

And again Lomas thought about it. "Where's the motive for murder? Unsympathetic father might drive a poetic son to suicide. He wouldn't murder the boy for being incompatible."

"Not by itself, no. Lots of motives about. Father might resent this unsatisfactory youth being the heir of the Bassets. There's a tradition that the estates go to the younger son. These little things take hold of people's

minds. Somebody else might want the elder son out of the way. The younger son is by a second wife, you know. Various possible jealousies, affections, ambitions. There may be other forces. And we're not bound to find a motive because we find a murderer. He might not have had a rational motive; might have had all sorts mixed up. It happens."

"Quite," Lomas nodded, frowning. "You're infernally rational, Reginald. It's an awkward business. Strictly speaking, I have no right to act. The local police haven't called me in."

"My dear fellow! Oh, my dear fellow! You have, they did, they asked for me. Here I am and I want assistants."

"There ought to be further investigation," Lomas pronounced officially. "I agree. Well, I brought down Underwood and Foster. I thought you were probably right, confound you. But for heaven's sake don't put the local backs up."

When Lomas had departed Reggie gave a lecture to Sergeant Underwood and Sergeant Foster on a large-scale map of Fingbourne. "Now what you have to do is to find me somebody who was about in the park near the boat-house on Monday morning. There's a local man on it, too. Inspector Horne. If you bump into him, give him butter, lots of butter. He's sore. You might also find out if Arthur Basset had a dog—and if any dog had been lost from Fingbourne House—and its name. That's all. Quite simple."

Underwood looked glum. "It's a simple inquiry, sir. If you don't mind my saying so, what bothers me is how the job was done if it was murder."

"I wonder." Reggie looked at him with dreamy eyes. "Secondary problem. When I know who did it, I'll tell you how. Good-bye."

Going out afterwards to visit the patient in the garage,

he saw a wooden face among the loungers about the door of the tap: the face of Bowes. It was not anxious to be observed. When he came back again he heard a voice which seemed familiar talking to the landlord in the office and sat down to wait till it should come out. The owner of it was Crendon. He gave Reggie a look of grave and friendly recognition.

"Well, well! Now they know," Reggie murmured to himself. "However." He went for his tea to the confectioner's used by the ladies of rank and fashion in Daneford.

Rather late that night Underwood came to report progress. They had been to Fingbourne and drunk beer at the inn with the village elders. "I'd say a lot of 'em think it was a fishy business, but nothing you could get onto. The lad was driven to suicide to clear the way for this second wife's son—that's their idea. And it does look like that to me, sir—really murder but not a thing you can prove."

"You think not?" Reggie murmured.

"Well, it's up to you, sir," Underwood said without confidence.

"Yes. That is so. Yes. You two had better go and put up at the Fingbourne inn."

"Very good, sir," Underwood said. "You see that's going to give everybody warning."

"Yes. I think so." Reggie smiled. "Work at it. Goodnight."

In the morning came to him a melancholy man. Inspector Horne's natural surliness was smarting with a sense of wrong. He had not been able to do anything at Fingbourne. He would not be able to do anything. The Chief Constable had had him on the carpet for trying, suspended him, threatened dismissal. "That's what you've let me in for,

Mr. Fortune. Turned out of the force after twenty-five years' service. Good finish for me, ain't it, thank you kindly."

"My dear chap! Not the finish, no. Far otherwise. When you see the Chief Constable you can tell him Mr. Fortune said you were on the track."

"Can I!" Horne growled. "Lot of good that'll do."

"Quite a lot. Yes." Reggie smiled.

"You're still at it, are you?"

"Oh, yes. You can tell him that, too," said Reggie. "I'm just going out to Fingbourne. Good-bye."

He did not on this expedition take the car into the park. Trudging the main avenue, he stopped to consider the nearness of several points to the boathouse, repeated the process on the road which led to the stables, then took the track which led from the house to the river.

As he came near the boathouse he saw a solid shape of a man who rolled in his walk. "The naval Bowes," he murmured. and he smiled. "Oh, yes. We're thinking it out, are we?" Bowes seemed to be making a search. He became aware of Reggie and stopped, but there was only a puckering of the eyes in his wooden face. He touched his hat with a gruff, "Morning, sir."

Reggie gave him a cheerful answer, glanced back at the house, and then said, "You should keep your eyes open, Bowes."

"Ay ay, sir," Bowes growled, and while Reggie wandered on stood sucking his teeth, then rolled off at a brisk rate to the house.

Reggie came to his car again and sank down and mopped his face. "Life is exhaustin', Sam," he complained. "But not without interest. Slow through the village. Same like the sign says. Lookin' for our active and intelligent police force. I want to give them a prod, too."

Underwood was seen talking to what seemed to be the

village ne'er-do-well outside the humbler village inn. He came to the car as it stopped. "Anything new, sir?"

"The butcher, the baker, the candlestick maker," Reggie murmured. "Try the tradesmen. Somebody took the Monday bread and the Monday fish and what not."

"I'll get Foster on it, sir," said Underwood curtly, and went back to his goggling wastrel.

"Well, well!" Reggie sighed. "Why are policemen so harsh to me, Sam?"

"'E was up to something on 'is own, sir."

"Yes, that was indicated. He has intelligence. But so stern withal. Nobody loves me. However. *C'est brutal mais ça marche*. Like gears and the human leg."

He had not long been back in the hotel, he was sprawling and drinking soda water when the Chief Constable was brought up to him, and the Chief Constable, it became swiftly clear, was far from loving him. "Rang you up this morning, Mr. Fortune."

"Good. I was out. Over at Fingbourne."

"Were you? Have a word with you about that, if you please."

"Have a drink, too," Reggie murmured. "No? You look so hot. Have a chair."

"Not here to sit down and gossip, sir," Colonel Chute barked. "Sent me a message—like to know what you mean by it. Horne says you asked him to tell me he was on the right track."

"Oh, yes. He was, you know. That's what it means."

"Let me tell you, sir, I want no interference from you—won't have it, what's more. Horne is suspended for disobedience to orders."

"Is he really?" Reggie sat up. "You ordered him not to investigate the case any further? Write me a letter saying so, will you?"

Colonel Chute gobbled. "I'll be damned—most impu-

dent thing I ever heard in my life— you have no authority here, sir, none at all—I'm in charge of all criminal investigation here——"

"Yes. You are. And you're usin' your position to impede the course of justice. You'd better not."

Colonel Chute was for a moment inarticulate. "Verdict of suicide, sir—on your own evidence—case is closed."

"I said there was no medical evidence of anything but suicide. There wasn't. And your inspector's inquiries were squashed and the inquest was huddled over. Your inspector wasn't satisfied. I'm not satisfied."

"Why—why not?" Colonel Chute stammered. "What other evidence is there? What could there be?"

Reggie smiled. "Well, well! Didn't you feel any suspicion, Colonel?"

"Do I understand you"—Colonel Chute was in a difficulty—"some fresh facts you've discovered?"

"I thought Horne told you he was on the track," Reggie murmured.

Colonel Chute breathed hard. "Very difficult position—most irregular—" he said thickly—"don't want any public altercation—take advice." He got himself out of the room.

After dinner Underwood arrived with a conviction of his importance manifest. "Well, Mr. Fortune, there was somebody else in the boathouse that morning," he announced.

"Oh, yes. Who was it?" Reggie murmured.

"Foster's got the fishmonger's boy, sir. He was cycling up to the house. He says he heard a dog barking down by the river as he came along, then it shut up, and he saw a man go into the boathouse. Afterwards when he was going back, there was someone coming across from the boathouse—the same chap, he's pretty sure."

"Who was it?" said Reggie sharply.

"Ah, he couldn't say. He wasn't ever near enough to see the face. He don't know the Fingbourne House people by sight—he's a lad from the town here."

Reggie sighed. "We don't have much luck, do we?"

"Not too much, sir. He thinks he might recognize the look of the man again if he saw him walking."

"Yes. If he had a hint he was to." Reggie murmured. "Not good enough. We want that hint ourselves first. He mustn't recognize a fellow who was somewhere else. We don't exactly command public confidence as it is."

"That's right, sir," Underwood said grimly. "We do not. But I've got something more. A Fingbourne lout put me onto an old poacher fellow from another village who was down by the river on the other side setting lines for eels. He heard talk in the boathouse and quit. Two men talking and laughing, he says, and then a hell of a splash."

Reggie moved in his chair. "Laughing," he murmured, and gazed at Underwood with melancholy eyes.

"Ah!" Underwood nodded. "Seems mighty queer, doesn't it? But it's not the sort of thing a fellow would make up. And he sticks to it. Swears he'd know the voices again, too. I daresay he would, sir. These poacher chaps are sharp on sounds."

"There's one voice he won't know again," said Reggie. Then the pity died from his sombre eyes. "The other—I wonder if that'll be laughing when he hears it next. Then and after. Yes. Oh, yes. What's that about the devils laughing in hell?"

"Devilish business, all right," Underwood said. "But I don't know. He says both the men he heard were laughing. Arthur Basset wouldn't laugh if he was being murdered. Looks like more than one in it."

"I wonder," Reggie murmured. "You'd better keep an eye on Fingbourne House tomorrow. Browse in the park.

In case anybody does anything unusual. Foster can go worryin' on. Good-night."

Among Reggie's letters in the morning was one which bore the Basset crest. It was from the Admiral:

> SIR:
>
> I had hoped to take an occasion of thanking you for your services at the inquest upon my unfortunate son. It has, however, been brought to my knowledge that you are not disposed to be content with the evidence which you gave. I fail to understand this and must require an immediate explanation. I am informed that my people are being disturbed by secret inquiries made without any legal authority and wish to know if this is upon your instructions.
>
> Yours faithfully,
> J. BASSETT.
>
> It would be best that you should meet me.
> J. B.

"You think so?" Reggie smiled at the epistle. "Interestin' state of mind. Several states of mind. Different one in each sentence. Yes, my Lomas, we've got 'em takin' notice now."

That afternoon he drove out to Fingbourne House. The footman who opened the door was told that Admiral Basset had asked him to come round and with some nervous hesitation took him into the garden.

The family were at tea there between two great syringas —the Admiral, Mrs. Basset, their boy, and Crendon. If there had been any conversation among them it was silenced by the approaching footsteps. The Admiral sprang up; his face was red, and his black eyebrows met in a frown. "Sorry to bring you out here," he growled.

"Quite the best way," Reggie murmured, "as you said," and he was gruffly introduced to Mrs. Basset, who

stared at him cold hostility, to the dumb, awed child, to Crendon.

"Sort of met before, haven't we, sir?" Crendon said. "With old Bowes, you know."

A small dog, a wirehaired terrier, came slowly round the chairs, with twitching nose, and sniffed at Reggie and whimpered. The teacup in Mrs. Basset's hand shook. "Be quiet, Mick," she said fiercely, and he lay where he stood, and Reggie talked about syringas. But only Crendon helped him.

"Won't you have any more tea?" The Admiral seized the first chance. "Come along, then."

The dog slunk after them close on Reggie's legs. "Go lie down," the Admiral roared at him, and he scuttled away, tail down, back curved.

"Oh, nice dog!" Reggie protested, looking after him. "Something worrying him?"

The Admiral strode on into the house and upstairs to a panelled room which had some pictures of ships and a cabinet of sailors' curiosities. He sat down at a writing table and pointed to a chair. "Now, Mr. Fortune." His black brows came down.

"Have you lost a dog lately?" said Reggie.

The Admiral was taken aback. "What? Dog? Yes. We have. That rascal's brother. Don't know what's become of him."

"Don't you really? Told the police?"

"No, I haven't. I've had something else to do than bother about a dog."

"Was it Arthur's dog?"

"Damn it, sir, I didn't bring you here to talk about dogs," the Admiral exploded.

"Oh, yes. You wanted me to explain why I don't believe Arthur committed suicide. First point: the vanished dog."

"Do you mean you knew the dog had gone?"

"Yes. Though you didn't tell anybody. And I know what happened to it. Could Arthur swim?"

Again the Admiral had a difficulty in adjusting himself to the conversation. "Swim? Swim like a fish. One of the few things he could do, poor fellow. That's why he had to tie his legs to kill himself, of course. But——"

"But not a reason why he should kill himself by drowning," Reggie murmured. "Second point."

"Let's keep to one thing at a time, for God's sake," the Admiral gasped. "What's this about the dog?"

"I'll take things my own way," said Reggie sharply. "Have you kept that book Arthur wrote in? I want to see it?"

"It was shown at the inquest, sir." The Admiral produced it.

"Not to me." Reggie turned the pages. "Oh, yes. The Greek that never being born is the best way and the second best to die quick, that's the only thing about death. And it's the last written."

"Of course it is. He wrote it when he was making up his mind to kill himself."

"Or it was written to suggest that he did. The ink's not as dark as the rest. And bein' Greek, there's no proof the writing is his. Third point."

"What the devil are you suggesting, sir?" the Admiral roared.

"Oh, isn't it clear yet? Your son Arthur was murdered, and there has been an elaborate and determined attempt to pretend that he killed himself."

The Admiral started up. "I murdered my own son, did I? That's what your tricks are going to prove. Do your worst, then, and be damned to you. I'll fight you, and by God I'll break you."

"Oh, no. No." Reggie smiled. "There won't be any

fight. I have my case. When Arthur was in the boathouse that morning somebody else was there, too. I have witnesses who saw him and heard him. The dog that's vanished followed Arthur down to the boathouse and scratched at the locked door and barked to be let in while the murder was being done. The murderer came out and stoned him with stones from the path, and he was smashed and hid in the bushes to die. I've found him and saved him. I couldn't save Arthur. But I can punish his murderer. He was seen twice. His voice is remembered. He was talking to Arthur and laughing. That's the evidence, sir. You'd better think it over. Good-bye."

He waited a moment, but the Admiral would not look at him, sat staring at hands which clenched and unclenched, had nothing to say. He went out, and as he opened the door heard footsteps. In the hall he saw the wooden face of Bowes.

His car was driven slowly across the park, and Underwood rose up from the turf. Reggie stopped. "Close up on the house. You might be wanted," he said. "I'm going back to the hotel." The car shot away.

It was less than an hour afterwards, he was sitting in the lounge of the hotel, smoking fast, when the telephone rang. He started up and made for the office. "Mr. Fortune?" the landlord was saying. "Right. I'll see if he is in."

And Reggie took the receiver out of his hand. "Fortune speaking."

"This is Underwood, sir. Come along quick. Regular mess here. Three of 'em laid out. All hurt bad. Haven't got the hang of it yet. Plenty of doctor's work."

"Coming," Reggie said and rang off.

His car was turning out of the courtyard when the landlord called: "Chief Constable on the phone, Mr. Fortune," and he returned to it.

"That Mr. Fortune?—Colonel Chute speaking—something queer at Fingbourne House—Admiral's been shot—can you come out?"

"I'm coming," said Reggie. "Bring another doctor."

When his car slid up to the door of Fingbourne House, Underwood ran out. "Who has it worst?" said Reggie.

"I couldn't rightly say that, sir. None of 'em dead yet. Mr. Crendon's smashed up and got his leg broke. The Admiral's shot in the head. His man Bowes is laid out bleeding like a pig. By what I can make out, Bowes ran amuck at 'em. I was waiting, like you told me, round there by the garden hedge, when I heard shots and the devil of a row. Then I ran up, and as I came I found Mr. Crendon lying out here with his face bloody and groaning. 'What's up, sir?' I said. 'God, I'm done,' he said, 'my damned leg's broke,' he said, 'go and stop that devil, for God's sake, he's killing the Admiral up there.' See, sir, where the window's all smashed."

Reggie looked: it was the window of the room in which he had explained things to the Admiral. "Yes, I see," he said.

"Well. I went up, sir. There was the Admiral and Bowes both lying dead to the world and Bowes with a service revolver in his hand. The Admiral had a mess of blood all over his head, and Bowes was bleeding out of the body. Servants coming in screeching like hens. Mrs. Basset, she's took charge, she kept her head fine, got 'em took off to bed and—oh, here she is."

She was white and at strain but in full command of herself. "Mr. Fortune, I have sent for our own doctor, but will you see my husband? Perhaps something ought to be done."

"Yes. I'd better see him."

"Your man has told you what happened?" She led the way in. "Mr. Crendon heard a noise in the study and

found Bowes there with my husband. Bowes had a revolver and was trying to shoot him. There was a struggle, and Bowes shot my husband in the head and flung Mr. Crendon out of the window, and when we found him he had shot himself, wretched man."

"Yes. Yes. A bad business." Reggie looked at the white, hard face. "Has Bowes ever done anything strange before?"

"He has been very strange since Arthur's death. I had warned my husband about him."

"I see. Yes," Reggie murmured, and was brought to the Admiral. He worked some time over the wound. . . .

He stood up and turned to the wife. "That's going to be all right, Mrs. Basset," he said.

"Oh, my God," she gasped and tottered.

"Yes. No serious injury. Slight concussion. Bullet slid along the skull. Shot was probably knocked up. He'll come round soon. Then we shall know."

"You can't be sure!" she cried.

"You think not?" Reggie looked at her.

She turned away from his eyes, trembling, then made for the door to the sound of voices and footsteps. "Ah, here is the doctor," she said.

Dr. Grove came, and with him the police surgeon. Reggie nodded at them. "That's a simple case. I'm going to see Bowes."

Upstairs in a little room the unconscious Bowes lay on his bed, still dressed, with a mature and buxom maid servant watching over him in helpless tears. "Now you're going to be useful," Reggie said. . . . There were wounds in chest and shoulder. . . . Dr. Grove came to help. . . . A long task. . . .

They left Bowes still unconscious with the woman at his side.

"Well? What's the opinion, Doctor?" Reggie said.

"Really, I have so little experience of this sort of thing. I expect him to pull through."

"Oh, yes. Yes. That is indicated."

"One hardly knows whether to wish it or not," Dr. Grove sighed.

"You think not?" Reggie murmured. "One moment." He ran downstairs to the hall where Underwood waited and spoke softly. "Take my car. Find the poacher. Bring him along quick." He turned back and saw Dr. Grove with the Chief Constable.

"Glad I managed to get hold of you, Mr. Fortune," Colonel Chute began. "Terrible business, this is—come in here, will you?"—he led the way into a morning room. "Mrs. Basset tells me you were with the Admiral this afternoon——"

"Yes. He asked for it," Reggie said.

"Quite—I understand that—did he—er—was he disturbed in his mind?"

"Much disturbed, yes. He wanted to know why I was fussin' about Arthur's death. And I told him I had evidence Arthur was murdered."

"You told him that—and then this happened——"

"Yes. Interestin' sequence."

"Pretty clear, I should say—damned clear—he guessed who it was—had Bowes in and accused him, and Bowes shot him."

"Yes. It could be." Reggie said slowly. "Whose revolver was it?"

Colonel Chute cleared his throat. "Seems to be the Admiral's own."

"Oh, yes. I thought it would be," Reggie murmured.

"Good God! You mean he was trying to shoot himself?"

"One of the possibilities. Yes."

"That's as good as to say he killed Arthur and was afraid you were going to prove it—is that what you meant—did he do it?"

"I don't know. I don't know who the murderer was yet."

"Well, but then," Colonel Chute stammered eagerly, "what about old Bowes—if it was him and he was being found out—there's your motive."

"Not so damned clear, is it?" Reggie smiled. "Well, well! I haven't seen Crendon yet. I'd better have a look at his damages."

"Not too bad—having his leg set now—" Colonel Chute bustled—"you've heard how he found them . . ."

They went up to Crendon's room. He was still under the hands of the police surgeon, but the work on the leg was done, his cut face patched with plaster, his left hand was being dressed. "Hallo, everybody. Cheerio," he smiled. "All stuck together again. How's the others?"

"Bad enough—bad enough—Admiral's still unconscious," Colonel Chute said.

"Hard luck. Did my best." Crendon settled down into his pillows. "Got it in the head, didn't he?"

"Yes. Shot in the head," said Colonel Chute. "Now, now, don't excite yourself. Just tell us how it happened."

"How's old Bowes?"

"Rather bad—nothing to be done with him—now tell us in your own way."

"Poor old beggar!" Crendon said. "He must have gone clean off his head. It was like this—" and he told again the story Reggie had heard from Underwood.

Reggie left Colonel Chute asking him questions and went back to the Admiral's room. He was at the bedside before Mrs. Basset heard him. She was bent over the Admiral, pale lips parted, her face fierce and eager.

"What has he said?" Reggie murmured.

She gasped and started and her hand went to her throat, then she waved him away.

Reggie sat down by the bed.

She said something sharp and stifled it. The Admiral stirred, made a noise in his throat, opened dim eyes and muttered, "Bowes—Bowes."

"Yes, dear, yes. I know it was Bowes," his wife said quickly.

He stared at her as though he did not see her. "Bowes," he said thickly. "Where's Bowes?"

"I know all about it, Gerald."

"Did Bowes get him?" the Admiral muttered,

"Yes, sir, Bowes got him," Reggie said. "What happened before?" he held up his hand against Mrs. Basset, and bent over the bed.

The Admiral turned to the new voice. "Who are you? I know you. You came about Arthur. Damn all."

"What happened, sir?"

"After you'd gone. Devil came in. Young devil came in. Took a pistol to me. Too quick for me. Like mad. Bowes came in, got at him. How is Bowes?"

"Doing well enough, sir. We've got Crendon. Don't worry any more. All clear now."

"Efficient, ain't you?" the Admiral mumbled. "Dam' 'ficient. Look after old Bowes."

"Right," Reggie said, and slid out of the room.

Mrs. Basset had gone before him. He heard her voice and followed it. "Colonel! Colonel, come here a minute. I want to speak to you. This room will do. Oh, my God!" Reggie came after them into a bedroom in which the curtains were drawn. She had her hand at her throat; she stumbled.

"Steady now steady—there, there," Colonel Chute exhorted her. "What's wrong now?"

"It's Arthur's room," she gasped. "No, it doesn't matter."

Reggie went to the window and let in sunlight.

"Colonel, my husband's spoken," she said. "It was Herbert shot them, shot them both."

"Herbert?" Colonel Chute barked. "You mean Crendon? God bless my soul! Crendon!" He turned to Reggie. "Hear that, Mr. Fortune?"

"Yes, I heard it," Reggie murmured. "I was waitin' for it." He turned to the window. A car had just driven up, his car, and Underwood was in it with a little man, rough and brown as a beechnut.

"What an awful thing!" Colonel Chute lamented. "My dear lady, what a dreadful thing!"

But she laughed. "Dreadful? My God, if you knew what it was like before! Take him away. Oh, take him away."

Colonel Chute was bewildered. "Er, quite, yes, quite—really most distressing——" He looked for help to Reggie.

"Go back to the Admiral, Mrs. Basset," Reggie said gently. "We'll do the rest." And she was quick to go.

"What do you think, Mr. Fortune?" Colonel Chute appealed. "What are we to do?"

"My only aunt!" Reggie moaned. "Do your job, man. Tell Crendon he's for it. Charge him with attempt to murder the Admiral and Bowes."

"Got to be done, of course—is he fit though? Poor devil's all smashed."

"Feelin' merciful?" Reggie snapped. "I'm not. This is the dead boy's room. Oh, get on!" While Colonel Chute went reluctantly, he ran down to the car where Underwood waited with the poacher. "You're my man. I want you to listen outside a room, in case you remember any of the voices. Come on, Underwood."

They went up to Crendon's room, and Reggie passed inside and left the door ajar.

"Hallo! You've blown in again, have you?" Crendon raised himself. "Let 'em all come."

"All?" said Reggie. "We can't arrange that, Mr. Crendon. There's one you won't see here again."

"Oh, God, don't be clever," Crendon cried.

"Now, now, my man!" Colonel Chute barked. "This won't do you any good—I warn you—careful what you say—told you the Admiral had come to himself——"

"Has he! What a change!" Crendon laughed.

"Hold your tongue, sir—Admiral's statement is, you shot him and Bowes—I shall charge you with attempt to murder—warn you—anything you say—evidence against you—understand?"

"Attempt?" Crendon said. "Attempt to murder? That's a good one!" and again he laughed.

"Thanks very much, Mr. Crendon," Reggie murmured and he called out: "Have you heard any voice you remember?"

"Ay," the answer came loud through the open door. "Him as laughed. Him's one o' they was laughing down to the boathouse."

Crendon tried to rise, staring at the door, and fell back with a scream of an oath and lay swearing.

"In the boathouse you laughed," Reggie said. "Come in, Underwood. Watch him. He may want to kill himself now." He wandered out.

The little poacher met him with twinkling eyes. "Good fellow!" Reggie said. "That was splendid."

"Ay, you did get him proper, master," the little man chuckled.

"Now my car'll take you wherever you want. But you'll be wanted again some day."

"Surely. I be ready. I han't no kindness to a man as hurts a dawg."

"Yes, that was his error," Reggie murmured. "Goodbye."

"What's all this, Mr. Fortune—what is all this?" Colonel Chute complained.

"Let's go into Arthur's room," said Reggie. He sat down on the dead boy's bed and sighed. "It's the end—for us. You can make another charge against Mr. Crendon—murder of Arthur Basset."

"I saw you were working to that—" the Colonel announced—"this fellow is evidence he was there—but how the devil could it be murder—how was it done?"

"My dear fellow! Oh, my dear fellow! That was always obvious—if there was another man there. Arthur was tempted to try if he could get out of the water with his legs tied. Possibly Crendon dared him. Possibly a bet. Hence some of the laughing. Crendon tied him up and pocketed the rest of the cord. Arthur jumped in. When he tried to get out, Crendon stamped on his hands. That's how the knuckles were skinned. Hence more laughing—by Crendon. In the midst of this amusement the dog came barking to be let into the boathouse. That row had to be stopped. Crendon ran out and drove the dog off—nearly killed him. Arthur made a last effort to get out and died. Crendon locked up the place and went off with the key. He couldn't leave it inside. Inevitable defect. Quite clever work. But not sound."

"Devilish clever—what's the motive, though?"

"Motive? Arthur was the heir. When he was gone, only the small boy between Crendon and the Fingbourne estate. I should say the small boy wouldn't have lived long if this had come off. Plenty of motives. Jealousy. Hate. Desire to show Mr. Crendon's power. Desire to kill. All quite common. Plenty of cases. You'll never hang

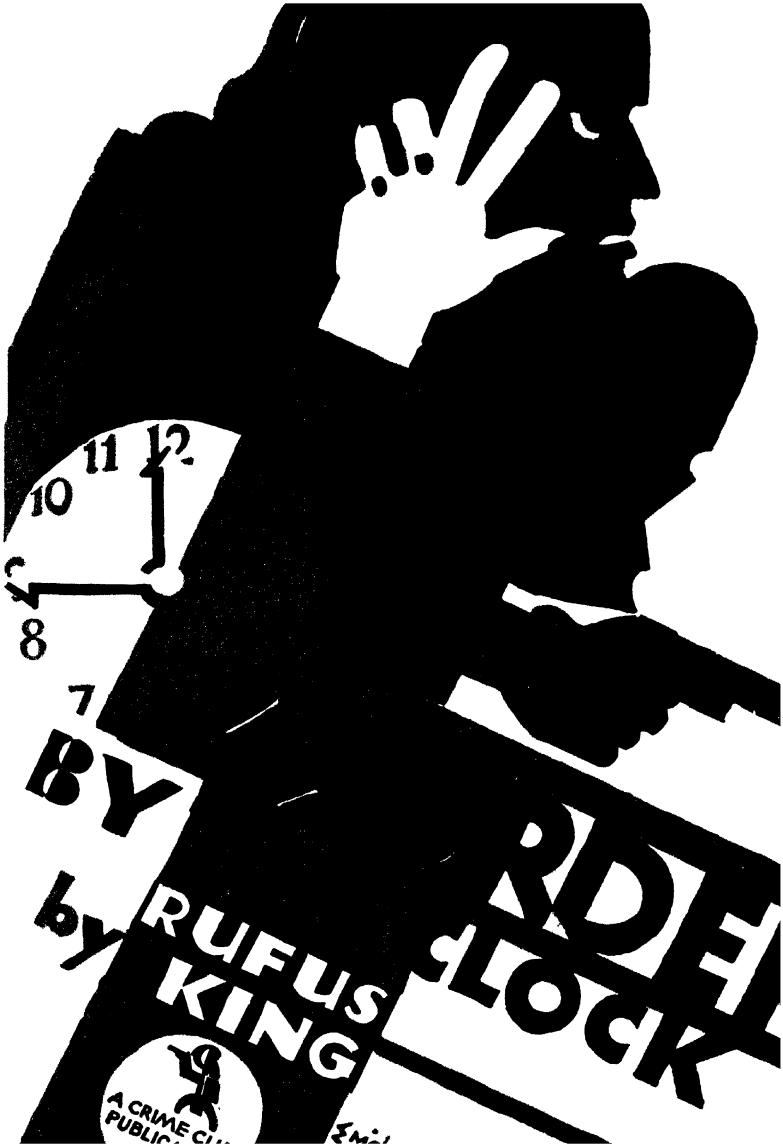
him. The experts will swear he's mad. He isn't, of course. However."

"Criminal lunatic asylum is the place for him," the Colonel pronounced.

"Well, well!" Reggie stood up. "You're a merciful man. Phone for Horne and get him taken to the prison infirmary. He isn't safe here. You owe Horne a good turn. Phone for nurses for old Bowes, too. I'm going back to my patient."

"Your patient, sir?"

"Yes. Little dog. Nice little dog."


BY
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RUFUS
KING
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CLOCK
A CRIME CL
PUBLIC

MURDER BY THE CLOCK

RUFUS KING HAS WRITTEN THE FOLLOWING DETECTIVE NOVELS FEATURING LIEUTENANT VALCOUR:

Valcour Meets Murder
Murder on the Yacht
Murder in the Willett Family
Murder by Latitude
Somewhere in This House
Murder by the Clock

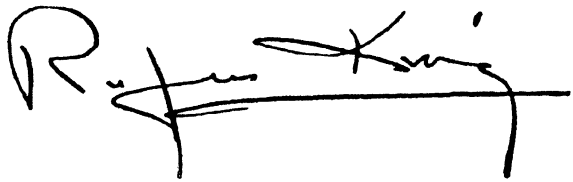
IN PREPARATION:

The Sutton House Murders

DETECTIVE stories have a high antiquity; Bel and the Dragon, Daniel and Susannah and the Elders—they go back in one form or another to the very first stories of all. People have liked to read them, and people have just as equally liked to write them. I have, I know.

In *Murder by the Clock* I broke away from a tradition that has often hindered the American detective story—the tradition that cops are dumb. They aren't. I've worked with them in my time, and I know. The New

York Police, particularly, are as efficient in the face of their unique problems as the forces of Scotland Yard and the Paris Surêté. And so Lieutenant Valcour came into being, a police detective who was not a copper but a real detective. He's appeared in many cases since, but I don't think he's ever done a better job than in this case of the man who was murdered twice, and of the woman who was his wife.



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CHAPTER I

8:37 *p. m.*—Spring 3100

MRS. ENDICOTT thought for a moment of simply dialling the operator and saying, "I want a policeman."

It was what the printed notices in the telephone directory urged one to do in case of an emergency. But it wasn't an emergency exactly, nor—still exactly—was it a policeman she wanted. She wanted a detective, or an inspector, or something; a man to whom she could explain her worry about Herbert, and who could do something about it if he agreed with her that Herbert was in danger.

Mrs. Endicott had never had any personal contact with the police. Whenever she thought about it at all she thought of the force as an efficient piece of machinery, the active parts of which one observed daily from one's motor as healthy and generally good-looking young men who controlled traffic. She knew that there was a patrolman whose beat carried him past their door. Upon thinking suddenly about it she

realized that she had only seen this man twice or three times at most during the past year. She knew that Herbert always left a ten-dollar gold piece to be given him by one of the maids at Christmas, and a check for twenty dollars as a subscription to some enterprise vaguely designated as the "fund."

She wondered momentarily whether the police characters she had seen in various plays, while at the theatre with Herbert, were true to life. Most of the characters had been brutal, in spite of a pleasant tender-heartedness reluctantly betrayed toward the final curtain, and just at present she wanted quiet, competent understanding—not brutality.

It occurred to her that a private investigator might be better, but she was uncertain as to the extent of their official powers. She decided to rely on the police, because the police could do something if they agreed with her that something ought to be done.

Mrs. Endicott looked up the telephone number of police headquarters and dialled Spring 3100. She grew nervous while waiting.

"This is Mrs. Herbert Endicott speaking," she said, when an undeniably masculine voice answered. It was an impersonal, efficient voice with no overtones about it. "Will you please connect me with your detective department? . . . I beg your pardon?

Oh." She gave the number of her house on East Sixty-third Street between Fifth and Madison avenues.

"This is Mrs. Herbert Endicott speaking," she began again, upon a second voice's saying, "Hello," "and I am worried about Mr. Endicott. I wonder whether you could send someone up to talk it over with me. . . . No. he hasn't disappeared. I know exactly where he has gone, but I have reason to believe that something might happen to him. . . . Yes, it's the Mr. Endicott who has been in the papers recently in connection with Wall Street. . . . Around in a few minutes? But I thought police headquarters were down on Centre Street. . . . They transferred the call to the precinct station? Really. . . . Oh, thank you."

Mrs. Endicott replaced the receiver on its hook. She felt distinctly impressed at the efficiency with which her request had been so instantly transferred to the place where it could be handled competently and with dispatch.

The living room where she had been telephoning was on the second floor of the house. She left it and went to her dressing room, which was toward the rear of a corridor on the same floor. She gave her appearance a preoccupied inspection before a pier glass. The soft and uneven lines of the jade chiffon

of her dress would offer a satisfactory mask, she felt, for the nervous tenseness of her body. She renewed the red on her upper lip where she had been biting it. She returned to the living room, lighted a cigarette and picked up a novel which she did not read.

She smoked three cigarettes.

Her sense of aloneness became stifling. The conceit grew upon her nervous condition that she had changed places with the furniture. She had become inanimate and the furniture endowed with attributes of life, as if her being were under the influence of some dispassionate regard by something that had no eyes with which to see. It was nonsense—nonsense. She never should have listened—at least not attentively—to that wretched old woman. She could very well just have given the appearance . . . one had to be polite . . .

Mrs. Endicott moved restlessly to one of the draped windows and stared down on the silent street. About her stretched the city of New York, and yet her environment could not have been quieter in some cabin in the woods. Not as quiet. Her memory swerved to that hellish week with Herbert in the forests outside of Copenhagen . . . what on earth *was* the name of that little watering place . . . Trollhättan? . . . No, that was in Sweden. Names never mattered. She

looked up for a while at a slender slice of night sky horizoned by cornices across the street. It was heavy with stars that held her as if they were so many magic mediums arranged in heaven for the express purpose of granting her earthbound wishes. Wishes? She shrugged. She released the drapes, and they settled into place.

A maid opened the living-room door and came in.

"A lieutenant from the precinct station, madam."

"All right, Jane. Ask him to come up here. Did he give his name?"

"Lieutenant Valcour, madam, I think he said."

"Try and be more careful in the future about getting names."

"Yes, madam."

Mrs. Endicott lighted another cigarette. Her sense of having done the proper thing began to desert her in a rush. The police had a habit of finding things out—unexpected things, irrelevant to any matter on hand. She was sure of it, and wondered on what she based the knowledge: books, hearsay. She would have to be careful, but after all, a person with intelligence —— He was standing in the doorway.

"My maid," she said, "wasn't sure of your name. Is it Valcour?" She noticed with a sense of relief that he was not in uniform and that he had left his hat and

overcoat downstairs. Mrs. Endicott had an aversion to discussing things which fringed on possible intimacies with people who were hatted and coated. He was a mild elderly man with features that were homely but not undistinguished, well dressed in tweed, and not smoking a cigar. He affected her with a quieting sense of reassurance.

"Valcour is correct, Mrs. Endicott. I happened to be leaving for home when your call was put in, so I stopped in personally instead of sending a detective as you suggested."

The faint trace of cultured precision in his speech made her suspect foreign origin. She was sensitive to voices, and while not exactly collecting them, they almost amounted with her to a hobby. They were an essential part in the attraction she felt toward certain people, and it would have been within the bounds of possibility for her to have fallen in love with a voice.

"You are of French origin, Lieutenant?"

"French-Canadian, Mrs. Endicott. I became naturalized twenty years ago."

She offered her hand. They sat down. Now that he was here she felt that the necessity for hurry had vanished; his air of official protection had erased it. She wondered how it would be best to begin: just

where to plunge into the foggy mass that composed her worry.

Lieutenant Valcour accepted a cigarette and lighted it. He was agreeably impressed with Mrs. Endicott and with the room. Both were unusual, and the competent foundation in culture he had acquired at McGill University in his youth enabled him to place them at a proper evaluation. The furniture was low set in design and severely simple, the general effect one of spaciousness and repose oddly marred by a muted undernote of harshness. It was not bizarre. He suspected it, correctly, of being modernistic. Mrs. Endicott herself had the startlingly clear perfection of features one occasionally finds in blondes. He decided that her age centred on twenty-five. Beneath her authentic beauty—her face seemed planed in pale tones of pink ice—there would be a definite substrata of metal. He noted that the six cigarette butts crushed in the vermilion lacquered tray on a small table beside her chair had not been smoked beyond a few puffs each. A clock standing on the broad-shelved mantel of the fireplace struck nine.

"My husband," Mrs. Endicott said abruptly, "has been gone now exactly two hours."

Lieutenant Valcour smiled amiably and settled himself a little less formally in his chair. His manner

presented itself to her as a freshly sponged slate upon which she could trace any markings that she might choose.

"He left here at seven o'clock this evening," Mrs. Endicott said, "to go to the apartment of a woman with whom he thinks he is in love. Her name is Marge Myles, and her apartment is on the Drive."

Lieutenant Valcour's smile seemed to offer both consolation and an apology.

"I'm afraid there isn't very much we can do for you," he said. "It's always private inquiry agents who handle work of that—well, of that rather delicate character."

"No—I haven't made myself plain." Mrs. Endicott's indeterminate thoughts began to crystallize. "I'm not looking for evidence to secure a divorce. This woman is nothing of any permanence, but I'm afraid of her—of what she might do to Herbert." Then she added, as if the simple statement in itself would insure his comprehension, "You see, I've seen her."

"With him?"

"Yes. They were lunching at the St. Regis. Herbert always was a fool about those things. She's foreign-looking—the Latin type." Mrs. Endicott felt the need for being meticulously explicit. "Her eyes are

like the black holes you see in portraits of Spanish women. They're the entire face; everything else blurs into a nonessential whiteness. This woman's eyes are like that—like weapons. I know she's the sort who would kill if she got stirred up over something—got jealous or something. People do get jealous enough to kill," she ended.

"Frequently." Lieutenant Valcour stored away in his memory the broken nail on the little finger of Mrs. Endicott's left hand. The uniform perfection of detail in the rest of her appearance made it stand out jarringly. "This is all most unfortunate," he said sympathetically, "but I still doubt whether there is anything we could do. If there were only something definite—say a threat, for example—we'd be very glad to investigate it and to offer Mr. Endicott suitable protection."

Mrs. Endicott stood up. The abruptness of the movement spread the folds of chiffon that streamed from a bow on her left shoulder, and Lieutenant Valcour's deceptively indifferent eyes lingered on bruise marks that showed blue smears upon white skin before the chiffon fell back into place.

"Would you come with me to my husband's room?" Mrs. Endicott said.

"Certainly."

"There's something there I'd like to show you—to ask you what you think about it."

Lieutenant Valcour followed Mrs. Endicott along the corridor that led past her dressing room. A door beyond this opened into her bedroom, and directly across the corridor from it was the door to Endicott's room. The blank end of the corridor served as a wall for the bathroom, which connected the two bedrooms and turned them into a suite which ran the width of the rear of the house.

Lieutenant Valcour sensed a difference in the furnishings of Endicott's bedroom that set it at sharp variance with the other parts of the house that he had seen. It was done in heavy mahoganies that were antiquated rather than antique, and methodically centred in each panel of its gray-toned walls was a print of some painting by Maxfield Parrish. After a comprehensive glance around he felt as if he had already met Endicott. He had at least evolved a fairly accurate portrait of the man's sensibilities, if not of his physique. He thought that Endicott would be difficult: a clearly divided neighbouring of the physical and the ideal, assuredly conscious of the fitness of things—which would be responsible for his acquiescence in the tone of the rest of the house—but dominated by an inner stubborness which faced

ridicule in the maintaining of his private room at the level he had accepted as a standard years before.

"That is his desk."

Mrs. Endicott indicated a flat-topped desk which was placed before one of the rear windows. A lemon-jacketed book with crumpled pages was lying on it as if it had been slammed there. Near the book was a scrap of paper. Lieutenant Valcour leaned down and stared at the paper without picking it up. On it was printed in pencil:

BY THURSDAY OR —

He looked at Mrs. Endicott. She was evidently waiting for him to speak.

"To-day is Thursday," he said. "Might it not be simply a memorandum?"

"My husband doesn't print his memorandums, nor is it likely he would use a piece of paper torn from a paper bag." She added, to clinch her belief, "I can't imagine Herbert ever having a paper bag."

"Perhaps he bought something at some haberdasher's."

"The paper is too cheap. It's more like the sort they use at grocers' or small stationers'."

"So it is."

"And there's a crudeness about the printing. It's almost an intentional crudeness." Mrs. Endicott stared fixedly at Lieutenant Valcour. "It's the sort of printing you'd expect to find in a threat," she said.

"I have learned to find almost any sort of writing or material used for purposes of conveying a threat," Lieutenant Valcour said. "People who threaten are invariably unbalanced emotionally, if not actually mentally, and there is never any telling just what they will do. There was a case that recently came to my attention where a woman received a threat which had been engraved on excellent paper and enclosed in the conventional inner envelope one uses for formal announcements or invitations."

"Really."

"I'm not, by that, questioning your judgment in the matter of this note, Mrs. Endicott. It might quite well be a threat, as you think."

"There is nothing else apparent that it could be."

"When did you find it, Mrs. Endicott?"

"After my husband had left."

"Lying just about where it is now?"

"Exactly where it is now."

"I see. You didn't touch it then—just read it. I wonder why your husband left it there."

She looked at him almost impatiently. "I don't

imagine he did leave it there—that is, purposely. It probably fell out from between the leaves when he slammed the book down."

"Has it occurred to you that we might call up this Marge Myles—but that's foolish. Of course you'd have thought of that."

He observed her obliquely as she answered.

"He'd never forgive me." Her gesture was faintly expressive of helplessness. "I'm not supposed to know anything about it."

"Of course. This menace, Mrs. Endicott, this danger that you are fearing, where do you think it lies?"

She became consciously vague. "The streets—indoors—out——"

"And you're basing it entirely upon this note?"

"Primarily. It's something concrete, at any rate I think that he ought to have protection, and yet, if I did do anything about it, he'd put it down as spying."

"Well, if this note is a threat there is rarely only one, you know. I wonder whether we might find any others. I haven't the remotest justification for looking, but I'm willing to do so if you wish me to."

Mrs. Endicott grew curiously detached. "His papers are in the upper right-hand drawer." she said.

Lieutenant Valcour opened the drawer. It's contents were in a state of considerable confusion. It was not the sort of confusion which is the result of a cumulative addition of separate notes, letters, and sheets of paper, but a kind that exists when a normally orderly collection of papers has been milled around in suddenly.

"There's quite a mass of stuff here," he said. "It might be simpler to eliminate other possible places before tackling it. I must repeat again that I'll be exceeding any legal rights by doing so, but if you earnestly believe your husband is in danger I'd like to go through the pockets of his clothing."

"Pockets?"

"It's a much more usual place to find important things than you would imagine."

"His clothes are in that cupboard."

Mrs. Endicott indicated a door. Lieutenant Valcour went over and opened it. An electric light was automatically turned on in the ceiling. The large hulk of a man crumpled into one corner of the cupboard gave him a severe shock. The man was dead. He closed the door and faced Mrs. Endicott. He nodded toward the desk, on which a telephone was standing.

"I'm going to use that telephone for a few minutes,"

he said. "There's a message I want to put through. Also, please ring for your maid."

Mrs. Endicott's eyes widened a little. "There's something in the cupboard," she said.

"Ring for your maid, please."

She went past him and toward the cupboard door. He shrugged. The value of her reaction would offset the brutality of not stopping her. She opened the door and looked in. Her grip tightened on the knob.

"Then he didn't go out at seven," she said.

"No, Mrs. Endicott. He didn't go out at all."

CHAPTER II

9:24 *p. m.*—Hall Marks of Murder

LIEUTENANT VALCOUR felt that the utter stillness of the room would overwhelm him. He—Mrs. Endicott—everything seemed to be taking its cue from death. He reached past Mrs. Endicott and touched the body's cheek. It was quite cold.

"Where is your room, Mrs. Endicott?"

He carefully pried her fingers from the knob of the cupboard door and then closed it.

"But you can't leave him in that cupboard."

Her voice held the toneless qualities of arrested emotion, as if the functioning of her nerve centres had stopped.

"We must leave him in there, Mrs. Endicott, until someone from the medical examiner's office has seen him. If you'll tell me the name of your family physician before you lie down——"

"Lie down—I? Lie down?"

"Yes, and rest. I'll call the doctor up on the possible chance that we're mistaken, only I'm quite certain, Mrs. Endicott, that we aren't."

She stumbled verbally in her rush. "Worth—Dr. Sanford Worth—Calumet 876—it's 876 something—I know it perfectly well. I—it's in my book—come with me."

She seemed mechanically vitalized, and her movements were those of a nervous, jerky toy. She flung open a door adjacent to the cupboard. It led into a bathroom, the fittings of which were of coral-coloured porcelain. A door in the opposite wall led into her bedroom. She went immediately to a leather reference book beside a telephone near her bed.

"It's Calumet 8769," she said.

Her finger slipped in the dialling. Lieutenant Valcour gently took the instrument from her hands and put through the call.

"The office of Dr. Worth?" he said, when a woman's voice answered him. "This is the home of Mr. Herbert Endicott. I am Lieutenant Valcour of the police department. Mr. Endicott is dead. I would appreciate it if Dr. Worth would come here at once and consult with the medical examiner, and also attend to Mrs. Endicott. Thank you." He replaced the receiver.

"I haven't the slightest intention of collapsing, Lieutenant."

"We will need Dr. Worth anyway, Mrs. Endicott."

Lieutenant Valcour dialled the Central Office and, in a suddenly most efficient voice, gave the requisite information. He then called his own precinct station and told the sergeant at the desk to send over a detail of five men in uniform.

"The chief of the Homicide Bureau, the medical examiner, and some of my own men will be here presently," he said to Mrs. Endicott.

"And my husband has to stay in that cupboard until they come?"

"Unless Dr. Worth arrives first and disagrees with me that Mr. Endicott is dead."

"It's inhuman."

"Very, but there's a set routine for these cases that we have to observe. Is this the button you ring for your maid?"

He pressed a push button set in the wall at the head of the bed.

"Yes, but I don't want her."

"You may, and there's no harm in her being with you. I'm going to leave you in here for a little while, until the people we've telephoned for come."

"You insist on my staying in this room?"

"Heavens, no. Do anything you like, Mrs. Endicott, or that you feel will help you. As long," he added gently, "as you don't leave the house."

"Oh."

"You see we'll have to talk such a lot of things over, just as soon as the usual formalities are finished."

"It's rather terrible, isn't it?"

"Pretty terrible, Mrs. Endicott."

"So"—she mentally groped for a satisfactory word—"so conclusive."

It seemed a peculiar choice. Lieutenant Valcour sensed that it wasn't just Endicott's life alone which was concluded by death, but something else as well—such as an argument, perhaps, or a secret and bitter struggle. The precise significance was elusive, and he gave it up, or rather checked it within his memory in that compartment which already contained six barely smoked cigarette butts, a broken finger nail, bruise marks, and a note which, in view of the body, might safely be presumed to have been a threat.

A maid knocked on the door and came in. She stared speculatively for a curious second at Lieutenant Valcour.

"Madam rang?"

"No, Roberts. Lieutenant Valcour rang. Lieutenant Valcour is of the police."

Any sudden announcing of the police is always shocking. It is a prelude to so many unpleasant

possibilities even in the lives of the most blameless. They are in a class with telegrams. Lieutenant Valcour noted that Roberts accepted his identity with nothing further than an almost imperceptible catching of breath. Mrs. Endicott's attitude puzzled him. It wasn't resentment, certainly, or any stretching at rudeness; such emotions seemed so utterly inconsequential at this moment when she must have been wrenched by a very severe shock. It reminded him of the aimless play of lightning clowning before the purposeful fury of a storm.

"Mrs. Endicott will explain things to you," he said. "Stay with her, please."

There lingered, as he went into the bathroom, a picture of the two women, separated by the distance of the room, standing quite still and staring at each other: Mrs. Endicott, young, exquisitely lovely looking—the other, older, quite implacable. The connection was absurd, but the effect remained of two antagonists in a strange encounter who are standing in their separate corners of a ring. He closed the bathroom door and slipped the catch. He turned on all the lights.

There was a single window. He parted muslin curtains and looked at a glazed lemon-coloured shade, especially along its hemmed bottom. There were some

smudges at its centre that interested him. He believed that they had been made by a dirty thumb. He raised the shade and the lower sash of the window.

The night was clear and cold and windless. A shallow stone balcony ran the width of the rear of the house. It was for ornamentation rather than use, as to get onto it one had to straddle the window sill. Lieutenant Valcour did so, and stood looking down upon the dimly defined outlines of what, in spring, would bloom into a formal garden. He satisfied himself that there seemed no access to the balcony from the ground unless one used a ladder or were endowed with those special and fortunately rare qualities which transform an otherwise normal person into a human fly.

The house was five windows wide; the two on the right of the bathroom belonged to Mrs. Endicott's room, and the two on its left to her husband's. He flashed on his electric torch and examined all five sills. None showed a trace of recent passage, and there was no very good reason, he realized, why any of them should. They were clean, windswept, and smooth.

How pleasant it would be, he reflected, to come across the perfect imprint of a shoe, or a rubber, or—what was it that was so popular at the moment?—of

course: the footprint of a gorilla. The case would then be what was technically known as an open-and-shut one. He'd simply take the train for California and arrest Lon Chaney, and—— But enough.

And the floor itself on the balcony was smugly lacking in clues. He relinquished the keen sharp air, the star-heavy night and returned to the bathroom by way of its window, which he closed, and again drew down its lemon-coloured shade.

A cake of soap in a container set in the wall above a basin attracted his attention. It was so incredibly dirty. Someone with exceptionally dirty hands had used it and either hadn't bothered to rinse it off or else hadn't had the time to. The dirt had dried on it.

He couldn't vision such a condition of uncleanliness in connection with the hands of either Mr. or Mrs. Endicott, unless there had been some obscure reason. He preferred to think for the moment that the hands had belonged, and presumably still did, to the murderer. That, of course, eliminated the gorilla. What a pity it was, he reflected, that he was so constantly obsessed with infernal absurdities. Even though he tried to keep them under triple lock and key when working with his associates on the force, they had a distressing habit at times of cropping out into the open where they could be seen. Nor were

they of a humour especially in vogue among his contemporaries; there rarely was an and-the-drummer-said-to-Mabel or an-Irishman-and-a-Jew among them. Rarely? He shuddered. Never. As a result there were occasions when he rested under the cloud of being considered mildly lunatic. It was bad business. He had told himself so firmly again and again. Success and humour formed bedfellows as agreeable as an absent-minded dog would be *en négligé* in the boudoir of a surprised cat.

With a beautiful access of gravity he lifted the lid of an enamelled wicker hamper and peered in at the soiled linen it contained. There were many towels. Towels were, he reflected, one of the few genuine hall marks of the rich. The Endicotts, hence, must be very, very rich, as it was obvious that they shed—or was it shedded?—towels as profusely as the petals fall from a white flowering tree.

There was a badly soiled and crumpled towel on the very top of the pile. He picked it up and looked at it. It was very dirty and still faintly damp. He folded it, set it on the floor beneath the basin, and placed the cake of soap upon it. They were, he smiled faintly, Exhibits B and C. The distinction of being classified as Exhibit A was already reserved by the threatening note on the desk. As for the smudges on

the lemon-coloured shade, they would have to be definitely determined as finger prints before they could have their niche in the alphabet. The prosecuting attorney would be pleased. He was a man whose flair for alphabeted exhibits amounted to a passion. Lieutenant Valcour hoped that he could find a crushed rose. The prosecuting attorney was at his best with crushed roses. For example, take that knifing case in the Ghetto. Three petals were all the prosecuting attorney had had there, but they had bloomed, via the jury, into tears. Into tears, Lieutenant Valcour amended, and tripe.

A pair of silver-backed brushes showed no finger marks upon their shining surfaces, nor were there any on the silver rim that backed a comb. One could infer, Lieutenant Valcour decided, and did, that someone later than Mr. Endicott had used them, as Mr. Endicott would never have wiped them off to remove his prints, and had he not done so there certainly would have been some signs of usage. What a careful murderer it was, he thought, to polish the evidence so very clean. And what a grip the subject of finger prints maintained upon the criminal mind, and upon the lay mind as well. It seemed to embrace their Alpha and Omega in the scientific detection of crime. Lieutenant Valcour offered to bet himself his last

nickel that the murderer had overlooked entirely the possibility of what might be found left within the bristles of the brushes and between the teeth of the comb. He took a clean hand towel from the rack and wrapped the brushes and the comb up in it. He set the bundle on the floor beside the cake of soap and the dirty towel. The alphabet, he reflected, had now been depleted down to F.

The bathroom could tell him nothing more. He reconstructed its segment of the drama before leaving it: the murderer had entered, gone at once to the window and pulled down its shade. There had been a washing of hands and a brushing and combing of hair. The murderer had wiped the silver clear of finger prints and had left. The whys and wherefors must come later. The shell would remain unchanged until the moment came to pour it full of motive and give it reason and life.

He went into Endicott's room and opened the cupboard door. The beam from his electric torch, added to the ceiling light, brought out sharply the waxy pallor of the face's skin. Its good-looking, homely ruggedness was marred by a slight cast of petulance, as inappropriate as a pink bow on a lion. Cruelty showed, too, a little—and something inscrutable that baffled analysis. Endicott weighed, Lieuten-

ant Valcour decided, close upon two hundred pounds and no fat, either; a strong, powerfully muscled man, and about thirty-five years old. He played the light upon Endicott's right hand and exposed the wrist a little by drawing up the sleeve. The wrist and hand were normally clean, as he had expected.

He gently inserted his fingers into such of Endicott's pockets as he could reach without disturbing the body. From the rumpled state of their linings and their complete emptiness it was apparent that they had been hastily turned inside out and replaced.

Lieutenant Valcour began to sniff at a motive. Not robbery, exactly, in the ordinary sense, as an expensive platinum wrist watch and a set of black pearl shirt studs were untouched, but robbery in the extraordinary sense—one that had been indulged in for a certain definite purpose. He strongly began to suspect that there would be the ubiquitous "fatal papers." It might also develop that Endicott was the secretive owner of some fabulous jewel of a sort usually referred to as a Heart of Buddha, or perhaps some important slice of the Russian crown jewels—the number of which now almost equalled, he reflected, the thousands upon thousands of ancestors who came over to our shores on the *Mayflower*.

The top button was missing from Endicott's

overcoat. It would have been torn away when the murderer had lifted his victim from the floor in order to drag him into the cupboard. Otherwise there wasn't anything that hinted at a struggle. There wasn't any blood, or any wound, or sign of contusion visible on the head, and no trace of blood around such parts of the cupboard that Lieutenant Valcour could see.

He suddenly wondered where Endicott's hat was. It wasn't on Endicott's head, nor in the cupboard, nor in the bedroom, which struck him as strange. He was a strong believer in the paraphrase that where the coat is, there the hat lies, too. One could look for it more carefully later. Just at present, of greater importance was Exhibit A.

Lieutenant Valcour went to the desk, picked up the note and studied it. The pencil used had been a thick leaded one, almost a crayon. And there, right before his nose in a shallow tray that held an assortment of office things, was a pencil with a very thick lead that was almost a crayon. He copied the note with it on the back of an envelope he took from his pocket. He compared the result with the printing on the note. They were alike.

One begins, he informed himself gently, to wonder.

CHAPTER III

9:45 *p. m.*—Guards Are Stationed at the Doors

THERE are knocks, Lieutenant Valcour believed, and knocks. He ranged them from gentle careless rappings, through sly sinister taps, to imperative demands and, finally, thumps. He classified the ones at the moment being bestowed upon the hall door as official whacks. He was right. He put the scrap of paper and the crayon pencil in his pocket and turned to greet five men from the station house who flooded into the room on the heels of his "Come in."

They were intelligent-looking young men, well built, alert, and their uniforms were immaculate—five competent blue jays outlined sharply against gray walls. Lieutenant Valcour knew each one of them both by reputation and by name.

He nodded to the starchiest and youngest looking of them. "Cassidy," he said, "stay in here. O'Brian, stay by the front door, and keep Hansen with you to carry messages. There's a servants' entrance at the front, McGinnis. It's yours. And you, Stump, watch

the door from the back of the house into the garden. If anyone wants to leave the house send him to me first. You can let anyone in, with the exception of reporters, and find out their business. Now in regard to the reporters' just be your natural genial selves and say that apart from the plain statement that Mr. Herbert Endicott, the owner of this house, is dead and that—" Lieutenant Valcour choked slightly—"foul play is suspected, you can tell them nothing. The police, as usual, are actively on the job, have the case well in hand, and there is every reason to believe that in view of our customary efficiency the guilty parties will soon be brilliantly apprehended etcetera and so forth Amen. Excuse-it-please."

"Cuckoo," confided O'Brian to Hansen as, with Stump and McGinnis, they filed out.

"Cuckoo as a fox," agreed Hansen, who had worked under Lieutenant Valcour on a case before.

"Yeh?"

"Yeah."

Lieutenant Valcour and young Cassidy were alone.

"Tell me, Cassidy, how are the servants taking all this, if you bumped into any of them?"

"Sure, I only saw the girl at the front door, Lieutenant. She's a sorry piece, and was shivering worse than one of them new and indecent dances."

"Did she say anything?"

"She did not, beyond telling us to follow her upstairs. She took us to that door across the hallway first, and some lady said you was in here."

"How did that lady's voice sound to you, Cassidy?"

"Smooth, sir."

"Not nervous?"

"Devil a bit."

"What are you looking for, Cassidy?"

"The corpse, sir."

"It's in that cupboard."

"Is it now?" said Cassidy, casually removing himself as far from the cupboard door as he could. "It ain't one of them Western hammer murders, is it?"

"I don't know what kind of a homicide it is, Cassidy. There are no marks on him that I can see."

"Will it be poison, then?"

"Maybe."

"Well, let's hope it's one or the other. I hate them mystery cases where the deceased got his go-by from a Chinese blow gun, or some imported snake from Timbuctu, or parts adjacent."

"When did you ever work on such a case, Cassidy?"

"Sure, Lieutenant, you can read about them every week in the magazines. There's one that's in its fourth part now where some louse of foreign extraction kills a dumb cluck of a Wall Street magnet with a package of paper matches, the tips of which was so fixed that they exploded when struck, instead of acting decent like, and shot dabs of poison into the skin of his fingers. Can you imagine it? Just say the word and I'll bring it around to the station house and you can read it for yourself."

"Thanks, Cassidy."

"It'll be no trouble at all, Lieutenant."

An important knock on the door disclosed a stranger. Lieutenant Valcour addressed him, correctly, as Dr. Worth.

Dr. Sanforth Worth did not merely imagine that he cut a distinguished figure; he was sure of it. A certain grayness clung impressively about the temples of an intellectual brow, and he was probably one of the few physicians left in New York who had both the audacity and ability to wear a Vandyke. He was dressed in evening clothes and had not bothered to remove his overcoat or to give up his hat.

"Dr. Worth? I am Lieutenant Valcour, of the police. Mr. Endicott is in here."

Dr. Worth bowed gravely, and with a sparklingly

manicured hand stroked his Vandyke once. "I have been afraid of something like this for quite a while, Lieutenant," he said. His voice, in company with everything else about him, sounded expensive.

Lieutenant Valcour raised his eyebrows. "It begins to seem, Doctor, as if everybody except Mr. Endicott himself anticipated his murder."

"Murder?"

It was Dr. Worth's eyebrows' turn. They raised. They fell. They became, in conjunction with pursed lips, judicious. He removed his overcoat and placed it, with his hat, upon a chair.

"I believe you will find, Lieutenant, that it is just his heart. His—— Dear God in heaven, man, what have you left him slumped down like this for?"

"You mustn't touch him, Doctor, unless you think he isn't dead."

Dr. Worth stiffened perceptibly. "Fancy that," he said. "Well, one would infer that he is dead, all right. Just the same, Lieutenant, is there any legal objection to opening his coat and shirt bosom? I dare say I could slit them, if you preferred. You see, it might be advisable to test for any trace of heart action with the stethoscope."

"I had no intention of offending you, Doctor.

Go right ahead and do anything you think is absolutely essential to establish life or death."

Dr. Worth melted conservatively. "You see, sir, I know his heart. He had a nervous breakdown two years ago which left its action impaired." He loosened Endicott's overcoat and the black pearl studs set in a semi-soft shirt bosom. He listened for a moment, and then removed the stethoscope. "No trace," he said. "He's dead. Shall I button up the shirt front and the coat again?"

"It isn't necessary, Doctor."

The hall door opened abruptly. The homicide chief and the medical examiner came in, followed by a squad of detectives. Lieutenant Valcour was well acquainted with both officials. He introduced them to Dr. Worth and placed at their disposal such information as he had gained while waiting for them to arrive.

The department's experts automatically began to function at once. A photographer was already arranging his apparatus to make pictures of the body from as many angles as its position in the cupboard would permit. A finger-print man went about his duties along the lines laid down by established routine. The medical examiner and Dr. Worth

gravitated naturally together and plunged into a discussion of Endicott's medical history.

The homicide chief, a well-built, alert-looking man of fifty, by the name of Andrews, drew Lieutenant Valcour a little to one side.

"What do you really make of it, Valcour?" he said.

"Oh, it's undoubtedly murder, Chief, but I doubt whether there'll even be an indictment unless we get a lucky break, establish a definite motive, and get a confession."

"I feel that way about it, too. Any signs of an entry having been forced?"

"I haven't looked. I've been in here all the time, and my men just came."

"Well, Stevens and Larraby are making the rounds now. They'll let us know. If the autopsy doesn't show poison or some wound it'll be a nuisance. If it's a straight heart attack, as Dr. Worth claims, we might just as well drop it. Can you imagine getting up before a jury that's been shown a picture by the defense of a big husky like Endicott and saying,'This man was scared to his death?' Suppose a woman was the defendant. They'd laugh the case out of court."

"Maybe it won't be as bad as all that, Chief. While you're busy in here I'll wander around and try to

scare up something. Would you mind sending for me when the medical examiner reaches some decision as to the manner of death?"

"Sure thing, Valcour. I'll see to it, too, that those brushes and comb are looked into."

"I'll probably be in Mrs. Endicott's room. That's the door just across the corridor."

Andrews was aware of Lieutenant Valcour's reputation in the department for the painless extraction of useful information from people. "Go to it," he said. "And squeeze every drop that you can."

CHAPTER IV

10:02 *p. m.*—Pale Flares the Darkness

LIEUTENANT VALCOUR wondered concerning Mrs. Endicott as he walked slowly across the corridor and knocked on the door of her room. A curious, curious woman, with youth and beauty that almost passed belief. He knew her instinctively as one of life's misfits: complex to a note far beyond the common tune; essentially an individualist; essentially unhappy from an inevitable loneliness which is the lot of all who are banished within the narrow confines of their own complexity; a type he had seldom met, but of whose existence he was well aware.

Roberts opened the door. The woman's face was butchered and her eyes had the quality of glass.

"Ask Mrs. Endicott, please, whether she feels strong enough to see me for a moment."

Mrs. Endicott's voice was definitely metallic. As it reached him in the corridor, disembodied from any visual association with herself, it seemed to hold a muted echo of brass bells.

"Certainly, come in. I wish, Lieutenant, you would give up the tiresome fiction that I am going to collapse. I'll ring, Roberts, when I want you."

"Yes, madam."

As Roberts passed him on her way to the door Lieutenant Valcour felt an imperative awareness of an attempt at revelations—an attempt to impart to him some special knowledge. Her eyes, as she glanced at him, lost their cobwebs and grew sharply informative. It was entirely an unconscious reaction on his part that forced from his lips the word "Later." The cobwebs reappeared. She left the room.

Lieutenant Valcour drew a chair close to the *chaise longue* upon which Mrs. Endicott was nervously lying. Flung across her knees was a robe of China silk, a black river bearing on its surface huge flowers done in silver and slashed at its fringes with the jade chiffon of her dress. He launched his campaign by first swinging, wordily, well wide of its ultimate objective. His tone, from a deliberate casual friendliness, was an anodyne to possible reservations, or fears.

"It is the tragedy of a detective's life," he said pleasantly, "that the sudden slender contact he has with a case affords such a useless background for human behaviour. You can see what I mean, Mrs.

Endicott. Were I you, or some intimate friend either of yourself or of your husband, I would already be in possession of the countless little threads that have woven the pattern of Mr. Endicott's life for the past five or ten years. You'll forgive me for outraging oratory? It's a nasty habit I've contracted in later years whenever dealing with the abstract. I'm not making a speech, really. What I'm trying to express is that in that background, that pattern of Mr. Endicott's life, one thread or series of interrelated threads would stand out pretty plainly as the reason why someone should wish to kill him."

"I," said Mrs. Endicott, "have several times wished to kill him."

Lieutenant Valcour nodded. "There is nothing left for me but the trite things to say about marriage. And trite things, after all, are the true things, don't you think?"

"If they're just discovered. I mean by that, that to the person just discovering their deadly aptness they're true. Rather terribly so sometimes."

"But the aptness wears off with usage?"

Mrs. Endicott's slender hand and arm were models of quietness in motion as she reached for a cigarette. "Everything wears off with usage," she said. "Love quicker than anything else."

"But it doesn't wear off completely, love doesn't ever."

Mrs. Endicott looked at him sharply. "Why are you a detective?" she said.

"The accident of birth—of environment. Only geniuses, you know, ever quite escape those two fatalities. My parents emigrated from France to Canada, where my father held a certain reputation in my present profession. My parents died. There was enough money to secure an education at McGill—one had contacts here in the States . . ." Lieutenant Valcour smiled infectiously. "I reversed Cæsar in that I came, was seen, was conquered."

Mrs. Endicott was amused. "How utterly conceited."

"Isn't it?"

The smile vanished from her face with the peculiar suddenness of some conjuring trick. She veered abruptly. "What are they doing in my husband's room now?" she said.

"Dr. Worth and the medical examiner are determining the cause of death. "Lieutenant Valcour transferred his attention to a Sargent water colour above the mantel. "Dr. Worth has already expressed the opinion that it was heart failure," he said.

Mrs. Endicott offered no immediate comment.

She withdrew, for a moment, into some private chamber, and her voice was rather expressionless when she spoke. "But that isn't murder."

"It could be—if the disease itself were used as a weapon."

"I don't believe that I understand."

"Why, if some person who knew that Mr. Endicott was subject to heart attacks were deliberately to shock or scare him suddenly, or even give him a not especially forceful blow over the heart, and he were to die as a result of any one of those things, that would be murder. It would have to be proved pretty conclusively, of course, that it had been done deliberately."

Mrs. Endicott joined him in his continued inspection of the Sargent. "It would indicate a rather circumscribed field for suspects, too, don't you think?"

"Yes. One would confine one's suspicions to those who were intimate enough with him to know of his physical condition. But apart from all that phase, there are those things we technically speak of as 'attendant circumstances.' They point to murder."

Their glances brushed for a second in passing and then parted.

"Such as?"

Lieutenant Valcour explained, with certain reservations. "The note you showed me—the position of Mr. Endicott in the cupboard—the fact that he is completely dressed for out of doors, but there is no trace of his hat—oh, several little things that speak quite plainly." He focussed her directly. "Where did Mr. Endicott usually keep his hats?"

"I've never noticed particularly. There's a cupboard downstairs in the entrance hall, and of course the one——"

"Yes, I've looked for it up here. I wonder whether you'd care to tell me what happened—what you did, I mean, and what you remember of Mr. Endicott's movements from the time, say, of his reaching home this afternoon."

Mrs. Endicott's face sought refuge in the very pith of candour. "Why, nothing much—nothing unusual."

Lieutenant Valcour laughed pleasantly. "That is where I fail in my background," he said. "The things done were usual to both of you and therefore of no importance. To me, however, they would prove interesting because of their unfamiliarity. Did you talk at all?"

"Elaborately."

"I beg your pardon?"

"I said elaborately. Herbert makes a point of talking elaborately whenever he's lying."

"I see—he was lying, then, about Marge Myles."

"And unoriginally. But Herbert never was original, much, in his emotions. He told me he was going to an impromptu reunion of some men in his class at the Yale Club. These reunions have occurred with astonishing regularity once a week for the past month, in spite of their impromptu character. I detest having my intelligence insulted," she ended, not unfiercely, "more than anything else in the world."

"You will forgive me for becoming personal, but I doubt whether Mr. Endicott understood you very well."

"He didn't understand me at all."

"And you, him?"

Mrs. Endicott momentarily disarranged the perfect arch of her eyebrows. "I could see through him perfectly," she said. "A child could see through him. But understand him? I don't think anyone could understand Herbert. He made a fetish of reticence. He was," she concluded, "half animal."

"And the other half rather cloudily complex?"

"A fog."

"And when he came home this afternoon at five?"

"Five-thirty—nearer six, even."

"Toward six, he joined you in the living room and gave you the weekly excuse."

"I didn't say the living room. It was the top floor—you may have noticed that this house has a peaked roof—in what would correspond in the country to an attic——" She stopped sharply, and her defensive veneer cracked for an instant, long enough to show that she was definitely startled. "I——"

"You feel that you shouldn't have told me that. Perhaps you shouldn't. If the fact of your having met Mr. Endicott in the attic has nothing to do with the case at all, it will cause us to snoop around among your personal affairs unnecessarily."

"He didn't 'meet' me there, as you say. He—I don't know why he came up there. I never will know why."

"You didn't ask him?"

Mrs. Endicott forced Lieutenant Valcour's full attention by the almost startling intentness of her eyes. "There has never been a direct question put or answered between Herbert and me during the whole period of our married or unmarried life," she said. "My hold on him was the static perfection of my features and a running, superficial smartness in

attitude and mind that passed for intellect. His hold on me was that I loved him."

"Even when you wished to kill him?"

"I suppose even then. Mind you, I never wished him *dead*—there's a difference."

"Oh, quite." Lieutenant Valcour smiled engagingly. "You often felt like killing him, but you wanted it to stop right there."

"You know, I wish you'd come to tea sometime ——" Mrs. Endicott's eyes contracted sharply. Her voice became a definite apology, not to Lieutenant Valcour, but as though its message were being sent along obscure and private channels to some port where it would find her husband. "There are moments," she said, "when you make me forget."

"Forgetting isn't a sin. That's natural. It's not loving—being mentally hurtful—that's a sin. There isn't any word exactly for what I mean. Did you both stay in the attic and go through the trunk together, or whatever it was you were going through?"

Mrs. Endicott smiled as if at some secret knowledge. "I wasn't going through a trunk," she said.

"No? I just mentioned it, as nine times out of ten that's what people do in attics."

"And the tenth customary thing," said Mrs. Endicott, reaching for a cigarette, "is suicide."

CHAPTER V

10:17 *p. m.*—Living or Dead?

LIEUTENANT VALCOUR'S eyes narrowed slightly. He had a habit of dividing suicides into two classes—those who talked about killing themselves, and those who did so. He knew that the two rarely overlapped. He felt a shocking conviction that in Mrs. Endicott's case she might well have been the exception which proved the rule. "I suppose an attic is the conventional place for suicide," he said. "Or at least to think about it."

Mrs. Endicott's laugh was without humour. "One doesn't need an attic in order to think about it."

"That's true. And so you went downstairs with him, then?"

"He followed me in here. That is," she corrected herself with noticeable carelessness, "we went into the living room and he wondered, while he kissed me, whether I'd mind very much being alone for dinner. I doubt whether you've ever experienced, Lieutenant, the rather perfect torture of a, well, an abstract kiss. Men don't."

"We're too self-centred, I'm afraid, or conceited or something, or else our sensibilities aren't refined enough to be hurt by it."

"But you could understand—if you could vision the background?"

"Everybody knows what love is, Mrs. Endicott."

"That's just it—it's the comparison of what is with what has been. It's an indescribably vulgar subject—kissing—but it's either very wonderful or very painful. People who claim it can be a combination talk nonsense. We can eliminate, of course——'

"Of course—'petting' they call it, or did. You never know from one minute to the next just what a thing is being called. And then he went to his room to dress?"

"Yes."

"Alone?"

"Certainly."

"Has he a valet?"

"Herbert? Heavens, no."

"And you dressed?"

"Yes."

"Roberts helped you?"

"Of course."

"Then when Mr. Endicott said good-bye?"

"He called it through the closed door."

Lieutenant Valcour almost visibly showed his surprise. "He did say good-bye?"

"Herbert insists upon saying good-bye. He rapped on the door and called in. If it would interest you to know his exact words," she said bitterly, "they were in the falsetto voice he uses when he thinks he's being especially funny and were, 'Don't be angry with Herbie-werbie, sweetheart. Goodie-byskie.'"

"They're almost a motive in themselves," said Lieutenant Valcour, smiling. "Which door did he rap on, Mrs. Endicott?"

"The hall door."

"I see. And you heard him going down the stairs?"

"One can't hear footsteps with the door closed."

"And that was at——?"

"The clock over there on my mantel was striking seven."

"And after that there is nothing further you can tell me about Mr. Endicott?"

"Nothing."

"You dined. You went to his room. You found the note. You began to worry, and then you called us up."

"That is it."

"Was it in this room here or up in the attic, Mrs.

Endicott, that you told him you were going to kill him?"

"Here, after he—— That wasn't exactly fair, was it?"

"Heavens no, but awfully smart." Lieutenant Valcour's smile was the essence of pleasantness. "I do wish you'd continue with the 'after he.' After he did what? Or was it something he said?"

"Did."

"Yes?"

"I told you," she blazed, "that he was half animal. You can hardly expect me to become more explicit."

Lieutenant Valcour was genuinely upset. "I do beg your pardon, Mrs. Endicott," he said. "About this afternoon, were you in the house?"

"Partly. I had tea at the Ritz, early, about four-thirty—with," she added defiantly, "a man."

"Ah."

"Exactly so. That will permit you to reverse another tradition and go *cherchez l'homme*."

Lieutenant Valcour found instant good humour. "So you decided to fight fire with fire," he said.

"If you care to call it that."

"Just who is Marge Myles, and what?" Lieutenant Valcour said suddenly.

"There are several terms one might apply to her.

They all mean the same thing. I believe that recently, however," Mrs. Endicott said very distinctly, "she has lost her amateur standing."

"Recently?"

"The past year or so."

"Mr. Endicott had known her as long as that?"

"Until the past month or two my husband had not known her at all. He'd heard of her, of course, and so had I."

"Then she is a woman who once had position?"

"She was the wife of one of Herbert's friends, a man who died two years ago and left her penniless. They say, incidentally, that she killed him."

"Killed him?"

"It was just gossip, of course. They had a camp near some obscure lake up in Maine. The canoe they were in one evening upset. Harry Myles couldn't swim."

"And Marge Myles?"

"Marge Myles was famous for her swimming."

"Then the inference is that she, well, neglected to save her husband?"

"That—and that she deliberately upset the canoe. I repeat it's all gossip. People dropped him, you see, after he married her. That's a commentary for you."

"You mean they still accepted him while he was—that is, before the ceremony."

"Yes, while he was living with her. It's thoroughly natural, of course. People didn't have to recognize her then; they could ignore her. But you can't ignore a man's wife; you either have to recognize her or not. The nots had it. If she had been a genuinely nice person, or an amusing one, I doubt whether the fact of their having lived together really would have mattered. But she wasn't."

"What was she before her marriage?"

"A member of that much-maligned group known as the chorus."

"And recently she had got in touch with your husband?"

"She looked up all of Harry's old friends. Don't you see? As a widow she again had a standing—a shade higher, but similar to the one she held before Harry married her. I don't know how many others she landed, but she certainly landed Herbert."

"And you were afraid she would do something to him?"

"Well, she killed Harry."

"Then you personally believe the gossip?"

Mrs. Endicott did not bother to give a direct reply.

She shrugged, and twisted a little on the *chaise longue*.

"And do you associate her in any way, Mrs. Endicott, with what has happened here to-night?"

She continued to evade further direct responsibility for an opinion. "Who else?" she said.

"But the actual mechanics of it, Mrs. Endicott—how could she have got into the house?"

"It could be done. Herbert himself might have let her in."

"That's going a little far, isn't it?"

"Yes. It was rotten of me to suggest it. I never really thought it, Lieutenant. I just said it."

"And after all, Mrs. Endicott, why should she want to kill your husband? You weren't trying to keep him from her."

"He might have been trying to keep himself from her."

"He might. It's stretching it a little, though, to think she'd deliberately kill him for that."

"She wouldn't do it deliberately "

"I don't know. When a woman starts out to kill she invariably chooses some weapon or a poison. Every case has proved it again and again. But we're only speculating, aren't we? Who was it who took you to tea?"

"I haven't any intention of telling you."

"Because it might involve him?"

"He couldn't possibly be involved. If I thought he were I'd tell you in a minute."

Someone knocked on the door.

"Just the same, Mrs. Endicott, I wish you would tell me who he was."

"No."

Lieutenant Valcour was able not only to recognize finality, he could accept it. He considered Mrs. Endicott's very definite refusal to answer his question as of small consequence; there were so many more ways than one for frying an eel. He stood up and crossed to the door. He opened it and stepped into the corridor, closing the door behind him. Even in the dimmish light young Cassidy's normally ruddy face was the colour of chalk.

"What's happened, Cassidy?"

"Honest to God, Lieutenant, I'm scared stiff. They're getting things ready in there to bring that corpse back to life."

CHAPTER VI

10:32 *p. m.*—Pictures in Dust

LIEUTENANT VALCOUR stared for a puzzled instant at the white face.

"What do you mean, Cassidy?" he said.

"Honest to God, Lieutenant, I mean just what I say."

"But that's impossible."

Cassidy went even further. "It's sacrilege," he said.

"Nonsense," Lieutenant Valcour said sharply. "You have simply misunderstood Dr. Worth. It is possible that Mr. Endicott was not dead at all but in some state of catalepsy. No one, Cassidy, can bring back the dead."

"I'm glad to hear you say so, sir."

"Then let us go in."

"Must I go back in there, too?"

"You must. Forget the fact that you're a superstitious Irishman, Cassidy, and remember that you're

a cop. Cops, as you've been told more times than one, should be noble, firm, and perpetually cool, calm, and collected."

"Sure now, you're kidding."

"Tut, tut."

"Well, and I'll try, Lieutenant—but cripes!"

"But nothing," advised Lieutenant Valcour as he opened the door to Endicott's room.

The effect was shockingly garish. All shades had been removed from their lamps, and the various details of the furnishing stood out in the painful white light brightly clear.

Andrews was alone. He stood near the bed upon which Endicott had been placed, looking in rather shocked bewilderment at the body. Lieutenant Valcour joined him. A blanket had been drawn up to Endicott's chin, and the face which remained exposed looked very waxlike—very still—very much like a dead man's indeed.

"This is the damnedest thing, Valcour."

"What is, Chief?"

"They say there's a chance that this man isn't dead. Worth is going to operate."

"Operate? But Dr. Worth himself admitted that the heart had stopped beating after testing with a stethoscope. What sort of an operation?"

"Worth's going to inject adrenaline into the cardiac muscles."

"I wonder just how much value there is in that stuff."

"Well, unless Endicott's been poisoned, the medical examiner and Worth both seem to think there's a chance. They feel there's no harm in trying, anyway. It sounds silly to me, but they reminded me of that recent case in Queens—you probably read about it—where a man had been pronounced dead for six hours and was revived. Of course, they said he wasn't really dead, just as they now think that Endicott may not be really dead. No one can bring back the dead."

Lieutenant Valcour threw a bland look to Cassidy, who was standing in as convenient a position to the hall door as he could possibly get.

"They say," Andrews went on, "that adrenaline's been used off and on for years. Worth says they try it quite often when a baby is born 'dead.' Sometimes it starts the heart pumping and the baby lives."

Lieutenant Valcour shrugged. "It will make things pretty simple for us if it works with Endicott," he said. "He can make a statement and prefer charges himself. Where is everybody?"

"The medical examiner and Worth are downstairs

telephoning and making arrangements for the operation. My men have finished and have gone back to headquarters. There wasn't any sign of forcing an entry, so it looks like an inside job, if there was any job. I tell you, Valcour, if it wasn't for your suggestion that robbery was a motive, or for that note that might have been a threat, I'd drop the whole thing. It's a different matter if the adrenaline doesn't work and an autopsy proves poison or something. Find out much from Mrs. Endicott?"

"Enough to be interested in learning more. Want the details?"

"Later, if I have to get to work on the case. You want to keep on handling it?"

"Yes."

"Go ahead. Call for any outside stuff you want us to check up on for you. I'll send you a report on the brushes and comb as soon as they finish with them downtown."

"You going, Chief?"

"No use in my sticking around, Valcour. We haven't a case yet, really, that calls for any Central Office work. Hell, according to those two six-syllable specialists downstairs, we haven't even got a corpse. Robbery there may have been, and it's your precinct —so go to it. I'll find out from the medical examiner

when he gets back how the operation turned out, and if there's going to be an autopsy. If poisoning is proved and you haven't pinned it on anyone by then, I'll get on the job again. I suppose you'll see that the people in the house are given the once-over?"

"Certainly, Chief."

"I'll run along then. Good luck, Valcour."

"Thank you, Chief."

Andrews left the room and closed the door.

"I bet he's got a date," said Cassidy.

"He'd stay here if he had twenty dates, if he thought it was necessary," said Lieutenant Valcour.

"Well, I wish I had a date."

"You'll have a whole vacation if you don't brace up. I'm going to take a look in that cupboard, now that Endicott's no longer in it."

Even a cupboard seemed preferable to Cassidy to being in the room. "Can't I help you, sir?" he said with almost fervent politeness.

"No, Cassidy, you can't. You can stay just where you are."

"Oh, very well, sir."

Lieutenant Valcour picked up a straight-backed chair and took it into the cupboard with him. He held a sincere respect for the Central Office men, but

at the same time felt that their work was too methodically routine to permit their darting along interesting tangents or wasting their time in strolls along by-paths that might lead to fertile fields. There was no criticism in his mind at all. He admired the system that had been established, and the expert functioning of its units and departments. He knew very well that its average of successes was greater than its average of failures. But it was deficient in that elusive, time-taking, and sometimes expensive thing known as the "personal equation." It remained, at its best, a machine.

A certain amount of carelessness, too, ran in the general plan. In many cases some things were slurred over, some missed entirely. This again was not surprising when one considered that the personnel was recruited largely from the more intelligent men in the ranks. Intelligent, yes, but hardly specialists, nor could one in all fairness expect them to be.

When working on a case they functioned along two distinctly separate but parallel lines. One department of specialists handled the technical and chemical investigation of material things and clues found on the scene of the crime—just as the brushes and comb were shortly to be examined by the proper men down at Central Office. A second department dealt

with the human aspect—examining witnesses, looking up all friends or connections of the victim; a large, competent organization that would stretch feelers, no matter how many were necessary, to every contact point of the victim's life within the city, and from whose findings some possible motive could be established and some possible suspect or group of suspects be evolved.

The two branches would then compare notes, and if a satisfactory amount of evidence had been obtained by the technical department to establish a case against one or several of the suspects, arrests would be made or the suspects brought in for questioning. According to the temperament and station of the suspects, one of the various forms that go to make up the properly dreaded third degree would be employed and a confession obtained. The work of the Central Office would then be finished, and the case up to the prosecutor.

Lieutenant Valcour was glad that in the present instance the homicide chief had felt it useless to set in motion the machinery of the second branch until more definite developments should occur. The case interested him. Mrs. Endicott interested him—her astonishing beauty, her mind, her contradictions—Roberts—Margc Myles—three women who offered

an assurance of satisfying an almost blatant curiosity he possessed for discovering the source springs of human behaviour. This talk about reviving Endicott and Endicott himself making a statement—well, perhaps. But until it was accomplished he preferred to think of Endicott as a corpse, the case a definite homicide, and of possible suspects right in the house.

Lieutenant Valcour concentrated his attention upon the cupboard. There were shelves along the back of it, the lowest one being at the height of a man's head. Numerous suits of clothes were hanging from beneath this lowest shelf. He stood on the chair and played his flashlight along the top of it. There was nothing there but an accumulation of dust. He felt a distinct and highly satisfactory thrill when he noted that streaks showed where the dust had very recently been rubbed away, as if somebody had deliberately wiped both his hands in it. It linked with the dirty cake of soap. Andrews had said nothing about the streaks. It was pretty obvious that the Central Office men had overlooked them—had casually observed that the shelves were empty and had let the matter go at that.

Lieutenant Valcour began to feel quite pleasant and informed himself gravely that a deduction was in order. For a happy moment he considered the

possibility of that curious and sinister Oriental influence that crops up so perennially in the very finest of murder cases—of Cassidy's murder cases: that elusive figure swathed in gray, whitely turbanned above coffee-coloured skin, who has a penchant toward religious fanaticism the esoteric rites of which involve dust. This breath-shocking villain would ultimately be trapped by the bright detective through the wretch's occult passion for this dust. Had one, Lieutenant Valcour wanted to know, such an enigma to deal with here? No, he informed himself sternly, one knew damned well one had not. But in the place of such a handy and beautiful deduction —what?

He stared at the dust and began to see pictures in it: a crouching person tormented by hate or fear, or both, who knows that Endicott is going to open the cupboard door. What, in the name of the lighter humorists, to do? The person dreads recognition. Is there no disguise? No; curse it—but yes—the dust! The person's hands are smeared, and by means of the hands, the face . .

"Ain't there *nothing* I can do for you, Lieutenant?"

Lieutenant Valcour sighed and got down from the chair.

"Yes. Cassidy," he said. "You can take this chair

and put it over by the hall door. Then you can sit down."

"Very well, Lieutenant," said Cassidy bitterly. "But when you're in that cupboard there ain't nobody in the room with me but that live corpse."

"Then sit where you can't see it."

"Cripes, Lieutenant, I don't *have* to see it. I get the chills just thinking about it."

"You'll get the gate, Cassidy, if you don't snap out of it."

"All right, sir, but if you come out and find me keeled over, don't blame me."

"I wouldn't dream of it, Cassidy."

Lieutenant Valcour reëntered the cupboard. He examined the corner in which Endicott had been slumped. The suits on the hangers had fallen back a little into shape. He carefully went through their various pockets. They were empty, and from the rumpled condition of their linings he knew that they had been hastily gone through before. Perhaps the Central Office men had done so, but he doubted it. They would concern themselves pretty exclusively with the effects taken from the clothes Endicott had been wearing at the time of the attack.

It interested him to note that the suits against which Endicott's body had been slumped showed

evidence of having been searched with the rest. It confirmed his theory that that was what the attacker had been doing when caught in the cupboard by Endicott's sudden appearance in the bedroom, and it also strengthened his theory of the ingenious use of dust from the shelf top as a disguise.

Shoes lined a low shelf along the bottom of one side, and hat boxes occupied a corresponding shelf on the other. Lieutenant Valcour dismissed the possibility that the particular hat he was searching for—the one that Endicott was wearing or intended to get at the moment of the attack—would be in a box. Perhaps it was in the cupboard Mrs. Endicott spoke about downstairs in the entrance hall. The point kept nagging at him irritatingly, and he considered it important enough to go down and find out.

Cassidy barely restrained himself from clutching Lieutenant Valcour's arm by the hall door.

"Honest to God, you ain't going to leave me in here alone, Lieutenant?"

"Honest to God, Cassidy, I am."

Lieutenant Valcour went out. Cassidy took one bleak look at his charge, the living corpse, carefully crossed the fingers of both his hands, and sat down.

"I just knew," he muttered truculently, "that this case was going to be one of them printed damn things."

CHAPTER VII

11:01 *p. m.*—Banked Fires

THE corridor was deserted.

Lieutenant Valcour walked along it to the top of the stair well and looked down into the entrance hall. He could see the broad athletic back of Officer O'Brian on guard at the door. O'Brian's snub nose was pressed against the plate glass, and his eyes, one presumed, were staring out through the door's bronze grille upon the street.

As Lieutenant Valcour went down he wondered at the complete stillness of the house. There was no sound of any nature at all. There was a waiting quality about the stillness: a definite waiting for something that would shatter the hush into bedlam.

"What are you pressing your nose against the glass for, O'Brian?" he said.

The young policeman turned and grinned at him broadly.

"Sure, it's them boys from the papers, sir," he

said. "They're all stirred up over what the medical examiner has just told them."

Lieutenant Valcour groaned faintly. "When was this, O'Brian?"

"Not two whisks of a lamb's tail ago, sir—out there in the vestibule."

"Did the medical examiner go out into the vestibule?"

"He did that, Lieutenant, and the last mother's son of them has just beaten it off down the street like a jumping jack rabbit. They were crazy after photographs, but he drew the line at that now."

"Really?" Lieutenant Valcour was politely astounded.

"Sure and he did—with the exception of a flash or two he let them take of himself."

"And were you the little birdie, O'Brian?"

"Was I the which, Lieutenant?"

"Did you say 'peet tweet' over his left shoulder as the flashlights went off?"

"Ah, sure now, sir, and I did have the door open a wee bit. I was just explaining to the boys that they couldn't come in without your permission nohow, and it was then that the medical examiner came along and, hearing the talking, went outside to pacify them."

"A modern martyr throwing himself to the lions. Except for the tea party, O'Brian, has anything happened down here?"

"Not a thing, sir."

"Any of the servants been drifting around?"

"Only one old dame in black, and seven foot tall if she's one inch. She came halfway down the stairs, took one dirty look at me, and then stalked back up as stiff as a poker. Her bonnet was on her head."

"You don't know who she was I suppose?"

"That and I don't, sir. She looked like she might be a housekeeper."

"She probably was. By the way, O'Brian, just what was it the medical examiner told the boys?"

"Lieutenant, I could make neither the head nor the tail out of it. I'd been telling them myself that the boss upstairs was dead and that foul play was suspected, and they were hot after the medical examiner for a further word, and I'm damned if he didn't give it to them."

"What was the word, O'Brian?"

"Indeed and it sounded like crinoline, sir—the stuff the missus do be talking about in old dresses."

"Was that all he said?"

"It was enough sir. 'Crinoline,' said he, and

looked very wise at that. Then he added, 'For the present, boys, no more,' and off they scampered like the devil in person was after them."

"All right, O'Brian. Just stick where you are."

Lieutenant Valcour wandered around the entrance hall but encountered, beyond his own and the medical examiner's, no hat. He knew that Dr. Worth's was still upstairs where the doctor had left it in Endicott's bedroom. He found the cupboard Mrs. Endicott had referred to. There was no hat. The subject was becoming a fixed idea. It was growing increasingly believable that the attacker had taken the hat and worn it out of the house. But why should the attacker leave the house? And what was the matter with the attacker's own hat? Time, if not Endicott himself, would have to tell.

From a reception room opening off the entrance hall he caught the murmur of Dr. Worth's and the medical examiner's voices in consultation. He passed the door indifferently and went upstairs.

. . . an old dame in black, seven foot tall if she was an inch. Her bonnet was on her head.

. . . and her bonnet, Lieutenant Valcour repeated softly to himself, was on her head.

He continued on up a second flight of stairs to the third floor. A door toward the end of the hall was

open, and light flooded out through the doorway. He walked to it and looked in.

A tall, thin woman sat on a chair before a grate in which some coals burned bleakly. She was unbelievably gaunt—her silhouette a pencil, rigidly supporting an austere face beneath a smooth inverted cup of steel gray hair. Black taffeta sheathed her, tightly pressing against flat narrow planes, and smoothly surfacing two pipelike arms that ended in the tapering, sensitive hands of an emotional ascetic.

Lieutenant Valcour rapped on the door jamb.

The woman did not start. Her head alone turned and faced him, and her eyes were a contradiction of nature—black planets glowing coldly in a sky of white.

"Pardon me, I am Lieutenant Valcour of the police. Are you, by any chance, the housekeeper?"

Her voice was of New England—low almost to huskiness, a trifle harsh, and completely stripped of all nuances.

"Yes, Lieutenant. I am Mrs. Siddons."

"May I come in? Thank you—please don't get up. I'll only stay a minute or two, if you don't mind."

He took a chair and placed it before the fireplace beside her own. He sat down and did nothing beyond

observing obliquely for a moment the curiously artificial placidity of Mrs. Siddons's clasped hands.

"There is no use in questioning me, Lieutenant, because I have nothing to say."

Her tone was the chill clear winds that sweep the rigorous mountains of Vermont.

Lieutenant Valcour warmed his hands before the lazy coals and smiled amiably. "And I," he said, "have absolutely nothing to ask."

"That is a lie."

There was nothing abusive in the remark. It was simply a statement of fact, coldly, dispassionately pronounced by the remarkable pencil dressed in black who spired beside him. Lieutenant Valcour was shocked into a nervous laugh. He discarded his mask of indifference and stared at Mrs. Siddons openly and with complete interest. Not planets, her eyes—rather were they banked fires beneath whose ash hot coals smouldered deeply.

"I shouldn't wonder," he said, "but that your forbears came from Salem."

A look of interest stirred sleepily in the coals.

"Why so, sir?"

"Because there's a look of witch-burning in your eyes."

Mrs. Siddons gestured a slow negation.

"I would never abrogate the rights of God."

"But you would approve, Mrs. Siddons."

"I would *rejoice*, sir, in the crushing out of any evil or"—her tone became implacably stern—"of any evil thing."

"Or even of a human being?"

Her look did not waver.

"Yes, Lieutenant—or even of a human being." She went on steadily and unemotionally. Her words were fragments of stone chipped from some elemental quarry of granitelike conviction and harsh purpose. "That is why you find me dry-eyed, sir, in spite of the tragedy which has been visited upon this house."

Lieutenant Valcour felt that there was a catch in it somewhere. If she held Endicott's condition in the light of a tragedy then she scarcely regarded his death as an act of vengeance on the part of her unquestionably inflexible god.

"Tragedy?" he repeated softly.

"A tragedy, sir, for blinded eyes."

He hoped that she wasn't going to be allegorical. He endeavoured to interpret. "It is hard on Mrs. Endicott," he said.

For a moment he thought she was going to melt. "That poor young thing," she said, and her voice

fringed on unaccustomed softnesses. "That sweet young child of beauty—what a bitter ending for the journey of her tormented heart."

He stepped delicately out upon the fragile ice. "But she's really better off, don't you think?"

"She will never know to the full the fortune of her release." Mrs. Siddons's incredibly thin body was suddenly shaken with passion as she added, "From that hateful—that filthy beast."

"Oh, come, Mrs. Siddons—no man is quite as bad as all that."

Her eyes blazed with the heat of a strange malevolence. "You didn't know him, Lieutenant, as we did."

"'We,' Mrs. Siddons?"

"Myself, sir, and the servants under my charge."

"You found him disagreeable—overbearing?"

Mrs. Siddons stared fixedly at the coals, as if finding in their vibrant reds some adequate illustration of her angered thoughts. "I found him such a man, Lieutenant, that I am glad to know that he is dead."

"But you see, Mrs. Siddons, he isn't dead."

He thought for a minute that she was going to faint and instinctively leaned forward to support her. She stood up unsteadily but refused the offer of his hands.

"If you will pardon me, sir, I believe I will lie down. There has naturally been a certain strain—a——"

She bowed and found her way to a door that led into an inner room. Lieutenant Valcour listened for a moment at its panels after she had closed it.

He could not determine whether the muffled sound he heard was of peculiar laughter or a sob.

CHAPTER VIII

11:28 *p. m.*—Mrs. Endicott Screams

THE tangents and the bypaths were beginning to increase. Lieutenant Valcour tabulated them as he went thoughtfully down the stairs and along the corridor toward Endicott's room: Mrs. Endicott herself, and the Spartan Mrs. Siddons—both had been partially explored; Roberts, with her astonishing glance that had hinted so definitely at revelations. Then what of Marge Myles? And what of the unknown man with whom Mrs. Endicott, that afternoon, had taken tea? He opened the door to Endicott's room and went in.

Preparations for the operation were practically complete. Dr. Worth and the medical examiner were beside the bed, and hovering near them were two trained nurses in uniform—middle-aged, competent women, starched and abstract looking, moving a bit aloofly in their private world which was so concisely separated from the sphere of laymen.

Cassidy, who seemed bleaker than ever, still

stiffly occupied the chair near the doorway. He continued to inspect with an almost feverish interest an unsullied expanse of white ceiling above his head.

Lieutenant Valcour seated himself on the corner of a long mahogany chest that was placed before the window farthest from the bed and gravely watched Dr. Worth. He began to feel a little sickish and hoped that he wasn't going to make an ass of himself and faint. He had witnessed any number of accidents and stabbings, but had never been present at an operation, and it worked on his nerves. Even if Endicott weren't dead, he certainly looked it. Suspended animation and catalepsy were all right as figures of speech, but the human illustration was rather ghastly. Lieutenant Valcour felt justified in believing that he knew his corpses. He wondered why Dr. Worth was delaying—hesitating—no, bending over now, and in his hand, ready to give the injection of adrenaline into the cardiac muscles, was . . .

The response was immediate.

With the aid of the stethoscope Dr. Worth heard Endicott's heart throbbing again, growing steadily stronger. Quite noticeably beneath the bright white lights a faint flush started to run through Endicott's skin. Lieutenant Valcour saw it, and he moistened with his tongue the dry pressed surface of his lips.

Dr. Worth straightened up and handed the stethoscope to the medical examiner. "Endicott lives," he said.

No one had noticed Mrs. Endicott standing in the doorway. No one had even noticed that the door was open. It was her terrific scream, her dropping to the floor, that shocked everyone into instant awareness of her presence. Dr. Worth nodded to one of the nurses. With her aid he lifted Mrs. Endicott and carried her from the room. Everyone else remained quite literally spellbound, still chained within the influence of that extraordinary scream. It didn't seem more than a second or two before Dr. Worth returned. He went directly to Lieutenant Valcour.

"I have given Mrs. Endicott a narcotic that will keep her quiet for the night," he said. "It was outrageous—her being here That guard at the door should have seen to it that it was kept closed."

"Most outrageous, Dr. Worth. I believe all of us were hypnotized by watching you."

"And I don't care what the law is, she can't be questioned or disturbed in any way at all until I say so."

"But that *is* the law, Doctor. You are quite within your rights to dictate concerning your patient."

"I don't want to dictate. I'm just as willing as any-

body to have the criminal side of this mess cleared up, if there is a criminal side."

"Endicott would hardly have crawled into a cupboard to have a stroke, would he, Doctor?"

"No." Dr. Worth's intelligent eyes stared speculatively at Lieutenant Valcour for a minute. "Not unless he'd hidden in there to overhear something, and did overhear something that gave him a stroke," he said.

The cesspool, Lieutenant Valcour decided, was beginning to show strange depths within its depth. The medical examiner came over and joined them. He complimented Dr. Worth briefly on the success of his operation, assured Lieutenant Valcour that the homicide chief would be given a full report of Endicott's recovery, and presumed that from now on the case would be left in Lieutenant Valcour's hands. Lieutenant Valcour would deal with whatever charges of robbery or assault might develop from it. He said good-bye and left the room, with the fullest intention of going right straight home to bed; and so he promptly did, as soon as he had made the promised report to Andrews.

Dr. Worth pointedly raised his eyebrows. "Then there will be charges, Lieutenant?"

"That will depend largely upon Endicott, Doctor.

As he is now revived he will tell us himself who attacked him, or the nature of the circumstance that gave him the shock."

"I trust so."

"There isn't any doubt, is there?"

Dr. Worth grew expansive. "Certainly there is a doubt," he said. "While it is true that Endicott has been revived, it is impossible to state definitely that he will recover consciousness. And even granting that he should recover consciousness, there is also a chance that he might prefer not to make any statement at all. What would you do then, Lieutenant?"

"Fold my tents, Doctor, and fade away."

Dr. Worth looked down a long straight nose for a minute at tips of low patent-leather shoes. "And if Endicott does not recover consciousness," he said softly, "what will you do then?"

"You'll be surprised at the number of things I will do then."

Dr. Worth's eyes, surfeited with patent leather, snapped up sharply. "I must impress on you that Mrs. Endicott is not to be disturbed," he said.

"She won't be, Doctor."

"Nurse Vickers, who helped me into her room with her, is going to stay with Mrs. Endicott all night. Two day nurses will come in the morning: one for her,

if necessary, and surely one for Endicott. I need scarcely impress upon you the seriousness of *his* condition." Dr. Worth made a gesture of irritated bewilderment. "I wish I knew him more intimately—who his friends are, I mean."

"He never talked with you about them?"

"Never. He seems an unusually reticent man, with an almost abnormally developed feeling for privacy concerning his intimate affairs." Dr. Worth's manner grew definitely severe. Mentally, he wagged a finger under Lieutenant Valcour's nose. "He mustn't have any further shock. There must be nothing, absolutely nothing that will shock him when, and if, he regains consciousness." He directed his attention momentarily to the nurse. "Get those shades back on the lamps, please, Miss Murrow, and turn out the ceiling lights. And now, Lieutenant, to continue about Endicott. As she is under the influence of the narcotic I gave her, it is out of the question that his wife be here. I wish she could be. I want the first person he sees to be someone he knows—loves. His mind, you see, will pick up functioning at the precise second where it left off—at least, such is my conclusion."

"And that was one of shock."

"Yes, Lieutenant, evidently one of shock or of

great fear. We cannot overestimate the importance of getting him past it safely. Personally, I shall sleep here in the house to-night, and Nurse Murrow will call me if Endicott shows any signs of coming to. That may not be before morning. I hope so, in a way, as the effect of the narcotic will have worn off by then, and Mrs. Endicott can be in here with him."

"One of the servants might know of some friend," Lieutenant Valcour suggested. "I take it you would like a friend to sit here with him during the night?"

Dr. Worth was emphatic. "It is almost a necessity that there should be. The mental and nervous viewpoints, you see, predominate in the case."

"There is just one thing that I would like to arrange, too, Doctor."

"Yes?"

"I want to keep a couple of men posted all night in the bathroom. They can sit on chairs just inside the doorway there, where they can watch the bed, but where Endicott can't see them. He need never know they are there."

"What on earth would be the need for that?"

"Why, it's quite simple, Doctor. When Endicott comes to he will be in a position to tell us who gave him the shock—a shock sufficient almost to kill him—

one which would have killed him if we hadn't found him to-night—and if," he added thoughtfully, "Mrs. Endicott hadn't had her suspicions."

"But why the men in the bathroom?"

"Because I don't want to take any chances of there being a repetition before Endicott makes his statement."

Dr. Worth pursed his lips and looked very wise indeed. "I see," he said. "I see. You are afraid that the same person might get at him again and, well, silence him before he could talk."

"Something like that, Doctor." Lieutenant Valcour became courteously formal. "As the physician in charge of this case, sir, have you any objection to my stationing the two men in the bathroom?"

"Providing Endicott isn't able to see them and won't be disturbed by them in any way at all."

"Then that's settled. You'll have a nurse in here all the time, I suppose?"

"Naturally."

"Then I'm going to ask her to keep this hall door locked on the inside. She can open it if anyone knocks, and my men will keep their eyes on whoever comes in."

"The precautions seem extraordinary, Lieutenant."

"And so does the case. I'll go downstairs now and

try to find out something from the servants about his friends. I'll tell them, if you like, about your staying here, in case there is anything that has to be got ready."

"Thank you, Lieutenant."

"Not at all, Doctor."

Lieutenant Valcour went outside. He found the maid Jane in the hallway, seated on a chair near the stairs, trembling. A tray with an empty glass was on the floor beside her. She saw him, picked up the tray, and stood up.

"I'm that upset, sir," she said, "*that* upset."

"Something has startled you?"

"Startled! Glory be, sir—what with this bringing back of the dead and the missus gone into a comma—if it wasn't for them three cops at the downstairs doors I'd be out of this house this minute, and so would the rest of us, too."

"How many of the 'rest of you' are there?"

"Sure and including the housekeeper there's eight of us, sir."

The Endicotts, Lieutenant Valcour was now quite certain, must be multimillionaires.

"All women?"

"Except for the houseman and chauffeur."

"And do they sleep in the house?"

"The chauffeur does not, sir. He has an apartment for himself and his wife and his three-year-old child, named Katie, over the garage in East Sixty-sixth Street, sir."

"Have all of you been in service here a long time?"

"Indeed and we haven't, sir—except for Roberts and the housekeeper. I've been here a month myself, and the rest of us not more than two or three."

"And Roberts has been Mrs. Endicott's maid for the past several years, say?"

"And sure and ever since she landed here from England, sir."

"Roberts is an Englishwoman?"

"Hold your whisht, sir, and I'll tell you that she's of the aristocracy, no less."

Lieutenant Valcour considered this gravely. It was not improbable. Many English families were utterly wrecked financially by the war, and the children had scattered whither they could, like sparrows, in search of bread. "You're sure of this?" he said.

"And indeed it is common knowledge, sir. The housekeeper herself, it was, who told me."

Lieutenant Valcour switched suddenly. "I wonder whether you could tell me who Mr. Endicott's intimate friends were," he said.

"Well, sir, there's quite a few people have called

on the madam off and on, and a few on Mr. Endicott, too. I couldn't say, though, as to just how intimate."

"But didn't he ever discuss his friends?"

"Not before me, sir. I'm one of the downstairs girls. Perhaps Roberts would know. She's often in the room with the madam and Mr. Endicott even when the pair of them is quarrelling that hard that—— Glory be to——".

"Tut, tut," said Lieutenant Valcour gently. "Married couples are always quarrelling together. There's nothing unusual in that."

"Indeed and there ain't."

"I wonder whether you'd ask Roberts to come out here and see me."

"I will, sir."

"Oh—and will you also tell whoever has to know about it that Dr. Worth plans to stay here all night? And then let him know, please, where he is to sleep."

"Yes, sir."

Jane went to the door of Mrs. Endicott's room and knocked. Nurse Vickers opened it and stepped halfway out, blocking the entrance. Their voices were too low for Lieutenant Valcour to hear, but he saw the nurse retreat into the room, caught an affirmative nod from Jane, and presently Roberts came out and toward him.

"You wished to see me, Lieutenant?"

There was still that curious shielding in her eyes—a hinting at definite information kept closely guarded behind twin gates.

"I want you to tell me," he said quietly, "why you compelled me a while ago in Mrs. Endicott's room to say 'Later.'"

"I don't believe I quite understand."

"And I believe that you do."

Roberts became coolly detached. "One is justified in having one's beliefs."

"Just why do you hate Mrs. Endicott so?"

She flinched as if he had struck her physically.

"Is that why you sent for me?" she said.

Lieutenant Valcour himself indulged in a veiling of eyes. "I wish," he said, "that you would sit down."

CHAPTER IX

11:55 *p. m.*—Queer Deeps

ROBERTS went indifferently to the chair that Jane had been using and sat down. Lieutenant Valcour drew another up beside her. He began with the usual distant skirmishing before launching the main body of his attack.

"I will explain why I wanted to see you," he said. "It's concerning Mr. Endicott—concerning his condition." He noted the sudden reflex from tension on the part of her hands as he summed up concisely the statement made to him by Dr. Worth. "I understand," he concluded, "that Mrs. Endicott is under the influence of a narcotic and will not be available before to-morrow morning at the earliest. Dr. Worth naturally wants to prevent all risk, and so we've turned to you."

He felt her staring through him, as if by some fourth-dimensional process his being had been erased from her vision.

"Mr. Endicott has very few friends," she said.

"You are taking the word at its literal meaning."

"Oh, quite. His acquaintances are numerous and transient." She focussed him into an entity again. "They are mostly women. I don't suppose one of them would do?"

Lieutenant Valcour smiled slightly. "Not if their status is so uncertain—their emotional status, I mean."

"Exactly." The masked effect of her attitude remained unchanged as she asked with almost perfunctory detachment, "Would a man do?"

"Why not?"

"Because there is one man of whom Mr. Endicott speaks quite frequently as being his 'best' friend."

"Here in town?"

"In a bachelor apartment on East Fifty-second Street."

"You have his exact address?"

"It is in the memorandum book beside the telephone in Mrs. Endicott's room."

Lieutenant Valcour grew markedly casual. "A mutual friend, then?"

"One couldn't say."

"He is your only suggestion?"

"He is the only man to whom I have heard Mr. Endicott refer in terms of friendship and of intimacy."

"Then there really isn't any choice."

Roberts' smile signified nothing. "No choice."

"Have you ever seen this man?"

"His name is Mr. Thomas Hollander. I have never seen him."

"Has anyone in the household ever seen him, to your knowledge?"

"I dare say. I don't know. One could inquire."

Lieutenant Valcour recognized the rising inflection at each period mark, a habit so much in vogue among certain types of English people when they wish to be mildly disagreeable. He felt a Gallic insistence to retaliate even at the expense of chivalry. At the worst, he thought, he would only be living up to the popular conception of the men in his profession. And there *was* some link of peculiar intimacy between this woman and Endicott. . . .

"If we cannot get hold of Mr. Hollander," he said, "would you consider it advisable for the post to be taken by yourself?"

He repented instantly at the sight of her deadly whiteness. It seemed impossible that blood could drain so swiftly from the skin. His own face blazed like fire from the slap of her hand across his cheek. He noticed, as he sat very still, the strange terror that hid beneath her bitter, staring eyes: it wasn't any terror of the law, the cheek of which she had

symbolically in his person just so vigorously slapped; it wasn't any terror of what he or the machine he represented could do to her—what anyone or anything could do to her. . . . It was baffling; baffling as the undiscoverable source of any intense emotional reaction is baffling—something that drew its sustenance from roots imbedded not in the immediate present but in the past. . . .

"You will permit me to offer my apologies?" he said.

She returned vividly to the moment, and her colour swept back in a succession of bright waves.

"I am not usually so unmannerly," she said.

"Nor usually subjected to insult. The fault was mine."

Her laugh was quite harsh. "On the contrary, Lieutenant, I am accustomed to insult."

"Then why do you stay with Mrs. Endicott?" he said softly.

"Because there are some people, Lieutenant, whc can only find their happiness in hell."

"Martyrs."

"Not martyrs, precisely."

"Just what, then, precisely?"

"It's a sharing, if you wish—sort of a sharing of torture."

Vague—vague. Lieutenant Valcour felt quite

convinced that he would shortly begin to gibber, if the mysteries of hearts, of minds that he had dipped into during the past few hours, did not soon coalesce within the mould of reason. He began to envy his sterner compatriots on the force who confined their processes to the comfortable fields of hard, cold facts—the "did you at five-forty-five this afternoon place the silver teaspoon on the pantry shelf, or did you not?" sort of facts. He conceded that their wholesome, plein-air tactics were quite right, and that his own, in spite of their usually successful results, were hopelessly wrong. They at least were never called liars, or slapped in the face, or found themselves helplessly swirling in a sea of metaphysics with a splendid chance of being thoroughly drowned. He forced himself to concentrate. What was it that slash of pale lips had been saying? A sharing of something . . . Of course, of torture.

"You mean," he said, "a sharing that is now going on?"

"Perhaps—but especially in the past. Do you believe, Lieutenant, that the dead remain in emotional touch with the living?"

"And that, my poor fish," he told himself severely, "is what your interminable probing into people's souls has got you into."

"I have never thought about it. But I should like to believe that it is true. I should like to believe in anything that offers corroborative proof of immortality."

"You are convinced of the finality of death?"

"It is a dread, not a conviction."

Roberts nodded her head swiftly. "And with me—with me—if I could only *know*."

"So that you would be quite certain that your sacrifice is not being made in vain." Lieutenant Valcour spoke very softly. He was approaching, he felt, no matter how grandiloquently, that goal toward which he had been aiming: the answer to the amazing look she had given him in Mrs. Endicott's room.

The mood broke. She stood up abruptly.

"You wished that address book?" she said.

It was of no great matter. Moods, at least, did not die. They were always there—somewhere—waiting to be recaptured.

"If you will be so kind," he said.

She went to the door of Mrs. Endicott's room, opened it, was swallowed up. Lieutenant Valcour waited outside. The case was becoming mired in evasions. That was the trouble with cases whose milieu

rose beyond a certain social and mental level. They invariably grew kaleidoscopic with overtones. Crime in the lower strata was noteworthy for its crudenesses rather than its subtleties: an intrigue among animals, with the general patentness of some jackal filching its prey. But breeding and intellect generally presupposed masks: the inbred defensiveness of manner and social combativeness with the world which offered barriers most difficult to pierce. Roberts opened the door and handed him the small leather reference book Mrs. Endicott had used when verifying the telephone number of Dr. Worth.

"Thomas Hollander," she said. "The names are listed alphabetically."

The door closed even in that short second which preceded his thanks. It was a gesture of retreat from hinted intimacies. It wasn't so much the door of the room she had closed as it was the door guarding her secrets. He felt that she wanted to show him she had already repented of having gone so far—not that she *had* gone any distance, really, but there were beacons, faint pin points of light toward which he would chart a course over the surface of her troubled seas.

He took the reference book and sat down. He began with A and started to go systematically through

it. At H he fixed in his memory the street and telephone number of Hollander's house. He continued without interest to turn the pages.

At the end of the M's he came, to his marked bewilderment, upon the address and telephone number of Marge Myles.

CHAPTER X

12:06 *a. m.*—The Stillness of a Grave

LIEUTENANT VALCOUR went to the head of the stairs.

"O'Brian!" he called down.

O'Brian looked up at him from below.

"Yes, Lieutenant?"

"Send Hansen up here, please."

"Yes, sir."

A painting on the wall held Lieutenant Valcour's attention while he waited. A Gauguin, he thought, and, going closer, confirmed it. His eye drifted over the entire corridor. Everywhere were the details of great wealth, and the young owner of it all not a happy child of kind fortune, but a detested, a passionately hated, and a passionately loved man. There flashed again before him in brief review Mrs. Endicott, a storehouse of mountain storms in summer; Mrs. Siddons, spiritual ash; Roberts, the shortest step this side of some fervour bred in the swamps of lunacy; Hollander—Marge Myles—who knew? And would one ever know? Suppose, as Dr. Worth had

more than hinted, Endicott should refuse to speak—if that strange reticence harped upon so insistently both by his wife and his physician should resist . . .

"Lieutenant, sir, Officer Hansen reporting."

Lieutenant Valcour dragged his eyes from the Gauguin unwillingly.

"All right, Hansen," he said. "Come with me."

They went down the corridor and stopped before the door to Endicott's room.

"Do you know what's gone on here to-night, Hansen?"

"From what I've heard, sir, the man who was thought dead is now alive."

"That is correct."

Lieutenant Valcour opened the door and beckoned to Cassidy. Cassidy came out and joined them.

"When you two men go back into that room," Lieutenant Valcour said, "I want you to get a couple of chairs and sit down just inside the bathroom doorway. Put the chairs where you can watch the bed and this hall door. If you talk, use a low voice that won't disturb either the patient or the nurse, and from the moment when she indicates that he's returning to consciousness, say nothing at all and sit still. The shock of knowing that you were there might disturb his heart again. Is that clear?"

They assured him, in unison, that it was.

"This hall door," Lieutenant Valcour went on, "is going to be kept locked on the inside by the nurse. Every time she opens it, watch carefully. Keep your eye on anyone who comes into the room, especially if they offer some excuse for wanting to be there—and when I say 'anyone,' I mean just that. For instance: the nurse might want some coffee and ring for a servant. Watch that servant every second until she goes and the door is locked again. While on the subject of coffee, you will drink none that may be offered you while you're on watch."

"I never drink coffee, Lieutenant," said Cassidy. "Now if it was a cup of tea——"

"If you get thirsty," said Lieutenant Valcour severely, "take some water from the tap. And eat nothing at all. I don't want to have to come back here and find you both groggy with knock-out drops and with heaven-knows-what happened to Endicott. Mind you, I'm not suggesting that anything like this will happen—but it might. Clear?"

Again, in unison, they assured him it was all most clear.

"Keep in mind," Lieutenant Valcour went on, "that primarily you are in a sick-room over which Dr. Worth has absolute charge. You are not to

interfere with anything he may do, or with any arrangements he may make during the night. You are only to step in if you see that Endicott's life is threatened through the action of some person who may approach him. Try to prevent this by physically overpowering the attacker if you can, but if there is no time for that do not hesitate to shoot."

"Even if it's a woman, Lieutenant?" said Hansen quietly.

Lieutenant Valcour shrugged. "There are no such things," he said evenly, "as sex or chivalry in murder."

"Yes, sir."

"I am painting, incidentally, the darkest prospect of the picture. In all probability nothing will happen at all. You'll spend a sleepless and tiresome night, get cricks in your necks, and damn the day you ever joined the force. Now, then, there is one thing more, and that concerns a man by the name of Thomas Hollander. Dr. Worth believes it advisable that an intimate friend of Endicott be near him and be the first person whom Endicott sees when he recovers consciousness. Mr. Hollander is that friend. I am going to try to get in touch with him shortly, explain matters to him, and get him to come up here. Mr. Hollander is naturally the exception to my previous

instructions. Let him alone. Don't interfere with him, but—" Lieutenant Valcour's pause was significantly impressive "—watch him. Watch him, my good young men, as two harmonious cats might watch a promenading and near-sighted mouse. Shall I repeat?"

"I get you, Lieutenant," said Cassidy. And Hansen, he was assured, had "got" him, too.

"Then we will go in, and you will establish yourselves for the night at once."

He opened the door, and they went inside. Dr Worth's arrangements were complete, and he was ready to turn in. Nurse Murrow had received her instructions and was to call Dr. Worth should Endicott show any symptoms of returning consciousness.

Dr. Worth joined Lieutenant Valcour at the door.

"There is nothing further we can do for the present, Lieutenant, except wait," he said.

"All right, Doctor. I've told my men how things stand." He nodded toward Cassidy and Hansen, who, on tiptoe, were vanishing into the bathroom with two chairs. "I've told them you're in charge here, and that there's not to be an unnecessary sound or move out of them."

Dr. Worth continued to remain politely incredulous. "Well, I dare say you know what you are doing,

but it still seems an extraordinary precaution to me."

"And it probably is. I spoke to one of the maids about your staying here, Doctor."

"Yes—thank you. They've told me where my room is. It's the one directly above this one."

"I've also lined up one of Endicott's friends. I'm getting in touch with him directly, and when he comes I'll have him sent up to you. You can tell him just what you want him to do, and then see that he gets in here all right, if you will, please."

"By all means. Who is he, Lieutenant?"

"A Mr. Thomas Hollander—lives on East Fifty-second Street."

"Never heard of him; but there's no reason why I should have." He sped a parting look toward Endicott, faintly breathing on the bed. "The most reticent man, Lieutenant, whom I have ever met."

They went outside and closed the door.

Nurse Murrow went over and locked it. She felt, to put it mildly, not a little atwitter. Her life had not conformed to the popular version of a trained nurse's. There had been no romantic patients in it whose pallid, interesting brows she had smoothly divorced from fever by a gentle pass or two with magnetic fingers. No grateful millionaire had offered her his heart and name; nor had any motherly eyed

old dowager died and willed her a fortune. No. There had been, on the other hand, a good many years of sloppy, disillusioning, grilling work, long hours spent in pampering peevish patients, patients who were ugly with that special ugliness which is inherent in the sick, snappish doctors, and a perfect desert of romance.

The present case loomed as a heaven-sent oasis. Who knew what might not develop out of it? It awakened all the atrophied hunger of her starved sentimentalism. And even if nothing *did* result from it—nothing practical, like marriage, or a good bonus—it would at least leave her something to think about during those endless, tiresome, tiring hours of the future. . . .

She crossed to the bed and looked down at Endicott. She felt his pulse and made a notation on her night chart. She lingered near the bathroom doorway.

"The strangest case," she whispered, "that I've ever been on."

Cassidy looked up at her bleakly.

Hansen said, "Yes, ma'am."

"I dare say," she whispered on, "that it's quite in the ordinary run of things for you gentlemen."

"Yes, ma'am."

"There's an atmosphere—a something sinister

"Yes, ma'am."

Nurse Murrow's broad shoulders jerked impatiently. There was a talk-chilling quality in being so determinedly ma'am'd. She gave it up, and settled herself starchily in an armchair. She adjusted a lamp so that it shaded more efficiently her eyes.

A floor board creaked upstairs—once.

That would be Dr. Worth, she decided, going to bed. What a man! What a shining light in his profession! A little bigoted, perhaps, in some things, but so distinguished—admirable—a bachelor, too—— But what nonsense!

A complete stillness settled gently on the house. The stillness of a grave.

Yes, she thought, just exactly that—the stillness of a grave. . . .

CHAPTER XI

12:15 *a. m.*—To Watch by Night

LIEUTENANT VALCOUR refreshed his memory from the leather reference book and then dialled the number.

"Mr. Thomas Hollander?" he said, when a man's voice answered him. It was a smooth, soft voice, and he suspected that further words beyond the initial "hello" would reveal a Southern accent.

"Who is calling, please?" went on the voice, making the expected latitudinal revelation.

"I have a message from the home of Mr. Herbert Endicott for Mr. Thomas Hollander. Will you ask him to come to the 'phone, please?"

"One moment."

"Certainly."

Lieutenant Valcour drew stars on a scratch pad while he waited. He wondered idly what secret powers or hidden vices they would disclose if examined by a trained graphologist. He made quite a good star and drew exciting rays out from its points. That would undoubtedly show, he told himself, that he was a

nosey, mean-spirited, and cold-hearted sleuth hound. What an infernal time it took to get Hollander to the telehone! Had the line gone dead? Ah . . .

"Yes?" It was a deeper voice, this time, and held no promise, or threat, of Southern softnesses.

"Mr. Thomas Hollander?"

"Yes."

"This is the home of Mr. Herbert Endicott, Mr. Hollander."

"Yes?"

"And I am Lieutenant Valcour talking—of the police."

The deadness of the wire became a pause of the first magnitude. Then:

"Well, Lieutenant, what's it all about?"

"It is about Mr. Endicott, Mr. Hollander."

"Yes?"

"Yes."

Another pause.

"He's dead?"

"Dead? Why no, Hollander. Were you expecting him to be?"

"What do you mean by 'expecting him to be'? Certainly I wasn't. Please come down to facts, Lieutenant."

"I was about to. Mr. Endicott has suffered a heart

attack brought on by some sudden shock. His condition is serious, and Dr. Worth, who is attending him, insists that some friend be at hand when Mr. Endicott recovers consciousness."

"You mean"—the voice was speaking very carefully now—"in addition to Mrs. Endicott?"

"No, unfortunately Mrs. Endicott cannot be present."

Again a pause, and then:

"Why not, Lieutenant? She isn't—that is——"

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Hollander?"

"Damn it, is she arrested?"

"Certainly not. What for?"

"Well, what in hell are you cops in the house for if"—the voice ended less belligerently—"there hasn't been some crime?"

Lieutenant Valcour remained splendidly detached.

"We shan't be certain that there either has or hasn't been a crime, as you infer, until Mr. Endicott recovers consciousness and lets us know."

"He's unconscious?"

"Yes."

"Is his condition serious, Lieutenant?"

"Most serious, Mr. Hollander."

"And Mrs. Endicott—why is it she can't be with Herb?"

"Dr. Worth has given her a narcotic. She's sleeping. Her nerves are unstrung."

This evidently took a minute to digest.

"From what, Lieutenant?"

"From her husband's condition."

"Did Mrs. Endicott suggest that you call me up, Lieutenant?"

"No. Roberts, her maid, said you were a friend—a mutual friend. Roberts tells me that your name is the only one she has ever heard spoken by Mr. Endicott in terms that would imply intimacy."

"That's right."

"You and Mr. Endicott are intimate friends, are you not?"

"Pretty thick, Lieutenant. What is it you want me to do?"

"To sit with Mr. Endicott until he recovers consciousness. Dr. Worth is afraid that his heart will go back on him again if there isn't someone he knows with him when he comes to. If you'll be kind enough to come up, Dr. Worth will explain the whole peculiar affair to you much better than I can."

"Why, of course. Yes. When?"

"As soon as convenient."

"In about an hour? There are some things——"

"That will do perfectly. Thank you very much, Mr. Hollander. Good-bye."

"Good-bye."

Lieutenant Valcour hung up the receiver of the hall telephone he was using and walked to where he had left his coat and hat. He put them on and buttonholed O'Brian by the front door.

"O'Brian," he said, "there's a man coming here shortly by the name of Thomas Hollander. Have him identify himself by a visiting card, or a letter, or his driver's licence, or initials on something or other. Give him a pat, too, in passing to make certain that he hasn't got a gun. If it offends him, say that it is just a matter of routine. As a matter of fact, in his case, it probably is. Then show him up to the room that Dr. Worth is occupying for the night."

"Yes, sir."

"From Dr. Worth's room he will be taken down to Mr. Endicott's room and will stay there until morning."

"Yes, sir."

"I want you to tip the men off on guard down here that I want it known I am going home until tomorrow. Tell Mr. Hollander that if he asks to see me. I am leaving the house now and may be gone for a

couple of hours, more or less. Then I'm coming back. I'll rap on this door here, and you let me in."

"Yes, sir."

"There's probably a lounge or something in that room there just off this hall. I'll spend the night on it."

"Yes, sir."

"What is the name of the gentleman who is coming?"

"Thomas Hollander, Lieutenant."

"Good."

Lieutenant Valcour went outside. The normal orderliness of life returned comfortingly with the first deep breaths of cold night air. He walked the short half block to Fifth Avenue and hailed a taxi. He got in. He gave the driver, through the half-opened window in front, the Riverside Drive address of Marge Myles.

CHAPTER XII

12:30 *a. m*—Madame Velasquez Stirs up Muck

THE taxi ran north along Fifth Avenue for a few blocks and then bore left into the leafless, frosty stretches of Central Park. It was deserted of pedestrians. Occasional yellow lights showed the vacant surface of benches and empty walks.

The average worthlessness of any person's reactions when suddenly confronted by the police, Lieutenant Valcour reflected, was a curious phenomenon. It was his belief that only rarely were such reactions the result of the moment at hand. They were instead a subconscious scurrying backward to some earlier time when something had been done by that person, or known by that person, which might then have brought him into the grip of the law. No one—he included himself in the arraignment—led a blameless life. No, not even the saints, for they had their periods of expiation, which in themselves presupposed blemishes that required the act of expiation for their

erasure. And so it was with people when, even in the rôle of the most innocent of bystanders, they were confronted by the police. Inevitably there lurked a certain fear, an instinctive thrusting out of defenses as a guard against the chance discovery of that early blemish. . . .

Take Hollander, for instance. Every word of his telephone conversation had been a negative defense, and yet one could not link it necessarily with the attack on Endicott. No, not necessarily. It was perfectly obvious that Hollander had *expected* something to happen to Endicott, and equally obvious that he was worried about the fact that Mrs. Endicott might be involved in it, but one couldn't say that he had been involved in it himself. . . .

The taxi stopped. Lieutenant Valcour got out, paid the driver, and dismissed him.

Riverside Drive seemed about ten degrees colder than the midtown section of the city had been. Or was it fifteen or twenty degrees? A northerly wind blew iced blasts from the Hudson River and at him across the treetops of the terraced park. Marge Myles, Lieutenant Valcour decided as he took in the façade of the building that housed her apartment, did herself rather well.

A sleepy and irritable Negro casually asked him

"Wha' floor—'n' who, suh?" as he entered the overheated lobby. The boy was smartly snapped into full consciousness by the view offered him of Lieutenant Valcour's gold badge.

The proper floor proved to be the fourteenth.

As the hour was hovering about one in the morning, Lieutenant Valcour was considerably surprised at the promptness with which the door swung open in response to his ring, and considerably more surprised by the querulous voice that emerged from beneath a wig, dimly seen in the poor light of a foyer, and said, "Well, I must say you took your own time in coming. Put your coat and hat on that table there, and then come into the parlour."

Lieutenant Valcour complied. He followed a dimmish mass of jet bugles into the more accurate light of a room heavily cluttered with gold-leafed furniture and brocades.

"I'm Madame Velasquez—Marge's ma. I ain't Spanish myself, but if there ever was a Spaniard, my late husband Alvarez was."

The wig on Madame Velasquez's head offered no anachronism to the bugles of her low-cut dress. Its reddish russet strands were pompadoured and puffed and showed at unexpected places little sprays of determined curls. The face beneath it bore an odd

resemblance to an enamelled nut to which nature, in a moment of freakish humour, had added features.

"Now I want you to tell me at once, Mr. Endicott, what you have done with my little Marge."

Lieutenant Valcour with curious eyes tried to probe a closed door at the other end of the room.

"I expected to find her here, Madame Velasquez," he said quietly. "Isn't she?"

"She ain't. And what is furthermore, Mr. Herbert Endicott, you know she ain't." Her voice had grown shrill, but without much volume. It was rather the ineffective piping of some winded bird.

"What makes you say that, Madame Velasquez?"

The bunched strands of artificial jewellery that were recklessly clasped about Madame Velasquez's thin neck quivered defiantly.

"And you never met her here at seven," she said. "I suppose you'll say you *wasn't* to meet her here at seven. Well, I got this note to prove it. There, now."

She handed Lieutenant Valcour a sheet of notepaper that reeked of some high-powered scent.

Make yourself at home, Ma [read the note]. Herb Endicott was to meet me here at seven. He didn't come although he was to take me to the Colonial for dinner. I am going to the Colonial now and see if he is there. Maybe I did not understand him right, Ma. I will be home soon anyways.

MARGE

"And it is now," said Madame Velasquez, "after 1 A. M."

"She knew you were going to pay her this visit, Madame Velasquez?"

"I telegraphed her this afternoon. I'm here for a week. Where is she?"

"I don't know where she is, Madame Velasquez."

"Mr. Endicott, one more lie like that and I'll call the police."

"That's all right, Madame Velasquez. You see, I am the police."

The bugles, the jewels, the curls became still with shocking abruptness, as a brake that without warning binds tightly.

"You belong to the police?"

"Yes, Madame Velasquez—Lieutenant Valcour."

He showed his badge.

"Then you ain't Mr. Endicott?"

"No, Madame Velasquez."

"Then he—she—they've gone and done it, Lieutenant—they have run away." Madame Velasquez began to simper.

"I'm sorry, Madame Velasquez, but they haven't run away. Mr. Endicott, you see, was attacked this evening. If he doesn't live, whoever did it will be charged with murder."

There was a complete absence of expression in Madame Velasquez's tone. "And you think Marge done it," she said.

"Not necessarily so at all. Your daughter may very well have met somebody else at the Colonial—some other party of friends—and have joined it when Mr. Endicott failed to show up. The Colonial is closed by now, but perhaps she went on to some night club. I shouldn't worry."

"Why should she go on to some night club when she knew her ma was waiting for her here?"

Madame Velasquez's thin hands, the fingers of which were loaded with cheap rings, played nervously with any substance they chanced to touch.

"Something's happened to her, Lieutenant," she went on. "I always told her as how it would. Marge—I told her a hundred times if I ever told her once—there's a limit to the number of suckers you can play at one and the same time."

"You think that some man who was jealous perhaps attacked Endicott first and then got after her?"

"Man? Men, Lieutenant, men. That brat kept the opposite of a harem, if you know what I mean."

"She isn't your daughter, really, is she, Madame Velasquez?"

"She was Alvarez's only child by his first wife—some Spanish female hussy from Seville. What made you guess?"

"The way you talked about her. But do keep right on, Madame Velasquez. What a remarkable pendant—it's a rarity to see so perfect a ruby—may I?"

Madame Velasquez simpered audibly while Lieutenant Valcour leaned forward and stared earnestly at the bit of paste.

"My late husband, Lieutenant, used to say that nothing was too good for pretty Miramar. That's my name, Lieutenant—Miramar."

"Few people are so happily named, Madame Velasquez. Tell me—let me rely upon your woman's intuition—just what did Marge expect from Endicott?"

Madame Velasquez leaned forward confidentially. An atmosphere as of frenzied heliotropes clung thickly about her.

"Every last damn nickel she could get," she said.

"Lieutenant Valcour assumed his most winning smile. "Scarcely an *affaire du cœur*, Madame Velasquez." If he had had a moustache, he would have twirled it. "I suppose her early marriage embittered her, rather hardened her against men?"

"Well, if it did I ain't noticed it none."

"Perhaps Endicott came under the heading of business rather than pleasure?"

"Well, yes, and then no."

"A happy combination?"

"Just a combination. Not so damn happy."

"A little bickering now and then?"

"A lot."

"Indeed? Marge was on the stage, wasn't she?"

"If you can call it the stage nowadays, Lieutenant."

"In the chorus, wasn't she?"

"Yes."

"And Harry Myles saw her and carried her off."

Madame Velasquez's laugh was an art; unfortunately not a lost one. "The millionaire marriage," she gasped. "My dear"—her hand found a resting place on one of Lieutenant Valcour's knees—"he didn't have a cent."

"She felt disappointed, I suppose?"

"Disappointed!" Madame Velasquez fairly screamed the word at him, like an angry parrot. Her manner changed and became darkly mysterious. "I know my little know," she said. "You can believe me, Lieutenant, little Miramar's not the boob some parties I could mention, but won't, think she is."

Her voice grew harsh with the gritty quality of a file. "I'll learn her to leave me in the ditch like this."

"Then you think Marge purposely isn't here to greet you?"

It was a sweet little bunch of filth, taken all in all, thought Lieutenant Valcour. It was perfectly plain: Madame Velasquez either held definite knowledge that Marge had killed Harry Myles, or else had convinced Marge that she knew. And then Madame Velasquez had simply bled Marge of all the money she could get.

"Is Marge frightened easily, Madame Velasquez?"

"About some things."

The reddish, dusty-looking curls nodded vigorously. Lieutenant Valcour looked at his watch. It was one-thirty. He stood up.

"Thank you for receiving me, Madame Velasquez. If I leave you a telephone number would you care to call me up when Marge comes in? Or will you be in bed?"

"Leave your number, Lieutenant." The seamy enamelled face became more nutlike than ever. "I got a thing or two to talk over with that female Brigham Young." She raised a be-ringed hand and held it unescapably close to Lieutenant Valcour's lips.

He brushed them gently against a hardened coat of whiting, smiled his pleasantest, and left, assisted doorward by what might at one time have been called a sigh.

He paused for a moment in the small foyer, after putting on his hat and coat, and pencilled the Endicotts' telephone number on one of his cards. He started back to give it to Madame Velasquez.

She wasn't in the room where he had left her, and the room's other door stood ajar. He crossed to it softly and looked in. Madame Velasquez—yes, he convinced himself, it *was* Madame Velasquez—was sitting before a dresser. Her wig was off, and her heavily enamelled face peered into a mirror beneath thin knots of corn-gray hair. As the lonely, weak old voice rose and fell, Lieutenant Valcour caught a word or two of what Madame Velasquez was saying:

"He didn't know—if I went and told her once, I told her a thousand times—he didn't *know*." There followed a short, dreadful noise that passed as laughter. "But *I* know—Miramar knows, darling—you little lousy . . ."

Lieutenant Valcour retreated softly. He left the card lying on a table. He went outside and closed the door. He rang for the elevator and shut his eyes while waiting for it to come up. There were times when

they grew a little weary from looking too intimately upon life.

Down in the lobby he used the house telephone and called up the Endicotts'.

"Lieutenant Valcour talking," he said.

"O'Brian, sir."

"Everything quiet?"

"Indeed and it is, sir."

"Mr. Hollander get there yet?"

"He's just this minute after arriving, sir. He's upstairs with Dr. Worth now."

"Did he identify himself all right?"

"He did that, Lieutenant, with cards and a driver's licence."

"Good. I'll be along in about an hour now. Goodbye."

He was helped by the bitter wind as he walked east to Broadway. He found a taxi and gave the driver Hollander's address on East Fifty-second Street. He settled back and closed his eyes. He went to sleep.

CHAPTER XIII

2:01 *a. m.*—Glittering Eyes

NURSE MURROW didn't slumber, exactly; it was much too slender a lapse from consciousness for that. But it was not until the second gentle rapping that she stood up.

Someone was rapping on the hall door.

She glanced at her wrist watch as she crossed the room, and was glad to note that it was just after two o'clock. Three or four hours, now, and it would be dawn. She'd get some coffee, then, and her work for the night would be almost over.

As she turned the key in the lock she noticed with a sharp thrill of interest that the two policemen, very quiet, very alert, but still sitting on their chairs in the bathroom doorway, had each drawn a gun from its holster and was holding it by his side. She opened the door.

Dr. Worth, his dignity considerably muffled in camel's hair, stood in the corridor with a stranger.

"Miss Murrow," he said, "this is Mr. Thomas

Hollander, the friend who is going to sit up with Mr. Endicott. He understands everything about the situation, and I have advised him just what to do."

"Yes, Doctor."

Dr. Worth failed futilely in suppressing a yawn. "Are there any reports?"

"No, Doctor."

"Then I'll return to my room. Call me at the slightest indication."

"Yes, Doctor."

Hollander came inside. Miss Murrow closed the door and locked it again. She stood watching Hollander as he went an uncertain step or two toward the bed, with that natural hesitation with which one approaches the very ill. He was a personable young man in his thirties. He was more than personable, she decided. Not handsome, exactly—heavens, no—she corrected herself rapidly. The features weren't moulded in the tiresome regularity of handsomeness. Engaging? Perhaps. A body perfectly proportioned, with the broad shoulders and slim hips of a fighter—of, yes, a prize fighter—an amateur sportsman.

Hollander had finished with staring down at Endicott. His walk, as he came over to where she was standing, caused Miss Murrow to change her opinion as to his vocation. She put him down as a sailor, a

yachtsman. There was a buoyancy, a certain fluidity, in his movements, as if his feet were accustomed to maintaining him with poise across the surfaces of moving things. His eyes, except for one flashing glance, did not meet her own directly.

"Is it all right to smoke?" he said.

Miss Murrow smiled apologetically. "I'm afraid not, Mr. Hollander. Mr. Endicott's lungs require as clear air as possible. I've even opened that window a little to keep the atmosphere in the room quite fresh." She nodded toward the window above the large mahogany chest. The sash was up about six or seven inches from the bottom.

"Oh." Hollander continued to stand before her, giving her still that peculiar effect of movement. There was nothing perceptible about it. His body was like a stolid field, motionless, beneath drifting shadows of the clouds. "Will Dr. Worth be here when Herb comes to?"

Nurse Murrow felt a professional stiffening. "I will inform Dr. Worth at the first sign of returning consciousness."

"How?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"How'll you inform him?"

"By going up to his room, of course."

"Oh." Hollander's gaze wavered about at the line of her chin. "Then I'll just baby Herb along until you get back down here with the doctor."

"The doctor and I will undoubtedly be back before Mr. Endicott actually does come to."

"Uh-huh. Good kid, Herb."

She threw out a tentative feeler.

"You and he are great friends, Mr. Hollander?"

"Buddies. War buddies."

Miss Murrow's thoughts fled back along old trails. "How splendid! So few war friendships have really lasted, Mr. Hollander. I know it's been so in my case, and with so many, many others." A faint flush crept over her palish cheeks and made her look rather young again. "There was a girl with me in hospital at Chaumont, and we just knew we were going to be friends for life, but she lives out in Akron, Ohio."

"Uh-huh."

"We wrote quite regularly for a while after we got back from France—we both sailed from Brest on the *Amerika*—but then it sort of dwindled. Postal cards—picture postal cards at Christmas. Last year we didn't even send any. I wonder what she'd be like if I saw her again. Have you ever wondered about people whom you've once been very fond of, that

way—about whether they change in time, I mean?"

"Everything changes."

"Doesn't it, though? Just like the seasons. Oh, I do think you can draw so many happy comparisons between life and nature. They're interlinked, if you get what I mean. That's why the weather is so affecting. I just can't *help* feeling gloomy on a gloomy day, and when it's bright and cheerful and all sunshiny outside, why then I'm that way, too."

"Cripes!" muttered Hollander softly.

"What did you say, Mr. Hollander?"

"I said that was nice."

"Now I suppose with you and Mr. Endicott you see each other quite regularly."

"Now and then."

"I suppose whenever your business permits?"

His look flicked her like a whip.

"Where'll I sit?" he said.

Nurse Murrow vanished within her professional sphere.

"Near the patient, please."

She wondered whether he had meant to snub her. It wasn't a snub exactly. Yes, it was, too. Well, what of it? He was attractive enough to get away with it, and it probably was nothing but brusqueness, after all. Many strong men were brusque—purposely so

to hide a tender interior. There was a man, and a millionaire at that . . . Hollander was back again beside her. She wondered whether it was so—whether people who didn't look into your eyes were people whom it was unsafe to trust.

"Just what do you know about all this?" he said softly.

"About all what, Mr. Hollander?"

"About the police being in the house."

"Isn't it just too thrilling?"

"Uh-huh. Whom do they suspect?"

Miss Murrow began to feel friendly again. He *was* so good-looking. She wished she had a whole lot of exciting and important information to give him that would keep him standing there listening, so that she could just stare at him and try to put her finger on the source of that amazing effect of fluidity.

"They haven't said whom they suspect, really." She lowered her voice to an appropriate pitch. "But I know they think it's somebody who is in the house."

Hollander's voice was a whisper. "You wouldn't say it was Mrs. Endicott whom they suspect, would you?"

Miss Murrow appeared a trifle shocked. "Oh, it would be too dreadful to think a wife would harm a husband. But it does happen." Her mind tabulated

the news offered daily by the papers. "Why, it happens almost every day. Oh, you don't *think*——"

"Certainly I don't think she did it," Hollander said fiercely. "It's what the police think that I'm trying to get at. What makes you so sure they're going to hang it onto somebody who's in the house?"

Miss Murrow nodded toward the bathroom door. "From the way they're guarding Mr. Endicott from being attacked again. From being attacked," she added, "before he can make a statement."

"Then they're still just guessing?"

"Just guessing."

It seemed to satisfy Hollander, and he managed to convey the impression that the conversation, so far as he was concerned, had come to an end. Miss Murrow went over to her chair in a corner of the room and sat down. He was deep, she decided. Yes, a deep creature, with deep impulses. . . .

Cassidy and Hansen tilted back their chairs a bit and, with loosened collars, settled for the last tiring watches of the night. They had nodded briefly to Hollander, and he had nodded just as briefly in return. He looked to them like a good scout. Like one of the boys. Regular. Cassidy tried to remember what that last line of hooey was that the lieutenant had shot at them about Hollander. Something about cats.

About two cats, that was it, watching a promenading and near-sighted mouse. Nuts.

Hollander took an armchair and pushed it close to the head of the bed. It was an upholstered armchair, heavy, and with a tall solid back. He placed it so that its back was to the bathroom door. The back also obliquely obscured him from a full view on the part of Nurse Murrow. He vanished into its overstuffed depths and settled down. His eyes travelled slowly along the spread until they came to rest with a curious fixity on the smooth, masklike face of his friend Endicott.

Then the pupils of Hollander's eyes contracted until they glittered like the heads of two bright pins

CHAPTER XIV

2:01 *a. m.*—An Empty Sheath

IT WAS just after two o'clock when Lieutenant Valcour stepped to the pavement and paid his fare to the driver. The cab snorted away and left silence hanging heavy on the street. The bachelor apartment house where Hollander lived had an English basement entrance. He found Hollander's name among a row of five others and pressed the proper button. After he had pressed it four times, a voice answered him through the earpiece of the announcer.

"Who and what is it?" said the voice.

It was the Southern voice.

"This is Lieutenant Valcour of the police department talking."

"Oh. Mr. Hollander has already left, Lieutenant."

"Thank you, I know that. I want to come upstairs."

"Fourth floor, Lieutenant—automatic lift."

"Thank you."

The release mechanism on the door was already clicking. Lieutenant Valcour entered a smart little

lobby and then an electric lift. He pressed the button for the fourth floor.

"Sorry to bother you like this," he said, as he stepped out into a private foyer, and stared curiously at the young man facing him.

"No trouble at all, Lieutenant."

"That's very kind of you, Mr.——"

"Smith, Lieutenant—Jerry Smith."

"Since when?" asked Lieutenant Valcour gently, as he started to follow Mr. Smith into an adjoining room.

"Why, what do you mean, Lieutenant?"

The man stopped, and his soft dark eyes stared earnestly at Lieutenant Valcour from a ruddy, slightly dissipated-looking young face.

Lieutenant Valcour removed his hat and placed it on a settee. "Nothing much, Mr. Smith," he said. "Certainly nothing beyond the fact that I saw you one morning last month in the line-up down at headquarters. In connection with some night-club business, I believe. The charge fell through, I also believe, because the woman involved preferred the loss of her emerald necklace to the loss of prestige she certainly would have suffered during the publicity of a trial had she pressed the case. That's all I mean, Mr. Smith."

"I don't suppose, sir, I could convince you of my innocence?"

"No, I don't suppose you could."

"It was my misfortune that the case never did come to trial, Lieutenant. I could have cleared myself then."

"Nonsense. You could have brought counter charges—sued for damage for false arrest."

Mr. Smith looked inexpressibly shocked. "We of the South, sir, do not bring charges against a lady."

"Well, the ethical distinction between swiping a woman's necklace and bringing charges against her is a shade too delicate for my Northern nerves to grasp." Lieutenant Valcour crossed casually to a chair placed before a secretary and sat down. "Sit down, Mr. Smith," he said, "and tell me something about your friend Thomas."

"The straightest, squarest gentleman who ever lived, sir. Why . . ." Mr. Smith plunged into a panegyric that would have brought a blush even to the toughened cheek of a Caligula.

Lieutenant Valcour permitted him to plunge. While the flood poured into his ears, his eyes were inconspicuously busied with such papers as were on view in the secretary.

TOM, DARLING [he read on the folded half of a sheet of notepaper]: Let's tea on Thursday at the Ritz. 4:30, as Herbert . . .

Lieutenant Valcour did not consider it essential to reach out and turn the page. His fingers absently busied themselves with the leather sheath for, presumably, a metal paper cutter or, perhaps, a stiletto.

"Yes, he is an honourable and an upright gentleman, sir, and if you think there is anything wrong with him in the Endicott business"—Mr. Smith temporarily moved north of the Mason and Dixon Line—"you're all wet."

Mr. Smith was through.

"For how long has he known Endicott, Mr. Smith?"

"As I've been telling you, Lieutenant, ever since that night he saved Endicott's life."

Lieutenant Valcour became almost embarrassing in the sudden focussing of his attention. "Would it bother you very much, Mr. Smith, to tell me of that occurrence again?"

"Why, it's just as I've been *saying*, Lieutenant, in the war— the war."

"Oh, of course. Endicott and Hollander were in the same outfit, and Hollander saved Endicott's life."

"You can prove it, sir, if you wish. Just call up the Bronx armoury and ask for the adjutant—in the morning, of course, as he wouldn't be there now. He'll make it official."

"Oh, I believe it all right, Mr. Smith. It's a very reasonable explanation of why Endicott should be so intimate with one of your friends."

"I swear you have me wrong, Lieutenant. I had no more to do with that gilt-knuckles job than—" Mr. Smith sought desperately for a convincing simile —"than a babe unborn."

"It isn't any of my business anyway, Mr. Smith, even if you had," said Lieutenant Valcour soothingly. He tapped the leather sheath he was holding against his fingers. "I suppose Hollander was even quite prominent at the wedding, when Endicott was married?"

"Prominent? He was the best man."

"Really. Well, well. Mrs. Endicott is indeed a very beautiful woman, and from all that she has told me, a much misunderstood one."

Mr. Smith poised himself delicately upon the fence and remained watchful.

"It must have been rather a problem for Hollander," Lieutenant Valcour went on reflectively, "when she told him this afternoon during their tea

at the Ritz that she was faced with one of two things."

"What do you mean, Lieutenant?"

"Didn't he tell you?"

"Tell me what, Lieutenant?"

"That Mrs. Endicott told him she couldn't stand it any longer: that she either was going to kill her husband or else commit suicide."

Mr. Smith smothered a sharp intaking of breath.

"Oh, you know how women talk, Lieutenant. It's just talk."

"Then he wasn't impressed, really?"

"Why, of course not. No more so than you or I would have been."

"He got back here from the Ritz at six?"

"About."

"And stayed here until I 'phoned him?"

Mr. Smith looked a little baffled. "Well, not exactly, Lieutenant."

"Just how exactly, Mr. Smith?"

"Why, you see, he left for dinner right after he came in."

"Just after six?"

"Near six-thirty."

"And what time did he get back from dinner?"

"I wasn't here, Lieutenant. I had a date and

didn't get back here myself until around midnight.'

Lieutenant Valcour became very, very casual.

"Did Hollander plan to marry Mrs. Endicott after she'd got the divorce?" he said.

"Golly, no. There wasn't going to be any divorce. It was platonic—and damned if I don't believe it."

"It's quite possible."

"I have never seen her—but to hear Tom rave!"

"She is very beautiful."

"Lieutenant," Mr. Smith's exceedingly attractive dark eyes stared solemnly into Lieutenant Valcour's veiled ones, "he thinks she's a saint. I mean it."

"Dark and strange," muttered Lieutenant Valcour. "Dark and strange."

"What's dark and strange, Lieutenant?"

"The rather terrible things that sometimes happen, Mr. Smith, under the patronage of love."

"I'll be damned if you talk like a cop," said Mr. Smith, suddenly very suspicious.

"Then I'm afraid you are damned, Mr. Smith. What," Lieutenant Valcour asked suddenly, "was kept in this?"

Mr. Smith, momentarily distracted from his suspicions by the abrupt switch, stared at the leather sheath Lieutenant Valcour was holding out at him.

"Some sort of a sticker that Tom picked up on

the other side," he said. "Damascus steel, he calls it. Uses it for a paper knife."

"I wonder why it isn't in its sheath," said Lieutenant Valcour mildly.

"Search me."

Lieutenant Valcour poked around among the papers.

"It isn't here in this secretary, either."

"Well, I don't know where it is, Lieutenant. It was there this afternoon."

"I don't know where it is either, Mr. Smith, but I'm going to find out."

"Go ahead."

"Where was it you saw it this afternoon? On this secretary?"

"Yes."

Lieutenant Valcour's search of the secretary was swift and thorough. The pigeonholes, the drawers yielded no stiletto of Damascus steel. Hidden in one of the drawers was a copy of the *Oxford Book of English Verse*. That interested him momentarily. He gave it sufficient attention to note that the most used portion included the Sonnets of Shakespeare. But there was no time now—no time.

"I'm going through the rooms here," he said, "and look for that stiletto."

"You'll be exceeding your authority if you do, Lieutenant."

"Have you any objections?" Lieutenant Valcour asked quietly.

Mr. Smith grew almost fervent in his protestations that he had none. Why should he? He had nothing to conceal, nor had Hollander. Of course, there were a bottle or two of gin and a quart of Scotch, but he didn't imagine the lieutenant would be interested in anything along that line. No, the lieutenant assured him, he wouldn't be. Liquor was not in his province. Then it would be all right to go ahead and search? Lieutenant Valcour wanted to know. Oh, quite.

In spite of his verbal acquiescence Mr. Smith followed Lieutenant Valcour through the two other rooms of the apartment with a gradually growing air of truculence. He stood near and a little behind him when, after the search yielded nothing, Lieutenant Valcour went to a telephone and dialled the Endicotts' number.

Lieutenant Valcour did not get the connection, because Mr. Smith drew a pliable leather-bound slug of lead from his pocket and struck Lieutenant Valcour with it on the head.

CHAPTER XV

2:13 *a. m.*—The Thin Steel Blade

MISS MURROW began to feel fidgety.

Even after the many, many years she had spent in nursing she had never accustomed herself to spending a night quite comfortably in a chair. She had always had her attacks of the fidgets, and would probably continue to have them until she arrived at the port of destination for all good nurses and married one of her patients or a doctor. Of the two she really preferred a patient.

She trained a speculative eye on her present one over there on the bed. Not really speculative, as—she told herself firmly—he was already married. Although heaven knew that that never mattered. Take the case of that red-headed Gilford girl who had snapped old man Tomlinson right up from under his wife's nose—probably, at that, because of his wife's nose, which had been an unusually large one. Miss Murrow giggled. That was almost witty enough to tell to Mr. Hollander.

He must have *felt* that she was thinking about him What a curious expression that was in his eyes. He had just turned them toward her, and they seemed to glitter. Yes, that was the word exactly—"glitter."

It was a fancy of Miss Murrow's to be meticulous in the matter of words. "Really," she thought, "I don't see why I couldn't be an author." She felt sure she had ever so much more knowledge of life than one encountered in the average run of books. Tripe. Yes "tripe" was indeed the word. Of course, her books wouldn't be average. Now that little story of Delia Hackenpoole and the interne with those shifty eyes . . .

Eyes . . .

Yes, Mr. Hollander's eyes *were* glittering—even in that second flash she had just caught of them. But possibly he, too, had the fidgets. He'd been sitting terribly quiet for the past ten minutes or so. Not a budge out of him. A body would forget he was there, almost.

Of course he was handsome. Especially in that soft, vague light from the distant lamp which picked his pale features out obscurely. And they *were* pale, at that. Genuinely pale. She did hope he wasn't going to be ill or have a nervous breakdown and

ruin this perfectly marvellous case of the dear doctor's. . . .

Mrs. Sanford Worth. What a pleasant name it would be. *Distingué.* How apt the French were! (She knew ten phrases.)

Was that right hand of Mr. Hollander's actually moving, or was it an illusion of light and shade? It seemed to be slipping slowly from the arm of the chair and would eventually end up in his lap. It was moving—it wasn't—quite creepy, really. Damn the fidgets! She shifted her centre of balance and felt temporarily relieved. Overstuffed chairs were really wretched for prolonged periods of sitting, when you came right down to it, whereas a good old-fashioned horsehair sofa, such as Aunt Helen had had at Sciota. . .

Why, the hand was gone!

Positively gone—like a conjuring trick.

It wasn't on the arm of the chair, so it must be in Mr. Hollander's lap. Then it *had* been moving after all, and she hadn't been just imagining it. Why, it was almost *sneaky*. . . .

His profile was toward her. Not a snub nose, exactly, nor *retroussé.* You couldn't apply that term to anything about a man, and whatever else he might be, Mr. Hollander certainly was a man.

How interesting his life at sea must have been. (She had definitely ticketed him as a sailor.) Lives at sea were always interesting. All the best books were in accord with that. You never read of a Main Street on the ocean. What with the girls in every port and the fights and the smell of crisp salt air . . . What a wretched little twirp that boy had been down at the beach last summer, with his absurd remarks about the salt smell being a lot of decayed lobster pots and dead fish. Of course the air at sea was salt. Sea and salt were synonymous.

Mr. Hollander *did* have the fidgets.

She couldn't see exactly, because of the masking arm of the chair, but he certainly was fiddling with something. She'd think he was twirling his thumbs, if he looked like the sort of man who twirled thumbs, but he didn't, so it wasn't that.

She looked at her wrist watch and saw that the hands were approaching the half hour. She'd have to examine her patient and note his pulse on the chart. What a pity that the only time you really felt comfortable in an overstuffed chair was at the moment when you had to get up.

She stood up, smoothed starched surfaces, and sailed, a smart white pinnace, toward the bed. She smiled engagingly at Mr. Hollander and then started

to take Endicott's pulse. She gave a slight start and concentrated her full attention upon Endicott.

"I think there's a change."

Hollander looked up at her alertly. "Change?"

"I think he shows signs of coming to."

Miss Murrow wondered a moment at the tight little lines which suddenly appeared on Hollander's face, hardening and aging it rather shockingly, and altering the features into a cast whose hidden significance she could not define exactly. Strain, perhaps, better than anything else, served as an explanation: an emotional strain.

"How can you tell?" he said.

Miss Murrow smiled a bit superiorly. "It becomes instinct, mostly."

"Will it be soon?"

"Very soon now. Be careful, please, not to disturb him or make any sudden noise or movement until I come back. I want Dr. Worth to be on hand before the patient actually does regain consciousness."

"You going up to get him now?"

"Yes." She went over to the bathroom door and spoke to Cassidy. "You gentlemen will be careful, won't you, about being seen? I'd stay well back within the doorway, as sometimes a patient is a little, well, wild when he comes to like this, and if he started

jerking around at all he might see you." She smiled engagingly. "What with the uniforms and everything——"

Miss Murrow left implications of the possible fatal consequences hanging in air and returned to Endicott. She examined him critically for another moment, checked his pulse again, and then started for the door. She stopped just before she reached it, and said to Hollander: "I suppose you had better lock the door after me. Lieutenant Valcour placed great stress on the fact that it should be kept locked constantly."

"I'll lock it," said Hollander.

"It does seem kind of foolish, doesn't it?"

Hollander smiled grimly. "Most foolish."

He stood up and joined her at the door. She went outside. He closed the door and locked it. He stared almost blankly for an instant at the two policemen. They had drawn their chairs back a little within the bathroom doorway. Hansen was impassively studying the ceiling above his head. Cassidy, leaning forward a little, was looking with solemn eyes at the outline of Endicott's still figure beneath the bedclothes.

Hollander stretched cramped muscles and then went back to his armchair beside the bed. He sat down and was all but completely obscured from the

two guards by its high back. With imperceptible movements he drew a thin steel blade from beneath the cuff of his left coat sleeve and held it in such a fashion that it was masked in the palm of his right hand, the hilt extending up a little beneath the shirt cuff. He leaned forward and stared down upon Endicott's quiet face. Not quiet, exactly, for the lids were twitching—opening—and Endicott's eyes, bright and unseeing from fever, stared up. . . .

CHAPTER XVI

2:13 *a. m.*—Time *versus* Death

O'BRIAN stirred a bit restlessly in his chair by the hall door and yawned; then he looked at his watch. It was almost a quarter past two. He began to enumerate the various things he would give for a good cup of strong black coffee, and his shirt headed the list. Or, if not coffee, some excitement to keep him awake.

The telephone jangled.

He stood up abruptly and went to the instrument. It would be, he imagined, Lieutenant Valcour calling again to find out if everything was all right. Well, everything was.

O'Brian lifted the receiver and said, "Hello!"

No one answered him, and there wasn't any sound from the other end of the line, unless you could call a sort of thumping noise and a faint tinkle that might have been breaking glass a sound.

"Hello!" O'Brian said again.

The line wasn't dead, because there wasn't that peculiar burring one hears when the connection is broken. The receiver of the 'phone at the other end

was certainly off the hook. O'Brian singled out one of the patron saints of Ireland and wanted to know, most emphatically, just what sort of fun and foustie was being made of him.

"Hello!" He tried it again.

There was a click. The burring sound started. The line was dead. Whoever had been calling from the other end had hung up.

O'Brian very thoughtfully did likewise.

Then he began to wonder what he ought to do. It didn't take him very long to decide, especially as the thumping noise and tinkle of breaking glass grew louder in retrospect the more he thought about them. He didn't have to go as far as Denmark; something was certainly rotten right here in New York.

He dialled the operator, identified himself as a member of the police force, and stated that he wanted the call he had just received instantly traced.

"Oneminuteplease," requested a voice with a macadamized smile.

The minute stretched into two—ten—but eventually he was informed that the call had come from the apartment of a Mr. Thomas Hollander, whose 'phone number and address were thereupon given.

O'Brian jotted them down. He then dialled the telephone number of Hollander who was, as he very

well knew, right upstairs. Several persistent diallings failed to awaken any response.

The complexion of the work afoot grew dirtier. O'Brian felt certain that it was connected with the terrain activities of Lieutenant Valcour. If it had just been some occupant of Hollander's apartment who had wanted to call Hollander up about something, there would have been an answer.

And there wouldn't have been that thumping noise, and the tinkle of breaking glass.

It seemed a matter that required investigation at once. O'Brian telephoned his precinct station and reported the occurrence and his beliefs about it to the sergeant in charge. He was assured that a raiding squad would be dispatched within a matter of minutes to the address he had given.

One was.

They found Lieutenant Valcour helplessly bound, very dazed, very weak, lying on the floor beneath a table when the men crashed the door to Hollander's apartment and broke in. Cold water—a glass of whiskey from a convenient decanter—and intelligence and strength began to return. Lieutenant Valcour pushed away the hands that were supporting him and, going to the telephone, called the Endicotts'.

"O'Brian?"

"Yes, Lieutenant—you all right, sir?"

"Yes, yes—pay attention to every word I say and follow my instructions to a letter. Endicott's life depends upon it."

"Yes, sir."

"Go upstairs to Dr. Worth and wake him. Tell him I believe that Hollander is armed with a knife and that he is probably just waiting for a chance to use it when he won't be observed by the nurse or Cassidy and Hansen. Hollander is Endicott's enemy, not friend. Tell Dr. Worth to go down and knock on Endicott's door. Tell him to go right inside when it opens. Now get this."

"Yes, sir."

"Tell him to ask the nurse how the patient is—to act natural about it. Tell him to start to go out and then, as a second thought, tell him to beckon to Hollander as if he wanted to tell Hollander something. Hollander will get up and go to him. Tell him to whisper to Hollander that there's something he wants to tell him privately, if Hollander will step outside for a minute into the corridor. You be in the corridor. When Hollander comes out, jump him. Put the cuffs on him and keep him quiet until I get there. I'll be right on up. O. K.?"

"Yes, sir."

Lieutenant Valcour rang off. He turned to the sergeant in charge of the detail.

"Leave one man here, Sergeant," he said. "The rest of you men can go back to the station after you've dropped me at the Endicotts'."

"Anything you want the man who's left here to do, Lieutenant?"

"Not unless a dark-haired youngster comes back, which he won't. But if he should, just have him kept for me, please, on ice."

Down on the street, Lieutenant Valcour jumped in beside the driver of the department car and said, "Step on it, Clancy. It's only eleven blocks up and three west."

The car shot forward, swept to the right at the corner, and lunged up Lexington Avenue. There was little traffic, and what little there was was so scattered that nothing impeded its way.

"Something going to break on that Endicott business, Lieutenant?"

"Either going to, or has."

"A homicide, ain't it?"

"Possibly—by now."

Nurse Murrow smoothed the last wrinkles from her uniform while waiting for Dr. Worth to open the

door. It paid to look one's best. Always, at any time at all. One never could tell.

"Oh, Doctor. I'm sorry to get you up again so soon, but Mr. Endicott shows symptoms of coming to."

Dr. Worth, who was no longer the eager-eyed practitioner he once had been, did his best to shake off the puffy chains of sleep.

"I'll come right down, Miss Murrow."

"I'll wait, Doctor."

"Just want to dash some cold water on my face."

"No hurry, Doctor."

He vanished into the room again. Ah, dreamed Miss Murrow, *what* a man! And he'd never been snappy with her, either. So many were snappy. Someone was coming up the stairs—quickly—two at a time—a policeman——

"Where's the doctor, miss?" said O'Brian, a little winded.

"He's coming right out, Officer."

"I gotta see him at once."

O'Brian brushed her aside and opened the door. Dr. Worth met him, astonished and glistening, on the threshold.

"Say, lissen, Doctor, the lieutenant just called up, and he said . . ."

O'Brian thereupon repeated all that the lieutenant had said.

"But, my dear man, this is the most extraordinary thing I have ever heard in my life!" Dr. Worth's slightly damp eyebrows indulged in a series of gyrations.

"Sure there ain't no time for astonishments, Doctor," said O'Brian. "Let's go—easy and quietlike, now. We're not to put this bird wise. . . ."

With O'Brian leading, they started down the stairs.

"Hello, Herb," Hollander said softly.

Endicott's voice was so weak that it scarcely carried to Hollander's ears. "Who is it?" he said. "What . . ." the voice dribbled off.

"It's your friend, Herb."

Sullen, petulant lines clung suddenly to Endicott's mouth, making the thickish lips look almost viciously weak. He made a curious noise that might have been intended for a laugh.

"Have no friend." The voice was the ghost of dead whispers.

"What happened to you, Herb?"

"Happened?" Endicott's eyes made a strong effort to get through the fogs shrouding them. "Something

did happen—I want the police—I'll teach that rotten -that-

There wasn't any sound for a while.

"You'll teach whom, Herb?"

Endicott was staring very fixedly up at Hollander now. And Hollander's right hand, the fingers of which were unnaturally rigid, was gently moving to that spot on the spread which would lie above Endicott's heart.

"Who is it you're going to teach, Herb?" Hollander said again.

The mists were clearing, and Endicott could see things almost plainly. He fixed Hollander's face into definite focus. "God damn you," he said, "for

"Now, now, Herb, that isn't nice, and you don't know what you're saying."

Hollander's right hand had found the spot. It hung above it, motionless, very rigid, and the fingers very stiff.

"I'm going to call a policeman and——"

Endicott's voice was so weak as to be almost inaudible. His lips seemed as motionless as the rest of his body, which was completely inert.

"No, you're not, Herb," whispered Hollander. "And you're not going to tell, either."

Endicott got tired of looking up at Hollander. His eyes travelled fretfully along Hollander's right arm.

"Neither you nor all the devils in hell," he whispered faintly, "can stop me from telling."

And then he saw the knife.

"Can't I, Herb?"

It was the slenderest knife Endicott had ever seen. He wondered where on earth Hollander had got it. No hilt—or perhaps the hilt was cupped in Hollander's hand. A stiletto, that's what it was, and its point was pressing through the white spread at a point that lay just above his heart. Why, if the pressure kept on, it would go right into his heart. . . .

Crack . . .

Crack . . . *crack crack* . . . *crack* . . . *crack* . . .

A bullet from Cassidy's gun shattered Hollander's right wrist. Hansen's shot caught him in the right shoulder. Two bullets out of the fusillade that followed lodged, one in his right hip, and the other one farther down in the leg. Both officers, in spite of Nurse Murrow's orders, had moved into the room and were crouched on the floor where they would still be concealed from Endicott's line of vision, but where they could better and more closely observe what had been

the faintly suspicious movements on the part of Hollander.

They were within four or five feet of him and still crouched below him as blood stained the white spread in a sickish smear when Hollander dragged his mangled wrist across it to the floor.

CHAPTER XVII

2:40 *a. m.*—The Angle of Death's Path

THE pounding on the door became hysterical, and Cassidy, who for two cents would have become hysterical himself, went over and unlocked it. He found Dr. Worth, backed by scandalously excited servants and flanked by Nurse Murrow and O'Brian, pressing across the sill.

"Is it Endicott?" Dr. Worth demanded breathlessly.

"No, sir—it's Hollander. We shot the knife from his hand before he could stick it into Endicott, and then we shot him down."

"Close this door, Officer, and keep these people out. Come in with me, Miss Murrow."

Dr. Worth came into the room with Nurse Murrow. Cassidy closed the door, and the shrill clatter of excited whisperings ebbed like a tide.

"Thank God, Officer, you saved Endicott. What a mess." Dr. Worth glanced critically at Hollander, huddled on the floor by the bed in a blood-soaked heap. "You two men help Nurse Murrow. Stretch

him out on that chest over there by the window. Do what you can for him, Miss Murrow, until I've taken care of Endicott."

Cassidy and Hansen lifted Hollander and carried him to the improvised cot Miss Murrow arranged with blankets and a pillow on top of the mahogany chest by the window.

Nurse Murrow then became the acme, the pink of proficiency. She dressed and bound Hollander's wounds, and applied the proper tourniquet above his shattered wrist. In her opinion, his condition was not fatally serious, when one considered his obvious physique and his probably excellent constitution—of iron—and, yes, he *was* distinctly handsome. What a pity they'd arrest him. Or perhaps he was under arrest already, although she usually associated handcuffings with arrests. But there surely wouldn't be any handcuffs now. In spite of her long familiarity with dreadful injuries she shuddered a little at that shattered wrist. And they couldn't be so soulless as to move him to prison. Dr. Worth would never permit any patient of his to be treated like that. And, after all, Hollander *was* the doctor's patient. . . .

Dr. Worth himself was standing beside her. There was a bewildered, curiously grave look on his face. She sensed intuitively what had happened.

"Mr. Endicott, Doctor?"

Dr. Worth shrugged helplessly. "He's dead."

"But I swear that knife never went in, sir," Cassidy said. "Hansen, here, and me was watching Hollander like cats. Sure we saw the knife even before it touched the bedclothes."

"Didn't Hollander have a gun, too?"

"No, sir. Why do you ask?"

"Because Endicott was killed by a bullet."

Hansen's Nordic young face grew very red and then very white. Cassidy showed nothing of what he was thinking—certainly nothing of the sickening, puzzled worry that clamped his chest—except that there was a tight clenching of his hands.

"Too bad," Cassidy said.

"Yes," agreed Dr. Worth, "it is too bad."

"You're sure, sir?"

Dr. Worth grew icily formal. "Quite," he said. He was also getting good and mad. This was the sort of thing, he told himself angrily, that taxpayers shelled out their money for. Protection! It was enough to make anybody laugh. A lot of protection the police force of New York City had been for Endicott. They'd shot him—that's what.

"But I don't see how——"

"Officer, there is no mistaking the difference be-

tween a bullet wound and one made by a knife. In this case especially it is perfectly obvious. I dare say the charge against you two men will be just technical —accidental homicide in line of duty!"

Dr. Worth did permit himself one short laugh.

"I guess so, Doctor," Cassidy said.

"And is there anything that has to be done, Officer?"

"In what way, sir?"

"Why, a report made to the medical examiner?" Dr. Worth became almost airy in his mounting anger. "This sort of starts the whole thing over again, doesn't it? I mean, won't the medical examiner have to come back up and investigate before we can move the body and—oh, well, you know the line."

"Maybe so, sir." Cassidy's face was the colour of a red tile brick. "Cripes, but I wish the lieutenant was here."

"I understand that he will be here any minute."

"You've heard from him, sir?"

Dr. Worth felt that if he didn't apply the brakes he would become positively light-headed. "Oh, yes, yes, indeed, Officer. He called up to warn me that my patient was going to be murdered and suggested that I run downstairs and stop it. Murder? Fiddlesticks—it's beginning to graduate into a catastrophe."

"What has happened here?"

Lieutenant Valcour, very pale, still very weak, and with an improvised bandage around his head, had come unobserved into the room.

"You can see," Dr. Worth said with almost insulting distinctness, "for yourself."

Dr. Worth then went on to expand. He related in detail his version of the battle—he insisted that it was a battle—which had just taken place.

Entirely apart from the natural discomfiture of his head, Lieutenant Valcour was feeling desperately glum. Under no light, no matter how favourable, could his handling of the case be considered a success. He had to his credit one slap on the face, a good crack on the head from a lead slug, and now it seemed that the very man whom they had been ordered to guard had been shot and killed by his own men. That, at least, was the impression the angry bee talking to him was obviously trying to give. Oh, it would be a *cause célèbre* all right, but he shuddered to think of just what it would be celebrated for.

"This," he said, "is nonsense."

Dr. Worth was by now thoroughly acid.

"I am glad that you are able to find in the miserable situation some element of humour, Lieutenant."

"Humour? Not humour, Doctor. I am just trying to say that the probability of Endicott's having been shot by one of my men is nonsense."

"Would it convince you, sir, were I to remove the bullet and let it speak for itself? Imperfections in the barrel leave their markings, don't they? You can then doubtless determine which one of these two young men fired the unhappy shot."

"Please don't get irritated, Doctor. I'm not trying to annoy you or to be funny. It's simply that I cannot see—just where is the wound located, Doctor?"

"In the chest."

"Cassidy, where were you and Hansen standing?"

"We was crouched on the floor just inside the room, sir—not over five feet off from Hollander," Cassidy said.

"Then consider your angles, Doctor. There's Endicott—there's about where my men were crouched. It would take pretty wild shooting for either of them to hit Endicott in the chest. In fact, one might almost consider it impossible."

Dr. Worth still hovered around zero. "From the number of innocent bystanders whom one reads about in the newspapers as having been shot down by the police——"

"That is an unfair comparison, Doctor. Those cases you refer to have all involved a chase of some sort—rapid motion—streets cluttered up with people. There was nothing like that here. I'm going to call up Central Office and ask permission for you to remove the bullet and determine the angle of its path."

"Permission, sir? And do you think it is my business or my pleasure to go probing about for bullets and determining the angles of their paths? I happen to be a specialist, sir——"

"Yes, yes, Doctor. But right now it is your business to do just that. We must have the information immediately."

"And why so, sir?"

"Because if the calibre of the bullet that killed Endicott differs from the ones in the guns of my men, or if the angle of its course proves conclusively that it could not have been fired by one of them, then the murderer is still loose about the house. He couldn't have escaped, you see, as the guards are still on duty down below."

. . . Then the murderer is still loose about the house . . .

The chilling possibilities of the statement served a good deal to cool Dr. Worth's steaming indignation. He was getting tired with being angry, anyway.

"I'm sorry I have been impatient, Lieutenant. You may be quite right, and I'll be glad to help you in any way that I can."

"Thank you, Doctor. I'll telephone Central Office from downstairs, as I want to instruct the men on guard down there to be doubly careful. If you'd care to start in probing it will be quite all right. I'll explain everything to the medical examiner. It's something, you see, that we must know. Cassidy, you and Hansen are not to leave this room, Search both it and Hollander for a gun."

"Yes, sir."

Lieutenant Valcour went out, and Dr. Worth proceeded, with the aid of Nurse Murrow, to probe.

The room had an air about it of a shambles. Cassidy and Hansen, having searched for a gun and found none, leaned dispiritedly against the wall near the chest on which Hollander was lying. They felt a measured sense of relief—had felt it, in fact, from the moment when Lieutenant Valcour had come into the room. Each knew he could never have fired that shot which had killed Endicott. And each was reasonably certain that the other couldn't have, either.

They could determine nothing from Dr. Worth's face as to how the examination was going. Neither of them looked very closely at what he was doing. Their

wonderings ran along parallel lines: Hollander couldn't have had a gun or they'd have seen it or found it during their recent search. None of their shots could have gone so hopelessly wild as to have hit Endicott. But somebody did have a gun, and Endicott had been shot by it. But there had been nobody in the room with Endicott except themselves and Hollander. And Hollander couldn't have had a gun, or they'd have seen it . . . the perfect loop continued on and on. Each made the circle in his thoughts and then started in all over again. If Lieutenant Valcour hadn't reëntered the room, and if Dr. Worth hadn't just then extracted the bullet, they probably would have gone mildly mad.

"Everything's all right, Doctor," Lieutenant Valcour said. "The medical examiner was only too pleased at your kindness in helping him out. He won't be up again to-night unless I send for him. He asked me to thank you."

"Not at all, Lieutenant." Dr. Worth showed considerable excitement. "You know, it's surprising. I don't know much about the calibre of bullets, but I think you're right about the angle. Here's the bullet."

Lieutenant Valcour inspected a leaden pellet curiously and then slipped it into a pocket.

"It isn't from one of our guns, Doctor," he said.

"I'm not surprised, Lieutenant—not surprised at all. Because the angle it entered at—why, damn it, Lieutenant, it must have been fired from some place over there."

Dr. Worth indicated a problematic area which included the corner where Hollander was stretched out. Lieutenant Valcour looked just above Hollander at the window. It was the window which had been opened about six or seven inches from the bottom by Nurse Murrow so that the air for her patient would be quite fresh and clear.

It was still open.

And outside of it, as Lieutenant Valcour very well knew, ran the shallow balcony which offered not only adornment to the rear of the house but a passageway to—and from—the windows of Mrs. Endicott's room.

But Mrs. Endicott was under the influence of a narcotic, and a nurse and a maid were both in the room with her.

But were they? . . .

CHAPTER XVIII

3:00 *a. m.*—Thin Haze of Dread

DR. WORTH, too, was staring at the black, impenetrable rectangle left by the opened window. It was a passageway for air, but infinitely more so was it a passageway leading to obscure recesses of the night: recesses that seemed to offer a maleficent sanctuary to hell-born secrets of distorted souls.

Who had crept along that balcony and fired that shot?

The apparent improbability of anyone from Mrs. Endicott's room having done so transplanted the problem from clear fields of logic and of simple facts into vague regions of absurd conjecturings which stared wanly out at Lieutenant Valcour through baffling curtains of darkness and of fog.

He felt a definite sense of uncertainty, and—as one does when confronted by a suggestion of the unknown—an impalpable dread. It was nothing that he could put his finger on; it seemed, absurdly, some emanation from the outer night creeping in through

that rectangle of black to hang in thin hazes about the room.

"What would you suggest doing with Hollander, Doctor?" he said.

Dr. Worth, whose own thoughts had been warily browsing in disagreeable pastures, sought relief in professional preciseness.

"He would be better off in a hospital, Lieutenant. I consider his constitution to be more than sufficiently strong to obviate any danger in moving him. Are you going to arrest him?"

Lieutenant Valcour smiled faintly. "He is under arrest now, Doctor. I should like to get a few things straightened out, though, before booking him on any definite charge. Would it hurt him very much to talk with me before he is taken to the hospital?"

"Not if it weren't for too long."

"Could you give him something to revive him—to brace him up?"

"Certainly."

"Then I will have a man send for an ambulance, and I'll just talk with Hollander until it gets here."

"That will be all right."

"And if you don't mind, Doctor, I should like to be alone with him. Just he and I and—Endicott."

Dr. Worth was already busied with restoratives.

"Certainly," he said. "Miss Murrow and I will be outside, if you want to call us."

"Cassidy," Lieutenant Valcour said, "wait outside in the hall, and you, Hansen, go downstairs and telephone for an ambulance. Let me know as soon as it gets here."

And in a moment Lieutenant Valcour found himself alone in the room with Endicott, with Hollander, and with those curious mists that hinted at unnamed dreads.

The restoratives were effective, and Hollander opened his eyes upon a stranger who was sitting on a chair beside the mahogany chest. He wondered idly who the stranger was. The drug which Dr. Worth had given him made him feel rather alert and smart. Any sense of pain was completely deadened. His eyes travelled leisurely about the room and hesitated at a sheet-covered object on the bed. That would be his friend called Endicott. His lids closed sharply as a reaction to some wound that was not physical.

Lieutenant Valcour stared thoughtfully down at Hollander's pale face.

"What did you do with Endicott's hat?" he said.

Hollander opened his eyes again in bewilderment. "I don't know what you're talking about," he said. "And who are you, anyhow?"

"I'm Lieutenant Valcour, Mr. Hollander. We've talked together over the telephone. The hat I'm referring to is the one that Endicott must have been wearing, or carrying in his hand, or that was some place near him when you attacked him shortly after seven this evening."

"I didn't attack him, Lieutenant." Hollander's lips were peaked-looking and didn't move very much when he talked. "I wasn't in this house until a little after one-thirty this morning—after you had called me up."

"Which did you think Mrs. Endicott would really do, Mr. Hollander?"

Hollander tried painfully to concentrate. He felt the need of being very careful of his footing: they were on dangerous ground.

"Do?"

"Yes—when she told you during tea at the Ritz that she had about reached the end and was either going to kill Mr. Endicott or commit suicide. Or didn't you really believe either?"

It seemed impossible that Hollander's face could grow any paler.

"You're crazy, Lieutenant."

"All sorts of people tell me so lots of times, Mr. Hollander. Did you have to wear Endicott's hat

when you went out because you had lost your own?"

Hollander sighed fretfully. "You must think I'm awfully dumb," he said.

"Oh, not at all—well, in a few things, yes. Your choice of friends, for example. And I don't mean the Endicotts."

"Whom do you mean, Lieutenant?"

"That dark-eyed child, for one—Mr. Smith. But perhaps you don't know that his name is not Smith. I imagine that when you left him in the apartment he was still either Jack Perry or Larry Nevins. He shows great versatility, really, in his adoption of names. I was just a little surprised and disappointed at his present selection of Smith."

"You've been to my apartment, Lieutenant?"

"Yes. I had quite an enlightening talk with the present Mr. Smith. Where did you leave Endicott's hat?"

Hollander, after one peevish glare, shut his eyes.

"I can tell you pretty well what happened, you see, except for that," Lieutenant Valcour went on. "You *did* believe Mrs. Endicott this afternoon when she told you her intention. That much is fact. And now for a little fiction: either at the Ritz, or just as you were handing her into her car, you stole her purse."

Hollander's eyes snapped open and glared viciously.

"Because," Lieutenant Valcour continued, "you wanted her keys—the keys to this house. You were a little hazy as to just what it was you intended to do, but you did know that you were going to kill Endicott, and that you were going to do it before his wife either committed suicide or killed him herself. You went to your apartment and got the stiletto. Then you came back here, let yourself in with Mrs. Endicott's keys, came up to this floor and into this room. You may have been in several of the other rooms first: I don't know. Nor do I know just what you were searching for while you waited in here, either. Mrs. Endicott herself will tell me all about that later. At any rate, you were going through Endicott's clothes in that cupboard when you heard him coming. You closed the cupboard door. You were naturally nervous and upset—everyone is when contemplating or committing a crime. You were afraid there would be some slip, so you disguised yourself with dust smeared on your face. Then, either because you made some noise or else because he wanted to get something Endicott opened the cupboard door and saw you. You must have had the stiletto all ready in your hand and have looked pretty horrible altogether, because the shock of seeing you stopped his heart and he crumpled to the floor."

Hollander's eyes began to look feverish.

"His falling like that startled you," went on Lieutenant Valcour. "You felt his heart, and in pulling open his overcoat so that you could get your hand inside you ripped off the top button. What did you do with it?"

Hollander grinned faintly. "Swallowed it," he said.

Lieutenant Valcour flushed a little. "You probably put it in your pocket. You were satisfied that Endicott was dead—miraculously dead—and that you hadn't had to stab him. But he *was* dead, and you experienced the natural panic of all murderers. I don't mean that you went wild, or anything. But your mind didn't function correctly. You may have been quite calm, but it wasn't a calmness based on intelligence. You dragged Endicott into the cupboard and closed the door. You washed the dirt from your hands and face in the bathroom, combed and brushed your hair, wiped the silver clean, and then printed that curious note which Mrs. Endicott found, and which contained no significance other than to direct suspicion to some outside agency in order to shield her from becoming a suspect herself. But why did you take Endicott's hat, and where did you put it?"

"You're talking bunk, Lieutenant."

"On the contrary, Mr. Hollander, those were the moves which were made here to-night—whether you were the person who made them or not."

"Yes?"

"Yes. And it is quite within the range of possibility that if you didn't make them, then Mrs. Endicott did."

Hollander looked very worried, very tired.

"You're bluffing, Lieutenant," he said.

"And you're a very frightened man, Mr. Hollander."

"Are you going to arrest Mrs. Endicott?"

"That depends."

"Because she didn't do it."

"Why didn't she, Mr. Hollander?"

"Because she loved her husband."

"I wish you would explain to me how it is that she loved him so much that she wanted either to commit suicide or else kill him."

"Pride, Lieutenant."

Lieutenant Valcour tested the possibility of that angle. It could not, he felt, be ignored. As many outrages were yearly committed under the goadings of pride as there were committed because of jealousy and hate.

"You believe, Mr. Hollander, that the other

women whom her husband played around with hurt her pride so keenly that her love became coloured with hate?"

"Why not?" A certain fierceness crept into Hollander's voice. His eyes were shining very brightly. "People don't know her as I know her. *Nobody* knows her the way I know her."

Lieutenant Valcour shrugged. "She made you hate your friend—a man you'd been through the war with—whose life you had saved."

"That's the bunk, Lieutenant."

"But you did, didn't you?"

"Oh, sure, it's all true enough, about it happening—but that stuff doesn't last."

"Friendship?"

"Among men? Hell, no." Hollander jerked his head fretfully. "Gratitude gets damned tiresome, Lieutenant, not only to give it but to get it."

"Especially," Lieutenant Valcour said gently, "if a woman comes between."

"No—no—no."

There was a complete and very convincing finality in the three negations.

"But you do love Mrs. Endicott."

"I worship her."

"And she?"

"I don't know." There was nothing obscure in Hollander's expression now, and his eyes were frankly, genuinely sincere. "Why should she? I'm nothing. Herbert was everything."

Lieutenant Valcour almost regretted having to do so when he said, "Then why, Mr. Hollander, does she address you in her notes as 'Tom, darling'?"

Hollander didn't answer for a minute. He considered the question quite seriously. "I guess it's just because she's sorry for me," he said.

"And I, personally, think that that's a pretty bum guess."

"No—listen here, Lieutenant . . ."

Hollander's voice began to wander. His sentences became broken—meaningless. It was with a sense of relief that Lieutenant Valcour saw the door open and two stretcher carriers come in followed by Dr. Worth and the ambulance surgeon. Hollander, as they carried him out, was unconscious again.

Lieutenant Valcour detained Dr. Worth at the door.

"There is something I should like to ask you," he said.

CHAPTER XIX

3:15 *a. m.*—The Properties of Horror

"DOCTOR," Lieutenant Valcour said, "our immediate concern is to find out who fired that shot. The principal reason is quite academic: we want to catch and arrest the person who did it. A secondary reason is that many people who reach the state of mental unbalance where they are impelled to commit murder don't stop with the crime. They've tasted blood. They are in a state of abnormal acuteness, and are driven by a new fear: that of discovery and capture. To prevent being captured, they reason, why not kill again? There is nothing to be lost. You see, they can only be electrocuted once. I am presupposing, of course, that the criminal is an outsider—some person at present hidden in the house, who will make some desperate effort at escape. It is a supposition that must be entertained, even though it is not a very good one. I believe that the facts will eventually prove the criminal to be a legitimate inmate."

"That narrows the field, doesn't it, Lieutenant, to whoever was in Mrs. Endicott's room?"

"It does, unless somebody dropped a rope ladder from an upstairs window and got onto the balcony in that way. But I don't put much stock in those tricks, Doctor, any more than I do in sliding panels and trapdoors. Outside of the badger game I've never come across a sliding panel in my life, and I don't ever expect to, either."

Dr. Worth was inclined to take the idea more seriously. "But a rope ladder—there might very well be one around the house for an emergency fire escape."

"All right, who was in the room just above this one? You. Did you come down a rope ladder and shoot Endicott?"

"God's truth—my dear man——"

"Oh, be sensible, Doctor, of course you didn't. And who had the room across the hall from you, which also is above the balcony? Mrs. Siddons, the housekeeper. If you saw her, you'd scarcely picture her as hurrying up and down a rope ladder. No, Doctor, whoever was on that balcony came from Mrs. Endicott's room. We're back to the same three people: Mrs. Endicott, her maid, and her nurse."

"But Mrs. Endicott is out of the question, Lieutenant. She is still under the influence of the narcotic I gave her."

"How about the nurse, Doctor? Have you known her long?"

"Known her? Only for the several cases she has worked on with me. But she comes from the most reputable agency in the city. How about the maid?"

"I don't know."

"She is just as good a candidate for suspicion as Miss Vickers, isn't she? Why under the sun should Miss Vickers want to shoot Endicott?"

"I'm not seriously considering Miss Vickers at all. It's perfectly obvious that whoever did shoot Endicott was either directly responsible for the earlier attack during the evening or else involved in it as an accomplice."

"That might still include the maid."

"It certainly might. I wonder if you'd mind asking Miss Vickers to come in here. I'd like to question her first."

Dr. Worth nodded toward Endicott's body, covered with a sheet on the bed. "Miss Vickers, Lieutenant, being a nurse is naturally accustomed to seeing the dead, but it will be rather gruesome for the maid if you question her in here, too."

"Very gruesome, Doctor."

"Well, you know best. You're liable to have a fine case of hysterics on your hands."

"I'll risk it."

Dr. Worth left and closed the door. There again swept over Lieutenant Valcour, with the solitude, that indefinable feeling of some lurking dread. There were voices crying out to him from the subconscious, warning him of dangers that were very real, very close at hand—but the messages were indecisive, as are all instinctive things which fall beyond the charted seas of any human knowledge.

Nurse Vickers came in without the formality of knocking. Her glance toward the bed was professional and not coloured by any sign of nervousness.

"Thank you for coming, Miss Vickers. I'll only bother you for a minute."

"No bother at all, Lieutenant."

"There is just one thing I want to know: who was in the room with you and your patient at the time of the shooting?"

"Why, I couldn't say, Lieutenant, exactly."

"Why not, Miss Vickers?"

"Because I wasn't there myself. I was down in the kitchen making some coffee. I left Roberts with Mrs. Endicott. You see, there wasn't anything that had to be done except just to be there. I'm sure it was quite all right."

"Of course it was. I'm not suggesting for a minute,

Miss Vickers, that I thought otherwise." Lieutenant Valcour studied the woman for a second and then said, "I just wanted to know if you could help me check up on the number of shots that were fired."

"I didn't hear any shots at all, Lieutenant, 'way down there in that kitchen."

Lieutenant Valcour wondered at this. The sound of one shot might well have been heard down in the kitchen: the shot which had killed Endicott and which had been fired from the balcony. The sound would surely have travelled clearly in the still night air and to the kitchen from outside. And yet he believed Nurse Vickers implicitly in her statement that she had heard no shot. There was no earthly reason why she should lie about it. The fact convinced him that whoever had fired had held the pistol inside of the window. He glanced at the sash and realized that the opening afforded plenty of room for a hand holding a gun to reach through.

"No," he said, "I suppose you couldn't have heard anything at all. Maybe Roberts can help me. She was in the room, wasn't she, when you came back?"

"Oh, yes, Lieutenant, and terribly excited about the shooting. She seemed so upset, in fact, that if there hadn't been so many much more important

things for Dr. Worth to attend to, I'd have asked him to give her something to quiet her."

"One can hardly blame Roberts," Lieutenant Valcour said. "The fusillade must have been quite a shock, you know. And then everyone's nerves are on edge to-night anyway. In just what fashion was she upset, Miss Vickers? From your professional experience, I mean, you probably could diagnose her actions. Was it fright—nervous shock?"

"Oh, fright, of course, Lieutenant. I've seen lots of nervous and hysterical people during my work but never one as badly off as she was. I'm not exaggerating one bit when I say that she was gripped with an hysterical sort of terror."

"Really. As bad as that?"

"Why, I was almost afraid even to let her stay in the room with the patient. The poor creature actually seemed to blame Mrs. Endicott in some fashion for what had happened. Just imagine this, Lieutenant: when I came in she was literally leaning over the bed and shaking her fist at Mrs. Endicott."

"You are quite certain of this, Miss Vickers?"

"I saw it with my own eyes, Lieutenant."

"And was Roberts saying anything?"

"Just the jumble that people go in for when they're hysterical."

"You couldn't catch anything connected?"

"I didn't try, Lieutenant. I had to get her away from the bed and calm her down."

"You were able to?"

"I was. She calmed down quite suddenly and became perfectly normal again. I persuaded her to run downstairs and make herself a good bracing cup of tea."

"Possibly carrying the pistol with her," Lieutenant Valcour thought bitterly, "to hide it in some place where it might never be found."

"Did she come back into the room afterward?" he said.

"Well, not really, Lieutenant. I know how particular you police officers are about the littlest details. She just stopped at the door to tell me she was feeling all right again. She said she was going upstairs to her room to take a little rest."

"And you're quite sure, Miss Vickers, that you can't recall any of the words that Roberts was saying when you found her leaning over the bed?"

"I would if I could, Lieutenant. It was just a jumble. Ice—something about 'ice and human hearts.' Then she switched to 'searing flames' and I don't know what all else."

"Would it bother you very much to go up to her

room and see whether she's in condition to come down here for a few minutes?"

"Why, not at all. I'd be glad to."

"Thank you, Miss Vickers. You've helped me tremendously. Oh, there's just one thing, Miss Vickers."

Miss Vickers paused at the doorway.

"Yes, Lieutenant?"

"When you came back upstairs from the kitchen, did you notice anything about the atmosphere of Mrs. Endicott's room?"

"Why—I don't know—you mean a sense of tension or something?"

"No, I don't. I mean was it as warm as when you left it, or cooler, or what?"

"Yes, I do, too—it was cooler—*much*. Because I remember after I quieted Roberts I went over to one of the radiators to see if the heat was still turned on. I thought Roberts must have turned it off, although I couldn't for the life of me see why. But the radiator was quite hot, so I realized it must have been just the change from the kitchen. It's a hot kitchen."

"That is probably just what it was. Would you send Roberts to me now, please?"

"I will, Lieutenant."

"Thank you."

Miss Vickers went out and closed the door.

Lieutenant Valcour then did a rather horrible thing. He went over to the bed and pulled down enough of the sheet so that Endicott's face was exposed.

And then he sat down and waited for Roberts.

CHAPTER XX

3:24 *a. m.*—On Private Heights

"You wanted to see me, Lieutenant?"

She *had* been under a strain, and a rather terrible one. There wasn't any doubt about that. It was emotion, after all, that brought age, not years, thought Lieutenant Valcour as he glanced at the dark rings so clearly visible beneath her tragic eyes.

Roberts hadn't looked toward the bed—yet—but then he hadn't really expected that she would. Perhaps she wouldn't look for some time, but eventually she would lose some portion of that really splendid self-control that she was exerting and then, instead of the expanse of white sheet she had been expecting, there would be Endicott's face. . . .

"I wonder if you could tell me, Miss Roberts, the number of shots that were fired during the shooting."

"I'm sure I couldn't."

She was pointedly on guard, her eyes held at a level that included his cravat but went no higher.

"The question isn't as silly a one as it seems,"

Lieutenant Valcour said. "I don't suggest for a minute that you counted the shots as they were being fired, actually, but it's quite within possibility that your subconscious mind really did that very thing, and that on consciously thinking about it the number might come to you. It's something along the principle of visualizing sound."

"I'm sorry. I'm sure that no amount of thinking about it would clear the rather terrible confusion of that moment."

"Won't you sit down?"

"I prefer to stand, thank you."

"Just as you wish. You were with Mrs. Endicott, weren't you, when it happened?"

"Yes."

Lieutenant Valcour admired the accomplished ease with which the word had so unhesitatingly been brought out; but then most women, in his estimation, were natural-born liars. The art formed for him one of their greatest charms.

"You were sitting down beside the bed?" he wenr on.

"Yes. Reading."

Splendid—splendid—shewas a Bernhardt—a Duse.

"And Miss Vickers?"

"She was down in the kitchen making some coffee."

"Did the shooting upset you, Miss Roberts?"

"I'm naturally nervous. The sound of firing has always disturbed me terribly." Then she flung at him abruptly, "My brother was killed in the war."

Lieutenant Valcour both looked and felt genuinely consoling. He also felt a selfish measure of irritation. The statement was such a perfect period mark. When a young woman, no matter how great a criminal, potentially, announces flatly that her brother has been killed during the war, one can't ride over the fact roughshod.

"Was there anyone whom you loved killed in the war, Lieutenant?"

She was determined to hammer at the point, it seemed. He wished that she would stop.

"There wasn't, Miss Roberts."

"Then you don't know much about soldiers.'"

"No, not much, really."

"I don't mean soldiers—or the war itself, either. It's a state of being—a sort of lucid abnormality. It's hard to tell you just what I do mean. But it's the thing," she ended fiercely, "that made me understand Mr. Endicott. He never quite recovered, you see, from being a soldier."

"And perhaps it also made you understand why Mrs. Endicott misunderstood him?"

Things were going better now; the channel was broadening into useful seas.

"Of course it was," Roberts said. "She, too, lost no one in the war."

The fog rolled in again.

"I'm afraid I'm not following you very clearly."

"It's quite useless, Lieutenant—simply that in Mr. Endicott I kept seeing my brother. I suffered for him to the extent I would have suffered for my brother had my brother been in similar circumstances."

"Suffered?"

"Yes, suffered. From her damned superiority."

"You think that Mrs. Endicott overdid the mental?"

He noted that Roberts was slowly losing control. There was a blazing quality of anger creeping into her eyes.

"Lieutenant, she regarded that man as her tame tiger. You realize how strong he must have been physically."

"Very strong."

"It used to please her to control him—you know the way it's commonly expressed—with a 'word.'"

"I shouldn't exactly say that she had succeeded."

"The other women?"

"Yes."

"She didn't care about that. If anything, it satisfied her sense of power. She looked on them as a pack of shoddy substitutes that he could fool with, kick around, and treat terribly, if he liked. But she still remained the original—the unapproachable—the happy possessor of a tame tiger. He was always *hers*, you see, no matter what it was he had done. She's had him crying."

"That's a little hard to believe."

"It's the truth. He took her in his hands one night and twisted her—just like that! She didn't say a thing to him. For a month afterward he went around the house like a whipped cat. Then she said something kind to him, and he cried. I wish she was in hell."

"Perhaps she is, Miss Roberts—just that."

"She won't stay in it long. Her kind doesn't."

Lieutenant Valcour held his eyes thoughtfully directed toward the bed.

"Tell me, Miss Roberts, do you think that Mr. Endicott is happier dead? Let me put it in this fashion: if Mr. Endicott had really been your brother, would you rather have seen him dead than living in the emotional hell you picture Mr. Endicott as having lived in?"

His gaze retained its determined fixity.

"No," she said. "There is always a way out." It was irresistible. She found herself having to look, too. Against every advice of instinct her eyes were drawn toward the bed in company with Lieutenant Valcour's . . . peace—there *was* peace—greater than she had ever seen when he had been living—peace to a tired heart—a plain, normal, happy human heart that had been broken on the wheel of too much complexity. . . . "Oh, I'm lying, Lieutenant! I would—I would—a million times rather."

He worked very fast now, having captured the mood. "Were you thinking of all that when you stood outside on the balcony and watched him through the window?"

Her eyes clung immovably to the cold closed lids, the mouth, carved in gentle shadows; her very being seemed withdrawn on private heights. "I wasn't on the balcony."

"And I'd like to know what you did with the gun."

. . . Perhaps he was laughing at it all now, if people laugh in heaven. He and her brother. They would have met and be laughing at it all together. But they wouldn't be laughing at her. . . . "There wasn't any need to use the gun, Lieutenant."

"Then what did you do with it?"

"Put it back in the bottom of my trunk." . . . He'd know, now, the exact reason why she had done the things that she had done. People know everything in heaven—sort of an enveloping awareness—like lightning darting brilliantly to immediate comprehension at its target—target—gun?—*gun*. Her face was bleak ivory. "What did you say, Lieutenant?"

"I had just asked you, Miss Roberts, what you did with the gun, and you told me that you put it back again in the bottom of your trunk."

Her eyes, as she looked at him, were strangely devoid of fear.

"Then if I told you that, you'll find it there."

"It wasn't the wisest place to put it, Miss Roberts."

"It doesn't matter much."

"You mean you don't care?"

"Not just that. I'm speaking about the gun. I never fired it."

"Then why did you hide it?"

"Because it's illegal to have a gun."

"Then why did you have one, Miss Roberts?"

"It's one my brother gave me over twelve years ago. I've always kept it with me."

"What calibre is it?"

"A Colt .38."

The bullet in Lieutenant Valcour's pocket had been fired from a Colt .38.

"And to-night you were going to use it to save Mr. Endicott by shooting him."

"No, Lieutenant. I was going to use it to shoot Mrs. Endicott if she attempted to get near him again."

"Again?"

"Why, yes, Lieutenant. She went out of the room last night right after he had knocked and said good-bye."

"Out into the hallway?"

"Yes."

"When did she come back?"

"She didn't come back."

"Then when was the next time you saw her?"

"When you rang for me—after you had found Mr. Endicott in the cupboard."

"And you think it was Mrs. Endicott who put him there." Lieutenant Valcour thought for a moment of the broken finger nail of Mrs. Endicott's otherwise immaculate hand. "But why, Miss Roberts, should she kill her—tiger?"

"Perhaps Mr. Hollander could tell you that better than I."

"And why did you get a gun to prevent Mrs. Endi-

cott from going again to her husband, when you knew she was under the influence of a narcotic, that she was unconscious, and couldn't possibly move?"

"Because, Lieutenant, she never drank the narcotic."

CHAPTER XXI

3:51 *a. m.*—A Woman's Slipper

LIEUTENANT VALCOUR felt a distinct shock, and his eyes became predatorily alert. If this astonishing thing was true and Mrs. Endicott had not taken the narcotic prepared for her by Dr. Worth, then the bypaths one might dart along were numerous and alarming indeed.

"How do you know, Miss Roberts?" he said.

"Because when the nurse went downstairs to make that coffee I went over to the bed. I wanted to take a close look at Mrs. Endicott. Have you ever felt that desire to look closely at something that you hate very much? It's the curiosity of hate, I suppose. I put my hand on the spread, at the edge, so that I could lean down. The spread was damp; something had been poured on it. There wasn't anything that could have been poured on it except the narcotic. She'd recovered consciousness, you see, when the nurse and Dr. Worth brought her in from here and put her to bed."

"But wouldn't he or the nurse have seen her pour it out?"

"None of us saw it, Lieutenant, because she said, just after the doctor had handed her the glass, 'There's blood on that dresser.' We all looked at the dresser, of course. Naturally there wasn't any blood on it. The doctor thought she was delirious. She was just finishing drinking when we turned around."

"Didn't you accuse her—when you felt the damp spot on the spread?"

"What was the use? She never would have admitted it. I believe," Roberts said fiercely, "that I could have stuck pins in her and that she'd have endured the pain rather than admit it. And suddenly I began to feel afraid—not so much of her, as of what she might do to Mr. Endicott. She was playing a trick and I didn't know just what the purpose of it was. I ran upstairs and got my gun, then came right back."

"She was still in bed?"

"Yes. But the shooting was over, and the room was cold. The room was cold"—Roberts's voice was very intense as she drove her points home—"and her skin was cold, and her breathing was heavy from recent exertion. I think I was going to kill her. I *would* have killed her if the nurse hadn't come in just then."

"Why didn't you tell someone of this at once, Miss Roberts?"

"Would you have? Would anyone have?"

"I don't quite understand."

"There had just been that shooting—and I had a gun. I wanted to get rid of it. By the time I had got rid of it, it was too late. I couldn't say anything then without practically accusing myself of a murder I didn't commit."

"You'll stay here in the house, Miss Roberts?"

"Naturally, since I'm to be accused of having killed Mr. Endicott."

"Not as yet, Miss Roberts."

"It won't bother me." She added bitterly, as she started for the door, "You'll find me a tractable prisoner."

"One minute please, Miss Roberts. How long were you gone from Mrs. Endicott's room when you went upstairs to get the gun?"

"Just long enough to run up and back again. I have no idea, really."

"Where is your room?"

"On the upper floor—the room to the left of the corridor in the front of the house."

"And whereabouts did you keep the gun?"

"In my trunk—where it is now."

"Was the trunk locked?"

"Yes. I keep it locked."

"And the keys for it?"

"In a purse. The purse was in a dresser drawer."

"Then that gives us a pretty good idea of the length of time you must have been gone, doesn't it?"

"I suppose it does. Three or four minutes, probably."

"Nearer, I imagine, to five or six. But we don't require the actual number of minutes. The point we need is, rather, a comparison of two different operations within the same time limit. While you were going through the various movements you have described, would Mrs. Endicott have had the time to get out of bed, supply herself with a revolver, open a window, and, from the balcony, shoot Mr. Endicott, return to her room, and be in bed again by the time you came down? I think so, don't you?"

"There would have been plenty of time for that."

"You've been with Mrs. Endicott for quite a while. Have you ever noticed whether or not she owns a pistol?"

"I don't think I have. No, I'm sure I've never seen one. That doesn't prove anything, though. There are any number of private places where she may have

kept it. It is also possible"—Roberts seemed desperately earnest in her effort to strengthen each link in her accusation, for she was accusing rather than simply offering a theory—"that someone may recently have given her a revolver, isn't it?"

"Everything is possible."

"Mr. Hollander, for example?"

"A very good example."

He said nothing further, and after a while the stillness became almost physically oppressive. Roberts was finished with emotions. "Is that all?" she said, and her voice was colourless.

"I believe so, Miss Roberts—except that I wish you would tell me why, in view of your recent insinuations concerning Mrs. Endicott and Hollander, you ever suggested him as the proper friend to stay with her husband to-night. It's a little inconsistent, don't you think?"

"Very."

"Then why did you do it?"

"I have nothing further to say."

Lieutenant Valcour went abruptly to the door and opened it. Cassidy and Hansen were standing near by in the corridor.

"Hansen," he said, "go with Miss Roberts up to

her room. There is a gun in her trunk. She will give it to you. Keep it for me."

"Yes, sir."

Roberts went outside.

"Am I to consider myself under arrest, Lieutenant?"

"No, Miss Roberts. But, as I have explained, you are not to leave the house. Cassidy, come inside here with me."

Cassidy came in and closed the door. He watched Lieutenant Valcour draw the sheet up again over Endicott's face.

"What's Dr. Worth doing, Cassidy?"

"He has gone back to bed, sir. Shall I go get him?" Cassidy cast one suspicious look toward the bed.

"No, let him sleep. There's nothing just this instant. I'll want to see him in about a quarter of an hour, though."

Lieutenant Valcour went into the bathroom, opened the window, and went outside onto the balcony. The gray before dawning was in the sky, and a rare clearness was vibrant in the fresh, sweet air.

The outline of the garden down below was quite distinct. There were other gardens belonging to the

adjacent houses, too, and to the houses backing them from the rear. It was a street of gardens which bloomed, Lieutenant Valcour reflected, for the express benefit of caretakers in summer, while their owners spent the season at fashionable resorts either in the mountains or on the shore.

Lieutenant Valcour went and carefully examined with his flashlight the window to Endicott's room that had been raised from the bottom when the shot was fired. He played the light upon the surface of its glass. It was quite clean. There was no trace of any pressing of noses or of foreheads against its polished surface. Nor, on the stone sill, were there any telltale threads of silk, or any of the various clues that would serve to indicate a woman's presence.

He stared speculatively for a minute at the windows of the room above, where the curiously vindictive Mrs. Siddons was now presumably resting, or else indulging in her blank-eyed game of mental maledictions. No, he couldn't really visualize her as descending to the balcony by a rope or any other kind of ladder. A hundred years ago, perhaps, she might have gone so far as to shape a replica of Mr. Endicott in wax and then, with appropriate incantations, proceed to stick pins in such portions of it as would cabalistically do the most good. But there

was no such simple expedient left her in our modern skeptic age. It would be necessary, of course, to interview her further concerning those vague, bitter hints she had thrown out about outrageous actions on the part of Endicott toward the maids.

Even the city could not kill the fair fresh breezes of dawn. He stared at the dimming stars and wondered whether Roberts's extraordinary statement was a lie. For after all it hinged upon nothing more significant than a damp spot at the edge of a spread, and Roberts could easily have spilled something there herself to offer as corroborative evidence to her tale. Was she, he wondered, quite so smart? And from all that he had been able to judge of her, he rather thought that she was.

He would have to consult with Dr. Worth, of course, before doing anything drastic. And the doctor would probably raise a holler, especially since he had just gone to bed and would have to be yanked summarily out of it again. Well, bed-yankings were to be expected in the lives of doctors and of the police; they were expected to be perpetually on tap, like heat or water.

He made his way slowly toward the windows of Mrs. Endicott's room, carefully inspecting the balcony and sills with his flashlight as he went along.

There were no smudges, no threads, no clues until he reached the last window in the row. And there, on the balcony floor just below its sash, something blazed in the circle of his torch a bright jade green.

It was a woman's slipper.

CHAPTER XXII

4:14 *a. m.*—Tap—Tap—Tap

LIEUTENANT VALCOUR picked the slipper up and sighed. It was a distressingly leading and decisive clue, but it did not lead in a direction he cared to follow, nor did it decide things as he thought they ought to be decided.

On the surface of it, the case seemed blatantly plain: Hollander had come to the house at seven to save Mrs. Endicott from committing murder or suicide and had shocked Endicott almost to death—and just a short while ago Mrs. Endicott had shot her husband to prevent him from making a statement that would convict Hollander.

Rubbish!

Lieutenant Valcour flatly refused to believe it. And yet one had to believe that Hollander had certainly intended to stab Endicott with that knife; the point was irrefutable. Furthermore, Hollander's motives remained clear enough and beautifully simple: he wanted to protect Mrs. Endicott.

But what about her motives?

And Roberts's?

And as a kernel to the whole perplexing enigma, what had been the object of the search through Endicott's pockets and among the papers in the left-hand upper drawer of his desk?

There was nothing to be gained, however, by standing outside on the balcony and admiring the flushing sky and breathing in with the manner of a connoisseur the morning air. Lieutenant Valcour returned, via the bathroom window, to Endicott's room.

"The night's almost over, Lieutenant," said Cassidy by way of greeting.

"Almost over, Cassidy."

"And it's been a hell of a night, too, if you don't mind my saying it."

"I don't mind your saying it."

"Especially for him."

Cassidy jerked a muscular thumb toward the bed.

"Least of all for him, Cassidy."

"He may be well out of it at that."

"He is. There's a lot of beautiful tripe written about how all people kill the things they love. Metaphysically, perhaps. But with a bullet, Cassidy? Not so."

"I don't get you, Lieutenant."

"That isn't strange, Cassidy. So far I don't even get myself."

Lieutenant Valcour went to the door and opened it. Hansen was standing outside, and in his hand was a gun wrapped in a clean handkerchief.

"Roberts's gun, Hansen?"

"Yes, Lieutenant. It was just where you said it would be, in the trunk. I wrapped it in a handkerchief to keep any prints you might want on it."

"That's right, Hansen. Go upstairs now and wake up Dr. Worth. Ask him if he will please come down here at once."

"Yes, Lieutenant." Hansen hesitated for a minute.

"Well, what is it, Hansen?"

"I understood you all right didn't I, sir," Hansen said uncomfortably, "when you told me that maid wasn't to be put under arrest?"

"Yes. I don't want to do anything about her as yet. Later on we may book her on a violation of the Sullivan Law and again we may not."

"Yes, sir."

Lieutenant Valcour took the gun and went back into the room with it, closing the door. He carefully unfolded enough of the handkerchief so that the barrel was exposed. He sniffed this and decided that the gun had neither been recently fired nor cleaned.

There was just the definite odourlessness which one finds with guns that have not been used or taken care of for a very long time. So far, then, he was inclined to believe that Roberts's story was correct.

"Is that the rod that done the trick, Lieutenant?" said Cassidy, who had been keenly interested in the sniffings.

"No, it isn't, Cassidy. This gun hasn't been fired for years, maybe."

"Well, I wish it was. I'd like to get out of this joint."

"Still nervous, Cassidy?"

"No, I ain't nervous, Lieutenant. I'm just uncomfortable. It's like there was something in this case that hasn't broken yet. You know what I mean? Something we ain't so much as put a finger on."

Lieutenant Valcour knew very well just exactly what Cassidy meant. He, too, felt that same indefinable effect of impending "somethings" that were connected with obscure danger. It was an emotion, however, which required official scowlings. After all, psychic patrolmen were not considered as being to the best interests of the force. One shouldn't be allowed, really, to graduate into psychic realms anywhere below the rank of lieutenant.

"Discounting your weekly adventures between

paper covers, this is your first real murder case, isn't it, Cassidy?"

"I thank God it is, sir."

"Well, you'll get used to them after a while. Before you're called in on your fourth or fifth you'll be finished with having presentiments."

"Will they be likely to be like this one, sir?"

"That will depend entirely, Cassidy, upon just how much publicity this one is given in the papers, as well as on the supply at hand of potential victims who have weak hearts. I dare say the method will become fashionable for a while." There was a peevish rap on the door. "Ah, come in, Doctor."

Dr. Worth was just as peevish as his knock. The camel's-hair dressing gown in which he was still bundled hinted blurringly at indignant muscles that quivered beneath its loose folds. His hair was rumpled-looking and frowsy.

"Really, Lieutenant," he began, "this is getting to be beyond a joke."

"I'm sorry, Doctor, but I had to discuss Mrs. Endicott's condition with you most seriously and at once."

Dr. Worth paled a little at this.

"Nothing's happened to her, too, has there?"

"No, Doctor, nothing has. And I don't think

that just now I could stand another murder. It's about her physical condition in general. Is her heart all right?"

Dr. Worth's curiosity was beginning to get the upper hand over his grouch.

"Perfectly sound. Why do you ask?"

"Because I want to try an experiment on her."

"You want to what, sir?" Dr. Worth almost shouted it. He was thoroughly awake now.

"Not so loud, please, Doctor. I want you to let me stay in the room alone with your patient. You can open the connecting bathroom door a little and watch me through its crack, but I want the nurse out of the way. And I don't want you to make any noise or comments while you're watching. I don't want Mrs. Endicott to know that you're there."

Dr. Worth looked at Lieutenant Valcour sharply. "This is nonsense. She couldn't possibly tell who was or who wasn't there. She's unconscious."

"Perhaps she isn't, Doctor. This is what her maid has just told me." Lieutenant Valcour offered Dr. Worth Roberts's astonishing theory concerning the poured-out narcotic, and Dr. Worth was quite properly astonished. "So you see it's a possibility, Doctor, and the fact of my finding that slipper outside of the window makes it practically a certainty."

"It's the most astounding thing I've ever heard of in my life. If you don't intend to shock her, Lieutenant, I'll agree to anything you say."

"I shan't do anything rough, Doctor, like discharging a gun off near her ear, or pinching her, or slapping her, or any of the tricks which are so popularly supposed to be kept up the sleeve of a policeman. You can stop me at any minute if you object to anything I may be doing."

"Have you planned just what you will do?"

"With a woman like Mrs. Endicott there wouldn't be any use in planning anything. All that I can do in advance is to create an atmosphere and then do whatever occurs to me as being best when the proper time comes. There won't be anything complicated about it."

"Just what sort of an atmosphere, Lieutenant?"

"Well, in the first place I'll call the nurse outside into the corridor and you can tell her not to go back in again until I say so. You might suggest to her that she go down to the kitchen and make some coffee—she seems a little dippy about coffee—or something. Then we'll leave Mrs. Endicott quite alone in her room for a minute or two. If she's really faking, she'll begin to worry about what is going on. Then the door will open again and instead of the

nurse, I'll come in. She'll be pretty certain to suspect that I've found the slipper, but will be all the more careful to keep up her pretence of being under the influence of the narcotic. If she gets away with that, you know, she can always claim that Roberts herself must have dropped the slipper onto the balcony as a plant. The main thing is that Mrs. Endicott won't know just what's up, and when a woman of her temperament can't figure a thing out mentally, it about drives her crazy."

"Then I suppose, Lieutenant, that when you get her into this receptive state you'll speak to her?"

Lieutenant Valcour laughed. "On the contrary, Doctor, I haven't the slightest intention of saying a single word. Shall we go now? After you've arranged things with Nurse Vickers you can come back in here again and start watching from the bathroom."

They went outside, and Lieutenant Valcour rapped softly on Mrs. Endicott's door. It opened a bit, and Nurse Vickers looked out. She saw Dr. Worth and came outside, shutting the door behind her.

"You wanted to see me, Doctor?"

"Yes, Miss Vickers. How is Mrs. Endicott?"

"Quite comfortable, Doctor. She's breathing as peacefully as a child."

"There haven't been any signs of restlessness?"

"Oh, no, Doctor. She hasn't budged since I've been watching her."

Dr. Worth mildly raised his eyebrows. "That in itself is rather curious," he said.

"Curious, Doctor?"

"Oh, nothing to be alarmed at, Miss Vickers. You look a little tired. Run downstairs and drink some coffee. The lieutenant, here, will stay with Mrs. Endicott, and you're not to go back into her room again until he says so."

"Help!" thought Lieutenant Valcour. As a detective Dr. Worth was a darned fine doctor. Miss Vickers, as he had expected, was instantly curious.

"Something more wrong, Doctor?"

"No Miss Vickers," Lieutenant Valcour said coldly. "Please do as the doctor instructed, and at once."

"Oh."

Nurse Vickers, feeling a little outraged, vanished toward the stairs.

"Shall I go and stand by the bathroom door now?" said Dr. Worth.

"If you wish. Don't make the slightest sound when you're opening it, and don't open it more than an inch at the most, please."

"I won't, Lieutenant."

Dr. Worth, feeling very much like one of those fabulous characters he had read about in Fenimore Cooper when a child, went back into Endicott's room.

Lieutenant Valcour waited another full minute before he opened the door and went inside. He did not look at Mrs. Endicott, but walked softly over to a chair, lifted it, and placed it close beside the bed. He drew the slipper from his pocket and sat down.

There was an utter and complete hush. For three minutes—he timed himself with his wrist watch—he sat motionless and stared at the closed lids of Mrs. Endicott's eyes.

Then he began to tap the slipper quite softly, but quite persistently and with a rhythmic regularity, upon an arm of the chair.

Tap—tap—tap—tap—tap——

Mrs. Endicott's face retained the smooth expressionlessness of slumber.

Tap—tap—tap——

Her breathing held the steady depths of sleep.

Tap—tap—tap—tap——

"If you do that much longer," she said quietly, "I shall go insane."

CHAPTER XXIII

4:29 *a. m.*—A Turn of the Screw

"You needn't say anything you don't care to, Mrs. Endicott."

"I'm glad you didn't use the stereotyped formula, Lieutenant. It would have disappointed me if you had. Get me a cigarette, please; there are some over there on the dresser."

Lieutenant Valcour stood up. He got the cigarettes and lighted one for Mrs. Endicott and one for himself.

"You shouldn't have dropped your slipper outside of the window," he said.

"You shouldn't have found it."

Her eyes, now that they were opened, were admirably guarded, and her fingers, as they held the cigarette, showed no trace of nervousness.

"The slipper is of no great consequence, Mrs. Endicott. There are so many other things, too, you see."

"Sort of a wholesale strewing of clues? I never imagined you as bothering very much with clues. It's

people you're more interested in: reading their minds."

Her eyes offered an almost impudent invitation that he read hers.

"Whom were you aiming at when you fired, Mrs. Endicott, at your husband or at Mr. Hollander?"

Mrs. Endicott blew smoke rings elaborately.

"At neither, Lieutenant. I didn't have a gun."

"Then it was just curiosity?"

"What was?"

"Your going out on the balcony."

"I didn't go out on the balcony. I've never been on it in my life."

"I am not stupid, Mrs. Endicott."

"Nor very credulous, either."

"No, nor credulous."

"That's the trouble with truth: it often sounds so silly."

"Surely you realize how things look against you, Mrs. Endicott."

"Black."

"The worst of all is your not having taken the narcotic, and then having pretended to be in a state of unconsciousness."

Her eyes became stupefyingly innocent. "Is it illegal to decide not to take medicine, Lieutenant?"

His respect for her as an adversary began to mount by leaps and bounds. "No, Mrs. Endicott. But in the present case it was purposefully deceptive."

"Why, I simply disliked hurting Dr. Worth's feelings; that was all."

Lieutenant Valcour pictured her maintaining that attitude—smartly dressed in becomingly plain black, very innocent, very beautiful-looking—before the twelve impressionable and normally dumb people one finds on juries. He was grudgingly afraid she could get away with it.

"And it isn't illegal, either," she went on, "to go to sleep, is it?"

Lieutenant Valcour decided that if anything was to be gained from the interview he would have to give a turn to the screw.

"No, Mrs. Endicott, sleeping isn't illegal. Even," he added negligently, "if your husband has just been killed, and your—well, whatever state of relationship exists between you and Mr. Hollander—your friend, let us say, is wounded to the point of death."

The cigarette dropped from her fingers to the floor. Lieutenant Valcour crushed it with the sole of his shoe.

"I don't believe you."

Her voice had the same pallid qualities as her skin.

"You must have seen for yourself, Mrs. Endicott, that he was pretty badly hurt when he slipped to the floor. There was blood enough smeared around, goodness knows."

"You're trying to trap me."

"Just stating facts, Mrs. Endicott. Of course you may have left the instant after you fired and so not have seen Mr. Hollander shot down by the police."

"You are being vulgarly brutal."

"You were certainly in a frantic enough hurry to have dropped your slipper and not to have bothered to pick it up. Did you throw the gun into the garden, Mrs. Endicott? We're bound to find it, you know."

"Is Mr. Hollander still in the house?"

"No."

"Where have they taken him?"

"To the hospital."

"Please ring for my maid and leave the room. I must go to him immediately."

"I'm sorry."

"Will you please leave this room?"

"You don't seem to realize, Mrs. Endicott, that you are under arrest."

The thought stunned her. Her head fell back

among the pillows as if it had been thrown there.

"But that's silly—silly, I tell you."

"You admitted yourself, Mrs. Endicott, that the truth is always silly."

"You are actually charging me with the murder of my husband?"

"'Arrest' was perhaps an injudicious word. I am holding you, Mrs. Endicott, as a material witness, for the present."

Mrs. Endicott had recovered somewhat from the shock.

"I shan't be bromidic, Lieutenant, and attempt either tears or bribery. I'm not stupid enough to think that either would affect you in the slightest from the performance of duty. But I should like to appeal to your reason."

"You will find me a sympathetic listener, Mrs. Endicott. My wretched conceit forces me to add that I shall also be an intelligent one."

"You see, I knew pretty well what was going on from hearing the nurse and Roberts talking about it. Lieutenant, just what do you want me to admit?"

"That you were on the balcony."

"But I wasn't."

"Then how did your slipper get there?"

"It fell from my foot."

Lieutenant Valcour stood up abruptly. "You will have to pardon me, Mrs. Endicott," he said, "while I search this room."

"You misunderstand me. I mean exactly what I say. I wasn't on the balcony, and the slipper did fall off my foot. If you must know it, I was straddling the window sill."

"What stopped you from going out, Mrs. Endicott?"

"The sound of the shooting. It unnerved me. I almost fell back into the room and closed the window. I knew that I had dropped a slipper outside, but the idea of doing anything further than hurrying back into bed terrified me."

Lieutenant Valcour examined the slipper he still held in his hand. "This is a slipper for the left foot," he said. "And in that case, when you were straddling the window it is the foot which must have been on the outside. Isn't that so?"

"That's rather elementary, isn't it?"

"Quite. But it serves to prove that at the moment when the shots were fired you could look along the balcony toward the windows of your husband's room. Did you?"

"I imagine so. I'm not quite certain, really. It was absolutely dark out there."

"On the contrary, there was a glow cast on the balcony from the farthest window, which was open a little, wasn't there?"

"Perhaps. Yes, I think there was."

"And did you see anybody standing at that window when the shots were fired?"

"You mean on the balcony?"

"Yes."

"No."

"That is all, Mrs. Endicott."

"You don't believe me."

"Frankly, I don't."

Mrs. Endicott's expression hardened perceptibly. Whether from bitterness or from some sudden private determination it was difficult to say.

"Does being detained as a material witness prohibit me from getting out of bed and dressing?" she said.

"Not at all. In fact, it is essential that you do so. You see, we detain our material witnesses in jail."

He heard again, as he had heard it earlier in the night, the muted echo of brass bells in her voice. "If you will leave me then, please?"

"Just as soon as I have searched the room."

"For what?"

"For a revolver, Mrs. Endicott."

Mrs. Endicott closed her eyes. She turned on her side and faced the wall. Lieutenant Valcour conducted his search with the thoroughness and speed born of experience. In the room, in the room's cupboard, in the various drawers, beneath the different pieces of furniture, there was no gun. He took a dressing gown and placed it on the bed.

"Put this on, please, Mrs. Endicott, I want to search the bed."

She did so, without either comment or objection. She went to the window and stared unseeingly at the breaking day.

Lieutenant Valcour removed the spread, and with a pencil roughly outlined the damp spot where the narcotic had been spilled. Then he folded the spread and tucked it under one arm. The rest of the bedclothes, the mattress, the pillows, concealed no gun. He walked to the door.

"I will send your maid to you, Mrs. Endicott, if you wish."

She continued to stare through the window and to present her back to him. She said nothing. He tried to catch the suggestion in her pose. It wasn't a gesture of petty rudeness or angry spite; nor was it by any means suggestive of despair or fear. He went outside and closed the door.

And as he crossed the corridor to Endicott's room it occurred to him with shocking clearness that, in spite of the idea's seeming absurdity, her pose had suggested a very definite mood of positive exaltation.

CHAPTER XXIV

4:41 *a. m.*—As the Colours of Dawn

"WELL," Lieutenant Valcour said, as he joined Dr. Worth in Endicott's room, "what do you think now?"

Dr. Worth was finished with bewilderments. In spite of the camel's-hair robe swathing him, he had recaptured to an impressive extent his air of dignity.

"Lieutenant," he said, "I think that my services are no longer required in this house. With your permission, I shall dismiss the two nurses and go home."

"Why, certainly, Doctor, if you wish. The prosecuting attorney will probably require your testimony to secure an indictment and will want you later on at the trial, but I'm sure he will bother you just as little as possible. We realize how annoying any court work is to a doctor."

"I shall be glad to testify whenever required."

"Will you also let me know where to keep in touch with the two nurses? Their testimony will be needed, too."

Dr. Worth stated the name and address of the

Nurses' Home at which Miss Vickers and Miss Murrow could always be reached, and Lieutenant Valcour wrote them down in his notebook.

"Would it bother you very much, Lieutenant, to let Mrs. Endicott know that I have gone, when you see her?"

"Not at all, Doctor."

"I doubt whether she will require my services again." He paused for a moment at the doorway. "That woman, sir, is of iron."

"I shouldn't wonder, Doctor. At any rate, she is pretty thoroughly encased in metal. I'll send Cassidy along with you to pass you and the nurses by O'Brian down at the door. No one can leave the house, you see, without permission."

"Thank you, Lieutenant. Good-bye."

"Good-bye, Doctor, and thanks for all your assistance. Cassidy, come back after you've seen the doctor out, and stay in the corridor. I'll call when I need you."

"Yes, sir."

The door closed, and Lieutenant Valcour was alone. With a persistence that was becoming annoying, the same curious feeling of lurking danger crept out at him from the room's stillnesses. His nerves were usually as steady as the quality reputed to be enjoyed

by a rock, and the strange little jumpings they were going in for were getting that fabulous animal known as his goat.

He went over to the chair before the flat-topped desk and sat down. There was that drawer filled with disordered papers to be gone through. He removed the drawer and emptied it of its contents by the simple expedient of turning it upside down onto the top of the desk.

There were, mixed up among bills and receipts, a surprising number of letters from women. He read each one of them carefully and felt a little sorrier, at the conclusion of each, for the future of the race—not so much because of any danger to its morals as to its mentality.

He made a little group of each batch of notes from the same woman. One pile topped the list with the number of ten. These were signed "Bebe" and were addressed with deplorable monotony to "My cave man." Endicott must have been rather an ass, he decided, as well as a pretty low sort of an animal. It was all very well for Roberts to rave on about soldiers, and simple hearts, and war, and things. That's just what it amounted to: raving. What if Endicott and, presumably, her brother had had simple hearts. So had guinea pigs.

Lieutenant Valcour wondered whether everyone else connected with the case was quite sane and he just a little mad. Roberts—Mrs. Endicott—the housekeeper—Hollander—Madame Velasquez. They all seemed a little touched, and that was a sign of madness when one considered everyone else but one's self insane. But no one was ever truly normal under disagreeable and terrifying circumstances; at least, he had never found anyone who was so.

The letters were meaningless as possible clues to a motive; just a sticky conglomeration of lust, greed, dullness, and execrable taste. He shoved them aside.

He watched the strengthening light of day as it came through the window across the desk before him. Such sky as he saw was of rubbed emerald, and the backs of the houses across the intervening gardens were mauve and dark gray, with lines of lemon yellow running thinly along their roofs.

He thought of *Bohême*—dawn always made him think of *Bohême*—and hummed a bar or two of it softly. Then he thought of Mrs. Endicott, and his thoughts were pastelled in the colours of the dawn: a woman of half-tones and overlapping lacquer shades.

It became quite clear in his mind that she never

would have killed her husband. Or Hollander. That, in fact, she never would have killed anybody at all. The belief became fixed, even in face of the sizeable amount of evidence against her.

He reviewed her case, in digest, as the prosecuting attorney might present it to a jury: from the very start there was that contrary fact of her having telephoned for the police. Why? On the slender ground of a pencilled note that might or might not have been a threat, and an instinctive premonition that her husband was in danger. The prosecution would thereupon interpolate a smart crack or two on the general subject of premonitions, fortune tellings, and the Ace of Spades. They would point out that people who committed crimes which were bound to be shortly discovered occasionallly got in touch with the police in order to use the gesture as a premise of their innocence.

There were her definite admissions of intent to kill her husband—her having left her bedroom immediately upon his having knocked and said goodbye—and her recent most damaging actions in regard to the narcotic and having been on the balcony.

Motive?

The prosecuting attorney could offer a thousand. The most prominent ones would include a jealous

rage at her husband's easily proved peccadillos with other women and her own rather significant attitude toward Hollander. Yes, it would be only too possible for the prosecuting attorney to get a conviction against Mrs. Endicott, and to rope Hollander in as an accomplice. He'd want the weapon, though, to make the case complete. Lieutenant Valcour had forgotten about the weapon. He stood up, went to the door, and opened it. Hansen was standing outside, having taken his post there until Cassidy should come back from letting out Dr. Worth and the nurses.

"Hansen," Lieutenant Valcour said, "I want you to search the backyard for a revolver that may have been thrown there from the balcony. If you can't find it, search the two adjoining backyards, and the three in the rear as well. Don't wake up the people in the other houses, just get a stepladder and cross the party walls."

"Yes, sir."

"Report to me as soon as you've finished, or find anything."

"Yes, sir."

Lieutenant Valcour closed the door again. The revolver would clinch the case: Mrs. Endicott the principal, and Hollander the accomplice. What a sweet bunch of muck it would be, too. There were all sorts

of sob angles: Hollander and Endicott as Damon and Pythias, brothers in arms during the war who were transformed through the vicious caprice of a siren into Cain and Abel. Or would Mrs. Endicott spatter the tabloids as a woman wronged who had by a reversal of the usual position of the sexes taken her just revenge beneath the legendary cloak of the unwritten law? If her lawyers were smart, she would. And they would be smart, too. She'd probably have the most impressive battery of legal guns that were procurable in the state lined up on her side.

It wasn't the gun only that Lieutenant Valcour wanted. There was something else. Endicott's hat: that was it. How did the person who had been caught in the cupboard fit in with Endicott's hat? The answer came to him with the sudden clearness that will enlighten a problem that the subconscious mind has been working on for some time. The hat was the final touch to the person's disguise. And the fact would pre-suppose a woman. A man's hat would add immeasurably to any disguise adopted by a woman.

But which woman?

And why had his hat been in the cupboard?

And still there was no answer to the baffling question as to what had been the object of the search through Endicott's pockets and his papers. There

was, of course, a perfectly plain and logically possible solution: the object or paper, whatever it was, had been found and had been carried off by the thief along with Endicott's hat and the top button from his overcoat. And if such were the case, just what that object or paper was might never be known.

For the fourth time since he had been sitting at the desk Lieutenant Valcour sniffed the air. There was a faint trace of scent—a curiously reminiscent odour—all but intangible, but which he was quite certain he had encountered in some different locality at some time during the night. It was only apparent when he sat at the desk, and the deduction was reached without too much mental labour that it must, hence, emanate from something connected with the desk. Perhaps that aperture from which he had pulled the drawer——

The telephone rang sharply. He drew the instrument to him across the top of the desk, and took the receiver from the hook.

The call came, he was informed, from Central Office.

CHAPTER XXV

5:01 *a. m.*—Lunatic Vistas

THE report from Central Office which Lieutenant Valcour received over the telephone contained one definitely useful piece of information: the person who had used the comb and brushes belonging to Endicott had been a blonde and was either a man or a woman with bobbed hair.

And Mrs. Endicott, Lieutenant Valcour reflected as he hung up the receiver, had blonde shingled hair.

And so, except for the shingling, did Hollander.

Roberts, on the other hand, had not.

And where, he wanted to know, was his inspiring confidence in the innocence of Mrs. Endicott now? Precisely where it had been before. His mind began to gibber. What *was* that curious scent, that trace of an aroma? What about Hollander's roommate: the young Southerner who preyed upon wealthy women in night clubs? Had Endicott evidence that Hollander was mixed up in similar jobs, and had Hollander come to steal it, or silence Endicott? Rats!

And what were Marge Myles's address and telephone number doing in Mrs. Endicott's personal directory? And why had Mrs. Endicott been such a stupid liar as to say she had seen no one on the balcony at the time when the shots were fired, when the only apparent place from which the shot that had killed Endicott could have been fired was the balcony? . . . A knock-knock.

"Come in," he said.

Cassidy opened the door.

"There's an old dame downstairs, Lieutenant, who insisted on coming in. She wants to see you."

"Did she say who she was, Cassidy?"

"She did. And you can believe it or not, sir, but her name is Molasses."

Lieutenant Valcour made a desperate clutch at his scattering reason.

"By all means, Cassidy," he said, "show Mrs. Molasses right up."

Madame Velasquez, in the penetrating light of early morning, was beyond words. The intervening hours since Lieutenant Valcour had left her, wigless and talking to herself in her stepdaughter's apartment, had unquestionably been ones of worry. As she came into the room Lieutenant Valcour motioned to Cassidy to wait outside and close the corridor door.

Over her black sequinned dress she had thrown an evening cape of blue satin edged with marabou, and on her wig rested a picture hat trimmed with plumes. Her eyes ignored the details of Endicott's room, of Endicott's body stretched beneath the sheet; ignored everything but Lieutenant Valcour, the man whom she had come to see.

"Marge is dead," she said.

Her voice still retained the curious qualities that made it suggest a scream.

Lieutenant Valcour wearily closed his eyes. One other murder would truly prove to be the straw with himself in the rôle of the already overladen camel.

"Sit down, Madame Velasquez," he said, "and tell me how it happened."

Madame Velasquez spread billows of blue satin and marabou into an armchair.

"I don't know how it happened," she said.

"Did you find her body in the apartment?"

"There ain't no body." Madame Velasquez then added, as her brittle little eyes glittered with a strange sort of conviction, "He made away with it."

"Who did, Madame Velasquez?"

"Herbert Endicott," she said.

For a startled moment Lieutenant Valcour stared sharply down curious vistas: *had* Endicott killed

Marge Myles, perhaps having called for her just after she had written that note to her mother? He brought himself up shortly. Utter nonsense! Endicott was in this very room at the time when Marge Myles must have been writing that note and was himself in the process of being killed.

"That isn't possible, Madame Velasquez," he said quietly. "Endicott was himself attacked right here at about the time your stepdaughter must have been writing that note to you. That was at seven last evening—at the very moment he was to call for her at her apartment—and it must have been a little after seven when she wrote, as she states in the note that he hadn't come."

"No matter"—her beringed fingers fluttered extravagantly—"I feel certain he did it, and I want him punished and caught."

"But Mr. Endicott is dead, Madame Velasquez."

"That's what *you* say," she said.

Was he really, Lieutenant Valcour wondered, going mad? There seemed such terribly disturbing possibilities of fact in every absurd aspect on the case the woman facing him opened up. Who, after all, *had* identified Endicott? His wife, and that only by implication; his friend Hollander, again by implication; Roberts had seen the dead man's face, but she, in

common with all the world, was mad; Dr. Worth—what proof was there that Dr. Worth *was* Dr. Worth, or that the telephone number given him by Mrs. Endicott had been Dr. Worth's? It could all have been arranged by some clever mob. . . .

"This is folly," he said abruptly, really more to convince himself than the nutlike face peering at hin. from the armchair. What he needed was sleep—just a couple of hours of good sleep. "Madame Velasquez, that body on the bed is Herbert Endicott. Now tell me as lucidly as you can, please, just why you say that Marge is dead."

Her little eyes began to glitter with rage. "I believe she has killed herself to spite me." The knotted paste jewels on her thin fingers quivered indignantly. "She did it to make me suffer," she added, "to *stint* me."

"Just so she wouldn't have to give you any more money," he suggested.

Madame Velasquez began to weep noisily. "What'll I do, Lieutenant—oh, what *will* I do?"

He continued to regard her through lazy eyes.

"Can't you find somebody else to take her place?" he said. "Somebody else to blackmail?"

"I ain't young. It's too *late*."

"Tut, tut, Madame Velasquez."

"No, I ain't. And unless it's a case like Marge's was, such rackets take looks."

"But surely such an intelligent and charming woman as you, Madame Velasquez"—he unearthed a trowel and laid it on pretty thick—"a woman of the world, surely you can think up other cases where the evidence or proof can be faked. You know very well that you never had any real or visible proof that Marge killed her husband in that canoe disaster, now, don't you?"

"I did, too, Lieutenant."

"Nonsense. If you really did, you'd have it with you and would show it to me."

She nibbled the bait slyly and refused it.

"I wouldn't, and I haven't. And," she said, "I want proof of that trollop's death. I'll get it if I have to drag the river myself."

Madame Velasquez jumped up and ran nervously to the door.

"Then you saw her drown herself, Madame Velasquez?"

"I saw nothing, but I know—I know—what must have been . . ."

She was out in the corridor and running for the stairs—a velvet virago in blue. Lieutenant Valcour

ran out after her, and saw that Cassidy was blocking her way.

"Ring up the wagon, Cassidy, and have her booked as a material witness."

Madame Velasquez began to screech. "Don't touch me. Keep your dirty hands off me."

"Take her downstairs, Cassidy, After you've arranged for the wagon leave her with O'Brian. Then go up to the housekeeper's room and ask Mrs. Siddons if she'll come down. I'll see her in Endicott's room."

"Yes, sir."

Lieutenant Valcour slowly retraced his steps When he was again in Endicott's room and the door shut, he felt a strong recurrence of that annoying sense of some hovering danger. He even shivered a little as if at some draught of cold air and glanced hastily at the windows.

But both were closed.

CHAPTER XXVI

5:25 *a. m.*—There Was a Sailor

MRS. SIDDONS had not gone to bed at all. She remained the same amazing pencil done in flat planes of black that had left him standing with his ear pressed against the panels of her bedroom door.

Lieutenant Valcour was acutely interested in her attitude toward Endicott's body. Her glance, the instant she entered the room, had flown to it surely and accurately. There was no sorrow, no horror or fear of the dead in that glance. It was wholly one of triumph, the satisfied gazing of some revenge that was removed from petty commonplaces. Mirrored in its satisfaction were avenging hell fires, tormenting presumably the black and wicked soul of what had been a very black and wicked Endicott. After that single initial glance she did not look toward the bed again, but came over and sat with extraordinary rigidity on the edge of a chair from where she could stare out of the window at the clear morning light of the winter's day.

"Several hours ago, Mrs. Siddons," Lieutenant Valcour said abruptly, "you spoke with considerable bitterness about Mr. Endicott's attitude toward the servants. I shan't embarrass you by asking for any information in detail. There are only one or two things that I want to know—— Are you listening to me, please?"

She dragged her eyes from the daylight, from the white misty air from which she had been gathering in her thoughts the happy flowers of a seed long bedded in hate.

"I am listening," she said.

"Then the first thing I want to know is this: was there any one particular instance in which Mr. Endicott's actions toward one of the servants were especially brutal or resented?"

The coals began to glow faintly beneath the ash that dusted her eyes.

"There was one very particular instance, Lieutenant."

"Recently, Mrs. Siddons?"

"It occurred about a year ago, almost to a day."

"Did Mr. Endicott attack her?"

"Yes."

"Here in the house?"

"No, Lieutenant. It happened on her afternoon

and evening out. Mr. Endicoott's car was parked outside at the curb. He offered her a ride."

"Where is this girl now, Mrs. Siddons?"

"She was committed last year to an institution for the insane."

The ash was completely gone now, and her eyes blazed with avenging fires.

"But surely she brought charges, Mrs. Siddons?"

"She was insane when they found her, Lieutenant. She was trying to die by throwing herself in front of a motor in Central Park. She has never spoken lucidly since."

Lieutenant Valcour shrugged hopelessly. There it was again: that wretched wave of hearsay showing its baffling crest above the placid sea of established fact. Rumour had had it that Marge Myles had killed her husband; rumour now would have it about all sorts of terrible implications concerning Endicott, who was dead, and a girl who was confined in an insane asylum. And neither, obviously, could give direct testimony in accusation or defense.

"What was Mr. Endicott's story?" he said.

"That he had driven her to Macy's, where she wanted to buy something, and had left her there."

And why not? Undoubtedly Endicott had been the blackest sort of a sheep, but the case was valueless

without a thousand illuminative lights, without a whole medical history of the girl's family, for example.

"Did you know this girl fairly well, Mrs. Siddons?"

"Yes. It is my habit to know all of the girls in my charge here very well. It is my duty, as I see it, to act not only as a housekeeper, but as their religious mentor and guide."

"Then in the case of this girl, had she ever previously shown any symptoms of being mentally unbalanced?"

"There were times when I thought so, yes. Her family, you see, was not free from the taint. Her grandmother, on her mother's side, had been insane. That is what made Mr. Endicott's actions so peculiarly detestable, sir. She might have continued to live a normal, useful, happy life had he not shocked her so fatally."

And on the other hand, Lieutenant Valcour decided, Endicott need not necessarily have done anything remotely of the sort. With such a direct strain of insanity inherent in her blood no outside agency whatever might have been needed to awaken it into activity. And then, he reminded himself, the girl had been shopping. He often wondered why more women didn't go mad while shopping.

"Had Mr. Endicott any alibi for the period between the time he left her at Macy's and came home?"

"No, Lieutenant. He said he had driven out a ways on Long Island along the Motor Parkway and than had come back."

"So nothing was done about the matter officially?"

"There was nothing to do."

"Then the only substantiated fact in the story is that she was seen getting into Mr. Endicott's car in front of this house. I suppose someone did see her?"

"Yes."

"Who?"

"Mrs. Endicott saw her, Lieutenant."

There was distinct food for thought in that. No matter how far flung the tangents in the case appeared to be, they touched as a common circumference the enveloping influence of Mrs. Endicott.

"Is this girl still confined at the institution, Mrs. Siddons?"

"I don't know. There has been nothing said—no communication."

"What was the colour of her hair, Mrs. Siddons?"

"Black—the deepest, prettiest black I ever saw. They say that opposites are attracted to one another, and it was so in her case."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Her husband was a blond."

Lieutenant Valcour caught his breath sharply. It fitted surprisingly well—the motive—the crime—the fact that the girl might have retained her key to the servants' entrance and her husband have got hold of it. And her husband would readily enough have believed the talk about his wife and Endicott—husbands had a habit of doing just that. To the man's way of thinking, it wouldn't have been anything so ephemeral as a maternal grandmother who had driven his wife insane: it would have been Endicott.

Madame Velasquez's innuendoes against the true identity of anybody came back to Lieutenant Valcour with annoying force. What about Hollander? Hollander was a blond, and obviously of a different level in education and position than the Endicotts. And who had identified Hollander? Nobody. Endicott and his wife were the only two in the house who could, and Endicott was dead, and Mrs. Endicott had not seen Hollander at all, if her unbelievable statement were true: that she had not gone out onto the balcony and along it to the window from where the shot had been fired.

Suppose the man who had sat with Endicott had

just been posing as Hollander but had been, in reality, the husband of this unfortunate girl. Suppose he had been waiting outside for an opportunity to reënter the house, had waylaid Hollander and forced his errand from him, had taken his driver's licence and cards from him and had shown them to O'Brian at the door to gain admittance. . . .

No—there still arose that fundamental question: what had the attacker been searching for among Endicott's papers? This girl's husband surely would have nothing for which to search, unless it would be for problematic evidence of his wife's infidelity, and that theory was pretty thin. . . .

"What became of this girl's husband, Mrs. Siddons?"

"He is a sailor on merchant vessels." Her gesture vaguely encompassed the Seven Seas. "Where he is, or when, is as indeterminate as wind and tide."

Lieutenant Valcour did not molest her extravagance. He refrained from pointing out that few things were determined quite so accurately, nowadays, as the tides or, for the matter of that, the winds themselves. He stood up.

"Thank you, Mrs. Siddons."

"Shall I go?"

"If you will be so kind. Later, perhaps, we will go

into greater details concerning this poor girl's husband."

Mrs. Siddons feasted her eyes for one parting, blinding instinct on the bed. She stopped at the door and said, "You will never get them from me, Lieutenant. And I am the only person who knows; who even knows that she was married at all. She confided in me, and if it was her husband who did this thing you will never drag his name from my lips even if my silence should mean——" Her eyes became clouded and her thoughts confused. She wanted to say something magnificent, something splendidly fitting to the occasion which she interpreted quite sincerely as a divine act on the part of God, with that poor, frail little Maizie's husband as His instrument on earth. Even if her silence were to mean what? The words wouldn't form. They rattled around in her tired head meaninglessly: bar of justice —herself in the dock—oh, it was cruel—life was cruel, and living was crueler still. Only death was kind, sleep and peace beneath the shelter of His sweet omnipotence. She stumbled a little as she crossed the threshold and made her way, sobbing futilely, back upstairs.

CHAPTER XXVII

5:46 *a. m.*—Mrs. Endicott Cannot Be Found

LIEUTENANT VALCOUR stepped across the corridor and rapped on the door of Mrs. Endicott's room. There was no response. He rapped again, and still there was no response. He turned the knob and the door swung inward.

The room was empty.

He closed the door and called to Cassidy, who was at the other end of the corridor.

"Sir?" said Cassidy, when he had joined him.

"You've been out here all the while, haven't you, Cassidy?"

"Except when I went upstairs to get the housekeeper, sir."

"That's right, you did. Come inside here for a minute with me. There are some questions I want to ask you."

They went into Endicott's room.

"Sure, it's good to see the daylight again, Lieutenant. Will we be cleared up here soon?"

"I have a feeling that we'll be finished pretty soon now. Tell me, Cassidy, was it you or Hansen fired first at Hollander?"

"Lieutenant, Hansen and I have been disputing that very point. We all but came to blows over it, we did."

"Why so?"

"Because I claim it was him who fired the first shot, and he still has the audacity to say it was me who not only shot first, but shot two times before he so much as pulled the trigger."

"That," said Lieutenant Valcour, "is exactly what I wanted to know. You were both right and both wrong."

"Now, how can that be, Lieutenant?"

"Neither of you fired the first shot, because it was fired by the murderer over there at the window. You heard it, and thought Hansen had fired. Hansen heard it, and then heard your following shot, and thought that you had fired twice."

"That must have been it at that, Lieutenant."

"It was. The second thing I wanted to ask you about is Mrs. Endicott. She isn't in her room. Have you seen her about the corridor, or anywhere else?"

"No, sir."

"Then go and look her up. Ask the men downstairs if they've seen her, and if they haven't, look through the rooms on this floor and up above. When you do come across her, ask her if she will please come in here and see me."

"Yes, Lieutenant."

Cassidy went out and closed the door.

Lieutenant Valcour was beginning to feel very, very tired. He yawned elaborately, stared out of the window for a minute or two, and then sat down again at the desk. There was something that he had intended to do there when he had been interrupted by the arrival of Madame Velasquez.

What was it?

It wasn't connected with that wretched premonition of danger which was nagging at him with increasing insistence. But it was something just as intangible . . .

Elusive as a shadow . . .

Yes, that was it—the thing that he had forgotten: he had intended to trace to its source that faint scent which was so curiously reminiscent of some place—some thing. It had come, he remembered, from the aperture from which he had taken the drawer. He shoved a hand inside and felt around. Wedged far in the back was a crumpled letter written

on heavy notepaper. He pulled it out, and the scent became more penetrating.

It came back to him quite clearly now. It was the same perfume that had drenched the note left by Marge for Madame Velasquez up at the apartment. He took the letter from its envelope, smoothed it, and then turned to the signature. Yes, it was signed "Marge."

A knock on the hall door interrupted him, and he placed the letter on the desk. Hansen came in.

"Yes, Hansen?"

"I have searched all the yards you told me to, sir."

"Well?"

"There wasn't any gun, Lieutenant, that I could see."

"Did you look through all the shrubbery? There are some evergreens down there that I noticed."

"Yes, sir, I looked through and beneath every one of them."

"All right, Hansen." Lieutenant Valcour studied the young man facing him for a curious moment. "You were at sea for a while, weren't you?"

"Yes, sir. I was with the navy during the war, and after that on merchant ships for a year or two."

"Would it be possible for a sailor to climb up onto the balcony outside this window from the garden?"

"I couldn't say offhand, Lieutenant. I didn't notice much about the balcony when I was down there."

"Then go down again and see what you think. Let me know whether it would be an easy job, difficult, or impossible."

"Yes, sir."

Hansen went out, and Lieutenant Valcour had barely returned his attention to the letter from Marge Myles when there was another rapping on the door. This time it was Cassidy who came in. Lieutenant Valcour dropped the letter back upon the desk and turned to him.

"Did you find Mrs. Endicott all right, Cassidy?"

"No, sir, I didn't."

Lieutenant Valcour felt strangely disturbed. He had half expected Cassidy to answer in just that way; the denial was nothing more than a fulfilment of the curious premonitions he had been experiencing of some subtle danger.

"Did you look in all the rooms?"

"Yes, sir."

"Question anybody?"

"Everybody, Lieutenant. There's no one has seen hide nor hair of her."

"How about the men at the doors?"

"Each one was at his post, sir. She didn't go out."

"Then in that case," said Lieutenant Valcour, "she must still be in."

The thought was both a bromide and a consolation. Nowadays, Lieutenant Valcour assured himself, people didn't vanish into thin air; it just wasn't being done. While concentrating in his mind as to the possible whereabouts of the unfindable Mrs. Endicott, his hands were mechanically placing the piles of letters he had assorted back into the empty drawer. He had shoved the letter from Marge Myles carefully to one side. Any reading of it would have to come later, after he had hit upon some logical explanation for this sudden move on the part of Mrs. Endicott.

"He must have been some stepper, Lieutenant," Cassidy said, eyeing with interest one disappearing pack of pink envelopes.

"Quite a stepper, Cassidy." . . . Where *could* she hide? And why should she? . . .

"Each one of them piles from some dame?"

"That's right, Cassidy—each one from some dame." . . . She wanted to get out of the house, one could be pretty sure of that, and go to the hospital to see Hollander. But how could she have got past the men at the doors? She couldn't. . . .

"It certainly does beat hell what some guys can get away with, Lieutenant."

"But it never does beat hell, Cassidy." . . . And Hansen had been out around the backyards, even supposing she had attempted anything so unbelievable as to scale fences. That was absurd. . . .

"It ain't all a matter of looks, exactly—no, nor money, either." Cassidy's glance toward the bed was but half complimentary. "I've run with lads that was one step this side of being human monkeys, but could they pick them? I'll say. They had sex appeal. How about it, Lieutenant?"

"Undoubtedly, Cassidy." . . . As for the roof, it was peaked and offered no passage to the roofs of the adjoining houses. One couldn't picture her, in any case scrambling over roofs any more than one could believe that she would scramble over fences. . . .

"And the worst of it is with these bimbos that have it, they ain't ever satisfied."

"No one is ever satisfied, Cassidy." . . . There might be a way to the roof at that, from the attic . . . attic . . .

"Not ever with anything, Lieutenant?'

"Not really ever with anything." . . . Attic . . . and that curious look that one had had to interpret

as exaltation. It couldn't be possible, but still——

"Stay right here, Cassidy!"

Cassidy gave a nervous jump. The words were sparks from flint striking steel. Lieutenant Valcour's sudden spurt of speed as he rushed toward the door was surprising.

A possible solution to Mrs. Endicott's absence had just come to him with rather horrible clearness.

CHAPTER XXVIII

6:00 *a. m.*—Mist Drifting Through Mist

LIEUTENANT VALCOUR was out of the door in no time and racing along the corridor up the stairs to the floor above. Somewhere—somewhere was the entrance to the stairs leading farther up to the attic. Ah!—softly now, quietly, not to disturb or shock. Thank God the treads were firm and didn't creak. . . .

There was a window in the attic, at the garden end of its peak, not a large window, but big enough to permit the cold white light of morning to illumine the place grayly.

Mrs. Endicott's back was toward him, her face toward that window, and the light from it blurred softly about her silhouette of darkness. She had upended the trunk she was standing on, and it had placed her hands within convenient reach of the rafter about which she had fastened one end of a short rope. Its other end was coiled in a running noose about her neck.

Lieutenant Valcour measured the distance between

where he stood at the top of the stairs and the trunk. He could never make it. Some board would creak. And yet, if he cried out, or spoke, if he failed in the proper choice of a word—in fact, the least thing that startled her would destroy her almost calm stance of fatalistic poise.

He took a penknife from his pocket and, slitting the laces of his shoes, removed them. Thank God her back was toward him, and the window was there with its square of light cut clearly in muffled grays—its light with which she seemed to be holding some private service of communion—that inevitable farewell with earth indulged in by each wretched soul before exchanging its conscious lonesomeness for the obscure and problematic company of the damned. . . .

He was very near her now, himself a mist drifting s ftly through mist. . . .

Whispering—whispering—he could hear her whispering—a thin flow of meaning rather than of words, sent from the grayness to that light beyond—sent through a little measured casement out into the immeasurable brilliance of eternity. Her hands were resting easily by her side; her body relaxed more and more peacefully in repose.

". . . and if you're there, Tom darling, and Herbert, too . . ."

He could leap forward now and catch her if it were necessary, but better be safe, quite safe.

". . . it won't be heaven, dear. They have no room for such as you and me in heaven. But when you come——"

His arms closed gently about her, and her body seemed to stiffen into steel. She relaxed at once, and then stared down at him incuriously. She removed the noose from about her neck as casually as she might have taken off a hat. He lifted her to the floor.

"There isn't any hurry," she said.

He knew that she was hinting definitely at the future, when he and the law were finished with her and she would be free to book her passage for eternity again without supervision or restraint.

"No hurry, Mrs. Endicott; nor any need, now."

The "now" dragged her sharply from the mists. She stared at him with penetrating interest.

"Mr. Hollander," he said, "will undoubtedly recover."

"Yes?"

The word was clipped from some inner store of ice.

"Doesn't that alter the surface of things, Mrs. Endicott—of your intention?"

"Why should it, Lieutenant?"

"I am sorry that you choose to continue evasive."

"I'm not. It is you who see things, read things in people that are never there."

"That isn't true, Mrs. Endicott."

"What is there further that you wish to know?"

There was no compromise, no yielding, and the hardness in her voice was very definite. She looked almost extravagantly capable, too, in the smart dark dress she had put on. She was, Lieutenant Valcour reflected, one of those rare women who always "look their best" no matter what the time is or the situation; who make a point of looking so even when quite alone, and especially so, he added, when committing suicide. But he was not deceived by her hardness. There were invisible forces working within her, still stirred into turmoil by that impressive emotional ladder she must have so recently climbed in order to arrive at the decision to take her own life. If he were ever to understand this complex woman he felt that he must do so now, while he and she stood where they were in their private world—a tight little sphere of shadows sifted with mists of sunlit dust—and before they descended the attic stairs to the routined environment of daily living. He decided to attempt to lead her by certain matter-of-fact paths that would end in quicksands.

"Why did you have the address of Marge Myles in your directory, Mrs. Endicott?"

She answered with the mechanical patience of an elder explaining some academic problem to a child.

"It was necessary to take her into account. As I have already told you, she possessed a certain standing—enough of a one to differentiate her from the other women whom my husband picked up promiscuously—and the time might have come when I felt it advisable to get rid of her. Not murder—you're too intelligent to misunderstand me—there are several ways one woman can get rid of another woman that are just as effective."

"Which one did you employ, Mrs. Endicott?"

"It wasn't especially nice, but I wasn't dealing with a nice woman. I employed forgery."

This caught Lieutenant Valcour a little unprepared.

"Forgery?"

"Yes. I added a postscript to a letter Harry Myles had sent me before he married Marge. Harry never dated his letters. This one was harmless enough, but there was a reference in it to the camp he owned by that lake up in Maine. The postscript that I added changed the whole character of the letter. It made it apparent that Harry very definitely feared Marge was planning to murder him. I gave that letter to

Herbert about a month ago, when it seemed that his interest in Marge was becoming dangerously serious."

"Didn't he ask you why you hadn't produced it before?"

"Yes. I explained that I had just come across it in an old letter file that hadn't been gone through for years. I asked him whether it was too late to do anything about it—show the letter to some proper authority, for instance. Of course I knew what he would say."

"That it was too late?"

"Yes."

"But didn't he also ask you why you hadn't said something about the letter at the time of Harry Myles's death?"

"I pointed out that we were in Europe at that time and didn't hear the news until many months later, when we got back. By then the letter had escaped my mind."

"And did your action influence your husband's feeling toward Marge Myles?"

"It was beginning to. Things like that work slowly; they keep breeding in the mind until they become effective."

She had missed, he decided, her century. When

the Medicis were in flower she, too, would have bloomed her best.

"Mrs. Endicott, what was your real reason for sending for the police last night?"

"I can explain that better by accounting for my movements between the time that Herbert knocked on the door to say good-bye and you arrived. Will that satisfy you?"

"I hope so, Mrs. Endicott."

"I shan't lie to you, Lieutenant. I shall tell you the exact truth. Roberts was in the room with me, fixing some disorder in my dress. I left the room shortly after and started down the corridor for the sitting room. Mrs. Siddons, my housekeeper—I don't know whether you've met her or not?"

"Yes, Mrs. Endicott."

"She was standing at the foot of the stairs leading to the floor above. She said she had something to tell me, and we went into the sitting room."

"That was just after seven o'clock?"

"Five minutes—ten—yes. Mrs. Siddons brought up the subject of a particularly despicable affair that my husband was involved in with one of our maids over a year ago. Shall I go into it?"

"It isn't necessary, Mrs. Endicott."

"The maid was married. Her husband was a

sailor." Mrs. Endicott paused for a moment, and seemed to be sorting in her mind which facts she cared to present and which, in spite of her recent avowal of candour, she preferred to hold in reserve. "You have probably noticed, Lieutenant, that Mrs. Siddons is an abnormal woman. She is the most striking example of the religious-fanatic type that I have ever met. Her life is literally built upon the composite foundation of faith and duty which she believes all mankind owes to God. Her belief in direct punishment visited by God on earthly sinners is a fixed idea. And last night in my sitting room she told me that God was going to strike my husband and that His instrument would be the husband of that maid whom Herbert had injured."

"But if that was an act which she so obviously desired to see consummated, Mrs. Endicott, why did she warn you—anybody—about it in advance?"

"Religious fanatics, Lieutenant, scorn the idea that human agency can interfere with the workings of any divine plan. Things, for them, are ordained and are supposed to happen just exactly as they are ordained."

"But why did she warn you?"

"She came to tell me about it, she said, in order that I might be prepared for the shock. She has al-

ways sympathized inordinately with me over what she terms Herbert's ungodly actions. I asked her, naturally, to be more explicit, and I finally forced the admission from her that she had seen, or else believed that she had seen, the maid's husband that afternoon loitering about the street in front of the house. She went upstairs, then, to her own quarters. It seemed absurd."

"Then it began to prey upon you?"

"Indirectly."

"How?"

"In its possible relation to something else."

Lieutenant Valcour became intuitive.

"You are wondering now," he said, "whether or not you ought to tell me all about the tea."

"How did you establish the connection?"

"Between your having tea with Mr. Hollander yesterday afternoon and Mrs. Siddons's story?"

"Yes."

"It's rather simple, isn't it?"

"Is it?"

"Yes, Mrs. Endicott, I think it is. You won't deny, will you, that you very definitely impressed on Mr. Hollander that your determination to 'end it all' either by committing suicide or killing your husband was sincere? Mr. Hollander *was* the confidant for

your secret confusions, sort of a proving ground for reactions. I've already substantiated that theory, both through Mr. Hollander himself and his friend."

"No, I won't deny it."

"And you believed that he would do something to prevent you from accomplishing your purpose."

"I suppose I did."

"And in your naturally upset state of mind last evening Mrs. Siddons's curious prophecy concerning the maid's husband taking his revenge made more of a genuine impression upon you than you cared to admit. You were subconsciously afraid that something *would* happen—that the sailor might really injure or kill your husband, and that Mr. Hollander, when the police investigated, would somehow become involved. There was even a possibility that worshipping you as he does, when he heard of your husband's murder he might give himself up to the police and offer a false confession in order to shield you. It has often been done, you know."

"You are right, Lieutenant. I did think exactly that. The muddle of the whole thing began to drive me crazy during dinner. I went down at seven-thirty and ate nothing. I don't think I stayed at the table for more than five minutes. I went upstairs and into Herbert's room, looking for something. I really don't

know what—unless it was for some sort of physical confirmation of his aliveness by the things he owned. Then I saw that note on his desk. I hadn't the shred of a nerve left by then, and the note genuinely worried me. It was such a direct confirmation of Mrs. Siddons's story. I wasn't exactly panicky, but I felt as if things had got out of hand. I tried to reach Mr. Hollander by telephone, but he wasn't in his apartment. I began to picture converging forces: himself —the maid's husband—and Herbert as a focal point. I felt that something had to be done. Well, I telephoned the police."

"Why didn't you tell me about the maid and her husband when I came, Mrs. Endicott?"

"It isn't the sort of thing one would plunge into directly."

"You would have told me in time, then?"

"Certainly."

"And why," he asked quietly, "did you try to direct my suspicions against Marge Myles when, in view of your special knowledge, that maid's husband was the logical suspect? That's a little inconsistent, isn't it?"

She looked at him evenly.

"Do you always do precisely the proper thing at the proper moment?"

"Rarely ever, Mrs. Endicott."

"Well, neither do I. I don't think anybody does."

She adopted again that patient, explanatory precision of the teacher. "A person's actions or statements during any moment of great strain are dominated by that moment itself, rather than being any sane reflection of logical and contributory causes. At such times one clings to straws."

"Marge Myles was a straw?"

Mrs. Endicott shrugged. "Herbert had gone, as I supposed, to see her. I believed that whatever happened to him would occur between this house and her apartment, or at some moment during the evening while they were together. I'm not claiming that there was any sense to my beliefs. I wasn't feeling exactly sensible just then."

"And you would have been quite willing to have Marge Myles blamed for anything that happened rather than either the sailor or Mr. Hollander?"

"Oh, quite."

It was very convincing—her willingness, that is. As for her credibility, Lieutenant Valcour retained reservations. He started along another divergence.

"Why have you kept Roberts so long in your employ, Mrs. Endicott, when you must have known how deeply she hates you?"

Mrs. Endicott smiled with frank amusement.

"You've never kept a maid, have you, Lieutenant?"

"Hardly."

"Then you can't appreciate fully what I mean when I say that Roberts is a good maid. What earthly difference does it make whether she hates or loves me? I'm hiring her services, not her emotions, and her services are excellent. I've frequently wished that someone in my successive chain of cooks would develop a similar passion. There's something so binding about it."

He felt that she was escaping him again, that her armour was swiftly undergoing repair. In the brightening light her face shone clearer. She didn't seem quite such an enigma, after all. Nothing ever was, he reflected, truly enigmatic in daytime. It was just a tired face, wearied by any number of things other than the lack of sleep.

"I wish you would trust me, Mrs. Endicott," he said. "I'm not a bad sort, really, and I'm not trying to trap you into admissions that would prove injurious to yourself. There are still confusions that have to be straightened out. I have been assured by Mr. Hollander that you were devoted to your husband. You personally imply that your interest in Mr.

Hollander is purely that of a friend, and yet you address him in your notes as 'Tom, darling.' And there isn't any question but that he worships you. The situation doesn't fall under the heading of the eternal triangle. It's a hub, rather, from which radiate several broken and uneven spokes."

"Broken spokes." The phrase appealed to her in a tragic sense inordinately out of keeping with its flavour of triteness. But then—he had said so to her before, ages ago—the trite things were the true things. And that's just what Tom and Herbert and herself were. And the hub? Passion, she supposed, or perhaps a composite illusion of all the various derivatives of love.

"It's hard to resolve human feelings into the simplicity of A B C's," she said. "I can't just say I loved Herbert because I was married to him and because he was the first person I ever loved, or that no matter how many other people there may be later in my life I will always return to him in my heart, just because he *was* the first person whom I loved, and expect you to understand." She brushed with elementary strokes through fog in her effort to be explicit. "I love Tom Hollander, too, just as much as I loved Herbert. It isn't nice, but it's the truth. Love isn't a unit, a single emotion tightly wrapped up in

one word. It's a hundred feelings and desires and any number of little human hurts that are longing to be made well again." A certain bitterness crept into her manner: a bitterness of revolt. "The whole wretched business is too stylized. It's quite all right to love your father and your mother equally; in fact, it's held wrong not to—exactly fifty per cent. of your parental love must go to each. Brotherly love must also be reduced to proportionate fractions. The love for one's neighbours is presumably scattered into legion. But if a woman announced that this otherwise divisible quality is spent upon more than one single man——"

Her laughter wasn't very pleasant to hear. Lieutenant Valcour felt a little upset; there was something disturbingly reasonable in her attitude. Was it pure sophistry? Not really. There was a strong element of fact and truth running through it all. It was useless to parade before her the different *clichés* of what any universal acceptance of her implied philosophy would do to society. He imagined rather accurately the treatment she would hand out to them. And like most people who had got what they wanted, he didn't know even faintly what to do with it. He couldn't come out flatly and ask her if she was planning to marry Hollander, and apart from the

insight it gave him into her character there hadn't been any special advancement toward a definite solution of the problem of who *did* kill her husband, and for what motive. Lieutenant Valcour began to feel that it was he who had landed in the quicksands rather than herself.

"You have been very patient with me, Mrs. Endicott, and very kind. To an extent I am beginning to understand you. We have arrived again, but perhaps with a surer footing this time, at our stumbling block. Before we attack it, I wonder if you cannot think of any reason why your husband should have joined you up here in the attic when he found you here yesterday afternoon."

Mrs. Endicott was still too drugged with abstracts to attend very kindly to the mechanics of detailed fact.

"Well," she said, "it wasn't to commit suicide. That leaves your other nine tenths, doesn't it?"

"You mean that he must have been just looking for something?"

"There's hardly any other plausible explanation."

"But does he keep things up here?"

"He may have. This is his trunk."

She moved off toward the window, disinterested in anything further that he might care to do. A com-

plete lassitude drenched her, and she sunned it negligently in the light sifting down through dusty panes.

Lieutenant Valcour righted the upended trunk and raised its lid. There were some papers lying loosely in its upper tray. He studied them curiously until he came across a certain one that caused him to draw his breath in sharply. He folded the paper and put it in his pocket. Then he closed the trunk. His manner, as he approached Mrs. Endicott, was implacably stern.

"I want you to tell me," he said, "just where about this house you have hidden Marge Myles."

CHAPTER XXIX

6:30 *a. m.*—As Is Mirage

MRS. ENDICOTT stared sharply at Lieutenant Valcour. She was suddenly tensely alert.

"I think," she said, "that you have gone mad."

"Do you still maintain the pretence that when you were on the sill of your window and looking toward your husband's room you saw nobody on the balcony?"

"There is no reason why I should alter the truth."

"I shall be as patient with you, Mrs. Endicott, as you have just been with me. Listen carefully to me, please, and I will tell you why it is I believe Marge Myles killed your husband, and why I think you have given her sanctuary after the crime by concealing her some place within this house."

"I've no alternative but to listen, Lieutenant. But you are wrong—absurdly wrong."

"We will start with the initial premise, Mrs. Endicott, that Marge *did* murder Harry Myles in that canoe episode on the lake. I know that she has been paying blackmail to her stepmother, Madame Velas-

quez, for a long while, probably since the time of the crime itself. Well, a woman of her type doesn't pay hush money easily; she makes very certain, first, that the blackmailer really has the goods on her. Which made it simple for your husband."

"Herbert? Are you suggesting the fantastic idea that Herbert was trying to blackmail her?"

"People are blackmailed into giving up more things than money, Mrs. Endicott. I'm not suggesting that your husband was after money, but I do suggest that to further some abortive purpose Mr. Endicott held the postscript forgery that you made over Marge Myles's head as a threat. I have just found that letter in his trunk, and it is now in my pocket."

"Abortive purpose—— Don't go on just for a moment, please—I'm trying to make it fit."

"It's something along the lines of cruelty that I'm suggesting—some special cruelty."

"Perhaps. Herbert liked to see things squirm. He was subconsciously sadistic."

"He probably drove her pretty far, because she made up her mind to get that letter—he undoubtedly greatly magnified its importance as evidence to her—no matter at what risk to herself. I don't really believe that when she came here last night she had any intention at all of actually killing your husband.

What she wanted was that letter. Did you let her into the house, Mrs. Endicott?"

Mrs. Endicott smiled a bit acidly and kept her lips tightly compressed.

"Because if you didn't," Lieutenant Valcour went on, "she must have stolen a key from your husband. At any rate, she was in the house here and searching for the letter in Mr. Endicott's room sometime around seven last night. Mr. Endicott should have been miles away up at her apartment, according to appointment, and leaving her a clear field. She had planned the whole thing out pretty carefully, because she left a note for Madame Velasquez, who was due to arrive at the apartment for a visit last night. Marge implied in the note that it had been written after seven when, as a matter of fact, it must have been written considerably earlier and planted in the apartment either as an alibi or as an explanation to Mr. Endicott of her absence. It would certainly have sent him hurrying off to the Colonial in search of her. It wasn't successful, of course, as he was undoubtedly delayed because of the quarrel he had with you, and was here in the house instead of up at her apartment as she had expected he would be. Don't you see that it rather all fits in?"

"Quite. But I still fail to understand what possible connection it can have with me."

"It has every connection with you, Mrs. Endicott, because unless we can prove that Marge Myles fired the shot this morning that killed your husband it will be unpleasantly necessary to establish the charge against yourself."

"I am probably very stupid, Lieutenant, but it is incomprehensible to me why I should shoot my husband around two or three o'clock this morning because Marge Myles was searching for a letter in his room at seven last night."

"Consider the problem, please, as two separate crimes and follow it through on that basis. At seven o'clock last night we have Marge Myles searching the pockets of your husband's clothes in his cupboard. He comes into the room, and she finds herself trapped in the cupboard. He opens the door, and the sudden terrifying sight of her gives him a heart attack. She believes him dead and drags him into the cupboard so that his body will not be found until she has had a chance to escape. She hasn't returned to her apartment, you know, all night, so it's quite possible she has either taken flight or is in hiding some place in the city."

"Then I can't, as you have suggested, be hiding her in the house."

It was Lieutenant Valcour who now assumed the rôle of teacher, with Mrs. Endicott as his young pupil.

"Not under that supposition. But if she did escape from the house at that time, what have we left? You found the scrap of paper on which she herself wrote a hinted threat in an effort to divert suspicion, and the writing of which was inspired by the distraught mental condition she must have been in. You called the police, and we found Mr. Endicott. Your suspicions jumped unerringly to the man who was uppermost in your thoughts: Mr. Hollander. He, you said to yourself, had done this thing to save you. Consequently, when you learned that Mr. Endicott had been revived and was expected to make a statement, you shot him to prevent his accusing Mr. Hollander, and you arranged your alibi with considerable ingenuity by only pretending to have taken the narcotic."

"It makes quite a case, doesn't it?"

"Yes, Mrs. Endicott, quite a case."

"And the alternative? You did suggest that there was an alternative."

"That Marge Myles has never left the house at

all. That she is still here. And this is what the prosecuting attorney will offer to the jury: that with your knowledge she got onto the balcony through one of the windows in your room, shot Mr. Endicott, returned to your room, and was hidden by you some place around this house."

"All of which is unfortunately negatived, Lieutenant, by the fact that it was my slipper you found outside the window, and not hers."

"The prosecuting attorney can alter the action of the scene to suit that, Mrs. Endicott. After Marge Myles got onto the balcony you were terrified at the thought of what you had become a party to. You made an effort to recall her, when the shots were fired and threw you into a panic. You dropped your slipper and got back into the room." Lieutenant Valcour became quietly persuasive. "Which of my two theories shall I believe? I can make you no promises, Mrs. Endicott, because any confession that has been given under an understanding that there will be an amelioration of punishment loses value in court. But I can suggest to you that if you choose to make things easier for justice the act may prove beneficial for yourself. There are more unwritten laws than the common one so generally known."

Mrs. Endicott looked at him queerly.

"You don't worry me," she said, "at all. Any course that I might take can have but a common, a desired ending. The method of achievement is utterly inconsequential to me, as long as the ultimate result remains the same."

She was mounted again, Lieutenant Valcour decided, upon her hobby which carried her along indifferent trails to death. The apparent strength of her obsession rendered any further efforts on his part futile. In the attic there was, for him, no longer anything of mystery or the beauty of shrouded things. It was an ugly, littered room peopled by a smartly turned out beauty who, like a petulant and spoiled child reaching for the moon, sought further mysteries in that life which beckons from beyond life, and by a tired, oldish fellow standing stupidly in his stockinged feet away from his shoes.

"Come downstairs with me, Mrs. Endicott," he said. "As soon as my men have thoroughly searched this house you will be formally charged."

CHAPTER XXX

7:11 *a. m.*—The Criminal and Weapon of the Crime

LIEUTENANT VALCOUR was once more in his shoes. Even in their laceless condition they restored his confidence in the relative fitness of things.

Mrs. Endicott preceded him down two flights of stairs and to the door of her husband's room, which Lieutenant Valcour opened. He looked inside and saw Cassidy sound asleep, seated on the large mahogany chest by the window. And he did not blame Cassidy so much as he envied him.

"Cassidy."

Cassidy's sharp return to consciousness would have reflected credit upon the hero of any Western drama.

"Sir?"

"Put your gun back, Cassidy."

"Yes, Lieutenant. I must have dropped off for a cat nap."

"We can discuss that later. I want you to take

Mrs. Endicott down to the entrance hall with you and leave her there in charge of O'Brian. She is under arrest."

"Yes, sir."

"After that, warn the men on the servants' entrance and garden door to keep on their toes. If anyone tries to get past them on any pretext whatever they are to stop him. Look up Hansen—he may still be in the backyard—and then both of you come back here. We will then search the house."

"Yes, sir."

Lieutenant Valcour went into Endicott's room and closed the door. It was getting to be a mechanical action with him that caused him to go to the desk and sit down. The perfumed sheet of notepaper, which he had twice been prevented through interruptions from reading, caught his attention at once. He read the letter through.

I don't believe you [it began, without any preliminaries], and right from the start I tell you I think you are a liar and a louse. Harry never wrote your wife no such thing, and even if he did it proves nothing anyway. Nobody can prove a *thing*. You think it is funny to scare me and if you do it any more I am going to show you just how damn funny it is. I am through with you just the same way that your wife is through with you and you are a nasty rat.

MARGE.

Not really, Lieutenant Valcour decided, an essentially nice person. He folded the letter and put it in his pocket to keep company with the postscript forged by Mrs. Endicott. It would serve ably in establishing a motive and help the prosecuting attorney to clinch the case. Just as soon, he added unhappily, as he had unearthed the criminal and the weapon of the crime. That criminal, he repeated softly to himself, who with her weapon was still at large about the house, unless his theory of the case was basically wrong.

And therein lay the danger, the source of that curious presentiment of impending menace which had gripped him at odd intervals throughout the night. Strange that it should possess him most strongly in this silent room. But wasn't that just the association of ideas? Endicott, dead on the bed over there, and the path of that death-dealing bullet cutting through that corner over by the other window. He sought relief from a return of it by a mental mopping up. It didn't do to linger on presentiments. . . .

There were those few little side issues to think about; issues that had puzzled him, but which did not bear any direct reference to the main theme. He felt that they were explainable without any further personal investigation.

It seemed obvious to him, for example, that the reason why Mrs. Siddons had gone downstairs with her bonnet on, when the sight of O'Brian by the front door had turned her back, was a desire on her part to get in touch with Maizie's sailor husband and warn him that the crime she thought he had committed had been discovered and that the police were in the house. She had told Mrs. Endicott that she believed that she had seen him loitering about the street during the afternoon. And Mrs. Siddons would never have questioned her own ability to walk right out and find him because, if it so desired, Providence would have prearranged a suitable rendezvous.

. . . They came from that corner, really: those definitely significant waves of warning, as insistent as the scent that had led him to find the letter from Marge Myles in the desk. But they weren't a scent, nor were they anything so definite as a letter. They were (the astonishing thought thrilled him disagreeably) *Marge Myles*—her personality—herself—inimical. . . . Nonsense, nonsense—the room was empty. . . .

He forced himself to think of the two little bewilderments that had troubled him in connection with the thoroughly bewildering Roberts. That pregnant look she had given him—what had it really meant

more or less, than an intense urge on her part to erase any spell of fascination which Mrs. Endicott might have cast upon him, and to plant in its place the seeds of suspicion of Roberts's own sowing. It had been nothing more, really, than that.

Now of greater inconsistency had been Roberts's suggestion of Hollander as the proper friend to stay with Endicott; for Roberts assuredly had held a fantastic passion for Endicott—fantastic in that there was this abnormal interrelationship of his personality with that of her war-killed brother—and she had just as assuredly been convinced that a liaison existed between Hollander and Endicott's wife. There was but one solution: Roberts had never observed Hollander and Mrs. Endicott together, and she had hoped, should morning bring a meeting, that under the natural dramatic effect of the setting there might be some betrayal. A look, perhaps, was all she wanted to confirm her suspicions. And there could have been in her mind no thought of any real danger to Endicott from Hollander, for had there not been a nurse and two policemen close by on guard? Then later, when Endicott was well again, Roberts could have told him the thing which she had seen.

. . . Mental fingers, that's what they were, plucking at his nerves and forming dissonances that

chilled him queerly. He *wasn't* alone—but he must be—the room was empty. . . .

He would think of that Mr. "Smith" who lived with Hollander. Did he fit in—beyond one solid thump on the head? Only as one of the myriad side issues that cling like parasites to the trunk of each major crime. One could suppose (with reasonable assurance that the supposition would later prove to be fact) that Hollander was in some genteelly illicit profession such as bootlegging, and that Mr. Smith drummed up Hollander's customers for him among the night clubs—incidentally relieving some of the more foolish of them of their jewels. Mr. Smith might well have believed, at that moment when Lieutenant Valcour went to the telephone in their apartment, that if Hollander's goose was cooked his own might be cooked, too, and a blackjack had then seemed the simplest expedient that would insure his fading swiftly out of the picture.

. . . The room was empty—the room was empty. . . .

As for the emotional jungle of warped and sunless growths through which Endicott, his wife, Marge Myles, and Hollander had all groped their illusion-drugged way to this unhappy end—that lay beyond the punishment or acquittal of earthbound law. The proper tribunal for that must be found seated within

their separate souls. Lies—evasions—fetid depths . . . .

But *had* she lied?

Had there truly been no one on the balcony, as Mrs. Endicott had said?

The shot had assuredly been fired from the direction of that window above the large mahogany chest.

Above?

Presentiments were banished before the lash of fact. The lid of that chest was *not quite closed*. And the object that was holding it open, for the space of perhaps a half of an inch, was the small black muzzle of a gun.

Lieutenant Valcour's hand moved indolently toward the upper left pocket of his vest, in which there rested a flat, efficient little automatic of small calibre. He knew what had happened—that owing to his stillness for the last five minutes the murderer had thought the room was empty and was attempting to escape. His hand moved more quickly, but not quickly enough. The lid opened wider—eyes—a face—a little shock of alarm, of terror—all ever so much more quickly accomplished than told. The lid slammed up.

"Quit it, Lieutenant, and put your hands down flat on the top of that desk."

"You're Marge Myles, of course," he said.

He flattened his hands on the desk's mahogany surface and stared curiously at her sultry beauty as she sat on the rim of the open chest. Flamboyant, that's what she was, and terribly bizarre from the effect of a shingled ripple of bleached blonde hair above her Spanish night-filled eyes.

"You have put yourself in my way, Lieutenant"—her voice was as disagreeable as the clash of dishes in a cheap restaurant—"and I am going to kill you and escape."

"I see," Lieutenant Valcour said politely, "that you believe in threes."

"How?"

"Your husband, Mrs. Endicott's husband, and now myself. One—two—three. For the sake of symmetry it is a pity that I am a bachelor."

She enjoyed for a full moment of silence—luxuriated in it, really—the sense of power which she held over this man. She had always enjoyed the power exerted by her body, and it was refreshing to drink quietly for a while of this different sort of power, which, through the medium of the pistol held unwaveringly in her hand, controlled the services of life and death. She would shoot him soon. . . .

Lieutenant Valcour hoped that Hansen would not blunder.

He could see Hansen quite clearly now, all but pressed against the outside of the window just behind Marge Myles. So Hansen, he reflected, had found that there *was* a way to climb up onto the balcony from the garden down below. What a handy thing it was, at times, to have been a sailor. Lieutenant Valcour fervently hoped that—the usefulness of the rule having been accomplished—Hansen would promptly stop being a sailor and become a policeman. He couldn't, and didn't, expect that Hansen would shoot a woman down in cold blood, nor would Hansen dare to startle her by throwing open the window or crashing through its glass. Could Hansen shoot through the glass and knock the pistol from her hand? Maybe once, Lieutenant Valcour thought unhappily, out of every twenty times. And she certainly wouldn't refrain from pulling the trigger while Hansen practised twenty times.

"Tell me," he said, "how you ever managed to breathe inside of that chest."

"The back of it is broken." The casualness of the question had startled her into an answer.

"Your own back must be pretty well broken, too." Was Hansen, the idiot, going to smash the glass after all with the butt of his gun? Hansen was staring very intently at him, seeking advice. He all but impercep-

tibly shook his head in negation. "And what did you have in the paper bag you carried when you came here and from which you tore that scrap of paper upon which you wrote the misleading note?"

"This gun."

"You carried the gun in a paper bag?"

"I was smart, was I not? Who would think that in a cheap paper bag there was a gun?"

"Not even a disciple of the fourth dimension." Hansen was aiming now at her wrist. It was absurd—he faintly shook his head again. No—no! "How did it happen that Mr. Endicott had his overcoat on but you had his hat?"

"I wear it for a better disguise. I have the dust on my face—there is the hat—it fits well over my cloche. The effect is astonishing."

"I see, and so when Endicott came back into the room to get it he couldn't find it and thought he must have left it in the cupboard?"

"Yes—yes—you are a smart man, too."

"And you entered the house with a duplicate key which you had had made from one of Endicott's?"

"Dear heaven, yes—how else?"

It did not please her that her climax should come at a commonplace moment, when inconsequential questions were being asked and equally inconsequential

answers being given. It was not bravura: the man was genuinely unafraid. And she wanted him to be afraid. One shouldn't just dribble from the world: there should be a blaze, a scene.

Then Hansen rapped, quite gently, upon the panes.

Inspiration? Genius? Perhaps. Lieutenant Valcour's Gallic blood swept back to the nation of its source and he could have kissed that dear, that brilliant Hansen upon both of his ruddy, his intelligent, his Nordic cheeks.

She whirled as if something had flicked her. Blue serge—brass buttons—a glinting shield. She pulled the trigger.

But the muzzle of the gun was in her mouth.

CHAPTER XXXI

8:37 *p. m.*—Five Years Later

MRS. HOLLANDER thought for a moment of simply dialling the operator and saying, "I want a policeman."

It was what the printed notices in the telephone directory urged one to do in case of an emergency. But it wasn't an emergency exactly, nor—still exactly—was it a policeman she wanted. She wanted a detective, or an inspector, or something; a man to whom she could explain her worry about Thomas, and who could do something about it if he agreed with her that Thomas was in danger.

Mrs. Hollander wanted most of all a man like Lieutenant Valcour, who had so ably handled that wretched affair five years ago when she had been married to Herbert and Herbert had been shot. She wondered whether Lieutenant Valcour was still on the force, and decided to find out. She dialled Spring 3100. She grew nervous while waiting.

"This is Mrs. Thomas Hollander speaking," she said, when the same type of impersonal, efficient voice answered her as had been the one five years before. "I am 'phoning to inquire whether a Lieutenant Valcour is still connected with the police force. . . . I beg your pardon? Oh." She gave the address of her apartment house on Park Avenue.

"This is Mrs. Thomas Hollander speaking," she began again upon a second voice saying, "Hello!" "and I am trying to get in touch with a Lieutenant Valcour who—— I beg your pardon? . . . You *are* Lieutenant Valcour—Inspector, is it? But how perfectly efficient! I am worried, Inspector, about Mr. Hollander, and I wonder whether it would be possible for you to come up and talk it over with me. . . . No, he hasn't disappeared. I know exactly where he has gone, but I have reason to believe that something might happen to him. . . . Yes, I am the Mrs. Hollander who was formerly Mrs. Herbert Endicott. . . . Yes, that dreadful affair. . . . Oh, you will? Thank you so much."

Inspector Valcour smiled a curiously satisfied little smile all to himself as he sat in a department limousine, chauffered by a department driver, and sped smoothly north along Lafayette Street on the way to Mrs. Hollander's address on Park Avenue.

And he thought of many things.

He thought of Marge Myles and of Herbert Endicott, who were dead; and of Madame Velasquez who, too, had died.

He thought of Mrs. Siddons, returned to her native New England hills, sinking her body and her being into their granite harshnesses and drawing amazing sustenance from them, as a flower will that grows in the imperceptible fissure of some solid rock.

He thought of Roberts whom he had never seen again and of whom he had never again heard, after the violation of the Sullivan Law had been charged against her, and her sentence suspended. She had gone back to England, probably, to lapse into a proper background for her neurotic broodings.

And that partner of Hollander's—the Southernistic Mr. Smith. He had faded entirely, never to return; nor was the fact of any consequence at all. He had been at best a side issue too unimportant for further bother.

But most of all he thought of Mrs. Endicott, who was now Mrs. Hollander.

The annals of history and the annals of crime were fringed with women just like her: beautiful, astonishing women, who revolved with their uncertainties

like satellites about the world of normal beings, trailing their baleful, striking brilliance like an impalpable poisonous gas across the surface of every person whom they plucked and tortured within the intricate enigma of their hearts. The law never could touch her—nor could a person, either. She would escape. She would always escape, with the subtlety of mercury slipping between impotent fingers.

For she *had* escaped.

There wasn't any doubt in his mind about that. She had been the focal point five years ago in that Endicott case, no matter what the law or men might say. Her forgery of that postscript had had a deeper, a more deliberate intention than the mere breaking up of any affair between her husband and Marge Myles: it was to have been a breaking up of all of his affairs. Of him.

She was the true murderer of her husband, and not Marge Myles. She had simply spread the powder train to a suitably lethal explosive and had then applied the match. The movements of the others had been nothing more than gyrations performed by stringed puppets. And she had held the strings. Some of her puppets had died, committed suicide, and been killed. And it didn't matter in the least. The world

was ageless, she herself was ageless, and plenty of puppets grew perennially every spring.

Inspector Valcour wondered, as he descended to the curb and prepared to enter the lift to her apartment, whether Thomas had become a puppet, too.

THE SHADOW MAN

EDGAR WALLACE HAS WRITTEN THE FOLLOWING BOOKS ABOUT MR. J. G. REEDER:

The Murder Book of J. G. Reeder
Red Aces
Mr. Reeder Returns

EDGAR WALLACE, mourned in England as a lost Dickens, did more than any other person except Sir Arthur Conan Doyle to raise the detective story to its present popularity. His swift, clear, unassuming style and his prodigious knowledge of police methods gave him an audience that ran literally into millions. It read him in a dozen languages, in books, magazines, and newspapers. In England, King George bought his books a dozen at a time; in Germany grave bürgomeisters were observed striding out of bookstores with armfuls of Edgar Wallace; in America he was adopted as a national institution.

He created many detectives in the course of his hundred or so books, but few of them have the appeal of

Mr. J. G. Reeder, that mild, elderly, benevolent old gentleman who was the greatest authority in England on bank crimes, and without whom the office of London's Public Prosecutor might have found it difficult to function. For stored in Mr. Reeder's singularly acute mind were a knowledge of every dodge of the professional criminals and a recollection of most of their faces. It was his boast that he had a criminal mind and that his success lay in the fact that he could think just as a criminal thought, but a great deal faster. The thieves and murderers who had faced his sudden snarl and the blue gleam of his death-spitting Browning automatic could testify to the truth of that; so, too, could the hard-faced gentlemen of New Scotland Yard, whose cases he had more than once pulled out of failure. They looked at the old-fashioned square black derby, and the tightly rolled umbrella that no man living had ever seen unfurled, and were inclined to smile. And then they remembered that no cobra quietly hidden in jungle grass was ever more deadly, and forebore. Mr. Reeder was, as a matter of fact, the most dangerous man in England, and they and the underworld knew it.

"The Shadow Man" from *Mr. Reeder Returns*, is a blood-curdling story, swift and exciting, one of the high points of the Reeder saga. Few better stories of crime have ever been written.

THE SHADOW MAN

CHAPTER I

WHEN Mr. Reeder went to New York in connection with the Gessler Bank fraud he was treated as if he had been a popular member of a royal family. New York policemen, who are more accustomed to seeing humanity in all sorts of odd shapes and appearances, and with that innate politeness and hospitality which is theirs, saw nothing amusing in the old-fashioned frock coat, which he kept tightly buttoned, in his square derby hat, or even his side whiskers. They offered him the respect which was due to a very great detective. They were less deceived by his seeming timidity and his preference for everybody's opinion but his own than were their English colleagues.

His stay was a comparatively short one, yet, in the time at his disposal, he glided through the police headquarters of four great American cities, saw Atlanta prison, and two days before he sailed traveled by train to Ossining, and, passing through the steel gates of Sing-Sing, inspected that very interesting building under the guidance of the deputy warden, from card index to death house.

"There's one fellow I would have liked you to have seen," said the deputy warden just before they parted. "He's an Englishman—a fellow called Redsack. Have you ever heard of him?"

Mr. Reeder shook his head.

"There are so many people I've never heard of," he murmured apologetically, "and Mr. Redsack is one of them. Is he staying here—er—for a long time?"

"Life," said the other laconically, "and he's lucky to have escaped the chair. He's broken three prisons, but he won't break Sing-Sing—the most dangerous man we have in this institution."

Mr. Reeder rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

"I—um—would like to have seen him," he said.

The deputy warden smiled.

"Just now he's not visible, but he'll be out tomorrow," he said. "We've had to put him in a punishment cell for trying to escape. I thought you might know him. He's had four convictions in the United States, and he is probably guilty of more murders than any prisoner inside these walls; he has certainly the biggest brain I have met with since I had to deal with criminals."

Mr. Reeder smiled sadly and shook his head.

"I have never yet met—um—anything that resembled a brain in the criminal world," he said, with a deep melancholy. "Redsack? What a pity his crimes were not committed in England."

"Why?" asked the deputy warden, a little staggered.

"He would be dead by now," said Mr. Reeder, and heaved a deep sigh.

This was a few years after the war, and in the winter, when sailings were a little irregular. The departure of his ship was delayed twenty-four hours, and Mr. Reeder filled in the time very profitably by glueing himself to

the record department at Police Headquarters, New York, and making himself acquainted with Mr. Redsack.

He was a consistently elusive person. There was no photograph of him, curiously enough, that had not been cleverly distorted by his own facial manœuvres. It was not true to say that he was an Englishman; he had been born in Vancouver, and had been educated in London, and at thirty had a record that would have made him respected in any criminal circle and nowhere else. Almost Mr. Reeder, albeit reluctantly, agreed with the deputy warden that this man showed evidence of genius. He was clever, he was ruthless. In the bare police records and even without the assistance of an explanatory dossier, the investigator noticed three samples of the operation of a brilliant mind.

Mr. Reeder sailed at midnight on the following day. As, clad in his gay pyjamas, he climbed into his bed, he could have no idea that, five decks below him, working in the bunkers, was the man he had left in the punishment cell at Sing-Sing, and, oddly enough, there was nothing in the newspapers about this astonishing fact.

When the deputy warden had said again at parting, a little regretfully:

"Pity you can't see Redsack. He'll be out to-morrow," he unconsciously was a prophet.

It was the most daring and the most sensational escape that Sing-Sing had known. It was all the more remarkable because it was entirely unpremeditated. This happened on a dull, wintry afternoon, when a dozen prisoners were at their exercises in the big yard of the

old prison. They were watching, with some curiosity and interest, the manœuvres of a small naval airship which, caught in a half-gale, was tacking over the Hudson in a vain effort to get back on its course. Suddenly, without warning, something went wrong, and the big gas-bag, sagging in the middle, began to make a rapid and oblique descent. Its trail rope came over the wall of the prison yard, dragging along the ground and the nearest man to it seized it. As he did so, a heavy quantity of ballast was released from the gondola beneath the bag, and the balloon shot up, carrying with it a Mr. Redsack.

Whether he intended to assist in tethering the balloon, or whether he saw here the helping hand of Providence, one must guess. But the guards saw their charge carried over their heads, and could neither fire at him nor do anything but watch helplessly.

The airship drifted across the Hudson into New Jersey, came low again.

Mr. Redsack dropped. It was near a small village. Close at hand, standing unattended by the side of the road, was a dilapidated touring car. Half an hour later that car drew up before a bank office in a small town ten miles from Jersey City; a man got out, carrying under his arm a double-barrelled shot gun that he had found in the car, and walked into the bank. It was within a minute of the time when the bank closed its doors. There was nobody there but the cashier and the accountant. The latter was going on a vacation and had a suit-case behind the counter. Redsack left with the suit-case, some six thousand dollars, two Colt automatics that he had discovered on a shelf under the counter, and

the janitor's second-best overall which he had found in the cellar where he had locked the two bank officials.

At the earliest opportunity he threw the suit-case into a ditch, changed into the workman's overalls, and trudged a few miles to the outskirts of Jersey City, where he boarded a car.

He knew that the police would be looking for a man dressed in the accountant's best clothes, and that all the descriptions would favour this apparel. He had no idea where he was going until he came by ferry to New York, and eventually to the quay where the outward mail was waiting. After that everything was very simple for Mr. Redsack.

Stokers were scarce, and money is an eloquent letter of recommendation. He had been assigned his watch, and was trimming coal with the greatest industry before the ship pulled out of New York harbour.

If you told Mr. Reeder it was a coincidence that he should at this stage have been brought into contact with one of the most remarkable criminals of our time, he would have shaken his head half-heartedly and in the most apologetic terms have differed from you.

"It is no coincidence—um—that any detective should meet, or nearly meet, any criminal, any more than it is a coincidence that the glass of water you are—er—drinking should at some time or other have been part of the Atlantic Ocean."

When the people in Scotland Yard speculate upon this peculiar happening they always begin with the word "if." "If" Redsack had not been in the punishment cell; "if" Mr. Reeder had only seen him. . . .

Quite a lot of trouble might have been saved, and the L. and O. Bank was by no means the beginning or the end of it.

That Mr. Reeder forgot about Redsack is unlikely. When he reached England and went through the files the man's name was familiar. It was inevitable that his record should go down in an abbreviated form in his case-book, for Mr. Reeder despised the story of no criminal, and held the view that crime, like art, knew no frontiers.

But, strangely enough, the name of Redsack did not occur to the man from Whitehall in connection with the L. and O. Bank affair.

CHAPTER II

MR. REEDER very seldom went to the theatre. When he did he preferred the strong and romantic drama to the more subtle problem plays which are so popular with the leisured classes.

He went to see *Hearts Asunder*, and was a little disappointed, for he detected "the man who did it" in the first act, and thereafter the play ceased to have any great interest for him.

The unpleasant happening of the evening occurred between the first and second acts, when Mr. Reeder was pacing the vestibule, smoking one of his cheap cigarettes and speculating upon the advisability of recovering his coat and hat from the cloakroom and escaping after the

interval bell that rung and the audience had gone back into the auditorium.

There approached him a resplendent man. He was stout, rather tall, very florid. He wore a perpetual smile, which was made up of nine-tenths of amused contempt. His small moustache was waxed to needle point at each end; his stubby nails were manicured and polished; Mr. Reeder suspected that they were faintly tinted. His clothes fitted him all too perfectly, and when he smiled his way up to Mr. Reeder that gentleman had a feeling that he would like to go back and see the second act after all.

"You're Mr. Reeder, aren't you?" he said in a tone which challenged denial. "My name is Hallaty, Gunnersbury branch of the L. and O. Bank. You came down to see me one day about a fellow who'd been passing dud cheques."

Mr. Reeder fixed his glasses on the end of his nose and looked over them at his new acquaintance.

"Yes, I—um—remember there was a branch of the bank at Gunnersbury," he said. "Very interesting how these branches are spreading."

"It's rather funny to see you here at a theatre," smiled Mr. Hallaty.

"I—um—suppose it is," said Mr. Reeder.

"It's a funny thing," the loquacious man went on, "I was talking to a friend of mine, Lord Lintil—you may have met him. I know him personally; in fact, we're quite pals."

Mr. Reeder was impressed.

"Really?" he said respectfully. "I haven't seen Lord Lintil since his third bankruptcy. Quite an interesting man."

Mr. Hallaty was jarred but not shaken.

"Misfortune comes to everybody, even to the landed gentry," he said, a little sternly.

"You were talking to him about me?"

Mr. Reeder spared himself the admonition which was coming.

"And—um—what did you say about me?"

For a moment the manager of the Gunnersbury branch did not seem inclined to pursue his aristocratic reminiscences.

"I was saying how clever you were."

Mr. Reeder wriggled unhappily.

"We were talking about these bank frauds that are going on, and how impossible it is to bring the —what do you call 'ems—perpetrators to justice, eh? That's what we want to do, Mr. Reeder—bring 'em to justice."

His pale eyes never left Mr. Reeder's.

"A most admirable idea," agreed the detective.

He wondered if any helpful advice was likely to be forthcoming.

"I suppose there must be a system by which you can stop this sort of thing going on."

"I'm sure there must be," said Mr. Reeder.

He looked at his watch and shook his head.

"I am quite anxious to see the second act," he said untruthfully.

"Personally," Mr. Hallaty went on with the greatest

complacency. "I'd like to be put in charge of one of these cases, on the basis of the old and well-known saying of which you've no doubt heard."

Mr. Reeder when he was most innocent was most malignant. He was innocent now.

"'Set a thief to catch a thief?' But surely not, Mr.—I didn't quite catch your name."

The man went purple.

"What I meant was *Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?*—a Latin proverb," he said loudly.

Fortunately the bell rang at that moment and Mr. Reeder made his escape. But it was only temporary. When he got outside the theatre that night, after the conclusion of the third and tamest act of the play, he found his banking friend waiting.

"I wondered if you'd like to come up to my club and have a drink?"

Mr. Reeder shook his head.

"It is delightful of you, Mr.—um——"

Mr. Hallaty told him his name for the third time.

"But I never go to clubs and I do not drink anything stronger than barley water."

"Can I drop you anywhere?" asked Mr. Hallaty.

Mr. Reeder said he was walking and therefore could not be dropped.

"But I thought you lived at Brockley?"

"I walk there," said Mr. Reeder. "I find it so good for my complexion."

He was not unduly surprised at the persistence of this very self-satisfied man. Quite a number of people did their best to scrape acquaintance with the country's

greatest authority on crime against banks; some out of morbid curiosity, some for more personal reasons, some who gave him an importance which perhaps he did not deserve, and desired to share it even to the smallest extent.

Mr. Hallaty was a type, self-important, pompous, self-sufficient and quite self-satisfied. To Mr. Reeder's annoyance a few days later, when he was eating his bun and drinking his glass of milk at a teashop, the smiling man appeared before him and sat down at the same table. Mr. Reeder's bun was hardly nibbled, his milk remained untouched. There was no escape. He sat in silence, listening to Mr. Hallaty's views on crime, the detection of crime, banking methods and their inadequacy, but mainly about Mr. Hallaty's extraordinary genius, prescience and shrewdness.

"They'd be very clever to get past me, whether they're crooks or whether they're straight," said Mr. Hallaty.

He lit a small and disagreeable cigar. Mr. Reeder looked significantly at a sign which said "No Smoking."

"You don't mind, do you?" asked Hallaty.

"Very much," said Mr. Reeder, and the other man laughed as though it were the best joke in the world, and went on smoking.

"Personally," he said, "I think professional crooks are not clever. They think they are, but when they're matched against the intelligence of the average business man, or a man a little above the average, they're finished."

He chatted on in this vein until Mr. Reeder put down

his bun, glared solemnly over his half-glass of milk, and said, with startling distinctness:

"Will you please go away? I want to have my lunch."

Thick-skinned as the man was, he was taken aback; went very red, apologising incoherently, and swaggered out of the shop without paying his bill for the cup of tea which had been brought at his order. Mr. Reeder paid it gratefully.

Recalling those two conversations, Mr. Reeder remembered later that most of the inquiries which the bank manager made had to do with systems of search for missing delinquents. When he got home that night he very carefully marked down the name of Mr. Hallaty in a little book the cover of which was inscribed with a big question mark.

Yet it seemed impossible to believe that a man who was so aggressive could be anything but an honest man. Men engaged in the tiresome trade of roguery are suave men, polite men. They soothe and please—it is part of their stock in trade. Only the twenty shillings to the pound and look-the-whole-world-in-the-face man can afford to be boorish. And Mr. Hallaty was undoubtedly boorish.

He was, as he claimed, the manager of the Gunnersbury branch of the London and Orient Bank, and was a man of style and importance. He had a flat in Albemarle Street, drove his own car, had a chauffeur, a valet and quite a nice circle of reliable friends. He had also a very humble flat in Hammersmith, and this was his official address.

The Gunnersbury branch of the L. and O. was in its

way rather important. It carried the accounts of half a dozen big plants on the Great West Road, The Kelson Gas Works, and the Brite-Lites Manufacturing Corporation, and was therefore responsible for very heavy pay-rolls.

About a month after the teashop talk Mr. Hallaty called at the London office of the Ninth Avenue Bank on Lombard Street, and said that he had had a request from the most important of his customers for a large supply of American currency. The customer in question was an Anglo-American concern, and in order to celebrate some new amalgamation the directors had decided to pay a big bonus in dollars. Could the Ninth Avenue Bank supply the necessary greenbacks—fifty-seven thousand dollars, no less?

The American bank, after the way of American banks, was obliging. It undertook to sell dollars to the required amount, and on the Friday afternoon at two o'clock Hallaty called and exchanged English currency for American.

At the headquarters of the L. and O. Bank there was rather an urgent conference of general and assistant-general managers that afternoon.

"I'm worried about this man Hallaty," said the chief. "One of our secret service people has discovered that he is living at the rate of five thousand a year."

"What is his salary?" somebody asked.

"Just under a thousand."

There was a little silence.

"He is a very careful man," said one. "He may have some very good investments."

The question became instantly urgent, for at that moment came an official with a telephone message from yet another American bank—the Dyers Bank of New York. Mr. Hallaty had just purchased a hundred thousand dollars' worth of American currency. He had negotiated the purchase in the morning, giving as a reason the requirements of the Brite-Lites Corporation. The Dyers Bank had certain misgivings after the departure of Mr. Hallaty with a thousand notes for one hundred dollars tucked away in a kit bag, and those misgivings were caused by a glimpse which one of the commissionaires had of the contents of the kit bag—already half-full of American notes.

The bank detectives sped to Gunnersbury—Mr. Hallaty was not there. He had the key of the vault, but the detectives had taken with them a duplicate key, which was kept in the safe at the head office.

There should have been, in preparation for the next day's pay-out, some £72,000 in the vaults. In point of fact, there were a few odd bundles of ten-shilling and pound notes.

Mr. Hallaty was not at the flat where he was supposed to live, nor at the flat in Albemarle Street, where he actually lived. His valet was there, and his chauffeur.

The Axford air port had a clue to give. Mr. Hallaty had arrived that afternoon, seemingly with the intention of flying a small Moth aeroplane which he kept at the port. He was well known as an amateur flyer and was a skilled pilot. When the aeroplane was removed from the hangar it was discovered that the wings had been slashed, the struts had been half-sawn through, and

other damage done which made the machine unusable. How it had happened was a mystery which nobody could explain.

Mr. Hallaty, on seeing the damage, had turned deathly pale and had re-entered his car and driven away, carrying with him his two suit-cases.

From that moment Mr. Hallaty was not seen. He vanished into London and was lost.

If the losses to the bank had been £72,000 only, it would have been serious enough. Unfortunately, Hallaty was a very ingenious man, with a very complete knowledge of the English banking system. When accounts came in and were checked, when the clearing-house made its quick report and certain northern and midland banking branches presented their claims, it was found that considerably over a quarter of a million of money had vanished.

There was much to admire here in the way of perfect training and clever expedient; but the L. and O. directors were not sufficiently broad-minded to offer any testimonial to their missing manager.

Three days after he had vanished, Mr. Reeder came upon the scene. He was in his most apologetic mood. He apologised for being called in three days after he should have been called in; he apologised to the gloomy chairman for the offence of his unfaithful servant; he apologised for being wet (he carried a furled umbrella on his arm) and by inference regretted his side-whiskers, his square bowler hat and his tightly-fitting frock coat.

The chairman, by some odd process of mind, felt that

a considerable amount of responsibility had been lifted from his shoulders.

"Now, Mr. Reeder, you see exactly what has happened, and the bank is leaving everything in your hands. Perhaps it would have been wiser if we'd called you in before."

Mr. Reeder plucked up spirit to say that he thought it might have been.

"Here are the reports," said the general manager, pushing a folder full of large, imposing manuscript sheets. "The police have not the slightest idea where he's gone to, and I confess that I never expect to see Hallaty or the money again."

Mr. Reeder scratched his chin.

"It would be improper in me if I said that I hope I never do," he sighed. "It's the Tynedale case all over again, and the Manchester and Oldham Bank case, and the South Devon Bank case—in fact—um—there is here the evidence of a system, sir, if I may venture to suggest such a thing."

The general manager frowned.

"A system? You mean all these offences against the banks you have mentioned are organised?"

Mr. Reeder nodded.

"I think so, sir," he said gently. "if you will compare one with the other you will discover, I think, that in every case the manager has, on one pretext or another, converted large sums of English currency into francs or dollars, that his last operation has been in London, and that he has vanished when the discovery of his defalcations has been made."

The general manager shivered, for Reeder was presenting to him the ogre of the banking world—the organised conspirator. Only those who understand banking know just what this means.

"I hadn't noticed that," he said; "but undoubtedly it is a fact."

Other people had observed these sinister happenings. A bankers' association summoned an urgent meeting, and Mr. Reeder, an authority upon bank crimes, was called into consultation. In such moments as these Reeder was very practical, not at all vague. Rather was he definite—and when Mr. Reeder was definite he was blood-curdling. He came to a sensational point after a very diffident beginning.

"There are some things—er—gentlemen, to which I am loath to give the authority of my support. Theories which—um—belong to the more sensational press and certainly to no scientific system. Yet I must tell you, gentlemen, that in my opinion we are for the first time face to face with an organised attempt to rob the banks on the grand scale."

The president of the association looked at him incredulously.

"You don't mean to suggest, Mr. Reeder, that there is a definite co-ordination between these various frauds?"

Mr. Reeder nodded solemnly.

"They have that appearance. I would not care to give a definite opinion one way or the other, but I certainly would not rule that out."

One member of the association shook his white head.

"There are such things as crimes of imitation, Mr. Reeder. When some man steals money in a peculiar way, other weak-minded individuals follow suit."

Mr. Reeder smiled broadly.

"I'm afraid that won't do, sir," he said with the greatest kindness. "You speak as though the details of the fraud had been published. In three cases out of five the general public know nothing about these crimes. In no case have the particulars been published or have they been available even to the managers of branch banks. And yet in every case the crime has followed along exactly similar lines. In every case there has been a man, holding a responsible position in the bank, who, through gambling on the Stock Exchange or for some other reason or from habits of extravagance, has—I will not say been compelled to rob the bank, because a man is quite —um—a free agent in such matters, but has certainly succeeded in relieving your—er—various institutions of very considerable sums of money. These are the points I make."

He ticked them off on his fingers.

"First of all, a manager or assistant manager in straitened circumstances. Secondly, a very carefully organised plan to draw, upon one given day, the maximum sum of money which can be drawn from headquarters, the changing over of the money into foreign currency, and the complete disappearance of the bank manager, all within twenty-four hours. It is an unusual kind of fraud, for it does not involve of itself any false book-keeping. In several cases we have found that a petty fraud, in comparison with the greater offence, has

been going on for some time and has been obviously the cause of the bigger crime. Gentlemen"—Mr. Reeder's voice was serious —"there is something very big in the way of criminal activity in London, and an organisation is in existence which is not only directing these frauds and profiting by them, but is offering to the men who commit them asylum during their stay here and facilities for getting out of the country without detection. I'm going to deal with the situation from this angle, and my only chance of putting a stop to it is if I am able to catch one of the minor criminals immediately before he brings off the big coup. I want from every bank a list of all their suspected staff, and I want this list before the bank inspectors go in to examine the books and certainly before anything like an arrest is made."

Instructions to this effect were immediately issued, and the very next morning Mr. Reeder had before him in his bureau at the Public Prosecutor's office a list of bank officials against whom there was a question mark. It was a very small list, representing a microscopic percentage of the enormous staffs employed in the business of banking. One man had been betting heavily, and attached to his name was a list of his bookmakers and what, to Mr. Reeder, was more important, exact details as to the period of time his betting operations covered.

Reeder's pencil went slowly down the list until it stopped before the name of L. G. H. Reigate. Mr. Reigate was twenty-eight and an assistant branch manager, and his "offence" was that he had been engaged in real estate speculation, had bought on a

rising market, and for some time past had vainly endeavoured to get rid of his holdings. His salary was £600 a year; he lived with a half-sister in a small flat at Hampstead. He had apparently no other vices, spent most of his evenings at home, did not drink and was a light smoker.

The reports were very thorough. There was not a detail which Mr. Reeder did not examine with the greatest care, for on these minor details often hang great issues.

He went through the remaining list and came back to Mr. Reigate. Evidently here there was a case which might repay his private and personal investigation. He jotted down the address on a scrap of paper and made a few inquiries in the city. They were entirely satisfactory, for on the third probe he found a Canadian bank which had been asked if it could supply Canadian dollars in exchange for sterling, and if the maximum amount could be so supplied on any average day. The inquiry had come not from this branch, but from a client of the branch. Reeder spread his feelers a little wider, and stumbled on a second inquiry from the same client. He went to the general manager of the head office. Mr. Reigate was known as a very conscientious young man, and, except for the fact that he had been engaged in real estate speculation, the exact extent of which was unknown, there were no marks, black or red, against him.

"Who is the branch manager?" asked Mr. Reeder, and was told.

The gentleman in question was a very reliable man, though inclined to be impetuous.

"He is a most excellent fellow, but loses his head at times. As he always loses it on the side of the bank we have no serious complaints against him."

The name of the manager was Wallat, and that week a strange thing happened to him. He received a letter from a man whose name he did not remember, but who had apparently been an old customer of the bank.

"I wonder if you would care to take a fortnight's trip to the fjords on a luxury ship? A client of ours has booked two passages but is unable to go and has asked me to present the passages to any friend of mine who may wish to make the trip. As you were so good to me in the past—I don't suppose you remember the circumstances or even recall my name—I should be glad to pass them on to you."

Now, the curious thing was that only a week before the manager had spoken enviously of a friend of his who was making that very trip. He had always wanted to see Norway and the beauties of Scandinavia, and here out of the blue came an unrivalled opportunity.

His vacation was due; he immediately put in a request to headquarters for leave. The request went before the assistant-general manager and was granted. The boat was due to leave on the Thursday night, but on the Tuesday the manager, in a burst of zeal, decided to make a rough examination of certain books.

What he found there put all ideas of holiday out of his mind. On the Wednesday morning he called before him Mr. Reigate, and the pale-faced young man listened with growing terror to a recital of the irregularities

which had been discovered. At this sign of his guilt the manager, true to his tradition, lost his head, threatened a prosecution, and, in a moment of hysteria, sent for a policeman. It was an irregular act, for prosecutions are initiated by the directors.

Panic engendered panic; Reigate put on his hat, walked from the bank, and was immediately pursued by a bare-headed manager. The young man, in blind terror, leapt on the back of an ambulance which happened to be passing, and was immediately dragged off by a policeman who had joined in the pursuit. If the manager had only kept his head the matter could have been corrected. As it was, he charged his assistant with the defalcations, which he admitted, and Reigate was put into a cell.

Bank headquarters was furious. They had been committed to a prosecution, and, as a sequel, the possibility of an action for damages. Mr. Reeder was called in at once, and went into consultation with the bank's solicitors. He interviewed the young man, and found him incoherent with terror and quite incapable of giving any information. The next morning he was brought before a magistrate and remanded.

Apparently the magistrate took a serious view, for although Reigate, who was now a little calmer, asked for bail, that bail was put at a prohibitive sum. The young man was taken to prison.

That afternoon, however, there appeared before the magistrate Sir George Polkley, who offered himself as surety. The name apparently was a famous one. Sir George was a well-known north country shipbuilder.

He was accompanied at the police court by a gentleman who gave the name of an eminent firm of Newcastle solicitors. The surety was accepted, and Reigate was released from Brixton prison that afternoon.

At seven o'clock that night Scotland Yard rang up Mr. Reeder.

"You know Reigate was bailed out this afternoon?"

"Yes, I saw it in the newspapers," said Mr. Reeder. "Sir George Polkley stood surety—how on earth did he know Sir George?"

"We've just had a wire from Polkley's solicitors in Newcastle. They know nothing whatever about it. Sir George is in the south of France, and his solicitors have sent nobody to London to represent them. What is more, they have never heard of Reigate."

Mr. Reeder, lounging in his chair, sat bolt upright.

"Then the bail was a fake? Where is Reigate?"

"He can't be found. He drove away from Brixton in a taxi-cab, accompanied by the alleged solicitor, and he has not been seen since."

Here was a problem for Mr. Reeder, and one after his own heart. Who had gone to all that trouble to get Reigate released—and why? His frauds, if they were provable, did not involve more than three or four hundred pounds. Who wanted him released on bail—immediately released? There was no question at all that, high as the bail was, the necessary sureties would have been forthcoming in twenty-four hours. But somebody was very anxious to get Reigate out of prison with the least possible delay.

Mr. Reeder interviewed the Public Prosecutor.

"It's all very, very odd," he said, running his fingers through his thin hair. "I suppose it is susceptible of a very simple explanation, but unfortunately I've got the mind of a criminal."

The Public Prosecutor smiled.

"And how does your criminal mind interpret this happening?" he asked.

Mr. Reeder shook his head.

"Rather badly, I'm afraid. I—um—should not like to be Mr. Reigate!"

He had sent for the cowed and agitated manager. He was a pompous little man, rotund of figure and round of face, and he perspired very easily. For half an hour he sat on the edge of a chair, facing Mr. Reeder, and he spent most of that half-hour mopping his brow and his neck with a large white handkerchief.

"Headquarters have been most unkind to me, Mr. Reeder," he quavered. "After all the years of faithful service. . . . The worst they can say about me is that I was misled through my zeal for the bank. I suppose it was wrong of me to have this young man arrested, but I was so shocked, so—if I may use the expression—devastated."

"Yes, I'm sure," murmured Mr. Reeder. "You were going on vacation, you tell me? That is news to me."

It was now that he learned for the first time about the two passages for the fjords. Fortunately the manager had the letter with him. Mr. Reeder read it quickly, reached for his telephone and put through an inquiry.

"I seem to remember the address," he said as he hung up the 'phone. "It has a familiar sound to it. I think

you will find it is an accommodation address, and the gentleman who wrote to you has in fact no existence."

"But he sent the tickets! They're made out in my name," said the manager triumphantly, and then his face fell. "I shan't be able to go now, of course."

Mr. Reeder looked at him, and in his eyes there was pained reproach.

"I'm afraid you won't be able to go now, and I'm quite satisfied in my mind that you would have been very sorry if you had gone! Those tickets were intended to serve one purpose—to get you out of the bank and out of England, and to give young Mr. Reigate an opportunity of bringing home the bacon—if you'll excuse that vulgarity."

Mr. Reeder was both puzzled and enlightened. Here was another typical bank case, planned on exactly the same lines as the others, and revealing, beyond any question of doubt, the operation of a master mind.

As soon as he got rid of the bank manager he took a cab and drove to Hampstead. Miss Dora Reigate had just returned from work when he arrived. She had read of her brother's misfortune in the evening newspaper on her way back from her office, and it struck Mr. Reeder that she was not as agitated by the news as the world would expect her to be. She was a pretty girl, a slim brunette, and looked much younger than her twenty-four years.

"I have had no news from my brother," she said. "He is really my half-brother, but he and I have been very great friends all our lives, and I was terribly upset by this awful thing."

She crossed to the window and looked out. Not a young lady, Mr. Reeder thought, who very readily showed her feelings. She was obviously exercising great self-control now. Her lips were pressed closely together; her eyes were filled with unshed tears, and he sensed rather than observed the tension she was enduring.

Suddenly she turned.

"I'll tell you, Mr. Reeder."

She saw his eyebrows go up and smiled faintly.

"Oh, yes, I realise you haven't told me your name, but I know you. You're quite famous in the city."

Mr. Reeder was covered in genuine confusion, but came instantly to business when she hesitated.

"Well, what are you going to tell me?" he asked gently.

"I'm relieved. That is what I was going to say. I've been expecting something for a long time. Johnny hasn't been himself; he's been terribly worried over his land deals, and I know he's been short of ready money—in fact, I lent him a hundred pounds of my savings only last week. I thought, however, he'd got over his worst difficulty, because he returned the money the next day —in fact, more than the money; five hundred dollars at the present rate of exchange is worth nearly a hundred and thirty pounds."

"Dollars?" said Mr. Reeder sharply. "Did he repay you in dollars?"

She nodded.

"In dollar bills?"

"Yes, five bills of a hundred dollars. I put them in my bank."

Mr. Reeder was now very alert.

"Where did he get them?" he asked.

She shook her head.

"I don't know. He had quite a large sum of money in dollars, a big roll."

Reeder scratched his chin thoughtfully, but made no comment, and the girl went on.

"I've always suspected there was something wrong at the bank, and I had an idea that he'd borrowed this money and was putting things right. And yet he wasn't very happy about it. He told me that he might have to go out of the country for a few months, and that if he did I wasn't to worry."

"Was he a cheerful sort of fellow?"

"Very," she said emphatically, "until the past year, when property went down. He used to do quite a lot of buying and selling, and I think made a considerable sum of money till the slump came."

"Had he any friends in London?"

She shook her head.

"None you know? You've not met any?" he insisted.

"No," she said. "There used to be a man who called here, but he was not a friend." She hesitated. "I don't know whether I'm doing him any harm by telling you all this, but Johnny is really a deeply religious man, a man of the highest principles. Something has gone wrong with him in the past few months, but what it is I haven't the slightest idea. unless it is that this slump has driven him desperate and made him do things which ordinarily he'd never dream of doing. He used to have terrible fits of depression, and one night he told me that it was much

better that his conscience should be at rest than that he should tide over his difficulties. He wrote a long statement, which I knew was intended for the bank. He sat up half one night writing, and he must have changed his mind about sending it, because in the morning, while we were at breakfast, he took it out of his pocket, re-read it and put it in the fire. I have a feeling, Mr. Reeder, that he was not acting entirely on his own initiative, but that there was somebody behind him who was directing him."

Reeder nodded.

"That is the feeling I have, Miss Reigate," he said, "and if your brother is as you describe him, I think we shall learn a lot from him."

"He has been under somebody's influence," said the girl, "and I am sure I know who that somebody was."

She would say no more than this, though he pressed her.

"Can I send him food in prison?" she asked, and learned now for the first time about the bail and Reigate's mysterious disappearance. She did not know Polkley, and so far as she was aware her brother had no association with Newcastle.

"But he knows you, Mr. Reeder," she said, surprisingly. "He's twice mentioned you, and once he told me that he thought of seeing and having a talk with you."

"Dear me!" said Mr. Reeder. "I don't think he kept his promise. He has never been to my office——"

She shook her head.

"He wouldn't have come to your office. He knows your address in Brockley Road." She gave the number,

to his amazement. "In fact, one night he did go down to your house, because afterwards he told me and said that at the last moment his courage had failed him."

"When was this?" asked Reeder.

"About a month ago," she answered.

Mr. Reeder went back to Brockley that night in a discontented frame of mind. Give him the end of the thread and he would follow it through all its complicated entanglements. He would sit patiently, untying knots, for days, for weeks, for months, even for years. But now he had not even the end of his thread. He had two isolated cases, distinct from one another, except that they were linked together by a similarity of method, but, looking in all directions, he saw no daylight.

The quietude of Brockley Road was very soothing to him. From near at hand came the gentle whirr of traffic passing up and down the Lewisham High Road, the clanging of car bells, the whirr and hoot of a ceaseless stream of motor traffic, the rumble of lorries, and the shrill voices of boys calling the final editions of the evening newspapers.

In the serenity of his home Mr. Reeder recuperated his dissipated energies. Here he could sit sometimes throughout the night, ambling through the dreams out of which his theories were constructed. Here he could put in order the vital little facts which so often meant the destruction of those enemies of society against whom he waged a ceaseless war.

He had very few visitors and practically no friends. In Brockley Road opinion was divided on his occupation. There was one school of thought that believed he was

"retired," and this was by far the largest section of public opinion, for everything about him suggested retirement from bygone and respectable activities.

No neighbour dropped in on him for a quiet smoke and a chat. He had been invited to sedate family parties during the festive season, but had declined them. And the method of his refusal was responsible for the legend that he had once been in love and had suffered; for invariably his letter contained references to a painful anniversary which he wished to keep alone. It didn't matter what date was chosen for the party, Mr. Reeder had invariably a painful anniversary which he wished to celebrate in solitude.

He sat at his large desk with a huge cup of tea and a large dish full of hot and succulent muffins before him, and went over and over every phase of these bank cases without securing a single inspiration which would lead him to that unknown force which was not only co-ordinating and organising a series of future frauds and robberies but had already robbed the banks of close on a million pounds.

Lewisham High Road at that hour was a busy thoroughfare, and nobody saw the extraordinary apparition until a taxi-cab driver, swerving violently, missed him. It was the figure of a man in a dressing-gown and pyjamas, darting from one side of the road to the other. His feet and his head were bare, and he ran with incredible speed up the hill and darted into Brockley Road. Nobody saw where he came from. A policeman made a grab at him as he passed, and missed him. In another second he was speeding along Brockley Road.

He hesitated before Mr. Reeder's house, looked up at the lighted window of his study, then, dragging open the gate, flew up the stone steps. Mr. Reeder heard the shouts, went to the window and looked out. He saw somebody run up the flagged pathway to the door, and immediately afterwards a motor cyclist speeding up the road ahead of a little crowd. The cyclist slowed before the door, and stopped for a second. At first Mr. Reeder thought that the explosions he heard were the backfire of the machine. Then he saw the flame of the third and the fourth shots. They came from the driver's hand, and instantly the cycle moved on, gathering speed, and went roaring out of his line of vision.

Reeder ran down the stairs and pulled open the door as a policeman came through the gate. A man was lying on the top step. He wore a dressing-gown of an Indian pattern, and apparently was undressed.

They bore him into the passage, and Mr. Reeder switched on all the lights. One glance at the white face told him the staggering story.

The policeman pushed back the crowd, shut the door and went down on his knees by the side of the prostrate figure.

"I'm afraid he's dead," said Mr. Reeder, as he unbuttoned the dressing-gown with deft fingers and saw the ugliness of a violent dissolution.

"I think he was shot by the motor cyclist."

"I saw him," said the policeman breathlessly. "He fired four shots."

Reeder made another and more careful examination of the man. He judged his age to be about thirty. His

hair was dark, almost raven black; he was clean-shaven, and a peculiar feature which Reeder noticed was that he had no eyebrows.

The policeman looked and frowned, put his hand in his pocket and took out his notebook. He examined something that was written inside and shook his head.

"I thought he might be that fellow they're looking for to-night."

"Reigate?" asked Mr. Reeder.

"No, it can't be him," said the policeman. "He was fair, with bushy eyebrows and dark moustache."

The dressing-gown was new, the pyjamas were of the finest silk. They made a quick examination of the pockets and the policeman produced a sealed envelope.

"I think I ought to hand this to the inspector, sir——" he began.

Without a word Mr. Reeder took it from his hand, and, to the constable's horror, broke the seal and took out the contents. They were fifty bills each for a hundred dollars.

"H'm!" said Mr. Reeder.

Where had he come from? How had he appeared suddenly in the heart of the traffic? The next hour Mr. Reeder spent making personal inquiries, without, however, finding a solution to the mystery.

A newsboy had seen him running on the sidewalk, and thought he had come out of Malpas Road, a thoroughfare which runs parallel with Brockley Road. A point-duty constable had seen him run along the middle of the road, dodging the traffic, and the driver of a delivery van was equally certain he had seen him on the

opposite side of the road to that where he had been observed by the newspaper boy, running not up the hill but down. The motor cyclist seemed to have escaped observation altogether.

At ten o'clock that night the chief officers of Scotland Yard met in Reeder's room. The dead man's finger-prints had been sent to the Yard for inspection, but had not been identified. The only distinguishing feature of the body was a small strawberry mark below the left elbow.

The chief constable scratched his head in bewilderment.

"I've never had a case like this before. The local police have called at every house in the neighbourhood where this fellow might have come from, and nobody is missing. What do you make of it, Mr. Reeder? You've had another look at the body, haven't you?"

Mr. Reeder nodded. He had had that gruesome experience and had made a much more thorough examination than had been possible in the passage.

"And what do you think?"

Mr. Reeder hesitated.

"It is a great pity," he said, "that the telephone system is not more universal in this country. I find it extremely difficult to get into touch with people, but I have sent a car for the young lady."

"Which young lady?"

"Miss—er—Reigate, the sister of our young friend."

He heard the ring of the bell and himself went down to open the door. It was the girl he had sent for. He took her into the little parlour on the ground floor.

"I'm going to ask you a question, Miss Reigate,

which I'll be glad if you can answer. Had your brother any distinguishing marks on his body that you would be able to recognise?"

She nodded without hesitation.

"Yes," she said, a little breathlessly. "He had a small strawberry mark on his forearm, just below the elbow."

"The left forearm?" asked Mr. Reeder quickly.

"Yes, the left forearm. Why? Has he been found?"

"I'm afraid he has," said Mr. Reeder gently.

He told her his suspicion and left her with his housekeeper whilst he went up to explain to the men from the Yard just what he had discovered.

"It was very clear to me," he said, "that the hair had been dyed, the moustache recently removed and the eyebrows shaved."

"Reigate?" said the chief constable incredulously. "If that's Reigate I'm a Dutchman. I've got a photograph of him. He's fair, almost a light blonde."

"The hair is dyed, very cleverly and by an expert."

Reeder pointed to the dollar bills lying on the table.

"The money was part of the system, the disguise was part of the system. Did you notice anything about the clothes?"

"I noticed they smelt strongly of camphor," said one of the detectives. "I've just been remarking to the chief constable that it almost seems as if the pyjamas and dressing-gown had been kept packed away from moths. My theory is that he must have had an outfit stowed all ready for his getaway."

Mr. Reeder shook his head.

"Not exactly that," he said; "but the camphor smell

is a very important clue. I can't tell you why, gentlemen, because I am naturally secretive."

The body was identified beyond any question by the distressed and weeping girl. It was that of L. G. H. Reigate, sometime assistant manager of the Wembley branch of the London and Northern Banking Corporation. He had been killed by four shots fired from a .38 automatic pistol, and any three of the four shots would have been fatal. As for the motor cyclist, there was none who could identify him or give the least clue.

At nine o'clock the next morning Reeder, accompanied by a detective-sergeant, made a minute search of the Reigate flat. It was a small, comfortably furnished apartment consisting of four rooms, a kitchen and a bathroom. It had no drawing-room, the dining-room serving also as a sort of lounge.

Reigate had occupied the larger of the two bedrooms, and in one corner was a small roll-top writing-desk which was locked when they arrived.

The dead man was evidently very methodical. The pigeon-holes were crammed with methodical memoranda, mainly dealing with the little properties he had bought and sold. These the two men inspected item by item before they made a search of the drawers.

In the last drawer they found a small steel box which, after very considerable difficulty, they succeeded in opening. Inside were two insurance policies, a small memorandum book, in which apparently Reigate had kept a very full record of his family accounts, and, in a small pay envelope, sealed down, they discovered two Yale keys. They were quite new and were fastened to-

gether by a flat steel ring. An inspection of these showed Reeder that they were intended for different locks, one being slightly larger than the other. There was no name on them and no indication whatever as to their purpose.

He examined the keys under a powerful magnifying glass, and the conclusion he reached was that probably they had never been used. At the bottom of the box, and almost overlooked because it lay under a black card that covered the bottom, he found a sheet of paper torn from a small notebook. Its contents were in a copper-plate hand; certain words were underlined in red ink, carefully ruled. It consisted of a column of street names, and against each was a time. Mr. Reeder observed that the times ranged from ten in the morning till four o'clock in the afternoon, and that the streets (he knew London very well) were side streets adjacent to main thoroughfares. Against certain of the times and places a colour was indicated: red, yellow, white, pink; but these had been struck out in pencil, and in the same medium the word "yellow" had been written against all of them.

"What do you make of those, Mr. Reeder?"

Reeder looked through the list again carefully.

"I rather imagine," he said, "that it's a list of rendezvous. At this place and at this time there was a car ready to pick him up. Originally it was intended to have four cars, but for some reason or other this was impracticable. I take it that the colour means a flower or a badge of some kind by which Reigate could distinguish the car that was picking him up."

Later at Scotland Yard he elaborated his theory to an interested circle.

"What is clear now, if it wasn't clear before," he said, "is that there is an organisation working in England against the banks. It is more dangerous than I imagined, for obviously the man or men behind it will stop at nothing to save themselves if matters ever come to a pinch. They killed Reigate because they thought—and rightly—that he was coming to betray them."

Mr. Reeder claimed that he had a criminal mind. That night, in his spacious study at Brockley, he became a criminal. He organised bank robberies; he worked out systems of defalcations; he visualised all the difficulties that the brain of such an organisation would have to contend against. The principal problem was to get out of England men who were known and whose descriptions had been circulated as being wanted by the police. Every port was watched; there was a detective staff at every aerodrome; Ostend, Calais, Boulogne, Flushing, the Hook of Holland, Havre and Dieppe were staffed by keen observers. No Atlantic liner sailed but it carried an officer whose business it was to identify questionable passengers.

For hours Mr. Reeder wallowed in his wickedness. Scheme succeeded scheme; possibility and probability were rubbed against one another and cancelled themselves out.

What was the organiser's chief difficulty? To avoid a close inspection of his protégés, and to keep them in a place where they would not be recognised.

The case of Reigate was a simple one. He was a man with a conscience, and though apparently he was heading for safety, that still, small voice of his had grown

louder and he had decided to make a clean breast of everything. Having reached this decision, he had escaped from wherever he was confined, and had made his way to Reeder's house—his sister had told the detective that the young man knew the exact address at which he could be found.

At midnight Mr. Reeder rose from his desk, lit his thirtieth cigarette, and stood for a long time with his back to the fireplace, the cigarette drooping limply from his mouth, his head on one side like a cockatoo, and cogitated upon his criminal past.

He went to bed that night with a sense that he was groping through a fog towards a certain door, and that when that door was opened the extraordinary happenings of the past few months would be susceptible of a very simple explanation.

On the following morning Mr. Reeder was in his office, and those who are not acquainted with his methods would have been amazed to find that he was engaged in reading a fairy story. He read it furtively, hiding it away in the drawer of his desk whenever there was the slightest suggestion of somebody entering. He loved fairy stories about wonderful little ladies who appeared mysteriously out of nowhere, and rendered marvellous assistance to poor but beautiful daughters of woodcutters, transforming them with a wave of their wands into no less lovely princesses, and by a similar wave turning wicked men and women into trees and rabbits and black cats. There were so many men and women in the world whom he would have turned into trees and rabbits and black cats.

He was reading the latest of his finds (*Fairy Twinklefeet and the Twelve Genii*) when he heard a heavy cough outside his door and the confident rap of the commissionaire's knuckles. He put away the book, closed the drawer, and said:

"Come in."

"Dr. Joseph Clutterpeck, sir."

Mr. Reeder leaned back in his chair.

"Show him in, please," he said.

Mr. Clutterpeck was tall, rather stout, very genial. He spoke with the slightest of foreign accents.

"May I sit, please?" He beamed and drew his chair up to the desk almost before Mr. Reeder had murmured his invitation. "It was in my mind to see you, Mr. Reeder, to ask you to undertake a small commission for me, but I understand you are no longer private detective but official, eh?"

Reeder bowed. His finger-tips were together. He was looking at the newcomer from under his shaggy brows.

"I am in a very peculiar position," said Mr. Clutterpeck. "I conduct here a small clinic for diseases of the 'eart, for various things. I am a generous man; I cannot 'elp it." He waved an extravagant hand. "I give, I lend, I do not ask for security, and I am—what is the word?—swindled. Now a great misfortune has come to me. I loaned a man a thousand pounds." He leaned confidentially across the table. "He has got into trouble—you have seen the case in the papers—Mr. Hallaty, the banker."

He waved his agitated hands again.

"He has gone out of the country without saying a

word, without paying a penny, and now he writes to me to ask me for a prescription for the 'eart."

Mr. Reeder leaned back in his chair.

"He's written from where?" he asked.

"From 'Olland. I come from 'Olland; it is my 'ome."

"Have you got the letter?"

The man fished out a pocket-book and from this extracted a sheet of notepaper. The moment Reeder saw it he recognised Hallaty's handwriting. It was very brief.

"*Dear Doctor,— I must have the prescription for my heart. I have lost it. I cannot give you my address. Will you please advertise it in the agony column of* The Times?"

It was signed "H."

If Mr. Clutterpeck could have looked under those shaggy eyebrows he would have seen Mr. Reeder's eyes light.

"May I keep this letter?" he asked.

The big man shrugged.

"Why, surely. I am glad that you should, because this gentleman seems to be in trouble with the police, and I do not want to be mixed up in it, except that I would like to get my thousand pounds. The prescription I will advertise because it is humanity."

Dr. Clutterpeck took his departure after giving his address, which was a small flat in Pimlico. He was hardly out of the building before Mr. Reeder had verified his name and his qualifications from a work of reference. The letter he carried to Scotland Yard and to the chief constable.

"Smell it," he said.

The chief sniffed.

"Camphor—and not exactly camphor. It's the same as we found in young Reigate's dressing-gown. I've sent it down to the laboratory; they say it's camphor-lactine, a very powerful disinfectant and antiseptic, used in cases of infectious diseases."

He heard a smack as Mr. Reeder's hands came together, and looked up in astonishment.

"Dear, dear me!" said Mr. Reeder.

He almost purred the words.

When he got back to his office in Whitehall the commissionaire told him that a lady was waiting to see him. Mr. Reeder frowned.

"All right, show her in," he said.

He offered a limp hand to the girl and pushed up the most comfortable chair for her.

"Mr. Reeder"—she spoke quickly and nervously—"I have found a little pocket-book of my brother's and the full amount of his defalcations——"

"I have those," said Reeder. "It is not a very large amount, certainly not such an amount as would have justified the trouble and pains they took to get him out on bail."

"And in the pocket-book was this." She put a little cutting on the table.

Mr. Reeder adjusted his glasses and read:

"*In your dire necessity write to the Brothers of Benevolence, 297 Lincoln's Inn Fields. Professional men who are short of money, and in urgent need of it, will*

receive help without usury. Repayment spread over years. No security but our faith in you."

Mr. Reeder read it three times, his lips spelling the words; then he put the cutting down on the table.

"That is quite new to me," he said, with a suggestion of shamefacedness which made the girl want to laugh. "I'll have a search made of the newspapers and see how often this has appeared," he said. "Do you know when your brother applied for a loan?"

She shook her head.

"I remember the morning he cut it out. That must have been months ago. And then one night, when he had a friend here, I brought him in some coffee and I heard Mr. Hallaty say something about the brotherhood——"

"Mr. Hallaty?" Reeder almost squeaked the words. "Did your brother know Hallaty?"

She hesitated.

"Ye-es, he knew him. I told you there was a man who I thought had a bad influence on Johnny."

He saw a faint flush come to her face, and realised how pretty a girl she was.

"I was introduced to him at the dance of the United Banks, but he was rather a difficult man to—to get rid of."

Reeder's eyes twinkled.

"Did you ever tell him to go away? It's a very rude but simple process."

She smiled.

"Yes, I did once. He came home one night when my brother wasn't in, and he was so objectionable that I

asked him not to come again. I don't know how he became acquainted with my brother, but he used to call rather frequently, and the curious thing was that after the time I spoke of——"

"When he was unpleasant to you?"

She nodded.

". . . He made no attempt to see me, and wasn't apparently interested."

"Did you know Hallaty had disappeared after robbing the bank of a quarter of a million?"

She nodded.

"It very much upset Johnny; he couldn't talk about anything else for a few days. He was so nervous and worried, and I know he didn't sleep—I could hear him pacing up and down the room throughout the night. He bought every edition of the papers to find out what had happened to him."

Mr. Reeder sat for a long time, pinching his upper lip.

"Does anybody know you found this book and this cutting?"

To his surprise she answered in the affirmative.

"It was the caretaker of the flat, who was helping me to turn out one of the cupboards, who found it," she said. "In fact he brought it to me. I think it must have fallen out of my brother's pocket. He used to hang some of his clothes there."

It was late in the afternoon when Mr. Reeder turned into Lincoln's Inn Fields, found No. 297, and climbed to the fourth floor, where a small board affixed to the wall indicated the office of this most benevolent institution.

He knocked, and a voice asked who was there. It was a husky, foreign voice. Presently the door was unlocked and opened a few inches.

Reeder saw a man of sixty, his face blotched and swollen, his white hair spread untidily over his forehead. He was meanly dressed and not too clean.

"What you want?" he asked, in a thick, guttural voice.

"I've come to inquire about the Brotherhood——"

"You write, please."

He tried to shut the door, but Mr. Reeder's square-toed shoe was inside. He pushed the door open and went in. It was a disorderly little office, grimy and cheerless. Though the day was warm, a small gas fire burnt on the hearth. The dingy windows looked as if they had never been opened.

"Where do you keep all your vast wealth?" asked Mr. Reeder pleasantly.

The old man blinked at him.

Though he spoke with a foreign accent, Reeder realised that he was a man of culture. He had evidence, apart from a bottle on the table, that this gentleman took a kindly interest in raw spirits. There was more than a suggestion that he slept in this foul room, for an old couch had the appearance of considerable use.

"You write here—we are agents. We are not to see callers."

"May I ask whom I have the pleasure of addressing?"

The old man glowered at him.

"My name is Jones," he said. "That is for you sufficient."

There were one or two objects in the room which interested Mr. Reeder. On the little window-sill was a small wooden stand containing three test tubes, and near by half a dozen bottles of various sizes.

"You do a lot of writing?" said Reeder.

The little desk was covered with manuscript, and the man's grimy hands were smothered with ink stains.

"Yes, I do writing," said Mr. Jones sourly. "We do much correspondence; we never see people who call. We are agents only."

"For whom?" asked Mr. Reeder.

"For the Brotherhood. They live in France—in the south of France."

He spoke quickly and glibly.

"They do not desire that their benevolence shall be publicised. All letters are answered secretly. They are very rich men. That is all I can tell you, mister."

As he went down the stairs Mr. Reeder was whistling softly to himself—and that was a practice in which he did not often indulge—although all his questions and all his cajoling had not produced the address of these Brothers of Benevolence, who lived in the south of France and did good by stealth.

It was too late for afternoon tea and too early to go home. Mr. Reeder called a cab and drove back to Whitehall. He was crossing Trafalgar Square when he saw a car pass his, and had a glimpse of its occupant. Dr. Clutterpeck was looking the other way, his attention

distracted by an accident which had overtaken a cyclist. Mr. Reeder leaned out of the window.

"Follow that car," he said to the taxi driver, "and keep it in sight. I will see that the police do not stop you."

The car went leisurely through the Mall, up Birdcage Walk, and, circling the war memorial, turned left into Belgravia. Reeder saw the big car stop before a pretentious-looking building, and signalled the cabman to drive on. Through the spy-hole at the back he saw Mr. Clutterpeck alight, and, when he was out of sight, stopped the cab, paid him off and walked slowly back.

He met a policeman, who recognised and saluted him.

"That building, sir? Oh, that's the Strangers Club. It used to be the Banbury Club, for hunting people, but it didn't pay, and then a foreign gentleman opened it as a club of some kind. I don't know what they are, but they have scientific lectures every week—they've got a wonderful hall downstairs, and I believe the cooking's very good."

Now the Strangers Club was a stranger to Mr. Reeder, and he was not unnaturally interested. He did not attempt to go in, but passed with a sidelong glance and saw a plate-glass door and behind it a man in livery. The Strangers Club formed part of an island site. At the back there had once been a range of mews, for this used to belong to the period when ladies and gentlemen kept many horses and at least two carriages, and the mews was, therefore, extensively planned. Some enterprising builder had purchased the mews and had erected a number of high buildings of the

metropolis type, tall, unlovely, their only claim to beauty being their simplicity. One of these was occupied by a West End store, which was apparently a dressmaking establishment. The second building had a more sedate appearance. Mr. Reeder noted the chaste inscription on the little silver plate affixed to a plain door, and went on finally to circumnavigate the island, coming back to where he had started.

Clutterpeck's car had disappeared. When he came again abreast with the club, the man in the hall was not in sight. He crossed the road and took a long and interested survey of the building, and when this was done, he again went round to the back. There was a pair of big gates in that building, which was indicated by a silver plate. He found a chauffeur cleaning his car, made a few inquiries, and went to his office not entirely satisfied, but with a pleasant feeling that he was on his way to making a grand discovery.

Mr. Reeder was a source of irritation to the staff of the Public Prosecutor's office. He kept irregular hours, he compelled attendants to remain on duty and very often held up the work of the cleaners.

What troubled him at the moment was the thought that in some way he had taken a wrong turning in the course of investigation, and that it might be straying into no man's land. For his own encouragement he had dispatched wires to various parts of the world, and sat down in his office to wait for replies.

He had hardly dipped again into his fairy book, when the telephone rang.

"A very urgent message, Mr. Reeder," said the

operator's precise voice. "You are through to New Scotland Yard."

There was a click. It was the chief constable speaking.

"We found Hallaty. Will you come over?"

In three minutes Mr. Reeder was at Scotland Yard, and in the chief constable's office.

"Alive?" was the first question he asked.

The chief constable shook his head.

"No, dead."

Mr. Reeder heaved a long sigh.

"I was afraid of that. The trouble was that Hallaty was too clever. He wasn't in pyjamas, of course?"

The chief constable stared at him.

"That's curious you should say that. No, he was in a sort of uniform, looked rather like an elevator attendant."

Late that afternoon a man riding a big and powerful motor bicycle had passed at full speed in the direction between Colchester and Clacton. He had stopped to ask the way to Harwich, for apparently he had missed the road. After he had gone on a light, hooded motor van had followed, taking the same direction as the cyclist. A labourer, working in the field, had heard a staccato rattle of shots, and had fallen into the same error as Mr. Reeder had done on a previous occasion. He thought it was the sound of the motor cycle. He saw the van stop for a short time, and then move on. He thought no more of the matter until he made his way back to the road on his way home. It was then he saw lying half in the ditch and half on the verge the body of a stout man in a dark-blue uniform. He was quite

dead, and had been shot through the back. There was no sign of the motor cycle, though the wheel tracks were visible on the road, and had swayed off on to the verge. Thereafter they were lost.

Detectives, who were on the spot from Colchester within an hour, searched the road and discovered pieces of broken glass, obviously portions of a smashed lamp. They found also a small satchel, evidently carried by the man; it was empty.

Hallaty's hair had been completely shaved, as had also been his moustache. Instead he had a pair of side-whiskers, which were of a recent growth. The examination of the clothes showed neither the maker's name nor any clue by which they could be identified, but when the clothes were stripped, it was found that underneath he wore a suit of silk pyjamas, similar in texture to that which was worn by the unfortunate Reigate.

Mr. Reeder made a rapid journey through Essex to the seat of the murder. He inspected the body and came back to London at midnight.

Again the Big Five sat in conference and Mr. Reeder offered his views.

"Hallaty was too clever. They all suspected that he had a plan for double-crossing them. You will remember that he was a pilot and had a machine at the Axford Air Port. When he went to take his 'plane he found that the struts had been cut through and the fabric of the wing was damaged so that it was unflyable. That was their precaution. Hallaty had to go either their way, or no way. Even in this eleventh hour he hoped to fool them. That empty case was probably full of loot. Har-

wich? Of course he went to Harwich. He had a trunk packed there and a passport. He had another at Brighton. You know you can get from Brighton to Boulogne on the pleasure steamers."

"Did you know this?" asked the staggered chief.

Mr. Reeder looked guilty.

"I had an idea this might happen," he said. "The truth is, I have a criminal mind, chief constable. I put myself in their places and, having satisfied myself as to their class of mentality, I do just what they would do, and usually I am right. There isn't a cloakroom at any sea port in England that my agents have not very carefully searched, and Mr. Hallaty's bags have been in my care for a fortnight."

He was a very tired man, and welcomed the offer of the police squad car, which was to take him home. Tired as he was, however, he took greater precautions that night than he had taken for many years. With a detective he searched his house from basement to garret. He inspected the strip of back garden which was his very own, and even descended to the coal cellar, for he realised that he had made one false move that day —and that was to call at Lincoln's Inn Fields and interview the dirty little old man who had test tubes in his office.

He was sleeping heavily at six o'clock the next morning, when the telephone by the side of his bed woke him. He got up and to his surprise he heard and recognised the voice of Dora Reigate. It was weak and tremulous.

"Could I see you to-day, Mr. Reeder? . . . Soon. . . . I've had a most terrible experience."

Mr. Reeder was now wide awake.

At his request the squad car had been held for him all night. It had remained parked outside his house not, as he explained, because he was afraid of dying, but because it would have been considerably inconvenient for everybody concerned if he did die that night.

He sat by the weary driver as the car sped through the empty streets and explained his system to a wholly uncomprehending and, if the truth be told, bored police officer.

"I think my weakness is a sense of the dramatic," he said. "I like to keep all my secrets to the very last, and then reveal them as though it were with—um—a bang. You may think that weakness is contemptible in a police officer, or one who has the honour to associate in the most amateur fashion with police officers, but there it is. It's my method, and it pleases me."

The driver felt it was necessary for him to offer some comment, and said:

"That was a very queer case." And Mr. Reeder, realising that his confidence if not rejected had been at least slighted, relapsed into silence for the remainder of the journey.

The caretaker had opened the main doors when Reeder arrived and was a little scandalised at this early morning call.

"I don't think the young lady is up yet, sir."

"I assure you she is not only up, but dressed," said Mr. Reeder.

As he was being taken up in the lift, he remembered something.

"Are you the man who found the small book belonging to the late Mr. Reigate?"

"Yes, sir," said the man. "Rather remarkable finding it. He had some press cutting about some brothers. I didn't rightly understand it."

"Have you told anybody about your finding the book?"

The man considered.

"Yes, sir, I did. A reporter from a paper came up here and asked me if there was any news. He was a very nice fellow. As a matter of fact, he gave me a pound."

Mr. Reeder shook his head.

"My friend, you have no knowledge of papers. If you had, you'd know that a reporter never gives you money for anything. And you told him about the book, I suppose?"

"As a matter of fact, I did, sir."

"And the newspaper cutting?"

The janitor pleaded guilty to that also.

Dora Reigate opened the door to him. She looked very white and shaky, and even now she was trembling from head to foot. She arrived home the previous night at eleven o'clock. She had been to see some relations of her stepmother and they had kept her too late. She opened the door with her key, went inside the flat and was reaching out to switch on the light, when somebody came out of the hall cupboard behind her. Before she could scream a hand was placed on her mouth and she was forcibly held. Somebody whispered to her that if she did not scream no harm would come to her, and almost on the point of collapse she allowed the men—

there were two apparently—to blindfold her, and, when this was done, she heard the light turned on.

She was led into her sitting-room and sat upon a chair. It was then that she became aware that a third man was in the flat. He was a foreigner and spoke with a harsh accent. Even though he whispered she recognised this, for there was a little wrangle between two of the men.

Presently she felt somebody hold her by the arm and pull up the sleeve of her blouse, and immediately afterwards she felt a sharp pain in the forearm.

"This won't hurt you," said the voice that had first spoken to her, and then somebody else said:

"Turn out the light."

Though she was thickly blindfolded, she realised that the lights were extinguished. The man was still holding her arm and apparently sitting by her side.

"Keep quiet and don't get excited," said the first man. "Nobody is going to hurt you."

She remembered very little after that. When she woke up she was lying on her bed, still fully dressed, and she was alone. The curtains and the blinds had been drawn up and she had a dim idea that as she woke she heard the door close softly. It was then about five o'clock. Her head was swimming, but not aching. She had a queer taste and when she dragged herself to her feet, her legs gave way, and she had to support herself with a chair.

"Did you send for the police?"

"No," she said. "The first person I thought of was you. What have they done, Mr. Reeder?"

He examined her arm. There were three separate punctures. Then he went in and looked at the bedroom. Two chairs had been drawn up by the side of the bed. The atmosphere was still thick with cigarette and cigar smoke. There were butts of a dozen smoked cigarettes on the hearth. But what interested Mr. Reeder most was something that the intruders had left behind. It was a fountain pen, and it had been overlooked, probably because the pen was the same colour as the table. He handled it gingerly, using a piece of paper, and carried it to the light. The pen was of a very popular make, but it offered a wonderful surface for finger-prints.

When he came back to the girl Mr. Reeder's face was very grave.

"They've done you no harm at all. I don't think they had any intention to hurt you. I was the gentleman they were out for."

"But how?" asked the bewildered girl.

Mr. Reeder did not reply immediately. He got on the telephone and called up a doctor he knew.

"I don't think you will feel any bad after-effects."

"What did they give me?" she asked.

"Scopalamin. It's main effect was to make you speak the truth. Not," said Mr. Reeder hastily, "that you ever speak anything but the truth, but rather it was to remove certain inhibitions. The questions they asked you were, I imagine, mainly about myself; what did you tell me, how much I knew. And I'm afraid"—he shook his head—"I am very much afraid that you told them much more than is good for me."

She looked at him with wide, disbelieving eyes.

"But who were they?"

Mr. Reeder smiled.

"I know two of them. The third may, of course, be the most dangerous of the trio, but I really don't think he matters."

That morning there was a swift raid on the premises at 297 Lincoln's Inn Fields, but the raiders arrived too late. They had to break open the door—the room was empty. Apparently there had been a considerable amount of destruction going on, for the gas fire had been dragged out of the hearth, and the original grate behind it was full of black paper. The test tubes had gone, and so had the manuscript which Mr. Reeder had seen on the desk. Inquiries made on the premises produced very little in the way of information. Mr. Jones had occupied his office for four years. He was believed to be a Swede, and he gave no trouble to anybody. Very few callers came. He paid his rent and his rates regularly and the only adverse criticism that was offered was that occasionally he used to sing in a strange language and in a stranger voice to the annoyance of the solicitor's clerks who occupied an office immediately below him.

Undoubtedly he drank. They found ten empty gin bottles in one cupboard and fourteen earthenware bottles in another.

After the raid Mr. Reeder took counsel with himself, and examined his motives in the most candid of lights. He had, he realised, sufficient evidence to produce most of the effects which were desirable. He had brought to him a file dealing with the bank crimes that had

been recorded in the past two years, and very carefully he went over the names of the men who had vanished, and with them considerable sums of money.

From his pocket he took the two keys which he had found in Reigate's pocket. If he could find the lock for these, the matter would be developed to its end. Mr. Reeder was very anxious that he himself should fit these keys to the right locks, the more so since he had seen, as he thought, a very likely lock in the queer shop building immediately behind the Strangers Club.

He fought with himself for a long time. Starkly he arraigned his dramatic instincts before the bar of sane judgment, and in the end he condemned himself and sought an interview with the chief constable to detail his theories.

The chief constable had eaten something which had not agreed with him. It was a prosaic explanation for a fall of a great man, but he was at home, in the doctor's hands, and the deputy chief constable occupied his chair.

It was unfortunate that Mr. Reeder and the deputy chief constable had never seen eye to eye, and that there was between them an antagonism which can only be understood by those fortunate people who have worked in or watched the work of a great government department.

The deputy chief was due for retirement. He had a grievance against the world, and every superintendent and chief inspector at Scotland Yard had a grievance against him.

He was a little man, very bald, thin of face, and thin-

ner of mind, and it was his boast that he belonged to the old school. It was so old that it had fallen down—if the truth be told.

When Mr. Reeder had detailed his theories:

"My dear fellow," said the deputy chief constable, "up to a point I am with you. But I will not accept —I never have accepted—the master criminal theory in any case with which I have been associated. There is a great temptation to fall for that romantic idea, but it doesn't work out. In the first place, there's no loyalty between criminals and therefore there can be no discipline, as we understand discipline. If the man is the man you think, he could not command implicit obedience, and certainly in this country he could not find people to carry out his instructions without regard to their own safety. The other idea is, of course, fantastical. I happen to know all about the Strangers Club. It is extraordinarily well conducted and every Thursday there is a series of lectures in the basement lecture hall, which have been given by some of the greatest scientists in this country. Dr. Clutterpeck has an international reputation——"

Mr. Reeder was staring at him owlishly. In his soul there was a fierce, malignant joy.

"There can be no question or doubt that there is quite a lot in your theory," the deputy chief constable went on; "but I could not advise action being taken until we have made very careful observations and there's no chance of our making a mistake. Personally, the fact that two men who were defaulting cashiers have been killed, suggests to me that there was a little

gang operating in each case, and that somebody has tried to double-cross them."

"And the silk pyjamas?" murmured Mr. Reeder.

The deputy chief was not prepared to explain the silk pyjamas.

It seemed to Mr. Reeder that the two chief inspectors, who were present at this interview, were not so completely happy about the matter as the chief.

"As it is," that gentleman went on (he was the type of man who always had an afterthought, and insisted upon expressing it), "we may have got into very serious trouble in raiding the office of Mr. Jones. I've been inquiring into the Benevolent Brotherhood, and they are most highly recommended by bishops and other important persons of the church. No, Mr. Reeder, I don't think I can go any further in this matter in the lamentable absence of the chief constable, and, anyhow, a day or two more or less isn't going to make any difference."

"Does it occur to you," asked Mr. Reeder gently, "that two men having been killed, there is quite a possibility of another seven going the way of all flesh?"

The deputy smiled. That was all—he just smiled.

Outside, in the corridor, one of the chief inspectors overtook Mr. Reeder.

"Of course he's all wrong," he said, "and I'm going to take the responsibility of covering whatever work you do."

Mr. Reeder made an appointment for the chief inspector to meet him after dinner, and alone he went back to the Strangers Club, carefully avoiding the front. He had to wait for his opportunity, because there

were several chauffeurs outside their garages, but after a while he crept along the wall, till he came to a small door, inserted first one key and then the other. At the twist of the second the door opened noiselessly.

Mr. Reeder drooped his head and listened. There was no sound. He had expected at least to hear a bell. Taking a lamp, with great discomfort to himself, from his trousers pocket, he sent a beam into the dark corridor. It was a little wider than he had expected and terminated, so far as he could see, with a flight of stairs which led up round a bend out of sight. On the left-hand side there was a wide door in the wall. He thrust the light up and saw a powerful electric globe fixed to the ceiling, but there was no sign of a switch; presumably the light was operated from upstairs. He closed the door carefully, tried the second key on the bigger door, but this time without success.

At the appointed time he met Chief Inspector Dance and told him what he had discovered. They sat for over an hour in Mr. Reeder's room, discussing plans. At nine o'clock the inspector left, and Mr. Reeder opened the safe in the office, took out a heavy Browning and loaded it with the greatest care. He pushed every cartridge into the chamber and out again, added a touch of oil here and there, and finally, slipping a spare magazine into his waistcoat pocket, he pressed up the safety catch of the Browning and pushed the pistol behind the lapel of his frock coat.

The night commissionaire saw him go out, wearing one big yellow glove on his left hand, in which he carried the spare glove. His bowler hat was set at a jaunty

angle. There was about him that liveliness which was only discernible in this very quiet man when trouble was in the offing. To his left wrist he had strapped a large watch, and as the hands pointed to twenty minutes to ten he walked almost jauntily up the steps of the Strangers Club, passed through the swing door and smiled genially at the porter.

That functionary was tall, broad-shouldered; he had a large round head and a wooden expression.

"Whom do you want?" he asked curtly.

Evidently the servants at the Strangers Club, though they might be hand-picked for some qualities, were not chosen either for their good manners or their finesse.

"I would like to see Dr. Clutterpeck. He did me the honour to call at my office—my name is Reeder."

For a perceptible moment of time he saw a light dawn and die in the dull eyes of the hall porter.

"Why, surely!" he said. "I think the doctor is dining here to-night, Mr. Reeder, and he'll be glad to see you."

He went to a little telephone, pressed a knob.

"It's Mr. Reeder, doctor. . . . Yeh? He just dropped in to see you."

What the man at the other end of the 'phone said —and he said it at some length—it was impossible to overhear, but Reeder saw the man step back a little, so that he could look through the glass doors into the street outside.

"No, that's all right, doctor," he said. "Mr. Reeder is by himself. You haven't got a friend, Mr. Reeder? Maybe you'd like to invite him in?"

Mr. Reeder shook his head.

"I have no friend," he said sadly. "It's one of the tragedies of my life that I have never been able to make friends."

The man was puzzled. Obviously he had heard a great deal of this redoubtable gentleman from the Public Prosecutor's office, and he was not quite sure of his ground. He gave Mr. Reeder a long, scrutinising glance, in which any antagonism there might have been was swamped by genuine curiosity. It was almost as though he doubted the evidence of his eyes.

Evidently somebody called him urgently at the other end of the wire, for he turned suddenly.

"That's all right, doctor. I'll bring him right up. Will you leave your coat here?"

Mr. Reeder regarded him with a pained expression.

"It's a frock coat," he said. "I don't think it would be wise for me to go upstairs in my shirt sleeves."

At the far end of the hall there was a door. The janitor opened it, switched on the light and disclosed a comfortable little elevator. Mr. Reeder stepped in and turned so quickly that he might have gone in backwards. He had expected the porter to follow. Instead the man closed the door. There was a click and a gentle whirr and the lift shot upward. It went up two storeys and then stopped, and the doors opened automatically—and there was Dr. Clutterpeck, very genial, very prosperous looking in his evening dress and his heavy gold watch guard, with an outstretched hand like a leg of mutton.

"Glad to meet you, Mr. Reeder. This is a great honour. Will you follow me, sir?"

He went ahead, down a narrow passage, then, turning to the right, descended two flights of stairs, which, so far as Reeder could judge, brought him to the first floor. It was obvious that from the first floor which the elevator had passed there was no communication with this part of the building. It was almost unnecessary for the doctor to explain this.

He opened a door and disclosed a beautifully furnished room. It was long and narrow. A heavy pile carpet was evidently laid over a rubber foundation, for the visitor had the sensation that he was walking on springs.

"My little sanctum," said Dr. Clutterpeck. "What do you drink, Mr. Reeder?"

Mr. Reeder looked round helplessly.

"Milk?" he suggested, and not a muscle of the big man's face moved.

"Why, we can give you that even."

Raising his voice:

"Send up a glass of milk for Mr. Reeder," he said. "I have a microphonic telephone in my room. It saves a whole lot of ringing," he added. "But maybe you'd like me to shut it off?"

He turned a switch near the big Empire desk which stood in an alcove.

"Now you can talk and say just what you like, and nobody is going to listen to you. You'll take that glove off, Mr. Reeder?"

"I'm only staying a few minutes," said Mr. Reeder gravely. "I wanted to see you about certain statements that have been made and which in some way suggest

that this club is associated with a benevolent society run by an old gentleman called Jones."

Clutterpeck chuckled. Whatever else he was, he was a good actor.

"Why, isn't that strange!" he said. "I know old Jones. In fact, I've kept the old man alive. That crazy benevolent society! The odd thing about it, Mr. Reeder, is that it is quite genuine. Some people get a whole lot of money out of those poor guys who live in the south of France."

Mr. Reeder inclined his head gravely.

"It has that appearance. In fact, I was speaking with the chief constable to-night. We were discussing whether there was anything sinister—if I may use that expression—about the society, and he took the view that it was quite genuine. I am perfectly satisfied in my own mind that the brotherhood is responsible for giving quite a lot of money to people who felt an urgent need for it."

Clutterpeck was watching him, projecting his mind into Reeder's, taking his point of view—Mr. Reeder knew it.

"The whole thing arose out of a discovery of an unfortunate young man named Reigate," Mr. Reeder continued. "He was shot at my door and after his death there was found in a notebook an advertisement of this brotherhood. That, and one or two other curious circumstances. . . . Oh, yes, I remember, two keys we found in his desk, gave the case a rather mysterious aspect."

Mr. Reeder was suffering under a great disadvan-

tage. By a curious trick of mind he had entirely forgotten the excuse on which Clutterpeck had called at the Public Prosecutor's office. Such a thing had happened once before, and he was as a man who was walking over a bridge from which one plank was missing.

"That fellow Hallaty now," began Clutterpeck, and in a flash the reason for the call was revealed. "You remember, Mr. Reeder, the man who owes me money, and who is in Holland."

"He returned," said Mr. Reeder gravely. "He was found shot in Essex. Probably he had come back from the Hook of Holland to Harwich, and now——"

There was a tinkle of a bell and Dr. Clutterpeck opened a panel in the wall which hid a small service lift, and took out a glass of milk.

Mr. Reeder sipped at it gently. He had a palate of extraordinary keenness, and would have detected instantly the presence in that harmless fluid of any quantity which was not so harmless, but the milk tasted like milk. He took a longer sip and put it down, and he thought he saw in the face of Dr. Clutterpeck just a hint of relief.

"And now, doctor, I am going to ask you a great favour. I am going to ask you to show me round your club, about which I have heard so much."

The smile came off from the doctor's face.

"I'm afraid I can't do that. In the first place, it isn't my club, and in the second, one of the rules of this establishment, Mr. Reeder, is that there should be no intrusion on the privacy of members."

"Of whom you have how many?"

"Six hundred and three."

Mr. Reeder nodded.

"I have seen the list," he said. "They are mainly honorary members who are admitted to the ground floor for your lectures. I've yet to have the satisfaction of seeing a list—um—of your members."

Clutterpeck looked at him thoughtfully.

"Why then," he said, "come along and meet them."

He walked past Mr. Reeder, opened the door and stood aside for his guest to pass.

"Maybe you'd like me to go first?" he said, with a smile, and Reeder knew that war had been declared, and followed him up the stairs. Again they were in the long corridor and presently, the doctor stood by the door of the lift, and pressed a bell. When the lift came up it was to all appearances the same elevator that he had seen before. It had the same black and white tiled floor, and yet Mr. Reeder had a feeling that it was a little newer, a little cleaner than when he had seen it last.

As his foot touched the floor, he felt it give under him. Throwing the full weight upon his right leg, he sprung backwards. He heard something swish past his head. There was a crash where the short leaden club struck, and, recovering his balance, Reeder lashed out with his gloved hand. Dr. Clutterpeck went down like a log, no remarkable circumstance—for under Mr. Reeder's glove was a knuckle-duster.

For a moment he stood, automatic in hand, looking down at the dazed man at his feet. Clutterpeck blinked up at him, and made a movement to rise.

"You can get up," said Reeder; "but you'll keep your hands away."

Then all the lights went out.

The detective stepped back quickly, so quickly that he collided with somebody, who was behind him. Again he struck out, but this time missed. He was deafened by the bang of an explosion. He was so close to the pistol that the powder stung his cheek. Twice he fired in the direction of the flash and then he suddenly lost consciousness. He did not feel the blow that hit him, but went painlessly down into oblivion.

"Put on the lights now, Clutterpeck. Has he hit anybody?"

The lights went up suddenly. The bullet-headed porter was looking stupidly at a wrist and arm that were red with blood.

A shorter edition of the porter came into view round the angle of the corridor, and looked at the senseless detective.

"Help me get him into the cubby, Clutterpeck."

Clutterpeck only stopped to inspect the wound of the hall porter.

"There's nothing to it," he said. "Bind it up with your handkerchief. It's just a scratch. Gee, you're lucky, Fred!"

He turned his attention to the senseless man. There was neither malice nor anger, but rather admiration in his glance.

"Help me get him into the cubby," he said.

In reality he needed no help. He was a man of extraordinary strength. Stooping, he lifted the uncon-

scious Reeder, dragged him through the passage into a little room, and dropped him into a chair.

"He's O. K.," he said.

The little man, who had come from the passage, looked at the detective with an expression of amazement.

"Is that the bull?" he said incredulously.

Clutterpeck nodded.

"That's the bull," he said grimly. "And don't laugh, Baldy. That guy's got more men in stir than any other fellow that ever broke from the pen."

"He looks nuts to me," grunted Baldy.

He had a shock of fair hair. Mr. Reeder, who was listening intently, found himself wondering, in his inconsequent way, how he had earned his name.

"Feed him some water. Here, give it to me."

Clutterpeck took a glass from the man's hand and threw it into the face of the drooping figure. Mr. Reeder opened his eyes and stared round. His glove had been pulled off. The knuckle-duster had disappeared.

"I hand it to you, Reeder," said Clutterpeck amiably. "If I'd not been all kinds of a sap, I'd have known you had that duster in your glove."

He felt his jaw and grinned.

"Have a drink?"

He turned the leaves of a table and a nest of decanters rose.

"Brandy will do you no harm."

He poured out a large portion and handed it to the detective; Mr. Reeder sipped it.

Putting his hand to his head he felt a large egg-sized bump, but no abrasion.

"All right, Baldy. I'll ring for you." Clutterpeck dismissed his assistant. When he had gone: "Let's get right down to cases. You're Reeder. Who am I?"

"Your name is Redsack," said Reeder without hesitation. "You are what I would describe as a fugitive from justice."

Clutterpeck nodded amiably.

"You're right first time," he said. "How far have you got, Reeder? You and me are old-timers and hard boiled. We'll talk it right out, just as we feel, and we're not going to get sour with each other. You went out for a prize and got a blank. There's only one way of treating blanks, Reeder—and that's the way you're going to be treated. Have some more brandy?"

"Thank you, I've had enough."

"Maybe you'd like a cup of tea?"

Clutterpeck was genuinely solicitous. He was not acting. He had pronounced the sentence of death upon the man who had come seeking his life, but he was entirely without animosity. Death was the natural and proper sequel to failure, because dead men cannot take the stand and testify to one's undoing.

"I think I would like a cup of tea."

Clutterpeck turned the switch and bellowed an order. Then switched it off again.

"You can't say you haven't met Clutterpeck." He grinned again.

Mr. Reeder nodded and winced.

"No, I met him in Lincoln's Inn Fields—a very unpleasant old gentleman."

"A clever old guy," interrupted Redsack. "In his way as clever as you. I picked him up when I came to England. He was doping then, and sleeping on the old Thames Embankment. He'd been so long away from Holland and had no friends in England, that I thought Clutterpeck might be as good a name for me as for him, and he didn't care anyway. It's been a grand racket, Reeder; if I clear up to-night we'll go on for a year or two.

"I came to this country with ten thousand dollars. Part of it I brought on the boat, and part of it I snitched from a passenger's cabin. It was so long since I'd been in England that I didn't know how easy it was. You're all so damn' law-abiding here that any big racket, if it looks good, would surely get past."

He settled himself comfortably in his chair, but rose almost immediately to open the panel, and took out a cup of tea.

"You can drink that. If you like, I'll drink half of it. Say, these poisoners make me sick. You know what I got the dungeon for in Sing-Sing? It was for beating up a guy who had poisoned his wife and mother-in-law. I just hated to see him around. He told them I was trying to escape and that he wouldn't stand by me. But that's ancient history, Mr. Reeder. Drink your tea."

Mr. Reeder drank and put down the cup carefully.

"I wasn't a month in this country before I found a young bank clerk who'd been playing the races and

had been snitching money from the bank. He got tight and told me all about it, and I saw how easy it was to make big money; so I just organised him, and he got away with a hundred thousand dollars."

He leaned forward and raised a warning finger.

"Don't say I didn't play fair with him, because I did. We shared fifty-fifty. The great thing was to hide him up for a month, and the next big thing was to get him away, and that was hard. I never realised before that England was surrounded by water, and that's where Clutterpeck came in useful. I set him up in some rooms in Harley Street, but he was never entirely satisfactory, because we couldn't keep him sober. We had one or two narrow escapes with the invalids he was escorting across the Channel." He chuckled as though it were a pleasant memory, and then with a deprecating smile: "You know what it is, Reeder, when you and me have to depend on second-class people and not on ourselves. We're so near being sunk that a life-belt doesn't mean a damned thing."

"When did you start the nursing home for infectious diseases?"

Mr. Redsack laughed uproariously and smacked his knee.

"Say, I wasn't sure whether you knew about that. You're clever. You got it, did you? Why, that happened after one or two of these birds had tried to double-cross us. You see, what we did was to put this advertisement in every paper once a week. Naturally we had thousands of letters, but we waited till we got a man who could hand in the dough. You've got no idea how bank clerks

don't know how to look after money! If he was just an ordinary five-cent man, we passed him on. But you'd be surprised at the number of big fellows—I once had an assistant general manager, who was so old that he couldn't be dishonest. But we got a good few real smarties; as soon as we picked on 'em, we sent them along a notification that, as a very special honour and on the recommendation of the Lord knows who, they had been elected members of the Strangers Club. We got a whole range of private rooms. But naturally we didn't want any member to meet another member. We gave 'em good food, free tickets for the theatre. Just made them feel that they were staying with Uncle John. How the hell they thought we did it on ten dollars a year I don't know. But I dare say you find, Reeder, that thieves are mean cusses.

"Once we got them here the benevolent brothers started their operations. I was the agent, and I had to make sure that they were men you could trust. I'm not going to give you the long of it, but it was not easy to get the smarties to fall for this grand idea. Most men are thieves at heart, but the thing that scares them is: how am I going to get away without a lagging? They can get the stuff all right, but where is it going to be put? Where will they hide? How will they leave the country without assistance? We provided everything for them; passports, transportation. Why, we even chartered a tug to get that guy who pulled down half a million from the Liverpool bank, from England to Belgium, and he didn't leave from Dover either. He went from London by water to Zeebrugge, and was

carried aboard and ashore on a stretcher with so many bandages on his face that half the people who saw him land were crying before the ambulance took him on to Brussels. We made more than half a million bucks out of that, and he is living like a prince in Austrak.

"We give service, Reeder. That's the key-note of our organisation—service. We took 'em out of London in ambulances marked 'infectious diseases only.' Can you see any policeman with children of his own stopping them and inspecting the patients? Why, you could smell that camphor dope before you saw the ambulance.

"You guessed right when you took an inspection of our nursing home at the back, and you guessed right when, after you had opened the door, you decided you wouldn't go in. We keep all our runaways snug in that home for a month. Sometimes two months, and no harm comes to them. They are out of the country as per contract. Service!"

He shook his head, and used the word lovingly.

"We picked 'em up from the bank; we brought 'em to London, we hid them and we got 'em out of the country, and never had a failure. Hallaty was yellow. In the first place, he didn't bring all the stuff to us, but cached nearly half of it at a small public house in the Essex road. Then he tried to get away and naturally we had to go after him. That kid Reigate, he got religious. We thought we had everything set, but he jumped out of the ambulance on his way to Gravesend, and naturally Baldy, who was acting as escort, had to stop him talking.

"I'm glad you didn't come in when you used that key.

I shouldn't have had the pleasure of talking to you. We had a machine gun on you, and Baldy was all ready with his motor cycle to cover up the sound. But you didn't come in, and, honestly, Reeder, I'm glad." He was very earnest. "You're the kind of guy I wanted to meet."

He shook his head, genuinely sad.

"I wish I could think of some other way out for you, but you're tied up to your graft, the same as I am to mine."

Mr. Reeder smiled with his eyes, and that was very rare in him.

"May I say not—um—as a matter of politeness, but in all sincerity, that if I have to go out at the hands of a desperado—if you'll forgive me using the word—I would prefer that it should be the best kind of desperado, and an—um—artist."

He paused.

"May I ask whether you plan to let the matter end in this interesting and complicated building, or have you a more spectacular method in your mind?"

Mr. Redsack smiled.

"You're a classy talker, Reeder, and I could listen to you for hours. Naturally you would think that I'd be thinking of something bad for a fellow who's given me the worst sock in the jaw I've ever had in my life." He touched his swollen cheek tenderly. "But I've got no malice in me. I guess we'll try the grand old American operation that's got so popular since I left the United States. We'll take you for a ride. If you've got any particular place you'd prefer, why, I'm willing to

oblige you, Mr. Reeder, so long as it gives me a chance of getting back before daylight."

Mr. Reeder thought for a minute.

"I naturally would prefer Brockley, which has been, as it were, and to use an expression which will be familiar to you, Mr. Redsack, my home town, but I realise that this highly populated suburb is not suitable for your purpose, and I suggest, respectfully, that one of the arterial roads out of London would suit both of us admirably."

Redsack switched on his loud speaker and gave an order.

He took from the belt under his waistcoat a large-sized automatic and examined it as carefully as Mr. Reeder earlier in the evening had inspected his own lethal weapon.

"Let's go," he said.

He led the way, opened the door again, and Mr. Reeder passed through into the passage.

"Turn right!"

Mr. Reeder followed his directions, and came to the blank end of the passage.

"There's a door there that'll open in a minute," said Redsack encouragingly.

They waited a few seconds. Nothing happened. Pushing past him, Redsack rapped on the wall and a tiny crack appeared in one corner. It opened wider and wider, and the door swung open.

"Say, what's the idea?" said Redsack loudly, and even as he spoke he whipped out his gun and fired twice.

It was a lucky day for Chief Inspector Dance. One

bullet whipped off his hat; the second passed between his arm and his coat.

He fired back, but by this time Redsack was flying along the passage and had turned the corridor.

When they came up, halting gingerly to feel their way, there was nobody in sight. They heard the whirr of the lift, but whether it was going up or down they could not tell.

Then again the lights went out from some central control. They could find no stairs.

"Back to where we came," said Dance.

They fled along the passage, through the door, down the steep flight of stairs. These turned sharply, and Mr. Reeder saw what it was. They were out in the mews, but not quickly enough; as Dance fumbled with the lock, they heard two gates open with a crash, the pulsation of an engine and the roar of it as it shot past. By the time they were out in the mews the Strangers Club had lost its proprietor, janitor and chief attendant.

"Both keys worked," Dance reported hastily. "I gathered he got you and advanced the time five minutes."

He saw Mr. Reeder rub his head.

"Hurt?" he asked anxiously.

"Only in my feelings," said Mr. Reeder.

They made a quick search of the garage and found the battered motor cycle on which Hallaty had tried to make his escape, and the big motor ambulance with its warning sign, which had assisted Redsack so vitally in his ingenious scheme.

"If the deputy chief had given me the sanction to

raid this place, I'd have had enough men here to catch 'em," growled Dance. "Where is this nursing home, and which is the way in?"

It took a long time before they finally reached the secret suites where three panic-stricken "patients" were waiting their discharge to that life of comfort which their depredations had earned for them.

Back at Scotland Yard, a chastened deputy constable was anxious to do all that was possible to correct his error, for he had been on the 'phone to his sick chief, and what passed between them is not on record.

In the middle of the night a more careful search was made of the garage. Mr. Reeder had seen a door which, he had imagined, led to a petrol store. When the lights were turned on, the thickness of the doors revealed the character of this "store." It was a steel-lined safe—it was empty. The accumulations of five years' hard work had gone. A barrage, immediately laid down about London, was established too late, and at five o'clock in the morning a tug left Greenwich and proceeded leisurely down the river, made its signal to Gravesend and passed out into the open sea.

The thing that came between Mr. Redsack and his future appeared in the form of a smoky cloud in the horizon, and a grey hull. From one tiny mast broke a string of little flags. The master of the tug reported to his chief passenger and charter party.

"A destroyer, sir," he said.

"What does he say?" asked Redsack, interested in the nautical drama.

The master consulted his signal book.

"'Heave to, I am searching you,'" he read.

Redsack considered this.

"Suppose we don't?" he suggested.

"He'll sink us," said the alarmed master. "Why shouldn't we let him come aboard?"

"That's O.K. with me," said Redsack.

He turned to the tall janitor, yellow-faced and shivering in spite of his heavy overcoat. "If I was sure they'd take me back to Sing-Sing, why, I wouldn't mind," he said. "Sing-Sing's kind of a lucky prison to me. But I'm so damned English that it's Dartmoor or nothing, I guess. Or maybe they don't hang people at Dartmoor."

He considered the problem as the destroyer came nearer and nearer, and then he went down to the little cabin and scribbled a note.

"*Dear Mr. Reeder,—I said last night it was you or me; and I guess it's me.*"

He signed his name with a flourish, sat down on the hard sofa, took out a cigar. He heard the bump of a boat as it came alongside and an authoritative voice demanding particulars of the passengers.

Mr. Redsack placed his cigar carefully in a little polished stove and shot himself.

THE MURDER OF HELEN JEWETT

From MURDER WON'T OUT by Russel Crouse

and

"BLODIE BELGIUM"

From FORTY YEARS OF SCOTLAND YARD

by Frederick Porter Wensley

CRIME, and particularly murder, is one thing in fiction; crime in real life is quite another. Life does things no author dare attempt; the most outrageous coincidences and the most baroque trappings are almost commonplaces: but the great difference comes in what might be called the incidence of detection. The murderer in the story books is always caught, but his luck is better in the flesh. Even when the murder is obviously a murder, and the corpse is found with a cut throat or a gaping bullet hole, the murderer has a good chance of going on undisturbed about his business. In a recent year in New York only six persons were sentenced to death for murder, an average of one to every fifty-six murders committed, and

of these six, five had been unlucky enough to choose policemen for their victims. All that is the basis for interesting speculation, on the comparative ease of murder as compared to the hazards of other kinds of crime, but more interesting perhaps is the second aspect of the question: how many murders are never detected at all, even as murders? How many people falling from windows; found sitting in closed garages dead from monoxide poisoning; dying of obscure heart ailments, strange fevers, and other diseases not readily diagnosed; falling off crowded subway platforms; drowning in bathing and boating accidents; committing suicide with knife, gun, or poison—how many victims of all these multifarious disasters are really victims of murder? No one can ever know, but police officials have been known to make guesses that are shockingly high. Sometimes a case occurs which illuminates this: a case, for instance, like that of Mr. George Joseph Smith, who had successfully drowned two of his brides before the death of the third aroused suspicion and Scotland Yard swung into action. A newspaper clipping started all that, but in how many cases is there no newspaper clipping, no clue at all?

In England the murderer has a more difficult time; England's celebrated tolerance functions not at all when it comes to murder. The two cases which follow illustrate, even if a little unfairly, the divergence of the murderer's fate in America and across the sea. The unfairness comes, principally, from the general attitude of our juries and of conditions in general, rather than from differences in police officials.

The case of Miss Helen Jewett (on which Manuel Komroff based his *New York Tempest*) is one of the most famous in American criminology. She was murdered in unusual, if not altogether glamorous, surroundings by someone whose identity is not, officially at least, known.

Russel Crouse, foremost of delvers into the antiquity of New York, and a formidable expert on its criminal history, has included her story in his startling handbook of New York's famous unsolved mysteries, *Murder Won't Out*, from which "The Murder of Helen Jewett" is now presented for your examination.

In contrast is a case from the invaluable memoirs of Frederick Porter Wensley, late Chief Constable of the C. I. D., New Scotland Yard, *Forty Years of Scotland Yard*. It is the chapter called "Blodie Belgium," and it is about a lady (dead) in a sack, with the head missing, a piece of torn wrapping paper with the words "Blodie Belgium" written on it, and detective work so direct and ruthless, from the finding of the body to Lord Darling's speech condemning the murderer to death, that it is almost a model of police procedure. With all but nothing to go on, Scotland Yard won, and another murderer graced England's gallows.

Both cases are fascinating; both are secure in the history of criminology, and both have that eerie fascination which no book of fiction, however, adroit, can ever attain.

HELEN JEWETT, the beautiful but unfortunate "Queen of the Pave."

THE MURDER OF HELEN JEWETT

1836

AT THREE o'clock on the Sabbath morning of April 10, 1836, Mrs. Rosina Townsend, a buxom if slightly faded lady who was privileged to the professional title of Madame, was awakened by a persistent knocking on the door of her elaborate and fashionable brothel at 41 Thomas Street.

Perhaps not without expressions of irritation,

for she was a churlish soul, Mrs. Townsend got out of a bed partly warmed by a gentleman other than her husband, who had deserted her in Cincinnati many years before, and, lamp in hand, went to see who could be up to no good at that time of night. It turned out to be a gentleman who had had some difficulty slipping away from his domestic circle. Mrs. Townsend directed him to the room of his favorite harlot and was about to follow him up the elegant mahogany staircase when she saw a light in the rear parlor.

Curious, she proceeded to investigate. She found the room empty but the rear door ajar. Thinking that perhaps someone had gone into the backyard for one reason or another she called out but received no answer. She locked and bolted the door and, recognizing the lamp as one of two of similar design in the household, started upstairs with it. She stopped at the door of Maria Stevens, where one of these lamps belonged, and found it locked. She went on to the next room.

There she pushed the unlatched door open. She was greeted by a wave of dense smoke which almost bowled her over. Stifling a cough Mrs. Townsend let out a scream which awakened every sinner under her nefarious roof. Girls in pretty nighties or none at all, and gentlemen in shirt tails or less came tumbling from the surrounding rooms.

Maria Stevens was the first to arrive, and she

and Mrs. Townsend, now a bit steadied, braved the signs of fire and dashed into the room. They found nothing in the way of a conflagration that could not be quenched with a few pails of water. But in the heap of smouldering bedclothes they found much worse.

There lay the alabaster body of Helen Jewett, New York's undisputed Queen of the Pave, a young lady of astonishing beauty "who had seduced by her blandishments more young men than any known in the police court records."

Miss Jewett was dead. One side of her lovely body was black from the burning bedclothes. But she had not been a victim of the fire. Her marble forehead was cleft by a blow from what undoubtedly had been not a blunt, but a very sharp, instrument.

"Murder!" whispered one of the frail ladies who had crowded near. And with the faint echo of the word came tumult. Harlots lapsed into hysteria and gentlemen, their faces gray with fright, began scrambling for their pantaloons. One wealthy but lecherous merchant volunteered with undue solicitude to summon a watchman and hurried away into the night. He evidently forgot his urgent mission once out of the house, but feminine screams carried far on a clear night and the watch eventually arrived. As one minion opened the door two men dashed past him into the shadows. Others

had trekked across dewy gardens and over high board fences to safety. A few remained to slip out quietly while the constabulary examined the hapless victim.

But if the gendarmerie was remiss in letting a fair proportion of the town's voluptuaries slip through its loose net in the excitement of the moment it was not altogether inalert. It had made an arrest before you could say, or at least a very few moments after someone did say, Richard P. Robinson. For in the very earliest official catechism that young libertine's name came bounding. Before dawn two watchmen had roused him from what seemed to be sincere sleep at the boarding house of Mrs. Moulton on Dey Street and placed him under arrest.

"This is a bad business!" Mr. Robinson said when he saw the body of the late light of his night life.

And indeed it was.

Before the Sabbath sun had set the news of Helen Jewett's untimely end had swept the length and breadth of the town. When Monday came and the daily newspapers had had their colorful say it was the outstanding incident of public interest, even though its locale led many to mention it only in hushed tones. For the newspapers by this time had no scruples about the bloody business of mur-

der and they had more space in which to exploit it, and, at the same time, their circulations.

Even the more conservative among them gave room to the gory details of the inexpedient death of the most magnificent of courtesans. As for the others, those penny dreadfuls hawked in the streets by an army of ragged and frequently annoying newsboys, it was to them as though a holiday had been declared in Rome. In particular was this true of the *Herald*, not long since launched by "an ill-looking squinting man called Bennett"—that would be the elder James Gordon Bennett.

It dared bare its first page, and almost its entire first page, to the dark business that was on everyone's lips. It sent one of its reporters into "the most splendid establishment devoted to infamous intercourse that the city can show" and he described its elegant furnishings. It quoted fallen women and it badgered public officials. It ranted against the oldest of all professions and the spread of its red glow over the city. It stormed against a civic complacency that could bring about a situation such as this. And it gained three thousand circulation in a single week, with some of its editions in such great demand that they sold for a shilling instead of a penny.

For New York now was no sleepy country village. It was a great and growing city of almost

two hundred thousand. Its Broadway was no longer a meandering country lane but a great avenue lined with Lombardy poplars which stretched miles past the scene of its first great murder mystery, then a lonely meadow but now strewn with great brick houses. The completion of "Clinton's big ditch"—the Erie Canal—in 1825 had turned the city's tide—it soon outstripped patrician Philadelphia in population and importance. It was moving with great strides toward the abundance that was to make it one of the cities of the world.

If its shadows in 1799 were becoming great enough and dark enough to hide crime they had grown now to the point where they could screen vice as well. In the dim streets that stretched out on either side of the neat City Hall Park were houses that seemed grim to the passer-by because their shades were tightly drawn. They were not so forbidding within. In some, men about town gathered to risk small fortunes at the gaming table. In others their pleasures were less austere, for gay doxies awaited them behind the barred doors with simulated love for sale.

Of these many "palaces of the passions" the most fashionable if not the most exclusive was that presided over by Mrs. Rosina Townsend. It stood on Thomas Street not far from Hudson Street, the center of a row of pale yellow two-story dwellings. It was furnished with all manner of "elegant"

carpets, mirrors, divans, and what-nots, and behind it stretched a garden with arbors and retreats. Here grew the brightest of flowers and "all the beauties of the vegetable world." And it was "filled with syrens and champagne, pineapples and pretty filles de joie."

"Eight young females of surprising beauty and three or four as horrible as sin, by way of contrast," said a newspaper writer of the day, "drew crowds of travelers night after night to these splendid rooms, hung round with elegant paintings." Of the eight beauteous females there was one whose charms were more than "surprising." They were amazing. When the blades of the town toasted her in the taprooms she was compared, to her own great advantage, to all the beauties of story and history. This was Helen Jewett—or at least, for all New York knew, her name was Helen Jewett. It was, however, only one of many names she had had.

Of all of these her real one was the most melodious. She was born Dorcas Doyen, in Augusta, Maine, in the year of 1813. Her father, a Welshman, seems to have been an accomplished drunkard. Her mother died when Dorcas was nine. The girl herself was a bright youngster and, if we are to believe the records, something of a prodigy in the field of incontinence. At the age of eleven she had given her budding body to a young fellow named Sumner.

Her father found out about this affair and, filled with indignation and a little liquor, gave the young man such a beating that he went off to China on the first sailing vessel that would take him. Shortly after that her father came to the conclusion that the time he spent looking after the girl was just wasted and could be much better employed at drinking, so he placed her in the family of a Judge Weston. There, with a little attention and affection, she flourished. She became a young lady of grace and accomplishment.

At sixteen she was the beauty of the town, with jet black hair and skin like white satin, and might soon have married into ease and complacency. But Fate caught up with her suddenly. Sumner, back from the seas, sought her out. They renewed their immature amours in the shack of an old negress and all seemed to be well. But Sumner had to go back to his ship, and no sooner had he gone than Judge Weston found out what had been taking place. With remarkable fidelity to the plot of any early melodrama he turned the poor girl out into a New England snowstorm to shift for herself.

Somehow she made her way to Portland, where she hoped to get work as a seamstress. She fell into the hands of a procuress and was lured into a bagnio on the pretense of doing light sewing. It wasn't that that was wanted, at all, but her great beauty saved her from utter promiscuity, for she had been

there only a few days when a wealthy young banker took her out and set her up in a fine house as his mistress. He might have married her, too, but for the return of an old shadow. One morning, reading her paper, Dorcas chanced upon the news of the arrival in port of Sumner's ship. She rushed to the wharf and found him. She took him home with her and they were in earnest reminiscent conversation when her lover happened in. He waited for no explanations but sailed into Sumner with both fists and no little ferocity.

Sumner, so the story goes, died of his wounds and the girl's erstwhile protector fled the wrath of the law. Dorcas packed up her petticoats and, not without tears, made her way to Boston. She was in no mood to resist life now and she soon found herself in the bordel of Mrs. Susan Bryant, a strumpet known rather sentimentally as "The Little Belt" after a British man-o'-war of that name which had visited the harbor a year or so before and to whose entire crew she had been faithful in her fashion.

There Dorcas was rediscovered, this time by a lavish son of a rich merchant who bought her a cottage in Cambridge and kept a key for himself. Once again she was approaching the altar, for the scion was eager to marry her. But Mrs. Bryant, missing the receipts attracted by her beauty and plotting shrewdly to get her back, sent Maria Livingston, who has already come into our story

as Maria Stevens and will come into it again later, to warn the merchant that his son was about to take to wife a graduate prostitute.

The father, looking into the source of the wealth which the boy had been lavishing on his mistress, found that he had been making false entries in the firm's books. He packed him off to the West and evicted Dorcas from her love nest. Things did not work out exactly as Mrs. Bryant had hoped they would, however. The girl came back to her for a time, but there was no balm for her now in Boston, and within a few weeks she was off by coach for New York.

The hackman who met her there sized her up at once and took her to Mrs. Post's "hotel" on Howard Street. She was not long for so common a camping ground, and moved soon to the regal establishment of the Duchesse de Berri, who was known to the police less picturesquely as Mrs. Berry. There she began to come into her own as the town's premier courtesan.

In this rise she had as her first aid her unusual beauty, which she now began to capitalize in earnest. She was so striking in appearance that men turned to look at her. Nor was she a stupid wench of the sort men usually found when they sought immodesty. On her desk in what turned out to be her death chamber the coroner found items by Scott and Dryden and Byron and Bulwer and

Shakespeare and, in her heyday, she could discuss them all intelligently. In her deathbed lay a copy of Lady Blessington's *Flowers of Loveliness*.

Men were known to pay her fee for no other purpose than to talk with her for an evening. More than once she left the commercial field to live in extravagant concubinage. A prosperous broker kept her for a time. A prominent Kentuckian prolonged a visit to New York to live with her. A man of means took her to Saratoga one summer where she mingled, not without credit, with the belles of the day.

She had a sense of showmanship, too. She walked down Broadway every day dressed stunningly in rich green silk. Men watched for her and followed her. She became known as "The Girl in Green" and "The Comet of the Sidewalk." She was to be seen, resplendent, at every public ball. She took her place in the third tier at the Park Theater with considerable regularity and sat through many a heavy classic with rapt attention.

It was at the theater that she met Richard P. Robinson. That was in 1834. He was only seventeen then but already he knew his way about the dark places. He had been born, of good Calvinistic parents, in Connecticut and had had an excellent rearing. At an early age he seems to have been addicted to novel-reading, which "seeming waywardness" grieved his father greatly. At fourteen

he had considerable temper and in a fit of it ran away to New York.

He was employed as a clerk, and a promising one, in the jewelry store of Mr. Joseph Hoxie, in Maiden Lane. His nights he seems to have devoted to seducing virtuous young ladies or dallying with those who had long since lost their amateur standing. In all the brothels of the town he was known as "Pretty Frank," having adopted for his libidinous activities the alias of Frank Rivers.

He had often seen and admired Helen Jewett but he had never spoken to her until that night he followed her into the theater. She dropped a ten-dollar bill, hoping that he would pick it up for her, but he did not fall for that old trick. She stooped to retrieve it herself. It had to be at that moment that two drunken roisterers passed and, seeing this sleek green posterior so prettily receptive, one of them could not resist temptation. He kicked her soundly on it and fled, with his companion, laughing.

Helen Jewett, thus propelled, fell flat. Robinson, near by, made no effort to help her up or to avenge the insult. He stood calmly by while she scrambled to her feet. Embarrassed and slightly disheveled she fled back to her bordel. In the intermission Robinson was accosted by a little girl in pantalettes and short sleeves who bore a note from Helen Jewett, asking him to call on her at Mrs. Berry's.

Robinson went, and found the lady in an elaborately furnished room where "a superb gilt eagle held in his shining beak a canopy which drifted its snowy sheets of film over a pampered couch." That was the beginning of a friendship both beautiful

RICHARD P. ROBINSON, who had a cheering section at his trial for murder.

and hideous, which spanned two years and ended only with Helen Jewett's death.

For the most part these two were happy in each other's company. They were to be found often in the garden of Mrs. Berry's seraglio reading Byron together. Their somewhat sordid romance was always under a shadow. Among the many men to whom Helen Jewett had to lend herself there were, from time to time, those to whom she paid some

little extra attention. On these occasions Robinson became furious.

On the other hand there were times, too, when he strayed. It was rumored on one occasion that he was paying court to Miss Hoxie, the daughter of his employer, and might marry into the firm. This caused a breach. At another time—and this is one to remember—he threw his affections and his trade to another trollop. It just happened that this baggage was Maria Livingston, now known as Maria Stevens, the young lady who, as Mrs. Bryant's dupe, had blasted Helen's near-romance in Boston.

The city's first lady of the night took bold steps to end that interlude. She dressed herself as a man one night, followed her faithless lover into the rival harem and, finding him in the arms of the other houri, gave her a good hair-pulling. Robinson came back to her the next night, penitent. He never yielded again to the blandishments of Miss Stevens, and the situation must have been a little embarrassing for him when these two ladies found themselves under the same shameful roof at Mrs. Townsend's.

In the winter of 1835 Robinson and Helen quarreled again and this time she went flouncing off to Albany with a commercial agent. It must have been patched up by post (Helen was a great

letter writer, it later turned out, and did almost as much business with the post office as a mercantile firm), and when she came back by steamboat Robinson was there to meet her. She established herself at Mrs. Townsend's and resumed her reign where she had left off.

Then came the night of April 9th, which was to be well marked. It was a Saturday night and on Saturday night all the rakes of the city were abroad. They trooped in and out of Mrs. Townsend's by the score. But that not-so-good lady was neither so busy nor so distracted by this rush that she could not tell almost too clear a story when the coroner came to question her.

A little after nine o'clock, then, a knock had come and she had gone herself to the door. Before answering it she asked who was there. This was because Helen had told her under no circumstances to admit one Bill Easy (the nocturnal sobriquet of another young debauchee), for she was expecting Frank Rivers. Satisfied by the responding voice that the visitor was not Mr. Easy, Mrs. Townsend opened the door.

There she saw, she insisted at all times later, Robinson. She was sure because a light in the hallway fell full upon his face. But Lizzie Salters, one of the girls who was standing near by, wasn't so sure. Both agreed that once the visitor stepped into the

house no one saw his face, for he pulled a black hat which he wore down over his eyes and raised a dark cloak up to his face.

He went at once to the staircase and ascended.

"Oh, my dear Frank, I am so glad to see you," Mrs. Townsend heard Helen Jewett say a moment later.

At eleven o'clock Helen came to the head of the stairs and called down for a bottle of champagne. Mrs. Townsend served it herself. The door was opened and Helen received the salver. She asked the madame in for a sip but the lady declined. Through the opened door, she said, she saw Robinson lying on the bed reading. His face was turned from her, but she was sure it was Robinson. Later she said she recognized him from a bald spot, but this seems to have been an afterthought.

That was the last she saw of Helen Jewett alive. She locked her doors a little after midnight, with most of her girls in bed and not alone and herself went to the wars, as Juliet's nurse would have had it. Three hours later she was roused by the knock at the door, then came the ghastly discovery, and before long the place was swarming with the watchmen in their helmets.

Until very recently I had wondered why the constabulary did not make quick work of the mystery of Thomas Street, for I knew that at its head at the time, as high constable, was Old Hays, one

of the most sagacious policemen the city has ever known. Old Hays was perhaps the first detective in America. He called himself a "shadow" when engaged upon such work, and later when the city

OLD HAYS, New York's first detective, who was too busy elsewhere to solve the Helen Jewett murder.

formed its first detective force they were called shadows.

More than once Old Hays disguised himself in some outlandish fashion to bring in a villainous caitiff. A study of some of his exploits reveals a knowledge of criminal psychology unusual for the time. He might have solved the murder of Helen Jewett had he hit the trails when they were fresh. But a few days before it occurred a trio of forgers

had sawed their way out of Bellevue prison. Old Hays was after them at once, and his was a single-track mind. He couldn't turn his attention elsewhere until he had captured them. Capture them he did, too, but by that time his underlings believed they had solved the tragedy of the belle of the pave.

For when Richard Robinson was roused from what seemed to be a sound sleep on that Sabbath it was not just a shot in the early morning dark. Three watchmen who had been summoned to the brothel had gone about their business in a workmanlike way once they had calmed the hysterical trollops. By following the clue of the open door they had discovered in the backyard a hatchet, which was to be identified by a porter as having come from Mr. Hoxie's store where Robinson worked.

In an adjoining garden they had come upon a dark cloak. Lizzie Salters told them at once that it was Robinson's cloak. She identified it by means of a tassel which she had sewed on for the young man after he had torn it off on a sleigh ride. Obliging hussies, those prostitutes of an earlier day! Hanging to an inner tassel was a snip of cord. Hanging from the hatchet's handle was a similar snip, as though one had been tied to the other. Hatchets have no scabbards to be strapped on and it was indicated that this one had been tied to the cloak.

Then, too, when Robinson had dressed at the command of the law to be taken to the scene of the crime he had put on a pair of pantaloons that had been thrown over the end of the bed. On these were found white patches that the police said were whitewash. On one of the fences behind Mrs. Townsend's place which might have been scaled by the murderer in his flight was a fresh coat of whitewash.

With true impulsive mob psychology the town accepted Robinson's guilt at the moment that it accepted Helen Jewett's death. A wave of righteous indignation swept the populace. It was just as well that the cheerless old Bridewell held the prisoner safely. The newspapers, evidently so sure of their ground that they felt no fear of libel, condemned him in phrases that would have regaled the devil himself. He was a black-hearted wretch and worse.

And then slowly the tide began to turn. Robinson's demeanor helped him no little. In those days the guilty were expected to quake and cower. He did nothing of the sort. Even the police admitted that from the moment of his arrest his behavior was anything but that of a guilty man. "He certainly looks as little like a murderer as any person I ever saw," wrote Philip Hone in his diary, a little reluctantly.

The newspapers, and in particular the flamboyant *Herald*, became less sure of their attack. It seemed incredible that this baby-faced boy could

ever have been the fiend. Reporters searched about for other explanations. It was hinted that Mrs. Townsend had owed her prize minx a goodly sum of money and had not been disposed to pay it. It was pointed out that Helen had had a rich collection of jewels, most of which were now missing.

The story of the old enmity between Helen and Maria Stevens, who had ruined one alliance for her and had almost ensnared Robinson, was whispered about. It was known that Maria had not even waited to be questioned on the night of the murder but, throwing together a few clothes, had fled through the basement into the night. And now, a few weeks after the crime, she was found dead in her indecorous bed at the bagnio of Mrs. Cunningham. Had she slipped a conscience-easing potion into the champagne she had drunk before retiring?

There were rumors that a prominent merchant who had been in the house on the night of the crime was so eager to keep his name out of the proceedings that he was paying blackmail to all those who knew. And then one morning the *Herald* gave space to an anonymous letter in which the writer confessed the crime. He gave jealousy as the reason, said he had stolen the hatchet from Mr. Hoxie's store and had bribed Helen Jewett's maid to let him hide under the bed so that he could kill her and fix the blame on Robinson. He announced,

blithely enough, that he was off to Europe and would never be caught.

So many of these clouds arose, some small, some large, that by the time the law was ready to judge Richard Robinson the town was of no single mind as to his guilt. As a matter of fact, so many had taken his side that it became almost a civic issue and his trial was the first of the legal hippodromes of which there were to be many when homicide became one of our great national pastimes and its perpetrators, from time to time, popular idols.

It was held in the City Hall which still stands. Then, however, it was new and its marble façade was the talk of the young nation. It began of a June morning, and even a deluge of clammy rain could not keep a great throng from fighting with the constabulary to gain admittance. Those who could not crowd into the courtroom stood in the downpour in the park and waited for the tidbits to be whispered down to them by the more fortunate.

The audience was not unlike a football crowd of today. Those pietists who believed Robinson's hands red with this crime within a circle of crime made no efforts to stifle their angry muttering when evidence against him was brought forth. But the prisoner at the bar was not without his adherents. The young men of the town, having known and enjoyed the ruttish circles in which he

moved, rallied loyally. They adopted as an ensign a dark cap with a peculiarly glazed visor which Robinson had affected in his night life and came to court in a body thus adorned. They were a veritable cheering section, greeting every favorable turn for the accused with such shouts that the judge had to speak harshly to them on several occasions.

The trial itself was dramatic only for its partisan demonstrations. Mr. Phœnix, for the State, wove his braid of circumstantial evidence, most of which you have read herein. But now Robinson had an opportunity to present his side, and under the shrewd manipulation of Ogden Hoffman, a wise attorney, retained, it is said, with funds supplied by an admiring Washington Square widow, there was a great deal to be brought out.

First, it was a simple matter to attack the credibility of the State's witnesses, for they were almost all demireps. Then, too, if Mrs. Townsend was sure in her identification of the villainous visitor on that night, Lizzie Salters was not. The coroner did not remember that the snips of cord were attached to the hatchet and the cloak when he first saw them, a few minutes after they were found. The watchman who had discovered the cloak admitted that it could hardly have been dropped where he found it by anyone in flight, but more likely had been thrown there. Mr. Hoxie's son testified that a day

or two before the crime he and Robinson had done some painting and that the spots on the prisoner's pantaloons might have got there then. The police admitted they had neither smelled nor tasted it to verify their suspicion that it was whitewash.

Mr. James Tew, Robinson's roommate at Mrs. Moulton's, said that on the fatal Saturday night he had gone to bed at nine-thirty. He awoke, he believed, between one and two but he could not be sure, and found Robinson in bed with him. He asked him what time he had come in, and Robinson replied between eleven and twelve. He awoke again shortly after three, he believed, and Robinson was still there, asleep.

But the master stroke for the defense was the production of Mr. Robert Furlong, a grocer. Mr. Furlong testified, with all the assurance in the world, that the prisoner had dropped into his store on Nassau Street at about nine-thirty on that very Saturday night and purchased no less than twenty-five segars. (These would be our present-day cigars.) He sat himself down on a barrel and proceeded to smoke them up. He had finished his second when, at ten o'clock, Mr. Furlong decided to close up.

He remembered the time well because Robinson had thought he was closing early and had produced his watch to prove that it wasn't yet ten. The two had compared watches. He remembered the occasion all the more vividly because his partner, one

Mr. Hitchcock, was asleep in a corner and Robinson had volunteered to waken him and had done so, rather roguishly it would seem, by dropping hot cigar ashes in his face.

Mr. Furlong later committed suicide by throwing himself off a boat in the bay, and this was taken to be proof of his guilt as a perjurer. But he was very much alive when the jurymen went out to consider his testimony with the rest. They evidently believed him for, within ten minutes, they were back with an acquittal.

In almost any stray items you may find dealing with this case you will read that this decision was arrived at through bribery. There is one story to the effect that Robinson and his attorney were seen conferring in the park that very night with one bewhiskered member of the twelvesome and were seen to hand him a package. If there were any such proof at the time it is strange that it was not produced in the courts.

At any rate Robinson went free. He lost no time in seeking a new field for his activities. It was at one time reported that he had become a desperado along the Mississippi. Another story had him turning soldier in the war with Mexico. There is considerable evidence, however, that he settled down to a peaceable life in Texas and died there some years later.

And so the death of the lovely, naughty Helen

Jewett remains a mystery until this day. There were many who could have killed her. It might have been, as was intimated by defense counsel, Mrs. Townsend, with a money motive. It might have been Maria Stevens with revenge in mind. It might have been one of a dozen of her jealous admirers. It might have been someone out of her none too peaceful past. It might have been a robber who wanted her jewels. It might have been a fiend of the sort whose sadistic case histories you find in treatises on abnormal psychology.

Whoever it was kept the secret well. Now it is so late that even if full proof were to be found nothing could be done to avenge the lady who loved not wisely but too well—and entirely too often.

"Blodie Belgium"

ONE of the strongest arguments in favour of a national detective service is that it would simplify team work in criminal investigation. If the team spirit had not existed in the C. I. D. there would have been, I think, much more trouble in getting to the truth of the murder of Madame Emilienne Gerard.

The opening of the case was the discovery, by a road sweeper, of a parcel wrapped in sacking which had been deposited inside the railings of the gardens that form the centre of Regent Square, Bloomsbury. When the parcel was undone there was found in it the trunk of a woman, clad in delicate underclothes of lace and blue ribbon. Head, hands, and legs were missing. A sheet had been wrapped round the body, and on a piece of torn wrapping paper the words "Blodie Belgium" had been roughly scribbled. A search in the vicinity resulted in the discovery of the legs in a paper parcel a little distance away.

This was on November 2, 1917. A medical inspection showed that the woman must have been killed at some time within the previous two days, and the mutilation of the body showed some anatomical skill.

John Ashley, who later succeeded me as Chief Constable, was then the divisional detective inspector of the E Division, and the first stages of the investigation fell automatically to him. The difficulties of the task were accentuated by the fact that it was wartime and London was full of refugees among whom it was probable that

inquiries would have to be made, for the writing suggested that the victim was one of them.

A close examination of the articles brought to light only one possible clue. This was a laundry mark "II H" worked in red cotton on a corner of the sheet. Inquiries were at once set on foot among all the laundries where information was likely to be picked up. By the following day this led to a house in Munster Square, Regent's Park, and there it was learned that a Frenchwoman, Madame Gerard, had been absent from her rooms since a particularly bad air raid on the night of October 31st. She was the wife of a chef, who had been in this country but was then serving in the French army.

Up to this time there had been nothing to indicate the place at which the woman had been murdered. She might have been killed anywhere in London or outside, and it was therefore decided that I, as senior chief detective inspector, should assist the divisional detective inspector in the conduct of the inquiries, so that if they led outside the division I should be able to continue the investigation with a full knowledge of all the details. The divisional detective inspector of such a district as E Division is always busy, and it would have been scarcely fair to expect him to carry on a special case demanding close attention and probably heavy work outside the limits of his district.

I went to Bow Street, where I found that Ashley and his staff had been energetically at work and had accumulated a considerable amount of very valuable information. He was obviously pleased when I told him that I had come to coöperate.

The usual efforts were made to trace the friends and associates of Madame Gerard. Among them was a butcher named Louis Voisin, who lived at a tenement building at 101 Charlotte Street, Fitzroy Square, to whom she had at some time acted as housekeeper. By

Saturday night we had enough material in hand to show us that it was necessary to interview this man and a woman with whom he was living, a Madame Berthe Roche. Officers went to find them, and they were invited to come to Bow Street so that statements might be taken from them.

No charge was then made against them. Theoretically they were in the same position as a number of other foreigners who had also been asked to come to the police station in connection with the case. We had no legal proof against anyone. The only link was that of the sheet, traced as belonging to Madame Gerard. That did not necessarily mean that the headless body was hers. It might have been that of some other person. Even if it was that of Madame Gerard, all that could have been shown was that she and Voisin were on intimate terms, which was far from proving that he had murdered her. Common sense, however, pointed to the probability that whether he murdered her or not he knew something.

I think that something had developed in a vague sort of way, because high voices of women had been heard coming from his rooms during the midnight hours. This might have been worthless gossip, or it might have had some association with the agitation induced by the air raid. But it was a point that in some degree brought in Berthe Roche. It was our plain duty to clear up these things. I had an open mind, but the position was a delicate one. If my recollection is right I was asked at the trial (I think by Lord Darling) what I should have done if Voisin had asked to go. I replied that I did not know, but that if he had I hoped I should have risen to the occasion. However, I added, I was glad that the question had not arisen.

There were some twenty or thirty people waiting at Bow Street at the time, whom it was necessary for me to see on various points of the investigation. Since, however,

we regarded Madame Roche and Voisin as the people most likely to throw light on the mystery, we interviewed them first.

Voisin was a short, thick-set man, heavy jawed and exceedingly powerful of frame, and he faced me with a sort of aggressive determination. He spoke broken English of a kind, but to make sure that we thoroughly understood each other I had with me Detective Sergeant Read (now a divisional detective inspector), who spoke French fluently and who helped at various points. In this way Voisin related a story that must have been carefully thought out.

His line was a profession of ignorance. He had known Madame Gerard for eighteen months or so, and she had for some while acted as his housekeeper, going between her rooms and his. All through their acquaintanceship he had been on the most friendly terms with her. On October 31st he met her with a friend, "Marguerite," a young French girl with whom she was going to France that day, on a visit to her husband. She had asked him to go to her rooms for letters and to feed the cat during her absence, and he had done so on two days since her departure.

All this was very plausible on the face of it. Voisin was cunning. He knew—he had the best of reasons for knowing—that we had not yet proved the body to be that of Madame Gerard, and that it was not likely to be a simple job to prove that she had *not* gone to the war area and disappeared. I may add, however, that at a later date we managed to trace "Marguerite" and had her brought back from France, whither she was prepared to swear she had gone alone.

Voisin rather gratuitously referred to some butchering operations and to taking home a calf's head. This, it became obvious at a later stage, was to forestall inquiries

as to the cause of a number of bloodstains that were found in his kitchen.

There was much to do that day, and the interview was broken off. The man and the woman were detained, and that night and the next morning I carefully considered the position. There was one test that might be applied to Voisin which would either go far to clear him or to show that he had a guilty knowledge of the crime. Could I justify myself in applying it? I foresaw complications and realized that I must take the responsibility on my own shoulders if it should be said that I had overstepped my duty. I had no hesitation in my decision.

When, on the Sunday, I again saw Voisin, after a little conversation I turned to the interpreter.

"Ask him," I said, "if he has any objection to writing the words 'Bloody Belgium'?"

"Not at all," returned Voisin, and a sheet of paper and a pencil were handed to him.

Laboriously—he was an illiterate man—he traced the words.

The writing was much smaller than that which had been found with the body, but there was a general resemblance, and the spelling was the same—"Blodie Belgium." But I wanted to be sure that there was no mistake.

"Perhaps you're not feeling quite yourself," I said. "Would you like to try again?"

Five times he wrote, each time using the same spelling, but the handwriting varied in size. The final copy bore a very close resemblance in every particular to that of the original. I knew then that it was only a question of time before the other points in the case would be cleared up.

Among the objects found on Voisin, when he had been searched, was a key that opened the door of a cellar at 101 Charlotte Street. Alfred Collins, then a detective sergeant and now a chief detective inspector, who had

worked with great keenness and ability on many phases of the investigation, was one of the officers entrusted with the search of the premises. He was not a man likely to overlook anything, and in going over the cellar, he came across a cask of sawdust in which were hidden the head and hands of the murdered woman. Not only was there now incontestable evidence of her identity, but something of the manner of her death was made plain. She had been struck about the head and face several times with a blunt weapon, and there were bruises on her right hand that indicated how she had attempted to shield herself. Bloodstains were all about Voisin's kitchen, particularly on the inside of the door, which was removed and later produced at the Old Bailey. These marks were all of human blood, so that they could not be accounted for by the explanation that Voisin had given.

When I told Voisin and Roche that they would be charged with the murder of Emilienne Gerard the woman was thunderstruck. She jumped to the conclusion that her lover had betrayed her, and broke into a storm of voluble and abusive French. "You nasty man! You have deceived me," she raged at him.

He merely shrugged his shoulders with a muttered, "It is unfortunate," as they were taken away.

Sir Bernard Spilsbury, the well known pathologist, was called in, and his report made it apparent that Madame Gerard must have struggled hard for her life. A bloody towel had one of the dead woman's earrings attached to it, and it was a fair inference that someone had held this round her head to stifle her screams. After she had fallen unconscious she had slowly bled to death. We also found some bloodstains at Madame Gerard's rooms, but Sir Bernard was positive that they must have been much more extensive had the woman died there. How those stains were probably caused I shall explain.

Bit by bit we filled in the gaps until we gained a fairly

coherent idea of the whole grim and dramatic episode, although some of the details were a matter of inference.

The terms on which Madame Gerard had been with Voisin were something more than those of a visiting housekeeper. She had unquestionably been his mistress, and whether she knew that he was living with Berthe Roche or not, she had certainly never met the other woman. I am inclined to think that she did not know of her existence.

The night of October 31st was marked by one of the worst air raids London had known. Sometime after eleven o'clock a warning was given, and Emilienne Gerard left her rooms and, in common with hundreds of others, sought the safety of one of the Tube stations. For some reason she did not remain there. I rather fancy that at the "all clear" signal the station was closed and the crowd of refugees turned out. There was always the possibility of a fresh relay of raiders and the panic-stricken woman was seized with the idea of spending the night in the refuge of her lover's room in the basement of 101 Charlotte Street, a little distance away. Thither she went, and there she found Berthe Roche, who also disliked air raids, sitting with strained nerves in a lighted room. I imagine that Voisin himself, who was of a more phlegmatic temperament, had gone to bed.

Conceive the situation as the two half-hysterical Frenchwomen unexpectedly confronted each other, with their lover asleep in one of the other rooms. There would be demands for explanations, protests, threats. And then suddenly the excitable Berthe Roche, seizing the first weapon that came to hand, springing like a wild cat at her rival. Voisin, aroused by the quarrel, rushes in, and perhaps seizes Madame Gerard, smothering her screams in a towel, while the other woman continues to rain blows on her. Finally, as the struggle went on, he himself made short work of her.

Whether the murder was carried out exactly in this way or not, it was in the highest degree probable that Berthe Roche must have struck the numerous early blows, for they had been dealt by a person of no great physical strength, and a man of Voisin's power and trade would have dealt with the victim with more deadly sureness at the outset.

During the rest of that terrible night, the pair must have sat up debating the means that they should take to conceal the crime and avert suspicion. Voisin's skill as a butcher suggested the dismemberment, and he must have also been charged with the disposal of the body. They must have been in some perplexity as to what should be done with the head and hands, and a clumsy expedient seems to have been determined upon.

On the afternoon of November 1st Voisin called at Madame Gerard's rooms—of which he had a key—and explained to the landlord that his tenant would be away for a week or two. She had asked Voisin (so his story went) to mention to the landlord that she was expecting a sack of potatoes and would he be good enough to put them in her rooms when they arrived. It may have been at this visit that Voisin made the bloody marks that were found at the place, and took away the sheet in which the headless body was to be wrapped. The idea was to create an impression that Madame Gerard had been killed at her own place by some person who had visited her there, and had carried away some parts of the body, although how Voisin could have failed to see that, if the head and hands were sent there disguised as a sack of potatoes, the landlord would have inevitably recalled enough of the conversation to betray him, it is difficult to understand. The writing "Blodie Belgium" was also intended to mystify us and lead to a false scent.

A day or two afterwards Voisin attempted to adapt this story to some of the discoveries he must have known

we had made. With some chivalry he tried to exonerate definitely Madame Roche without committing himself. "She is not concerned in this crime at all," he asserted. He added:

"I went to Madame Gerard's place last Thursday, at 11 A. M., and when I arrived the door was closed but not locked. The floor and carpet were full of blood. The head and hands were wrapped up in a flannel jacket which is at my place now. They were on the kitchen table. That is all I can say. The rest of the body was not there.

"I was so astonished at such an affair I did not know what to do. I go to Madame Gerard's every day. I remained five minutes stupefied. I did not know what to do. I thought that a trap had been laid for me. I commenced to clean up the blood, and my clothes became stained with it. . . .

"I then went back to my house, had lunch, and later returned to Madame Gerard's rooms and took the packet to my place. I kept thinking this was a trap.

"I had no intention to do any harm to Madame Gerard. Why should I kill her? I didn't want any money. Madame Gerard owes me nothing, and I owe her nothing." (He did, in fact, owe her £50.) "I cannot see why I should do such a thing as that to Madame Gerard. I wanted to see Monsieur Gerard because I knew Madame Gerard was being mixed up with bad associates and had taken people to her flat. I knew that she had taken somebody there that night, and there are letters to show that she had been meeting men."

This statement was so naïve in its intention to mislead us that it could be dismissed as the futile concoction of a confused if cunning mind. That any reasonable person would believe that Voisin should carry away the head and hands from Madame Gerard's rooms to his own was out of the question. The other damning links in the chain against him were his association with the woman, the

human bloodstains found at his premises, the skill with which the body had been cut up, the resemblance of his writing and spelling of "Blodie Belgium" to the same words on the scrap of paper found on the body. These points he left unexplained.

Sir Richard Muir, who became leading counsel, went into the case with his usual thoroughness, tramping from one place to another to get a complete grasp of every detail. He never spared himself.

When Voisin and Berthe Roche were committed for trial the man made a further attempt to shield her. "Madame Roche is entirely innocent," he declared. "All that was found was taken from Madame Gerard's to my home."

At the trial, as I had expected, there was some legal argument as to whether the circumstances in which "Blodie Belgium" had been written by Voisin were such that the evidence was admissible. Mr. Justice Darling held that it was.

After quoting various legal authorities he said:

"He could see no reason for thinking that the statement was involuntary. It was quite proper for the police to ascertain who was the person who wrote 'Blodie Belgium.' It would be greatly in favour of Voisin if his handwriting did not resemble the writing on the paper. What was done was not setting a trap for a man—it was a legitimate attempt to assist the police."

The point, in fact, formed one of the principal grounds of appeal, and in equally strong language the judges there held that I had been right. The decision may be of interest to police officers who read this book, and for that reason I quote some portions of it. Mr. Justice A. T. Lawrence said:

> The question whether the prisoner had been duly cautioned before the making of the statement was

one of the circumstances which must be taken into consideration, and one on which the judge must exercise his discretion. It could not be said as a matter of law that the absence of a caution made the statement inadmissible. It might tend to show that the person was not on his guard as to the importance of what he was saying or as to its bearing on some charge of which he had not been informed. Voisin had written the words quite voluntarily. The mere fact that there were police officers present, or that the words were written at their request, or that Voisin was being charged at Bow Street Police Station did not make the writing inadmissible. There was nothing in the nature of a "trap" or of the "manufacture" of evidence. The identity of the dead woman had not been established, and the police, although they were detaining the appellant in custody for inquiries, had not decided to charge him with the crime.

It was desirable in the interests of the community that investigations into crimes should not be cramped, and the Court was of opinion that they would be most unduly cramped if it were held that a writing voluntarily made in the circumstances proved in this case was inadmissible in evidence. The mere fact that a statement was made in answer to a question put by a police officer was not in itself sufficient to make it inadmissible in law. It might be and often was, a ground for a judge to exclude the evidence, but he should do so only if he thought the statement was not voluntary in the sense which he (Mr. Justice Lawrence) had mentioned, or was an unguarded answer made in circumstances which rendered it untrustworthy, or made its admission against the prisoner unfair.

The evidence against Berthe Roche was less direct in legal sense than that against Voisin, and on the second

day of the trial she was, by direction of the judge, acquitted of murder. On an indictment as accessory after the fact she was subsequently found guilty and sentenced to seven years' penal servitude. She went mad in prison, and about a year after she had been sentenced died in an institution at Highgate.

Voisin was found guilty, and heard the sentence of death—which Lord Darling passed in French—with a composure that had marked his attitude all through the trial. He was executed on March 2, 1918.

The murder of Emilienne Gerard was among those affairs which might well have ranked as an unsolved mystery had less swift determination been shown in dealing with it at the outset. That Voisin would have found some means of getting rid of the head and hands, as well as the incriminating bloodstains at his rooms, had the investigation lagged, is in the highest degree probable, and there would have been remote chance of a conviction without that evidence. As it was, the body was discovered on a Friday. Thanks to Ashley's activities its likely identity had been established by Saturday. On that day Voisin and Roche were detained and by Monday the case against them was practically established.

THE WONDERFUL WAR

From WANTED FOR MURDER
by Leslie Charteris

LESLIE CHARTERIS HAS WRITTEN THESE BOOKS ABOUT THE SAINT:

The Saint and Mr. Teal
Getaway
The Saint vs. Scotland Yard
Angels of Doom
Wanted for Murder
Daredevil
Enter the Saint
Meet the Tiger
The Avenging Saint
The Bandit
The Last Hero
The White Rider
X Esquire

IN PREPARATION:

The Brighter Buccaneer

THE art of Leslie Charteris, whose saga of the Saint has made detective-story history, is a delicate and subtle one. He combines, deftly and without effort, the predominant features of Edgar Wallace and P. G. Wode-

house. He is hilariously funny and cold-bloodedly ruthless. He is full of champagne and, to mix a bad sort of simile, dynamite. Things happen in his stories with a headlong rush and an untiring vivacity; people are murdered, robbed, jailed, hung, threatened, and generally subjected to the hazards of crime with a heartening gusto. And through it all the Saint, otherwise plain Simon Templar, goes his placid way, sometimes a bulwark to Scotland Yard, sometimes a particularly poisonous thorn in the Yard's tough hide. Placid mentally, that is, for the Saint would as soon shoot as eat, and adventure (preferably profitable) sings loudly in his blood. He is, as a matter of fact, the modern Robin Hood, D'Artagnan without the horse, the man all of us would like to be.

In "The Wonderful War," from *Wanted for Murder*, you will meet the Saint in action. You will find him in the republic of Pasala, a Central American country which would have delighted O. Henry, and you will watch him become involved in war—a wonderful war, as the title puts it. That word hardly describes the fiesta of crime, excitement, adventure, and gayety which is the result of the Saint's efforts, but it will have to do. The words to describe his achievements properly haven't been invented yet.

THE WONDERFUL WAR

THE WONDERFUL WAR

THE Republic of Pasala lies near the northward base of the Yucatan peninsula in Central America. It has an area of about 10,000 square miles, or roughly the size of England from the Tweed to a line drawn from Liverpool to Hull. Population, about 18,000. Imports, erratic. Exports, equally erratic, and consisting (when the population can be stirred to the necessary labour) of maize, rice, sugar-cane, mahogany, and—oil.

"You can hurry up and warble all you know about this oil, Archie," said Simon Templar briskly, half an hour after he landed at Santa Miranda. "And you can leave out your adventures among the *señoritas*. I want to get this settled—I've got a date back in England for the end of May, and that doesn't give me a lot of time here."

Mr. Archibald Sheridan stirred slothfully in his long chair and took a pull at a whisky-and-soda in which ice clinked seductively.

"You've had it all in my letters and cables," he said. "But I'll just run through it again to connect it up. It goes like this. Three years ago almost to the day, a Scots mining engineer named McAndrew went prospecting round the hills about fifty miles inland. Everyone said he was crazy—till he came back six months later with samples from his feeler borings. He said he'd struck one of the richest deposits that ever gushed—and it was only a hundred feet below the surface. He got a concession—chiefly because the authorities still couldn't believe his story—staked his claim, cabled for his daughter to come over and join him, and settled down to feel rich and wait for the plant he'd ordered to be shipped over from New Orleans."

"Did the girl come?" asked Templar.

"She's right here," answered Sheridan. "But you told me to leave the women out of it. She doesn't really come into the story anyway. The man who does come in is a half-caste bum from God

knows where, name of Shannet. Apparently Shannet had been sponging and beachcombing here for months before McAndrew arrived. Everyone was down on him, and so McAndrew, being one of these quixotic idiots, joined up with him. He even took him into partnership, just to defy public opinion; and, anyhow, he was wanting help, and Shannet had some sort of qualifications. The two of them went up into the interior to take a look at the claim. Shannet came back, but McAndrew didn't. Shannet said a snake got him."

Simon Templar reached for another cigarette.

"Personally, I say that snake's name was Shannet," remarked Archie Sheridan quietly. "Lilla—McAndrew's daughter—said the same thing. Particularly when Shannet produced a written agreement signed by McAndrew and himself, in which it was arranged that if either partner should die, all rights in the claim should pass to the other partner. Lilla swore that McAndrew, who'd always thought first of her, would never have signed such a document, and she got a look at it and said the signature was forged. Shannet replied that McAndrew was getting over a bout of malaria when he signed it, and his hand was rather shaky. The girl carried it right to the court of what passes for justice here, fighting like a hero, but Shannet had too big a pull with the judge, and she lost her case. I arrived just after her appeal was turned down."

"What about McAndrew's body?"

"Shannet said he buried it by the trail; but the jungle trails here are worse than any maze that was ever invented, and you can almost see the stuff grow. The grave could quite reasonably be lost in a week. Shannet said he couldn't find it again. I took a trip that way myself, but it wasn't any use. All I got out of it was a bullet through a perfectly good hat from some sniper in the background —Shannet for a fiver."

"After which," suggested Simon Templar thoughtfully, "Shannet found he couldn't run the show alone, and sold out to our dear friend in London, Master Hugo Campard, shark, swindler, general blackguard, and promoter of unlimited dud companies——"

"Who perpetrated the first sound company of his career, Pasala Oil Products, on the strength of it," Sheridan completed. "Shares not for public issue, and sixty percent of them held by himself."

Simon Templar took his cigarette from his mouth and blew a long, thin streamer of smoke into the sunlight.

"So that's what I've come over to deal with, Archibald?" he murmured. "Well, well, *well!* . . . Taken by and large, it looks like a diverting holiday. Carol a brief psalm about things political, son."

"Just about twice as crooked as anything else south of the United States border," said Sheridan. "The man who matters isn't the President. He's under the thumb of what they call the Minister of the Interior, who finds it much more convenient and much safer to stay in the background—they never assassinate Ministers of the Interior, apparently, but Presidents are fair game. And this man —Manuel Concepcion de Villega is his poetic label—is right under the wing of Shannet, and is likely to stay there as long as Shannet's money lasts."

The Saint rose and lounged over to the veranda rail. At that hour (which was just after midday) the thermometer stood at a hundred and two in the shade, and the Saint had provided himself suitably with white ducks. The dazzling whiteness of them would have put snow to shame; and he wore them, as might have been expected of him, with the most cool and careless elegance in the world. He looked as if he would have found an inferno chilly. His dark hair was brushed smoothly back; his lean face was tanned to a healthy brown; altogether he must have been the most dashing and immaculate sight that Santa Miranda had set eyes on for many years.

Sheridan was in despair before that vision of unruffled perfection. His hair was tousled, his white ducks looked somewhat limp with the heat, and his pleasantly ugly face was moist.

"What about the rest of the white, or near-white, inhabitants?" inquired the Saint.

"A two-fisted, rip-roaring giant of a red-headed Irishman named Kelly," was the reply. "His wife—that's two. Lilla McAndrew, who's staying with them—I wouldn't let her put up at the filthy hotel in the town any longer—three. Four and five, a couple of traders, more or less permanently drunk and not worth considering. Six—Shannet. That's the lot."

The Saint turned away and gazed down the hillside. From

where he stood, on the veranda of Sheridan's bungalow, he could look down onto the roofs of Santa Miranda—the cluster of white buildings in the Moorish style which formed the centre, and the fringe of adobe huts on the outskirts. Left and right of him, on the hill above the town, were other bungalows. Beyond the town was the sea.

The Saint studied the view for a time in silence; then he turned round again.

"We seem to be onto the goods," he remarked. "Shannet, the small fish, but an undoubted murderer—and, through him, our real man, Campard. I had a hunch I shouldn't be wasting your time when I sent you out here as soon as I heard Campard was backing Pasala Oil Products. But I never guessed P.O.P. would be real till I got your first cable. Now we're on a truly classy piece of velvet. It all looks too easy."

"Easy?" queried Sheridan skeptically. "I'm glad you think it's easy. With Shannet's claim established, and the concession in writing at Campard's London office, and Lilla McAndrew's petition dismissed, and Shannet twiddling the government, the army, the police, and the rest of the bunch, down to the last office boy, round and round his little finger with the money he gets from Campard —and the man calls it easy. Oh, take him away!"

The Saint's hands drove even deeper into his pockets. Tall and trim and athletic, he stood with his feet astride, swaying gently from his toes, with the Saintly smile flickering faintly round his mouth and a little dancing devil of mischief rousing in his blue eyes.

"I said easy," he drawled.

Sheridan buried his face in his hands.

"Go and put your head in the ice bucket," he pleaded. "Of course, it's the sun. You're not used to it—I forgot that."

"How big is the army?"

"There's a standing army of about five hundred, commanded by seventeen generals, twenty-five colonels, and about fifty minor officers. And if your head hurts, just lie down, close the eyes, and relax. It'll be quite all right in an hour or two."

"Artillery?"

"Three pieces, carried by mules. If you'd like some aspirin——"

"Navy?"

"One converted tug, with 5.9 quick-firer and crew of seven, commanded by two admirals. I don't think you ought to talk now. I'll put up the hammock for you, if you like, and you can sleep for an hour before lunch."

"Police force?"

"There are eleven constables in Santa Miranda, under three superintendents. And in future I shouldn't have any whisky before sundown."

The Saint smiled.

"I'm probably more used to the sun than you are," he said. "This is merely common sense. What's the key to the situation? The government. Right. We don't propose to waste any of our good money bribing them—and if we did, they'd double-cross us. Therefore they must be removed by force. And at once, because I can't stay long. Long live the revolution!"

"Quite," agreed Sheridan helplessly. "And the revolutionary army? This state is the only one in South America that's never had a revolution—because nobody's ever had enough energy to start one."

The Saint fished for his cigarette case.

"We are the revolutionary army," he said. "I ask you to remember that we march on our stomachs. So we'll just have another drink, and then some lunch, and then we'll wander along and try to enlist the mad Irishman. If we three can't make rings round six hundred and fifteen comic-opera dagoes, I'm going to retire from the fighting game and take up knitting and fancy needlework!"

2

"MY DEAR soul," the Saint was still arguing persuasively at the close of the meal, "it's so simple. The man who manages the government of this two-by-four backyard is the man who holds the fate of Pasala Oil Products in his hands. At present Shannet is the bright boy who manages the government, and the master of P.O.P. is accordingly walking around under the Shannet hat. We'll go one better. We won't merely manage the government.

We'll *be* the government. And Pop is ours to play hell with as we like. Could anything be more straightforward? as the actress said when the bishop showed her his pass-book."

"Go on," encouraged Sheridan weakly. "Don't bother about my feelings."

"As the actress said to the bishop shortly afterwards," murmured the Saint. "Blessed old Archie, it's obvious that three months in this enervating climate and the society of Lilla McAndrew have brought your energy down to the level of that of the natives you spoke of so contemptuously just now. I grant you it's sudden, but it's the only way. Before I knew the whole story I thought it would be good enough if we held up the post office and sent Campard a spoof cable purporting to come from Shannet, telling him the government had been kicked out, the concession revoked, and the only thing to do was to sell out his Pop holdings as quickly as possible. What time our old friend Roger, back in London, snaps up the shares, discreetly, as fast as they come on the market."

"Why won't that work now?"

"You're forgetting the girl," said Templar. "This oil is really her property, so it isn't good enough just to make Campard unload at a loss and sell back to him at a premium when the rumour of revolution is exploded. The concession has really got to be revoked. Therefore I propose to eliminate the present government, and make Kelly, your mad Irishman, the new Minister of the Interior. That is, unless you'd take the job."

"No, thanks," said Sheridan generously. "It's not quite in my line. Pass me up."

The Saint lighted a cigarette.

"In that case Kelly is elected unanimously," he remarked with charming simplicity. "So the only thing left to decide is how we start the trouble. I've been in South American revolutions before, but they've always been well under way by the time I arrived. The technique of starting the blamed things was rather missed out of my education. What does one do? Does one simply wade into the Presidential Palace, chant 'Time, gentlemen, please!' in the ear of his illustrious excellency, and invite him to close the door as he goes out? Or what?"

"What, probably," said Sheridan. "That would be as safe as anything. I might get you reprieved on the grounds of insanity."

The Saint sighed.

"You aren't helpful, Beautiful Archibald."

"If you'd settle down to talk seriously——"

"I am serious."

Sheridan stared. Then:

"Is that straight, Saint?" he demanded.

"From the horse's mouth," the Saint assured him solemnly. "Even as the crow flieth before the pubs open. Sweet cherub, did you really think I was wasting precious time with pure pickled onions?"

Sheridan looked at him. There was another flippant rejoinder on the tip of Archie Sheridan's tongue, but somehow it was never uttered.

The Saint was smiling. It was a mocking smile, but that was for Sheridan's incredulity. It was not the sort of smile that accompanies a test of the elasticity of a leg. And in the Saint's eyes was a light that wasn't entirely humorous.

Archie Sheridan, with a cigarette in his mouth, fumbling for matches, realized that he had mistaken the shadow for the substance. The Saint wasn't making fun of revolutions. It was just that his sense of humour was too big to let him plan even a revolution without seeing the funny side of the show.

Sheridan got a match to his cigarette.

"Well?" prompted the Saint.

"I think you're pots, bats, and bees," he said. "But if you're set on that kind of suicide—lead on. Archibald will be at your elbow with the bombs. You didn't forget the bombs?"

The Saint grinned.

"I had to leave them behind," he replied lightly. "They wouldn't fit into my sponge bag. Seriously, now, where and how do you think we should start the trouble?"

They were sitting opposite one another at Sheridan's bare mahogany dining table, and at the Saint's back was the open door leading out onto the veranda and commanding an uninterrupted view of the approach to the bungalow.

"Start the thing here and now and anyhow you like," said Sheri-

dan, and he was looking past the Saint's shoulder towards the veranda steps.

Simon Templar settled back a little more lazily into his chair, and a very Saintly meekness was spreading over his face.

"Name?" he inquired laconically.

"Shannet himself."

The Saint's eyes were half closed.

"I will compose a little song about him immediately," he said.

Then a shadow fell across the table, but the Saint did not move at once. He appeared to be lost in a day-dream.

"*Buenos dias,* Shannet," said Archie Sheridan. "Also, as soon as possible, *adiós*. Hurry up and say what you've got to say before I kick you out."

"I'll do any kicking out that's necessary, thanks," said Shannet harshly. "Sheridan, I've come to warn you off for the last time. The *Andalusia* berthed this morning, and she sails again on the evening tide. You've been nosing around here too long as it is. Is that plain enough?"

"Plainer than your ugly face," drawled Sheridan. "And by what right do you kick me out? Been elected President, have you?"

"You know me," said Shannet. "You know that what I say here goes. You'll sail on the *Andalusia*—either voluntarily or because you're put on board in irons. That's all. . . . What's this?"

The Saint, perceiving himself to be the person thus referred to, awoke sufficiently to open his eyes and screw his head round so that he could view the visitor.

He saw a tall, broad-shouldered man of indeterminate age, clad in a soiled white suit of which the coat was unbuttoned to expose a grubby singlet. Shannet had certainly not shaved for two days; and he did not appear to have brushed his hair for a like period, for a damp, sandy lock drooped in a tangle over his right eye. In one corner of his mouth a limp and dilapidated cigarette dangled tiredly from his lower lip.

The Saint blinked.

"Gawd!" he said offensively. "Can it be human?"

Shannet's fists swept back his coat and rested on his hips.

"What's your name, Cissy?" he demanded.

The Saint flicked some ash from his cigarette and rose to his feet delicately.

"Benito Mussolini," he answered mildly. "And you must be one of the corporation scavengers. How's the trade in garbage?" His gentle eyes swept Shannet from crown to toe. "Archie, there must have been some mistake. The real scavenger has gone sick, and one of his riper pieces of refuse is deputizing for him. I'm sorry."

"If you——"

"I said I was sorry," the Saint continued, in the same smooth voice, "because I'm usually very particular about the people I fight, and I hate soiling my hands on things like you."

Shannet glowered.

"I don't know who you are," he said, "and I don't care. But if you're looking for a fight you can have it."

"I am looking for a fight, dear one," drawled the Saint. "In fact, I'm looking for a lot of fights, and you're the first one that's offered. 'Cissy' is a name I particularly object to being called, O misbegotten of a pig!"

The last words were spoken in colloquial Spanish, and the Saint made more of them than it is possible to report in printable English. Shannet went white, then red.

"You——"

His answering stream of profanity merged into a left swing to the Saint's jaw, which, if it had landed, would have ended the fight there and then. But it did not land.

Simon Templar swayed back, and the swing missed by a couple of inches. As Shannet stumbled, momentarily off his balance, the Saint reached round and took the jug of ice water off the table behind him. Without any appearance of effort or haste, he sidestepped and poured most of the contents of the jug down the back of Shannet's neck.

Shannet swung again. The Saint ducked, and sent the man flying with a smashing jab to the nose.

"Look out, Saint!" Sheridan warned suddenly.

"Naughty!" murmured the Saint, without heat.

Shannet was getting to his feet, and his right hand was drawing something from his hip pocket.

The Saint took two steps and a flying leap over Shannet's head,

turning in the air as he did so. Shannet had only got to his knees when the Saint landed behind him and caught his opponent's throat and right wrist in hands that had the strength of steel cables in their fingers. Shannet's wrist was twisted behind his back with an irresistible wrench. . . .

The gun clattered to the floor simultaneously with Shannet's yelp of agony, and the Saint picked up the gun and stepped away.

"A trophy, Archie!" he cried, and tossed the weapon over to Sheridan. "Guns I have not quite been shot with—there must be a drawer full of them at home. . . . Let's start, sweet Shannet!"

Shannet replied with a chair, but the Saint was ten feet away by the time it crashed into the opposite wall.

Then Shannet came in again with his fists. Any one of those whirling blows carried a kick that would have put a mule to sleep, but the Saint had forgotten more about ringcraft than many professionals ever learn. Shannet never came near touching him. Every rush Shannet made, somehow, expended itself on thin air, while he always seemed to be running his face slap into the Saint's stabbing left.

"Want a rest?" the Saint asked kindly.

"If you'd come in and fight like a man," gasped Shannet, his tortured chest heaving, "I'd kill you!"

"Oh, don't be silly!" said the Saint in a bored voice, as though he had no further interest in the affair. "Hurry up and get out—I'm going to be busy."

He turned away, but Shannet lurched after him.

"Get out yourself!" snarled the man thickly. "D'you hear? I'm going right down to fetch the police——"

The Saint sat down.

"Listen to me, Shannet," he said quietly. "The less you talk about police when I'm around, the better for you. I'm telling you now that I believe you murdered a man named McAndrew not so long ago, and jumped his claim on a forged partnership agreement. I'm only waiting till I've got the proof. And then—well, it's too much to hope that the authorities of this benighted republic will execute the man who pays half their salaries, and so in the name of Justice I shall take you myself and hang you from a high tree."

For a moment of silence the air seemed to tingle with the same

electric tension as heralds the breaking of a thunderstorm, while the Saint's ice-blue eyes quelled Shannet's reawakening fury; and then, with a short laugh, the Saint relaxed.

"You're a pawn in the game," he said, with a contrasting carelessness which only emphasized the bleak implacability of his last speech. "We won't waste good melodrama on you. We reserve that for clients with really important discredit accounts. Instead, you shall hear the epitaph I've just composed for you. It commemorates a pestilent tumour named Shannet, who disfigured the face of this plane. He started some fun, but before it was done he was wishing he'd never began it. That otherwise immortal verse is marred by a grammatical error, but I'm not expecting you to know any better. . . . Archibald—the door!"

Archie Sheridan had no reason to love Shannet, and the kick with which he launched the man into the garden was not gentle, but he seemed to derive no pleasure from it.

He came back with a grave face and resumed his chair facing the Saint.

"Well," he said, "you've done what you wanted. Now shall we sit down and make our wills, or shall we spend our last hours of life in drinking and song?"

"Of course, we may be shot," admitted the Saint calmly. "That's up to us. How soon can we expect the army?"

"Not before five. They'll all be asleep now, and an earthquake wouldn't make the Pasala policeman break off his siesta. Much less the army, who are inclined to give themselves airs. We might catch the *Andalusia,*" he added hopefully.

The Saint surveyed him seraphically.

"Sweetheart," he said, "that joke may now be considered over. We've started, and we've got to keep moving. As I don't see the fun of sitting here waiting for the other side to surround us, I guess we'll bounce right along and interview Kelly. And when you two have coached me thoroughly in the habits and topography of Santa Miranda, we'll just toddle along and capture the town."

"Just toddle along and which?" repeated Sheridan dazedly.

The Saint spun a cigarette high into the air, and trapped it neatly between his lips as it fell.

"That is to say, *I* will capture the town," he corrected himself, "while you and Kelly create a disturbance somewhere to distract their attention. Wake up, sonny! Get your hat, and let's go!"

3

THE Saint's breezy way of saying that he would "just toddle along and capture the town" was a slight exaggeration. As a matter of fact, he spent nearly four days on the job.

There was some spade-work to be done, and certain preparations to be made, and the Saint devoted a considerable amount of care and sober thought to these details. Though his methods, to the uninformed observer, might always have seemed to savour of the reckless, tip-and-run, hit-first-and-ask-questions-afterwards school, the truth was that he rarely stepped out of any frying pan without first taking the temperature of the fire beyond.

Even in such a foolhardy adventure as that in which he was then engaged, he knew exactly what he was doing, and legislated against failure as well as he might; for, even in the most outlandish parts of the world, the penalty of unsuccessful revolution is death, and the Saint had no overwhelming desire to turn his interesting biography into an obituary notice.

He explained his plan to Kelly, and found the Irishman an immediate convert to the Cause.

"Shure, I've been thinkin' for years that it was time somebody threw out their crooked government," said that worthy, ruffling a hand like a ham through his tousled mop of flaming hair. "I'm just wonderin' now why I niver did it meself."

"It's a desperate chance," Simon Templar admitted. "But I don't mind taking it if you're game."

"Six years I've been here," mused Kelly ecstatically, screwing up a huge fist, "and I haven't seen a real fight. Exceptin' one or two disagreements with the natives, who run away afther the first round."

The Saint smiled. He could not have hoped to find a more suitable ally.

"We might easily win out," he said. "It wouldn't work in England, but in a place like this——"

"The geography was made for us," said Kelly.

On a scrap of paper he sketched a rough map to illustrate his point.

Pasala is more or less in the shape of a wedge, with the base facing northeast on the seacoast. Near the centre of the base of the wedge is Santa Miranda. In the body of the wedge are the only other three towns worth mentioning—Las Flores, Rugio, and, near the apex, Esperanza. They are connected up by a cart track of a road which includes them in a kind of circular route that starts and finishes at Santa Miranda, for the State of Pasala does not yet boast a railway. This is hardly necessary, for the distance between Santa Miranda and Esperanza, the two towns farthest apart, is only one hundred and forty miles.

It should also be mentioned that the wedge-shaped territory of Pasala cuts roughly into the Republic of Maduro, a much larger and more civilized country.

"Of course, we're simply banking on the psychology of revolutions and the apathy of the natives," said the Saint, when they had finished discussing their plan of campaign. "The population aren't interested—if they're shown a man in a nice new uniform, and told that he's the man in power, they believe it, and go home and pray that they won't be any worse off than they were before. If we take off a couple of taxes, or something like that, as soon as we get in, the mob will be with us to a man. I'm sure the exchequer can stand it—I don't imagine Manuel Concepcion de Villega has been running this show without making a substantial profit on turnover."

"That'll fetch 'em," Kelly averred. "They're bled dhry with taxes at present."

"Secondly, there's the army. They're like any other army. They obey their officers because it's never occurred to them to do anything else. If they were faced with a revolution they'd fight it. So instead of that we'll present the revolution as an accomplished fact. If they're like any other South American army, they'll simply carry on under the new government—with a bonus of a few *pesos* per man to clinch the bargain."

They talked for a while longer; and then they went out and joined Archie Sheridan, who had not been present at the council, being otherwise occupied with Lilla McAndrew on the veranda.

The Saint had a little leisure to admire the girl. She was rather tall, fair-haired and blue-eyed, superbly graceful. Her sojourn in that sunny climate had coloured her skin a pale golden brown that was infinitely more becoming than mere pink-and-white; but the peachlike bloom of her complexion had not had time to suffer.

It was plain that Archie Sheridan was fatally smitten with the inevitable affliction, and the Saint was mischievously delighted.

"You want to be careful of him, Miss McAndrew," he advised gravely. "I've known him since he was so high, and you wouldn't believe what a past he's collected in his brief career of sin. Let's see. . . . There was Gladys, the golden-haired beauty from the front row of the Gaiety chorus, Susan, Beryl—no, two Beryls—Ethel, the artist's model, Angela, Sadie from California, Joan—two Joans—no, three Joans——"

"Don't believe him, Lilla," pleaded Archie. "He's been raving all day. Why, just before lunch he said he was Benito Mussolini!"

The girl laughed.

"It's all right," she told Simon. "I don't take him seriously."

"There's gratitude for you!" said Sheridan wildly. "After all I've done for her! I even taught her to speak English. When she arrived here she had a Scots accent that would have made a bawbee run for its life. She reeked of haggis——"

"Archie!"

"Haggis," persisted Sheridan. "She carried one around in her pibroch till it starved to death."

"What are pibroch?" asked the Saint curiously. "Are they something you wear under a kilt?"

When the girl had recovered her composure:

"Is he really so impossible?" she exclaimed.

"I don't know you well enough to tell you the whole truth," said the Saint solemnly. "The only hope I can give you is that you're the first Lilla in his life. Wait a minute—sorry—wasn't Lilla the name of the barmaid——"

"Go away," said Sheridan morosely. "With sudden death staring you in the face, you ought to be spending your time in prayer

and repentance. You'll be shot at dawn to-morrow, and I shall look over the prison walls and cheer on the firing squad."

He watched Kelly and the Saint retire to the other end of the veranda, and then turned to the girl, with his pleasant face unusually serious.

"Lilla," he said, "I don't want to scare you, but it isn't all quite as funny as we make out. The Saint would still be laughing in the face of the firing squad I mentioned; but that doesn't make the possibility of the firing squad any less real."

She looked at him with sober eyes.

"Then it's easily settled," she said. "I won't let you do it."

Sheridan laughed.

"It isn't me you've got to deal with," he replied. "It's the Saint. Nothing you could say would stop *him*. He'd simply tell me to beat it with you on the *Andalusia* this evening if I was scared. And I'd rather face the said firing squad than have the Saint say that to me."

She would have protested further, but something in the man's tone silenced her. She knew that he was making no idle statement. She had no experience whatever of such things, and yet she realized intuitively what she was up against, recognized the heroic thing when she met it—the blind, unswerving loyalty of a man to his friend, the unshakable obedience of a man to a loved leader. And she knew that any attempt she made to seduce her man from that reality would only lower herself in his eyes.

Perhaps there are few women who could have shown such an understanding, but Lilla McAndrew was—Lilla McAndrew.

She smiled suddenly.

"I've always wanted to see a revolution," she said simply.

Moments passed before Sheridan could grasp the full wonder of her sympathy and acquiescence. And then his arms went round her, and her hands tousled his hair.

"Dear Archie!" she said, and found herself unaccountably breathless.

"I admit every girl the Saint mentioned," said Sheridan defiantly. "And a few more. But that doesn't alter the fact that I love you, and as soon as this comic revolution's over I'm going to marry you."

"I'll believe that when you do it," she teased him; but her heart was on her lips when he kissed her. . . .

Some almost offensively discreet coughing from the Saint interrupted them ten minutes later.

"I tried to save you," said the Saint, declining to avert his shamelessly quizzical gaze from the girl's efforts to straighten her hair inconspicuously. "And I'm sorry to have to butt in, but your boy friend and I have work to do. If you look down towards the town you'll see a file of men advancing up the main street in our direction, led by two men on horseback in the uniform of commissionaires. The entire police force of Santa Miranda, as far as I can make out from this distance, is on its way up here to arrest me for assaulting and battering one of their most prominent citizens, and to arrest Archie as an accessory before, after, and during the fact. They have just woken up from their afternoon snooze and have been put on the job by the aforesaid citizen with commendable rapidity. Will you excuse us if we escape?"

They went to the edge of the veranda and looked down. Below them, about a mile away, Santa Miranda, as yet hardly astir from its siesta, lay bathed in the afternoon sunshine.

The town, indeterminately vignetted at the edges, had a definite core of nearly modern white buildings ranged down its principal streets. These numbered two, and were in the form of a T. The top of the T ran parallel with the waterfront; the upright, halfway down which was the Presidential Palace, ran inland for nearly a mile, tailing off in the mass of adobe huts which clustered round the core of the town.

From where they stood they could look down the length of the street which formed the upright of the T; and the situation was even as the Saint had diagnosed it. . . .

"One minute for the fond farewell, Archie," said the Saint briskly, and Sheridan nodded.

Simon Templar drew Kelly inside the bungalow.

"By the way," he said, "do you happen to have such a thing as a good-looking pot of paint?"

"I've got some enamel," replied the mystified Kelly.

He produced a couple of tins, and the Saint selected one with every appearance of satisfaction.

"The very idea," he said. "It's just an idea of mine for dealing with this arrest business."

Kelly was suspicious.

"I don't seem to have much to do," he complained aggrieyedly. "It's hoggin' the best of the fightin' yez are. Now, if I had my way, I'd be shtartin' the throuble with these policemen right away, I would."

"And wreck the whole show," said the Saint. "No, it's too soon for that. And if you call being fifty percent of an invading army 'having nothing to do' I can't agree. You're one of the most important members of the cast. Besides, if your bus doesn't break down, you'll be back here just when the rough stuff is warming up. You get it both ways."

He adjusted his hat to an appropriately rakish and revolutionary angle on his head, and went out to collect Archie Sheridan.

They shook hands with the still grumbling Kelly; but the Saint had the last word with Lilla McAndrew.

"I'm sorry I've got to take Archie," he said. "You see, he's the one man I can trust here who can tap out Morse fluently, and I sent him out from England for that very reason, though I didn't know it was going to pan out as it's panning out now. But I'll promise to get him back to you safe and sound. You needn't worry. Only the good die young. I wonder how you've managed to live so long, Lilla?"

He smiled; and when the Saint smiled in that particularly gay and enchanting manner, it was impossible to believe that any adventure he undertook could fail.

"Archie is marked 'Fragile—With Care' for this journey," said the Saint, and went swinging down the veranda steps.

He walked back arm-in-arm with Sheridan to the latter's bungalow at a leisurely pace enough, for it was his last chance to give Sheridan his final instructions for the opening of the campaign.

Archie was inclined to voice much the same grievance as Kelly had vented, but Templar dealt shortly with that insubordination.

"I'm starting off by having the most boresome time of any of you," he said. "If I could do your job, I promise you I'd be making you do mine. That being so, I reckon I deserve a correspond-

ing majority ration of excitement at the end. Anyway, with any luck we'll all be together again by Thursday, and we'll see the new era in in a bunch. And if you're going to say you've thought of another scheme that'd be just as effective, my answer is that you ought to have spoken up before. It's too late to change our plans now."

At the bungalow the Saint made certain preparations for the arrival of the police posse which to some extent depleted Archie Sheridan's travelling athletic outfit. That done, he sent Sheridan to his post, and himself settled down with a cigarette in an easy chair on the veranda to await the coming of the Law.

4

THE *guindillas* came toiling up the last two hundred yards of slope in a disorderly straggle. The hill at that point became fairly steep, they were in poor condition, and, although the sun was getting low, the broiling heat of the afternoon had not yet abated; and these factors united to upset what might otherwise have been an impressive approach. The only members of the squad who did not seem the worse for wear were the two *comisarios,* who rode in the van on a pair of magnificent high-stepping horses, obvious descendants of the chargers of Cortes's invading Spaniards, the like of which may often be seen in that part of the Continent. The Saint had had an eye for those horses ever since he spied them a mile and a half away, which was why he was so placidly waiting for the deputation.

He watched them with a detached interest, smoking his cigarette. They were an unkempt and ferocious-looking lot (in Pasala, as in many other Latin countries, Saturday night is Gillette night for the general public), and every man of them was armed to somewhere near the teeth with a musket, a revolver, and a sabre. The Saint himself was comparatively weaponless, his entire armoury consisting of a beautifully fashioned little knife, strapped to his left forearm under his sleeve, which he could throw with a deadly swiftness and an unerring aim. He did not approve of firearms, which he considered messy and noisy and barbarous in-

ventions of the devil. Yet the opposition's display of force did not concern him.

His first impression, that the entire police force of Santa Miranda had been sent out to arrest him, proved to be a slight overestimate. There were, as a matter of fact, only ten *guardias* behind the two mounted men in resplendent uniforms.

The band came to a bedraggled and slovenly halt a few yards from the veranda, and the *comisarios* dismounted and ascended the short flight of steps with an imposing clanking of scabbards and spurs. They were moustached and important.

The Saint rose.

"Buenas tardes, señores," he murmured courteously.

"Señor," said the senior *comisario* sternly, unfolding a paper overloaded with official seals, "I regret that I have to trouble a visitor illustrious, but I am ordered to request your honour to allow your honour to be taken to the *prevención,* in order that in the morning your honour may be brought before the *tribunal* to answer a charge of grievously assaulting the Señor Shannet."

He replaced the document in his pocket, and bowed extravagantly.

The Saint, with a smile, surpassed the extravagance of the bow.

"Señor polizonte," he said, "I regret that I cannot come."

Now the word *"polizonte,"* while it is understood to mean "policeman," is not the term with which it is advisable to address even an irascible *guardia*—much less a full-blown *comisario.* It brought to an abrupt conclusion the elaborate ceremony in which the *comisario* had been indulging.

He turned, and barked an order; and the escort mounted the steps and ranged themselves along the veranda.

"Arrest him!"

"I cannot stay," said the Saint sadly. "And I refuse to be arrested. *Adiós, amigos!"*

He faded away—through the open door of the dining room. The Saint had the knack of making these startlingly abrupt exits without any show of haste, so that he was gone before his audience had realized that he was on his way.

Then the *guardias,* led by the two outraged *comisarios,* followed in a body.

The bungalow was small, with a large veranda in front and a smaller veranda at the back. The three habitable rooms of which it boasted ran through the width of the house, with doors opening onto each veranda. The dining room was the middle room, and it had no windows.

As the *guardias* surged in in pursuit, rifles at the ready, with the *comisarios* waving their revolvers, the Saint reappeared in the doorway that opened onto the back of the veranda. At the same moment the doors to the front veranda were slammed and barred behind them by Archie Sheridan, who had been lying in wait in an adjoining room for that purpose.

The Saint's hands were held high above his head, and in each hand was a gleaming round black object.

"Señores," he said persuasively, "I am a peaceful revolutionary, and I cannot be pestered like this. In my hands you see two bombs. If you shoot me, they will fall and explode. If you do not immediately surrender I shall throw them—and, again, they will explode. Is it to be death or glory, boys?"

He spoke the last sentence in English; but he had already said enough in the vernacular to make the situation perfectly plain. The *guardias* paused, irresolute.

Their officers, retiring to a strategic position in the background from which they could direct operations, urged their men to advance and defy death in the performance of their duty; but the Saint shifted his right hand threateningly, and the *guardias* found the counter-argument more convincing. They threw down their arms; and the *comisarios,* finding themselves alone, followed suit as gracefully as they might.

The Saint ordered the arsenal to be thrown out of the door, and he stepped inside the room and stood aside to allow this to be done. Outside, the guns were collected by Archie Sheridan, and their bolts removed and hurled far away into the bushes of the garden. The cartridges he poured into a large bag, together with the contents of the bandoliers which the Saint ordered his prisoners to discard, for these were required for a certain purpose. Then the Saint returned to the doorway.

"Hasta la vista!" he murmured mockingly. "Until we meet again!"

And he hurled the two gleaming round black objects he carried, and a wail of terror went up from the doomed men.

The Saint sprang back, slamming and barring the doors in the face of the panic-stricken stampede; and the two tennis balls, which he had coated with Kelly's providential enamel for the purpose, rebounded off the heads of the cowering *comisarios,* leaving great splashes of paint on the gorgeous uniforms and the gorgeous mustachios of Santa Miranda's Big Two, and went bouncing insolently round the room.

The Saint vaulted over the veranda rail and ran round to the front of the bungalow. Sheridan, his bag of cartridges slung over his shoulder, was already mounted on one of the police horses, and holding the other by the bridle. From inside the dining room could be heard the muffled shouting and cursing of the imprisoned men, and on the panels of the barred doors thundered the battering of their efforts to escape.

The Saint sprang into the saddle.

"Vamos!" he cried, and smacked his hand down on the horse's quarters.

The pounding of departing hoofs came to the ears of the men in the locked room, and redoubled the fury of their onslaught on the doors. But the mahogany of which the doors were made was thick and well seasoned, and it was ten minutes before they broke out. And then, on foot and unarmed, there was nothing for them to do but to return to Santa Miranda and confess defeat.

The which they did, collaborating on the way down to invent a thrilling tale of a desperate and perilous battle, in which they had braved a hundred deaths, their heroism availing them naught in the face of Simon Templar's evil cunning. But first, to restore their shattered nerves, they partook freely of three bottles of Sheridan's whisky which they found. And it may be recorded that on this account the next day found them very ill; for, before he left, Archie Sheridan had liberally adulterated the whisky with Epsom salts, in anticipation of this very vandalism. But, since *guardia* and *comisario* alike were unfamiliar with the flavour of whisky, they noticed nothing amiss, and went unsuspecting to their hideous fate.

But when they returned to Santa Miranda they said nothing whatever about bombs, wisely deeming that the inclusion of that

episode in their story could not but cover them with derision.

Meantime, Simon Templar and Archie Sheridan had galloped neck and neck to Kelly's bungalow, and there Kelly was waiting for them. He had a kitbag already packed with certain articles that the Saint had required, and Simon took the bag and lashed it quickly to the pommel of his saddle.

Sheridan dismounted. The Saint shook hands with him, and took the bridle of the spare horse.

"All will be well," said the Saint blithely. "I feel it in my bones. So long, souls! See you all again soon. Do your stuff—and good luck!"

He clapped his heels to his horse, and was gone with a cheery wave of his hand.

They watched him till the trees hid him from view, and then they went back to the bungalow.

"A piece of wood, pliers, screws, screwdriver, and wire, Kelly, my bhoy!" ordered Sheridan briskly. "I've got some work to do before I go to bed to-night. And while I'm doing it you can gather round and hear the biggest laugh yet in this revolution, or how the Battle of Santa Miranda was nearly won on the courts of Wimbledon."

"I thought you weren't coming back," said the girl accusingly.

"I didn't know whether I was or not," answered the shameless Archie. "It all depended on whether the Saint's plan of escape functioned or not. Anyway, a good-bye like you gave me was far too good to miss just because I might be coming back. And don't look so disappointed because I got away. I'll go down to the town and surrender, if that's what you want."

Towards sundown a squadron of cavalry galloped up to the bungalow, and the officer in command declared his intention of making a search. Kelly protested.

"You have no right," he said, restraining an almost irresistible desire to throw the man down the steps and thus precipitate the fighting that his fists were itching for.

"I have a warrant from the Minister of the Interior, El Supremo é Ilustrisimo Señor Manuel Concepcion de Villega," said the officer, producing the document with a flourish.

"El Disgustado y Horribilisimo Señor!" muttered Kelly.

The officer shrugged, and indicated the men who waited below.

"I do not wish to use force, Señor Kelly," he said significantly, and Kelly submitted to the inevitable.

"But," he said, "I do not know why you should suspect me to be hiding him."

"You are known to be a friend of the Señor Sheridan," was the brief reply, "and the Señor Sheridan is a friend of this man. We are looking for both of them."

Kelly followed the officer into the house.

"What did you say was the name of this man you are looking for?" he inquired.

"To the Señor Shannet, whom he attacked," said the officer, "he gave his name as Benito Mussolini."

He was at a loss to understand Kelly's sudden earthquaking roar of laughter. At last he gave up the effort, and put it down to another manifestation of the well-known madness of all *ingleses*. But the fact remains that the joke largely compensated Kelly for the indignity of the search to which his house was subjected.

The officer and half a dozen of his men went through the bungalow with a small-toothed comb, and not a cubic inch of it, from floor to rafters, escaped their attention. But they did not find Archie Sheridan, who was sitting out on the roof, on the opposite side to that from which the soldiers had approached.

At last the search party allowed themselves to be shepherded out, for barely an hour's daylight was left to them, and they had already fruitlessly wasted much valuable time.

"But remember, Señor Kelly," said the officer, as his horse was led up, "that both Sheridan and Mussolini have been declared outlaws for resisting arrest and assaulting and threatening the lives of the *guardia civiles* sent to apprehend them. In the morning they will be proclaimed; and the Señor Shannet, who has heard of the insolence offered to the Law, has himself offered to double the reward for their capture, dead or alive."

The troopers rode off on their quest, but in those latitudes the twilight is short. They scoured the countryside for an hour, until the fall of night put an end to the search, and five miles away they found the horses of the two *comisarios* grazing in a field, but of the man Mussolini there was no trace. The Saint had had a

good start; and what he did not know about the art of taking cover in the open country wasn't worth knowing.

He was stretched out on a branch of a tall tree a mile away from where the horses were found when the troop of cavalry reined in only twelve feet beneath him.

"We can do no more now," said the officer. "In the morning we shall find him. Without horses he cannot travel far. Let us go home."

The Saint laughed noiselessly in the darkness.

5

THAT night there came into Santa Miranda a *peón*.

He was dirty and disreputable to look upon. His clothes were dusty, patched in many places, and threadbare where they were not patched; and his hair was long, and matted into a permanent thatch, as is the slovenly custom of the labourers of that country.

Had he wished to do so, he might have passed unnoticed among many other similarly down-at-heel and poverty-stricken people; but this he did not seem to want. In fact, he went out of his way to draw attention to himself; and this he found easy enough, for his poverty-stricken appearance was belied by the depth of his pocket.

He made a fairly comprehensive round of the inferior cafés in the town, and in each he bought wine and *aguardiente* for all who cared to join him. Naturally, it was not long before he acquired a large following; and, since he seemed to account for two drinks to everybody else's one, there was no surprise when he became more and more drunk as the evening wore on.

It was not to be expected that such display of affluence on the part of one whose outward aspect argued against the probability that he would have more than a few *centavos* to his name could escape comment, and it was not long before the tongues that devoured the liquor which he bought were busy with rumour. It was whispered, as with authority, that he was a bandit from the Sierra Maduro, over the border beyond Esperanza, who had crossed into Pasala to spend his money and rest until the *rurales* of Maduro tired of seeking him and he could return to his old hunt-

ing grounds with safety. Then it was remarked that on his little finger was a signet ring bearing a heraldic device, and with equal authority it was said that he was the heir to a noble Mexican family indulging his hobby of moving among the *peones* as one of themselves and distributing charity where he found it merited. Against this, another school of thought affirmed that he was a *peón* who had murdered his master and stolen his ring and his money.

The *peón* heard these whisperings and laughingly ignored them. His manner lent more support, however, to either of the two former theories than to the third. He was tall for a *peón,* and a man of great strength, as was seen when he bought a whole keg of wine and lifted it in his hands to fill his goblet as if it had weighed nothing at all. His eyes were blue, which argued that he was of noble descent, for the true *peón* stock is so mixed with the native that the eyes of that sea-blue colour are rare. And again, the bandit theory was made more plausible by the man's boisterous and reckless manner, as though he held life cheap and the intense enjoyment of the day the only thing of moment, and would as soon be fighting as drinking. He had, too, a repertoire of strange and barbarous songs which no one could understand.

"Drink up, *amigos!*" he roared from time to time, "for this is the beginning of great days for Pasala!"

But when they asked him what they might mean, he turned away their questions with a jest, and called for more wine.

Few of his following had seen such a night for many years.

From house to house he went, singing his strange songs, and bearing his keg of wine on his shoulder. One or two *guardias* would have barred his way, or, hearing the rumours which were gossiped about him, would have stopped and questioned him; but the *peón* poured them wine or flung them money, and they stood aside.

Towards midnight, still singing, the man led his procession up the Calle del Palacio. The crowd followed, not sure where they were going, and not caring, for they had drunk much.

Now, the Calle del Palacio forms the upright of the T which has been described, and halfway down it, as has been stated, is the palace from which it takes its name.

In the street opposite the palace gates the *peón* halted, set down his keg, and mounted unsteadily upon it. He stood there, swaying slightly, and his following gathered round him.

"Viva! Viva!" they shouted thickly.

The *peón* raised his hands for silence.

"Citizens!" he cried, "I have told you that this is the beginning of great days for Pasala, and now I will tell you why. It is because at last we are going to suffer no more under this Manuel Concepcion de Villega. May worms devour him alive, for he is a thief and a tyrant and the son of a dog! His taxes bear you down, and you receive nothing in return. The President is his servant, that strutting nincompoop, and they are both in the pay of the traitor Shannet, who is planning to betray you to Maduro. Now I say that we will end this to-night."

"Viva!" responded a few doubtful voices.

"Let us finish this slavery," cried the *peón* again. "Let us storm this palace, which was built with money wrung from the poor, where your puppet of a President and this pig of a De Villega sleep in luxury for which you have been tortured! Let us tear them from their beds and slay them, and cast them back into the gutter from which they came!"

This time there were no *"Vivas!"* The awfulness of the stranger's blasphemy had sobered the mob as nothing else could have done. It was unprecedented—incredible. No one had ever dared to speak in such terms of the President and his minister—or, if they had, it was reported by spies to the *comisarios,* and *guardias* came swiftly and took the blasphemers away to a place where their treason should not offend the ears of the faithful. Of course, the *peón* had spoken nothing but the truth. But to tear down the palace and kill the President! It was unheard of. It could not be done without much discussion.

The stranger, after his first speech, had seen the sentries at the palace gates creep stealthily away; and now, over the heads of the awestruck crowd, he saw a little knot of *guardias* coming down the street at the double. Whistles shrilled, and the mob huddled together in sudden terror.

"Amigos," said the stranger urgently, in a lower voice, "the hour of liberation will not be long coming. To-night you have

heard me sing many strange songs, which are the songs of freedom. Now, when you hear those songs again, and you have thought upon the words I have said to-night, follow the man who sings such songs as I sang, for he will be sent to lead you to victory. But now go quickly, or you will be taken and punished."

The mob needed no encouragement for that. Even while the *peón* spoke many of them had sneaked away into the dark side streets. As he spoke his last sentence, it was as if a cord had been snapped which held them, and they fled incontinently.

The *peón* straightened up and shook his fists at their backs.

"Fools!" he screamed. "Cowards! Curs! Is it thus that ye fight? Is it thus that ye overthrow tyrants?"

But his audience was gone, and from either side the *guardias* were closing in on him with drawn sabres.

"Guarro!" challenged one of them. "What is this raving?"

"I speak for liberty!" bawled the *peón,* reeling drunkenly on his pedestal. "I speak against the President, who does not know the name of his father, and against the Minister of the Interior, Manuel Concepcion de Villega, whom I call Señor Jugo Procedente del Estercolero, the spawn of a dunghill—*guarros, perruelos, hijos de la puta adiva. . . .*"

He let loose a stream of the vilest profanity and abuse in the language, so that even the hardened *guardias* were horrified.

They dragged him down and hustled him ungently to the police station, where they locked him up in a verminous cell for the night; but even then he cursed and raved against the President and the Minister of the Interior, mingling his maledictions with snatches of unintelligible songs, until the jailer threatened to beat him unless he held his tongue. Then he was silent, and presently went to sleep.

In the morning they brought him before the magistrate. He was sober, but still rebellious. They asked him his name.

"Don Fulano de Tal," he replied, which is the Spanish equivalent of saying "Mr. So-and-So, Such-and-Such."

"If you are impertinent," said the magistrate, "I shall order you to receive a hundred lashes."

"My name is Sancho Quijote," said the *peón* sullenly.

He was charged, and the sentries from the palace testified to

the treason of his speeches. So also did the *guardias* who had broken up his meeting. They admitted, in extenuation of his offense, that he had been very drunk.

He was asked if he had anything to say.

"I have nothing to say," he answered, "except that, drunk or not, I shall spit upon the names of the President and the Minister of the Interior till the end of my days. As for you, *señor juez,* you are no better than the *guindillas* who arrested me—you are all the miserable hirelings of the oppressors, paid to persecute those who dare speak for justice. But it will not be long before your pride is turned to humiliation."

"He is mad," whispered one *guardia* to another.

The *peón* was sentenced to seven years' imprisonment with hard labour, for there are no limits to the powers of summary jurisdiction in Pasala. He heard the verdict without emotion.

"It does not matter," he said. "I shall not stay in prison seven days. It will not be long before you know why."

When he reached the prison he asked to be allowed to send a message by telegraph to Ondia, the capital of Maduro.

"I am of Maduro," he confessed. "I should have returned to Ondia to-morrow, and I must tell my wife that I am detained."

He had money to pay for the telegram, but it was evening before permission was received for the message to be sent, for nothing is done hurriedly in Spanish America.

Twenty-four hours later there came from Ondia a telegram addressed to Manuel Concepcion de Villega, and it was signed with the name and titles of the President of Maduro. A free translation would have read:

> *I am informed that a citizen of Maduro, giving the name of Sancho Quijote, has been imprisoned in Santa Miranda. If he is not delivered to the frontier by Wednesday noon my armies will advance into Pasala.*

Shannet was closeted with De Villega when the message arrived, and for the moment he was no better able to account for it than was the Minister.

"Who is this man Quijote?" he asked. "It's a ridiculous name.

Here is a book called *Don Quijote,* Quixote in English, and there is a man in it called Sancho Panza."

"I know that," said Don Manuel, and sent for the judge.

He heard the story of the *peón's* crime and sentence and was not enlightened. But he had enough presence of mind to accuse the magistrate of inefficiency for not having suspected that the name Sancho Quijote was a false one.

"It is impossible," said De Villega helplessly, when the magistrate had been dismissed. "By Wednesday noon—that hardly gives us enough time to get him to the frontier even if we release him immediately. And who is this man? A labourer, a stranger, of whom nobody knows anything, who suddenly appears in Santa Miranda with more money than he could have ever come by honestly, and preaches a revolution to a mob that he has first made drunk. He deserves his punishment, and yet the President of Maduro, without any inquiry, demands his release. It means war."

"He knew this would happen," said Shannet. "The judge told us—he boasted that he would not stay in prison seven days."

They both saw the light at the same instant.

"An agent provocateur——"

"A trap!" snarled De Villega. "And we have fallen into it. It is only an excuse that Maduro was seeking. They sent him here, with money, for no other purpose than to get himself arrested. And then this preposterous ultimatum, which they give us no time even to consider. . . ."

"But why make such an intrigue?" demanded Shannet. "This is a poor country. They are rich. They have nothing to gain."

Don Manuel tugged nervously at his mustachios.

"And we cannot even buy them off," he said. "Unless we appeal to the *Estados Unidos——*"

Shannet sneered.

"And before their help can arrive the war is over," he said. "New Orleans is five days away. But they will charge a high price for burying the hatchet for us."

Dan Manuel suddenly sat still. His shifty little dark eyes came to rest on Shannet.

"I see it!" he exclaimed savagely. "It is the oil! You, and your accursed oil! I see it all! It is because of the oil that this country

is always embroiled in a dozen wars and fears of wars. So far Pasala has escaped, but now we are like the rest. My ministry will be overthrown. Who knows what Great Power has paid Maduro to attack us? Then the Great Power steps in and takes our oil from us. I shall be exiled. Just now it is England, through you, who has control of the oil. Perhaps it is now America who tries to capture it, or another English company. I am ruined!"

"For God's sake stop whining!" snapped Shannet. "If you're ruined, so am I. We've got to see what can be done about it."

De Villega shook his head.

"There is nothing to do. They are ten to one. We shall be beaten. But I have some money, and there is a steamer in two days. If we can hold off their armies so long I can escape."

It was some time before the more brutally vigorous Shannet could bring the minister to reason. Shannet had the courage of the wild beast that he was. At bay, faced with the wrecking of his tainted fortunes, he had no other idea but to fight back with the desperate ferocity of a cornered animal.

But even when Don Manuel's moaning had been temporarily quietened they were little better off. It was useless to appeal to the President, for he was no more than a tool in De Villega's hands. Likewise, the rest of the Council were nothing but figureheads, the mere instruments of De Villega's policy, and appointed by himself for no other reason than their willingness, for a consideration, to oppose nothing that he put forward.

"There is but one chance," said De Villega. "A *radiógrafo* must be sent to New Orleans. America will send a warship to keep the peace. Then we will try to make out to Maduro that the warship is here to fight for us, and their armies will retire. To the *Estados Unidos,* then, we will say that we had made peace before their warship arrived; we are sorry to have troubled them, but there is nothing to do."

It seemed a flimsy suggestion to Shannet, but it was typical of De Villega's crafty and tortuous statesmanship. Shannet doubted if America, having once been asked to intervene, would be so easily put off, but he had no more practicable scheme to suggest himself, and he let it go.

He could not support it with enthusiasm, for an American occu-

pation would mean the coming of American justice, and Shannet had no wish for that while there were still tongues wagging with charges against himself. But he could see no way out. He was in a cleft stick.

"Why not let this *peón* go?" he asked.

"And will that help us?" demanded Don Manuel scornfully. "If we sent him away now he would hardly have time to reach the border by noon to-morrow, and they would certainly say that they had not received him. Is it not plain that they are determined to fight? When they have taken such pains to trump up an excuse, will they be so quickly appeased?"

A purely selfish train of thought led to Shannet's next question.

"This man Sheridan and his friend—has nothing been heard of them yet? They have been at large two days."

"At a time like this, can I be bothered with such trifles?" replied De Villega shortly. "The squadron of Captain Tomare has been looking for them, but they are not found."

This was not surprising, for the searchers had worked outwards from Santa Miranda. Had they been inspired to work inwards they might have found Simon Templar, unwashed and unshaven, breaking stones in their own prison yard, chained by his ankles in a line of other unwashed and unshaven desperadoes, his identity lost in his official designation of Convicto Sancho Quijote, No. 475.

It was the Saint's first experience of imprisonment with hard labour, and he would have been enjoying the novel adventure if it had not been for various forms of microscopic animal life with which the prison abounded.

6

THERE came one morning to the London offices of Pasala Oil Products, Ltd. (Managing Director, Hugo Campard), a cable in code. He decoded it himself, for it was not a code in general use; and his pink face went paler as the transliteration proceeded.

By the time the complete translation had been written in between the lines Hugo Campard was a very frightened man. He read the message again and again, incredulous of the catastrophe it foreboded.

Maduro declared war Pasala on impossible ultimatum. Believe deliberately instigated America or rival combine. Pasala army hopelessly outnumbered. No chance. Villega appealed America. Help on way but will mean overthrow of government. Concessions probably endangered. Sell out before news reaches London and breaks market.

SHANNET.

Campard's fat hands trembled as he clipped the end of a cigar. He was a big, florid man with a bald head and a sandy moustache. Once upon a time he had been a pinched and out-at-elbows clerk in a stockbroker's office, until his ingenuity had found incidental ways of augmenting his income. For a few years he had scraped and saved; then, with five hundred pounds capital, and an intimate knowledge of the share market, he had gone after bigger game.

He had succeeded. He was clever, he knew the pitfalls to avoid, he was without pity or scruple, and luck had been with him. In fifteen years he had become a very rich man. Innumerable were the companies with which he had been associated, which had taken in much money and paid out none. He had been "exposed" half a dozen times, and every reputable broker knew his stock for what it was; but the scrip of the Campard companies was always most artistically engraved and their prospectuses couched in the most attractive terms, so that there was never a lack of small investors ready to pour their money into his bank account.

It is said that there is a mug born every minute, and Campard had found this a sound working principle. Many others like him, steering narrowly clear of the law, have found no lack of victims, and Campard had perhaps found more suckers than most.

But even the most triumphant career meets a check sometimes, and Campard had made a slip which had brought him into the full publicity of a High Court action. He had wriggled out, by the skin of his teeth and some expensive perjury, but the resultant outcry had told him that it would be wise to lie low for a while. And lying low did not suit Campard's book. He lived extravagantly, and for all the wealth that he possessed on paper there were many liabilities. And then, when his back was actually to the wall, had

come the miracle—in the shape of the chance to buy the Pasala concession, offered him by a man named Shannet, whom he had employed many years ago.

Pasala oil was good. In the few months that it had been worked, the quality and quantity of the output had been startling. Campard enlisted the help of a handful of his boon companions, and poured in all his resources. More plant was needed and more labour, more expert management. That was now to be supplied. The directors of Pasala Oil Products sat down to watch themselves become millionaires.

And then, in a clear sky, the cloud.

Hugo Campard, skimming through his newspaper on his way to the financial pages, had read of the early manifestations of the Saint, and had been mildly amused. In the days that followed he had read of other exploits of the Saint, and his amusement had changed gradually to grave anxiety. . . . And one day there had come to Hugo Campard, through the post, a card. . . .

Each morning thereafter the familiar envelope had been beside his plate at breakfast; each morning, when he reached the offices of Pasala Oil Products, he had found another reminder of the Saint on his desk. There had been no message. Just the picture. But the newspapers were full of stories, and Hugo Campard was afraid. . . .

Then, two days ago, the Saint had spoken.

Campard could not have told why he opened the envelopes in which the Saint sent his mementoes. Perhaps it was because, each time, Campard hoped he would be given some indication of what the Saint meant to do. After days of suspense, that had painted the black hollows of sleeplessness under his eyes and brought him to a state of nerves that was sheer physical agony, he was told.

On that day, underneath the crude outline, was pencilled a line of small writing:

In a week's time you will be ruined.

He had already had police protection—after the Lemuel incident there had been no difficulty in obtaining that, as soon as he showed the police the first cards. All night there had been a con-

stable outside his house in St. John's Wood. All day a constable stood in the corridor outside his office. A plain-clothes detective rode in his car with him everywhere he went. Short of some unforeseeable masterpiece of strategy, or a recourse to the machine-gun fighting of the Chicago gangsters, it was impossible that the Saint could reach him as he had reached Lemuel.

Now, at one stroke, the Saint brought all these preparations to naught, and broke invisibly through the cordon. Against such an attack the police could not help him.

"In a week's time you will be ruined."

An easy boast to make. A tremendous task to carry out.

And yet, even while he had been racking his brains to find out how the Saint might carry out his threat, he had his answer.

For a long time he stared blindly at the cablegram, until every letter of the message was burned into his brain as with a hot iron. When he roused himself it was to clutch at a straw.

He telephoned to the telegraph company, and verified that the message had actually been received from Santa Miranda via Barbadoes and Pernambuco. Even that left a loophole. He cabled to an agent in New York, directing him to obtain authentic information from Washington at any cost; and by the evening he received a reply confirming Shannet's statement. The U.S.S. *Michigan* was on its way to Santa Miranda in response to an appeal from the President.

There was no catch in it. Shannet's code message was not a bluff, not even from an agent of the Saint in Santa Miranda. It was a grimly sober utterance of fact.

But the gigantic thoroughness of it! The colossal impudence of the scheme! Campard felt as if all the strength and fight had ebbed out of him. He was aghast at the revelation of the resources of the Saint. Against a man who apparently thought nothing of engineering a war to gain his ends, he felt as puny and helpless as a babe.

His hand went out again to the telephone, but he checked the impulse. It was no use telling the police *that*. They could do nothing—and, far too soon as it was, the news would be published in the press. And then, with the name of Campard behind them,

P.O.P. shares would tumble down the market to barely the value of their weight in waste paper.

Before he left the office that night he sent a return code in cable to Santa Miranda:

Believe war organized by criminal known as Saint, who has threatened me. Obtain particulars of any strange Englishman in Pasala or Maduro. Give descriptions. Report developments.

What the Saint had started, Campard argued, the Saint could stop. Campard might have a chance yet, if he could bargain. . . .

But the declaration of war was announced in the evening paper which he bought on his way home, and Hugo Campard knew then it was too late.

He had no sleep that night, and by nine o'clock next morning he was at the office, and speaking on the telephone to his broker.

"I want you to sell twenty thousand P.O.P.s for me," he said. "Take the best price you can get."

"I wish I could hope to get a price at all," came the sardonic answer. "The market's full of rumours and everyone's scared to touch the things. You're too late with your selling—the bears were in before you."

"What do you mean?" asked Campard in a strained voice.

"There was a good deal of quiet selling yesterday and the day before," said the broker. "Somebody must have had information. They're covering to-day, and they must have made thousands."

During the morning other backers of the company came through on the telephone and were accusing or whining according to temperament, and Campard dealt with them all in the same formula.

"I can't help it," he said. "I'm hit twice as badly as any of you. It isn't my fault. The company was perfectly straight; you know that."

The broker rang up after lunch to say that he had managed to get rid of six thousand shares at an average price of two shillings.

"Two shillings for two-pound shares?" Campard almost sobbed. "You're mad!"

"See if you can do any better yourself, Mr. Campard," replied

the broker coldly. "The market won't take any more at present, but I might be able to get rid of another couple of thousand before we close at about a bob each—to people who want to keep them as curios. A firm of wall-paper manufacturers might make an offer for the rest——"

Campard slammed down the receiver and buried his face in his hands.

He was in the same position three hours later when his secretary knocked on the door and entered with a buff envelope.

"Another cable, Mr. Campard."

He extracted the flimsy and reached out a nerveless hand for the code book.

He decoded:

Maduro armies advancing into Pasala. Only chance now sell any price. Answer inquiry. Man arrived nearly four months ago——

With a sudden impatience, Campard tore the cablegram into a hundred pieces and dropped them into the waste-paper basket. There was no time now to get in touch with the Saint. The damage was done.

A few minutes later came the anticipated message from the firm that he had induced to back him over Pasala Oil Products. Rich as he had become, he would never have been able to acquire his large holding in the company without assistance. How, with his reputation, he had got any firm to back him was a mystery. But he had been able to do it on the system known as "margins"—which, in this instance, meant roughly that he could be called upon immediately to produce fifty percent of the amount by which the shares had depreciated, in order to "keep up his margin."

The demand, courteously but peremptorily worded, was delivered by special messenger; and his only surprise was that it had not come sooner. He scribbled a check, which there was no money in the bank to meet, and sent it back by the same boy.

He sent for his car and left the office shortly afterwards. The paper which he bought outside told of the panic of P.O.P.s, and he read the article with a kind of morbid interest.

There was a letter, delivered by the afternoon post, waiting at his house when he got back.

I sold P.O.P.s and covered to-day. The profits are nearly twelve thousand pounds.

The expenses of this campaign have been unusually heavy; but, even then, after deducting these and my ten percent collecting fee, I hope to be able to forward nine thousand pounds to charity on your behalf.

RECEIVED *the above-named sum—with thanks.*

THE SAINT

Enclosed was a familiar card, and one Pasala Oil Products share certificate.

Hugo Campard dined well that night, and, alone, accounted for a bottle of champagne. After that he smoked a cigar with relish, and drank a liqueur brandy with enjoyment.

He had dressed. He felt the occasion deserved it. His mind was clear and untroubled, for in a flash he had seen the way out of the trap.

When his cigar was finished, he exchanged his coat for a dressing gown, and passed into his study. He locked the door behind him, and for some time paced up and down the room in silence, but no one will ever know what he thought. At ten o'clock precisely the pacing stopped.

The constable on guard outside heard the shot; but Hugo Campard did not hear it.

7

THE men serving sentences of hard labour in the prison of Santa Miranda are allowed an afternoon siesta of three hours. This is not due to the humanity and loving-kindness of the authorities, but to the fact that nothing will induce the warders to forgo the afternoon nap which is the custom of the country, and no one has yet discovered a way of making the prisoners work without a wide-awake warder to watch them and pounce on the shirkers.

The fetters are struck off the prisoners' ankles, and they are

herded into their cells, a dozen in each, and there locked up to rest as well as they can in the stifling heat of a room ventilated only by one small barred window and thickly populated with flies. The warders retire to their quarters above the prison, and one jailer is left on guard, nodding in the passage outside the cells, with a rifle across his knees.

It was so on the third day of the Saint's incarceration, and this was the second hour of the siesta, but the Saint had not slept.

His cell mates were sprawled on the bunks or on the floor, snoring heavily. They were hardened to the flies. Outside, the jailer dozed, his sombrero on the back of his head and his coat unbuttoned. Through the window of the cell a shaft of burning sunlight cut across the moist gloom and splashed a square of light on the opposite wall.

The Saint sat by the gates of the cell, watching that creeping square of light. Each afternoon he had watched it, learning its habits, so that now he could tell the time by it. When the edge of the square touched a certain scar in the stone it was four o'clock. . . . That was the time he had decided upon. . . .

He scrambled softly to his feet.

The jailer's head nodded lower and lower. Every afternoon, the Saint had noted, he set his chair at a certain point in the passage where a cool draught from a cross-corridor would fan him. Therefore, on that afternoon, the Saint had taken pains to get into the nearest cell to that point.

He tore a button off his clothes, and threw it. It hit the jailer on the cheek, and the man stirred and grunted. The Saint threw another button. The man shook his head, snorted, and roused, stretching his arms with a prodigious yawn.

"Señor!" hissed the Saint.

The man turned his head.

"Loathsome disease," he growled, "why dost thou disturb my meditations? Lie down and be silent, lest I come and beat thee."

"I only wished to ask your honour if I might give your honour a present of fifty *pesos,"* said the Saint humbly.

He squatted down again by the bars of the gate and played with a piece of straw. Minutes passed. . . .

He heard the jailer get to his feet, but did not look up. The

man's footsteps grated on the floor and stopped by the cell door. In the cell the other convicts snored peacefully.

"Eater of filth and decomposing fish," said the jailer's voice gruffly, "did I hear thy coarse lips speak to me of fifty *pesos?* How hast thou come by that money?"

"Gifts break rocks," replied the *peón,* quoting the Spanish proverb. "I had rather my gifts broke them than I were compelled to break any more of them. I have fifty *pesos,* and I want to escape."

"It is impossible. I searched thee——"

"It was hidden. I will give it to your honour as a pledge. I know where to find much more money, if your honour would deign to release me and let me lead you to where it is hidden. Have you not heard how, when I was arrested, it was testified that in the town I spent, in one evening, enough to keep you for a year? That was nothing to me. I am rich."

The jailer stroked his stubbly chin.

"Verminous mongrel," he said, more amiably, "show me this fifty *pesos* and I will believe thee."

The Saint ran his fingers through his tangled hair, and there fell out a note. The jailer recognized it, and his avaricious eyes gleamed.

He reached a claw-like hand through the bars, but the Saint jerked the note out of his reach. The jailer's face darkened.

"Abominable insect," he said, "thou hast no right to that. Thou art a convict, and thy goods are forfeit to the State. As the servant of the State I will confiscate that paper, that thy low-born hands may defile it no longer."

He reached for his keys, but the Saint held up a warning hand.

"If you try to do that, *amigo,*" he said, "I shall cry out so loudly that the other warders will come down to see what has happened. Then I shall tell them, and they will make you divide the fifty *pesos* with them. And I shall refuse to tell you where I have hidden the rest of my money. Why not release me, and have it all for yourself?"

"But how shall I know that thou dost not lie?"

The Saint's hands went again to his hair, and a rain of fifty-*peso* notes fell to the floor. He picked them up and counted them before the jailer. There were thirty of them altogether.

"See, I have them here!" he said. "Fifteen hundred *pesos* is a lot of money. Now open this door and I will give them to you."

The jailer's eyes narrowed cunningly. Did this fool of a *peón* really believe that he would be given his liberty in exchange for such a paltry sum? Apparently.

Not that the sum was so paltry, being equal to about two hundred pounds in English money; but if any prisoner escaped, the jailer would be blamed for it, and probably imprisoned himself. Yet this simpleton seemed to imagine that he had only to hand over his bribe and the jailer would risk punishment to earn it.

Very well, let him have his childish belief. It would be easily settled. The door opened, the money paid over, a shot. . . . And then there would be no one to bear witness against him. The prisoner was known to be violent. He had attempted to escape, and was shot. It would be easy to invent a story to account for the opening of the cell door. . . .

"*Señor peón,*" said the jailer, "I see now that your honour should not be herded in with these cattle. I will set your honour free, and your honour will give me the money, and I shall remember your honour in my prayers."

He tiptoed back to his chair and picked up his rifle. Then, with elaborate precautions against noise, he unlocked the cell door, and the *peón* came out into the passage.

The other prisoners still snored, and there was no sound but the droning of the flies to arouse them. The whole colloquy had been conducted in whispers, for it was imperative for the jailer as for the *peón* that there should be no premature alarm.

"Now give me the money," said the jailer huskily.

The Saint held out the handful of notes, and one broke loose and fluttered to the floor. As the jailer bent to pick it up, the Saint reached over him and slid the man's knife gently out of his belt. As the man straightened up the Saint's arm whipped round his neck, strangling his cry of fear before it could pass his throat. And the man felt the point of the knife prick his chest.

"Put thy rifle down against the wall," breathed the Saint in his ear. "If it makes a sound thou wilt not speak again."

No rifle could ever have been grounded more silently.

The Saint withdrew the knife and picked the man off his feet.

In an instant, and without a sound, he had him on the floor, holding him with his legs in a jiu-jitsu lock so that he could not move.

"Be very quiet," urged the Saint, and let him feel the knife again.

The man lay like one dead. The Saint, his hands now free, twisted the man's arms behind his back and tied them with the sling of his rifle. Then he rolled the man over.

"When you searched me," he said, "I had a knife. Where is it?"

"I am wearing it."

The Saint rolled up the man's sleeve and unstrapped the sheath from his forearm. With loving care he transferred it to his own arm, for he had had Anna for years, and she was the darling of his heart. That little throwing-knife, which he could wield so expertly, had accompanied him through countless adventures, and had saved his life many times. He loved it like a child, and the loss of it would have left him inconsolable.

With Anna back in her place, the Saint felt more like himself —though it is doubtful if anyone could have been found to agree with him, for he could never in his life have looked so dirty and disreputable as he was then. He, Simon Templar, the Saint, the man who was known for his invariable elegance and his almost supernatural power of remaining immaculate and faultlessly groomed even in the most hectic rough-house and the most uncivilized parts of the world, had neither washed nor shaved for nearly four days. There was no provision for these luxuries in the prison of Santa Miranda. And his clothes had been dreadful enough when Kelly had borrowed them off his under-gardener for the purpose; now, after having been lived in day and night on the stone pile and in the filthy cell which they had just left, their condition may be imagined. . . .

His greatest wish at that moment was to get near some soap and water; and already the time of grace for such a diversion was getting short. The square of light on the cell wall told him that he had barely half an hour at his disposal before Santa Miranda would be rousing itself for the second instalment of its day's work; and the other warders would soon be lurching down, yawning and cursing, to drive the prisoners back to their toil. It was time for the Saint to be moving.

He unfastened the jailer's belt and used it to secure the man's legs; then he rolled him over and stuffed his handkerchief into his mouth for a gag. He straightened up, hands on hips; and the helpless man glared up at him with bulging eyes.

"But I had forgotten!" cried the Saint, under his breath, and stooped again to take his money from the jailer's pocket.

The man squirmed, and the Saint swept him a mocking bow.

"Remain with God, my little ape," he murmured. "There will now be nothing to disturb thy meditations."

Then he was gone.

He ran lightly down the corridor and out at the end into the blazing sunlight of the prison courtyard. This he crossed swiftly, slowing up and moving a little more cautiously as he neared the gates. Within the courtyard, beside the gates, was a little sentry box where the gatekeeper might take shelter from the sun.

The Saint stole up the last few yards on tiptoe, and sidled one eye round the doorway of the box.

The gatekeeper sat inside on a packing case, his back propped against the wall. His rifle was leaning against the wall in one corner. He was awake, but his eyes were intent on a pattern which he was tracing in the dust with the toe of his boot.

The bare prison walls were too high to scale, and the only way out was by way of the gates.

The Saint's shadow suddenly blocked the light from the sentry box, and the gatekeeper half rose to his feet with a shout rising to his lips. It was rather like shooting a sitting rabbit, but the issues involved were too great to allow of making a more sporting fight of it. As the warder's head came up, the Saint hit him on the point of the jaw scientifically and with vim, and the shout died stillborn.

The Saint huddled the man back against the wall and tipped his sombrero over his eyes as if he were asleep—which, in fact, he was. Then he scrambled over the gates, and dropped cat-footed into the dust of the cart track of a road outside.

The prison of Santa Miranda lies to the east of the town, near the sea, among the slums which closely beset the bright main streets; and the Saint set himself to pass quickly through the town by way of these dirty, narrow streets where his disreputable condi-

tion would be most unnoticed, avoiding the Calle del Palacio and the chance of encountering a *guardia* who might remember him.

Santa Miranda had not yet awoken. In the grass-grown lanes between the rude huts of the labourers a child in rags played here and there, but paid no attention to his passing. In the doorway of one hut an old and wizened Indian slept in the sun, like a lizard. The Saint saw no one else.

He threaded the maze quietly but with speed, steering a course parallel to the Calle del Palacio. And then, over the low roofs of the adobe hovels around him, he saw, quite close, a tall white tower caught by the slanting rays of the sun, and he changed his plans.

That is to say, he resolved on the spur of the moment to dispense with making plans. His original vague idea had been to make for Kelly's bungalow, get a shave, a bath, some clean clothes, and a cigarette, and sit down to deliberate the best way of capturing the town. So far, in spite of his boast, the solution of that problem had eluded him, though he had no doubts that he would be given inspiration at the appointed time.

Now, looking at that tower, which he knew to be an ornament of the Presidential Palace, only a stone's throw away, the required inspiration came; and he acted upon it at once, branching off to his left in the direction of the tower.

It was one of those gay and reckless, daredevil and foolhardy, utterly preposterous and wholly delightful impulses which the Saint could never resist. The breath-taking impudence of it was, to his way of thinking, the chief reason for taking it seriously; the suicidal odds against success were a conclusive argument for having a fling at bringing off the lone hundred-to-one chance; the monumental nerve that was plainly needed for turning the entertaining idea into a solemn fact was a challenge to his adventurousness that it was simply unthinkable to ignore. The Saint took up the gauntlet without the faintest hesitation.

For this was the full effrontery of his decision:

"Eventually," whispered the Saint, to his secret soul—"why not now?"

And the Saintly smile in all its glory twitched his lips back from his white teeth. . . .

His luck had been stupendous, and it augured well for the future. Decidedly it was his day. A clean get-away from the prison, with no alarm. And he reached the high wall surrounding the palace grounds unobserved. And only a dozen feet away from the walls grew a tall tree.

The Saint went up the tree like a monkey, to a big straight branch that stuck out horizontally fifteen feet from the ground. Measuring the distance, he jumped.

The leap took him onto the top of the wall. He steadied himself for a moment, and then jumped again, twelve feet down into the palace gardens.

He landed on his toes, as lightly as a panther, and went zigzagging over the lawn between the flower beds like a Red Indian. The gardens were empty. There was no sound but the murmuring of bees in the sun and the soft rustle of the Saint's feet over the grass.

He ran across the deserted gardens and up some steps to a flagged terrace in the very shadow of the palace walls. Eight feet above the terrace hung a low balcony. The Saint took two steps and a jump, hung by his fingertips for a second, and pulled himself quickly up and over the balustrade.

An open door faced him, and the room beyond was empty. The Saint walked in, and passed through to the corridor on the other side.

Here he was at a loss, for the geography of the palace was strange to him. He crept along, rather hesitantly, without a sound. In the space of a dozen yards there was another open door. Through it, as he passed, the Saint caught a glimpse of the room beyond, and what he saw brought him to a sudden standstill.

He tiptoed back to the doorway and stood there at gaze.

It was a bathroom.

Only a year ago that bathroom had been fitted up at enormous cost for the delectation of the Saturday nights of his excellency the President and the Minister of the Interior. A gang of workmen specially sent down by a New York firm of contractors had affixed those beautiful sky-blue tiles to the walls, and laid those lovely sea-green tiles on the floor, and installed that superlative pale green porcelain bath with its gleaming silver taps and showers and other gadgets. Paris had supplied the great crystal jar of bath salts which

stood on the window sill, and the new cakes of expensive soap in the dishes.

The Saint's glistening eyes swept the room.

It was not Saturday, but it seemed as if someone were making a departure from the usual habits of the palace household. On a rack above the wash basin were laid out razor, shaving soap, and brush. On a chair beside the bath were snowy towels. On another chair, in a corner, were clothes—a spotless silk shirt, a sash, wide-bottomed Mexican trousers braided with gold, shoes. . . .

For a full minute the Saint stared, struck dumb with wonder at his astounding good fortune. Then, in fear and trembling, he stole into the room and turned on a tap.

The water ran hot.

He hesitated no longer. War, revolution, battle, murder, and sudden death meant nothing to him then. He closed the door, and turned the key.

Blessings, like misfortunes, never come singly. There was even a packet of Havana cigarettes and a box of matches tucked away behind the bath salts. . . .

Ten minutes later, already shaved, the Saint was stretched full length in a steaming bath into which he had emptied the best part of the Presidential jar of bath salts, innocently playing submarines with the sponge and a cake of soap.

A cigarette was canted jauntily up between his lips, and he was without a care in the world.

8

ARCHIE SHERIDAN mopped his moist forehead and smacked viciously at a mosquito which was gorging itself on his bare forearm.

"Thank the Lord you're back," he said. "This blistered place gives me the creeps. Have you fixed anything?"

Kelly settled ponderously on the spread ground sheet.

"I have arranged the invadin' army," he said. "Anything come through while I've been away?"

"Nothing that matters. One or two private messages, which I duly acknowledged. I wonder what they're thinking at the Ondia end of the line."

"There'll be a breakdown gang along sometime," pronounced Kelly. "It's now the second day of the wire bein' cut. Within the week, maybe, they'll wake up and send to repair it. What's the time?"

Sheridan consulted his watch.

"A quarter-past eleven," he said.

They sat under a great tree, in a small clearing in the jungle near the borders of Maduro, some ten miles east of Esperanza. A mile away was the rough track which led from Esperanza across the frontier to Maduro, and which formed the only road link between the two countries; and there Kelly's Ford, in which they had made most of the journey, waited hidden between the trees at a little distance from the road.

But for all the evidence there was to the contrary they might have been a thousand miles from civilization. At the edge of the tiny clearing colossal trees laced together with vines and creepers hemmed them in as with a gigantic palisade; high over their heads the entangled branches of the trees shut out the sky, and allowed no light to pass but a ghostly, gray twilight, in which the glaring crimsons and oranges and purples of the tropical blooms which flowered here and there in the marshy soil stood out with a shrieking violence.

Now and again, in the stillness of the great forest, there would be a rustle of the passing of some unseen wild thing. Under some prowling beast's paw, perhaps, a rotten twig would snap with a report like a rifle shot. Sometimes the delirious chattering of a troop of monkeys would babble out with a startling shrillness that would have sent a shudder up the spine of an impressionable man. And the intervals of silence were not true silence, but rather a dim and indefinable and monotonous murmur punctuated with the sogging sound of dripping water. The air was hot and steamy and heavy with sickly perfumes.

"You get used to it," said Kelly with a comprehensive wave of the stem of his pipe.

"Thanks," said Sheridan. "I'm not keen to. I've been here two days too long already. I have nightmares in which I'm sitting in an enormous bath, but as soon as I've finished washing a shower of mud falls on me and I have to start all over again."

Now this was on the morning of the day in the afternoon of which the Saint escaped from prison.

On Sheridan's head were a pair of radio headphones. On the ground sheet beside him was a little instrument, a Morse transmitter, which he had ingeniously fashioned before they left Santa Miranda. Insulated wires trailed away from him into the woods.

The telegraph line, for most of its length, followed the roads, but at that point, for some inexplicable reason, it took a short cut across country. They had decided to attack it at that point on grounds of prudence; for, although the road between Esperanza and the Maduro frontier was not much used, there was always the risk of someone passing and commenting on their presence when he reached his destination.

The afternoon before, they had cut the line and sent through to Esperanza, to be relayed to Santa Miranda, the ultimatum purporting to come from the President of Maduro. Since then, night and day, one of them had sat with the receivers upon his ears, waiting for a reply. The arrangement was complicated, for Kelly could not read Morse, while Sheridan's Spanish was very haphazard; but they managed somehow. Several times when Archie had been resting Kelly had roused him to take down a message; but the translation had had no bearing on the threat of war, except occasionally from a purely private and commercial aspect. There had been no official answer.

Sheridan looked at his watch again.

"Their time's up in half an hour," he said. "What do you say to sending a final demand?—the 'D' being loud and explosive, as in 'Income Tax.' "

"Shure—if there's no chance of 'em surrenderin'," agreed Kelly. "But we can't let anything stop the war."

The message they sent was worded with this in view:

Understand you refuse to release Quijote. Our armies will accordingly advance into Pasala at noon.

While they waited for zero hour, Kelly completed the task of breaking camp, strapping their tent and equipment into a workmanlike bundle. He finished this job just before twelve, and returned to his prostrate position on the ground sheet.

"I wonder what that blayguard Shannet is doin'?" he said. "I only hope he hasn't missed the news by takin' a thrip to the concession. It'd be unlucky for us if he had."

"I think he'll be there," said Sheridan. "He was in Santa Miranda when we left, and he's likely to stay there and supervise the hunt for the Saint."

"He's a good man, that," said Kelly. "It's a pity he's not an Irishman."

Sheridan fanned himself with a handkerchief.

"He's one of the finest men that ever stepped," he said. "If the Saint said he was going to make war on Hell, I'd pack a fire extinguisher and go with him."

Kelly sucked his pipe and spat thoughtfully at an ant.

"That's not what I call your duty," he remarked. "In fact, I'm not sure that yez should have been in this at all, with a girl like Lilla watchin' for yez to come back, and worryin' her pretty head. And with a crawlin' sarpint like Shannet about."

"He's tried to bother her once or twice. But if I thought——"

"I've been thinkin' a lot out here," said Kelly. "I'm not sayin' what I've thought. But it means that as soon as we've done what we're here to do we're goin' to hurry back to Santa Miranda as fast as Tin Lizzie'll take us. There's my missus an' Lilla without a man to look afther them; an' the Saint——"

Sheridan suddenly held up a hand for silence. He wrote rapidly on his little pad, and Kelly leaned over to read.

"What's it mean?"

"The war's on!" yelled Kelly ecstatically. "Don Manuel ain't the quitter I thought he was—or maybe he didn't see how he could get out of it. But the war's on! Hooroosh! There's goin' to be fightin'! Archie, me bhoy, the war's on!"

He seized Sheridan in a bear hug of an embrace, swung him off the ground, dropped him, and went prancing round the clearing uttering wild Celtic cries. It was some minutes before he could be sobered sufficiently to give a translation of the message.

It was short and to the point:

The armies of Pasala will resist aggression to the death.

Manuel Concepcion de Villega, being a civilian official, had thought this a particularly valiant and noble sentiment. In fact, he was so pleased with it that he used it to conclude his address to the army when, with the President, he reviewed it before it rode out of Santa Miranda to meet the invaders. Of course the speech should have been made by the President, but his excellency had no views on the subject.

At lunchtime the news came through from Esperanza that the enemy were attacking the town.

Although there had been ample warning, few of the inhabitants had left. The bulk of the population preferred to stay, secure in the belief that wars were the exclusive concern of the professional soldiers and had nothing to do with the general public, except for the inconvenience they might cause.

There was a small garrison stationed in the town, and they had barricaded the streets and settled down to await the attack. It came at about one o'clock.

The "invading armies" which Kelly had prepared had been designed by Archie Sheridan, who was something of a mechanical genius.

In the woods on the east, three hundred yards from the front line of improvised fortifications, had been established a line of ten braziers of glowing charcoal, about twenty yards apart. Above each brazier was suspended a string of cartridges knotted at intervals of a few inches into a length of cord. The cord passed over the branch of a tree into which nails had been driven as guides. All these cords were gathered together in two batches of five each at a point some distance away, in such a way that one man, using both hands, could slowly lower the strings of cartridges simultaneously into all ten braziers, and so give the impression that there was firing over a front of two hundred yards. If they had had fireworks they could have saved themselves much trouble; but they had no fireworks, and Archie Sheridan was justly proud of his ingenious substitute.

Sheridan worked the "invading armies," while Kelly lay down behind a tree some distance away, sheltered from any stray bullets, and loaded his rifle. To complete the illusion it was necessary that the firing should seem to have some direction.

Sheridan, with a low whistle, signalled that he was ready, and the battle began.

The cartridges, lowered one by one into the braziers and there exploded by the heat, provided a realistic rattle up and down the line; while Kelly, firing and reloading like one possessed, sent bullets smacking into the walls of the houses and kicking up spurts of dust around the barricades. He took care not to aim anywhere where anyone might be hit.

The defense replied vigorously, though no one will ever know what they thought they were shooting at, and there were some spirited exchanges. When another whistle from Sheridan announced that the strings of cartridges were exhausted, Kelly rejoined him, and they crawled down to the road and the waiting Ford, and drove boldly towards the town, Kelly waving a nearly white flag.

The car was stopped, but Kelly was well known.

"They let me through their lines," he explained to the officer of the garrison. "That is why the firing has ceased. I was in Ondia when war was declared, and I came back at once."

He told them that he was on his way to Santa Miranda.

"Then travel quickly, and urge them to not delay sending help," said the officer, "for it is clear that we are attacked by a tremendous number. I have sent telegraphs, but you can do more by telling them what you have seen."

"I will do that," promised Kelly, and they let him drive on.

As soon as the car was clear of the town he stopped and assisted Sheridan to unearth himself from under the pile of luggage; for, being now an outlaw, Sheridan had had to hide when they passed through the towns on the journey up, and it was advisable for him to do the same for most of the return.

A little farther down the road they stopped again, and Sheridan climbed a tree and cut the telegraph wires, so that the news of the fizzling out of the attack should not reach Santa Miranda in time for the troops that had been sent out to be recalled. Instead

of organizing the "invasion" they might have tapped the wire there and sent on messages from the commander of the garrison describing the progress of the battle, and so saved themselves much labour and thought; but the short road between Esperanza and Las Flores (the next town) was too well frequented for that to be practicable in broad daylight.

The Minister of the Interior was informed that it was no longer possible to communicate with Esperanza, and he could see only one explanation.

"Esperanza is surrounded," he said. "The garrison is less than a hundred. The town will fall in twenty-four hours, and the advancing armies of Maduro will meet our reinforcements at Las Flores. It will be a miracle if we can hold the invaders from Santa Miranda for five days."

"You should have kept some troops here," said Shannet. "You have sent every soldier in Santa Miranda. Once that army is defeated there will be nothing for the invaders to overcome."

"To-morrow I will recruit the *peones*," said Don Manuel. "There must be conscription. Pasala requires the services of every able-bodied citizen. I will draft a proclamation to-night for the President to sign."

It was then nearly five o'clock, but none of them had had a siesta that afternoon. They were holding another of many unprofitable conferences in a room in the palace, and it was significant that Shannet's right to be present was undisputed. The President himself was also there, biting his nails and stabbing the carpet nervously with the rowels of his spurs, but the other two took no notice of him. The President and De Villega were both still wearing the magnificent uniforms which they had donned for the review of the troops that morning.

Shannet paced the room, the inevitable limp unlighted cigarette drooping from his loose lower lip. His once-white ducks were as soiled and sloppy as ever. (Since they never became filthy, it is apparent that he must have treated himself to a clean suit occasionally, but nobody was ever allowed to notice this fact.) His unbrushed hair, as always, flopped over his right eye.

Since the day before, Shannet had had much to think about. Campard's amazing cable, attributing the war to a criminal gang,

had arrived, and Shannet had replied with the required information. He had passed on the suggestion of his employer to the Minister of the Interior, pointing to the undoubtedly lawless behaviour of Sheridan and the Unknown; but that two common outlaws could organize a war was a theory which De Villega refused to swallow.

"It is absurd," he said. "They are ordinary criminals. Two men cannot be a gang. In due time they will be caught, the man Sheridan will be imprisoned, and the man Mussolini will be hanged."

Shannet, asked for the name of the man who had assaulted him, had replied indignantly: "He told me his name was Benito Mussolini!" Since then, he had been impelled to make several protests against the conviction of the officials that this statement was to be believed; but the idea had taken too firm a root, and Shannet had to give up the attempt.

But now he had an inspiration.

"There can be no harm in finding out," he urged. "Send for the *peón* that all the trouble is about, and let us question him."

"I have a better idea than that," exclaimed De Villega, jumping up. "I will send the *peón* to the garrote to-morrow, for an encouragement to the people. They will enjoy the spectacle, and it will make them more ready to accept the proclamation of conscription. I will make a holiday——"

But Shannet's brain had suddenly taken to itself an amazing brilliance. In a flash it had soared above the crude and elementary idea of sending for the *peón* and forcing him to speak. He had no interest in De Villega's sadistic elaboration of the same idea. He had seen a much better solution than that.

9

RAPIDLY Shannet explained his inspiration to the others. It was as simple as all great inspirations.

He was now firmly convinced in his mind that Sheridan and the Unknown were at the bottom of all the trouble, and this belief was strengthened by the fact that no trace of them had been found since their escape, although both police and military had searched

for them. Some of the things that the Unknown had said—before and after the interlude in which words were dispensed with—came back to Shannet with a dazzling clarity. It all fitted in.

And ready to his hand lay the key to the trap in which he found himself. He saw that what the Unknown had started the Unknown could stop. It was Campard's own idea, but Shannet was more conveniently placed to apply it than his master had been. Also, he had the necessary lever within a few minutes' reach.

Lilla McAndrew.

She was the master card. Sheridan, he knew, was infatuated. And Sheridan was an important accomplice of the Unknown. With Lilla McAndrew for a hostage Shannet could dictate his own terms.

"I know I have reason!" Shannet said vehemently, while he inwardly cursed the limitations of his Spanish, which prevented him driving his ideas home into the thick skulls of his audience more forcibly. "I know well the Señor Campard, for whom I have worked for years. Perhaps it sounds fantastic to you, but I know that he is not an easy man to frighten. If I had suggested this to him myself, that these two men could have plotted a war, he would have laughed me to scorn. But he has said it of his own accord. Therefore I know that he must have some information."

"I think everyone has gone mad," said De Villega helplessly. "But you may proceed with your plan. At least it can do no harm. But I warn you that it is on your own responsibility. The Señorita McAndrew is a British subject, and questions may be asked. Then I shall say that I know nothing of it; and, if the authorities demand it, you will have to be handed over to them."

It was significant of the way in which Shannet's prestige had declined since the commencement of the war, for which De Villega was inclined to blame him; but Shannet did not care.

"I will take the risk," he said, and was gone.

In the palace courtyard his horse was still being held by a patient soldier—one of the half-dozen left behind to guard the palace. Shannet clambered into the saddle and galloped out as the gates were opened for him by a sentry.

His first course took him to an unsavoury café at the end of the town, where he knew he would find the men he needed. He en-

rolled two. They were pleased to call themselves "guides," but actually they were half-caste cutthroats available for anything from murder upwards. Shannet knew them, for he had used their services before.

He explained what he wanted and produced money. There was no haggling. In ten minutes the three were riding out of the town.

Kelly, too late, had thought of that very possibility, as he had hinted to Sheridan in the jungle clearing that morning. But Kelly and Sheridan were still twenty miles away.

And the Saint, in the President's palatial bathroom, was leisurely completing the process of dressing himself in the clean clothes which he had found. They fitted him excellently.

Meanwhile, the men whom Shannet had left in conference were receiving an unpleasant surprise.

"God!" thundered De Villega. "How did this *peón* escape?"

"Excellency," said the abashed governor of the prison, "it was during the siesta. The man fell down moaning and writhing as if he would die. The warder went to attend him, and the man grasped him by the throat so that he could not cry out, throttled him into unconsciousness, and bound and gagged him. He also surprised the gatekeeper, and hit him in the English fashion——"

De Villega let out an exclamation.

"What meanest thou, pig—'in the English fashion'?"

The governor demonstrated the blow which the gatekeeper had described. It was, in fact, the simple left uppercut of the boxer, and no Latin American who has not been infected with our methods ever hits naturally like that.

"What manner of man was this *peón?*" demanded Don Manuel, with understanding dawning sickeningly into his brain.

"Excellency, he was tall for a *peón,* and a man of the strength of a lion. If he had washed he would have been handsome, with an aristocratic nose that such a man could hardly have come by legitimately. And he had very white teeth and blue eyes——"

"Blue eyes!" muttered De Villega dazedly, for, of course, to the Latin, all Englishmen have blue eyes.

He turned to the governor with sudden ferocity.

"Tonto de capirote!" he screamed. "Imbecile, dost thou not know whom thou hast let slip through thy beastly fingers? Dost

thou not even know whom thou hast had in thy charge these three days?"

He thumped upon the table with his fist, and the governor trembled.

"Couldst thou not recognize him, cross-eyed carrion?" he screeched. "Couldst thou not see that he was no true *peón?* Maggot, hast thou not heard of the outlaw Benito Mussolini, for whom the *rurales* have searched in vain while he sheltered safely in the prison under thy gangrenous eyes?"

"I am a worm, and blind, excellency," said the cringing man tactfully, for he knew that any excuse he attempted to make would only infuriate the minister further.

De Villega strode raging up and down the room. Now he believed Shannet, wild and far-fetched as the latter's theory had seemed when he had first heard it propounded. The news of the prisoner's escape, and the—to Don Manuel—sufficient revelation of his real identity, provided incontrovertible proof that the fantastic thing was true.

"He must be recaptured at once!" snapped De Villega. "Every *guardia* in Santa Miranda must seek him without rest day or night. The *peones* must be pressed into the hunt. The state will pay a reward of five thousand *pesos* to the man who brings him to me, alive or dead. As for thee, offal," he added, turning with renewed malevolence upon the prison governor, "if Sancho Quijote, or Benito Mussolini—whatever he calls himself—is not delivered to me in twelve hours I will cast thee into thine own prison to rot there until he is found."

"I will give the orders myself, excellency," said the governor, glad of an excuse to make his escape, and bowed his way to the door.

He went out backwards, and, as he closed the door, the Saint pinioned his arms from behind, and allowed the point of his little knife to prick his throat.

"Make no sound," said the Saint, and lifted the man bodily off his feet.

He carried the governor down the passage, the knife still at his throat, and took him into a room that he had already marked down in his explorations. It was a bedroom. The Saint deposited the man

on the floor, sat on his head, and tore a sheet into strips, with which he bound and gagged him securely.

"I will release you as soon as the revolution is over," the Saint promised, with a mocking bow.

Then he walked back to the other room and entered softly, closing the door behind him. De Villega was penning the announcement of the reward, and it was the President who first noticed the intruder and uttered a strangled yap of startlement.

Don Manuel looked up, and loosed an oath. He sprang to his feet, upsetting the ink pot and his chair, as if an electric current had suddenly been applied to him.

"Who are you?" he demanded in a cracked voice, though he had guessed the answer.

"You know me best as Benito Mussolini, or Sancho Quijote," said the Saint. "My friends—and enemies—sometimes call me *El Santo*. And I am the father of the revolution."

He lounged lazily against the door, head back, hands rested carelessly on his hips. The Saint was himself again, clean and fresh from razor and bath, his hair combed smoothly back. The clothes he had appropriated suited him to perfection. The Saint had the priceless gift of being able to throw on any old thing and look well in it, but few things could have matched his mood and personality better than the buccaneering touch there was about the attire that had been more or less thrust upon him.

The loose, full-sleeved shirt, the flaring trousers, the scarlet sash —the Saint wore these romantic trappings with a marvellous swashbuckling air, lounging there with a reckless and piratical elegance, a smile on his lips. . . .

Seconds passed before the minister came out of his trance.

"Revolution?"

De Villega echoed the word involuntarily, and the Saint bowed.

"I am the revolution," he said, "and I have just started. For my purpose I arranged that the army should leave Santa Miranda, so that I should have nothing to deal with but a few officials, yourselves, and a handful of *guardias*. Wonderful as I am, I could not fight an army."

"Fool!" croaked Don Manuel, in a voice that he hardly knew as his own. "The army will return, and then you will be shot."

"Permit me to disagree," said the Saint. "The army will return, certainly. It will be to find a new government in power. The army is the servant of the state, not of one man, nor even of one government. Of course, on their return, the soldiers would be free to begin a second revolution to overthrow the new government if they disliked it. But I do not think they will do that, particularly as the new government is going to increase their pay. Observe the subtle difference. To have attempted to bribe the army to support a revolution would have been treason, and rightly resented by all patriotic citizens; but to signalize the advent of the new constitution by a bonus in cash to the army is an act of grace and generosity, and will be rightly appreciated."

"And the people?" said Don Manuel, as in a dream.

"Will they weep to see you go? I think not. You have crushed them with taxes—we shall liberate them. They could have liberated themselves, but they had not the initiative to begin. Now I give them a lead, and they will follow."

The Saint straightened up off the door. His blue eyes, with a sparkle of mischief in them, glanced from the Minister of the Interior to the President, and back to the Minister of the Interior again. His right hand came off his hip in a commanding gesture.

"*Señores,*" he said, "I come for your resignations."

The President came to his feet, bowed, and stood to attention.

"I will write mine at once, *señor,*" he said hurriedly. "It is plain that Pasala no longer needs me."

It was the speech of his life, and the Saint swept him a low bow of approval.

"I thank your excellency!" he said mockingly.

"Half-wit!" snarled De Villega over his shoulder. "Let me handle this!"

He thrust the President back and came round the table.

A sword hung at his side, and on the belt of his ceremonial uniform was a revolver holster. He stood before the Saint, one hand on the pommel of his sword, the other fiddling with the little strap which secured the flap of the holster. His dark eyes met Simon Templar's bantering gaze.

"Already the revolution is accomplished?" he asked.

"I have accomplished it," said Templar.

De Villega raised his left hand to stroke his moustache.

"*Señor,*" he said, "all this afternoon we have sat in this room, which overlooks the front courtyard of the palace. Beyond, as you know, is the Calle del Palacio. Yet we have heard no commotion. Is a people that has been newly liberated too full of joy to speak?"

"When the people hear of their liberation," said the Saint, "you will hear their rejoicing."

De Villega's eyes glittered under his black brows.

"And your friends, *señor?*" he pursued. "The other liberators? They have, perhaps, surrounded the palace and overcome the guards without an alarm being raised or a shot fired?"

The Saint laughed.

"Don Manuel," he said, "you do me an injustice. I said I was the father of the revolution. Can a child have two fathers? Alone, Manuel, I accomplished it—yet you persist in speaking of my private enterprise as if it were the work of a hundred. Will you not give me the full credit for what I have done?"

De Villega stepped back a pace.

"So," he challenged, "the people does not know. The palace guards do not know. The army does not know. Will you tell me who *does* know?"

"Our three selves," said the Saint blandly. "Also two friends of mine who organized the war for me. And the governor of the prison, whom I captured on his way to mobilize the *guardias* against me. It is very simple. I intend this to be a bloodless revolution, for I am against unnecessary killing. You will merely resign, appointing a new government in your places, and leave Pasala at once, never to return again on pain of death."

The holster was now undone, and De Villega's fingers were sliding under the flap.

"And you—alone—demand that?"

"I do," said the Saint, and leaped at De Villega as the revolver flashed from its place.

With one arm he grasped Don Manuel around the waist, pinning his left arm to his side; with his left hand he gripped Don Manuel's right wrist, forcing it back, and twisting.

The President sprang forward, but it was all over in a couple of

seconds. The revolver exploded twice, harmlessly, into the floor, and then fell with a clatter as the Saint's grip became too agonizing to be borne.

The Saint hurled De Villega from him, into the President's very arms, and as De Villega staggered back his sword grated out of its sheath and remained in the Saint's right hand. The President's revolver was halfway out of its holster when the Saint let him feel the sword at his breast.

"Drop it!" ordered Simon.

The President obeyed.

Templar forced the two men back to the wall at the sword's point. Then he turned quickly, using the sword to fish up the two revolvers from the floor by their trigger guards, and turned again to halt their immediate rally with the guns impaled on his blade.

From below, through the open windows, came the shouting of the sentries, and the sound of running feet thundered in the passage outside the room.

Like lightning the Saint detached the revolvers from his sword, and held them one in each hand. They covered their owners with an equal steadiness of aim.

The two shots that De Villega had fired, though they had hit no one, had done damage enough. They hadn't entered into the Saint's plan of campaign. He had betted on being quick enough to catch De Villega before he could get his hand to his gun in its cumbersome holster—and the Saint, for once, had been a fraction of a second slow on his timing. But the error might yet be repaired.

"You, excellency, to the windows!" rapped the Saint in a low voice. "You, De Villega, to the door! Reassure the guards. Tell them that the President was unloading his revolver when it accidentally exploded. The President will repeat the same thing from the window to the sentries below."

He dodged out of sight behind the door as it burst open, but there was no mistaking the menace of the revolvers which he still focussed on the two men.

The President was already addressing the sentries below. De Villega, with one savagely impotent glance at the unfriendly muzzle that was trained upon him, followed suit, giving the Saint's

suggested explanation to the guards who crowded into the doorway.

"You may go," he concluded. "No harm has been done. But remain within call—I may need you shortly."

It required some nerve to add that last remark, in the circumstances, but De Villega thought that the Saint would not betray his presence with a shot if he could possibly help it. He was right. The President came back from the window. The guards withdrew, with apologies for their excited irruption, and the door closed. The Saint slid the bolt into its socket.

"A wise precaution, Don Manuel, to warn the guards that you might need them," he said. "But I do not think it will help you."

He stuck the revolvers into his sash and picked up the sword again. It was a better weapon for controlling two men than his little knife, and much quieter than the revolvers.

"Your resignations or your lives, *señores?*" said the Saint briskly. "I will take whichever you prefer to give, but I must have one or the other at once."

De Villegas sat down at the table, but did not write. He unbuttoned his coat, fished out a packet of cigarettes, and lighted one, blowing out a great cloud of smoke. Through it he looked at the Saint, and his lips had twisted into a sneering grin.

"I have another thing to offer, *señor,*" he remarked viciously, "which you might prefer to either of the things you have mentioned."

"*Es decir?*" prompted Simon, with a frowning lift of his eyebrows.

De Villega inhaled again with relish, and let the smoke trickle down from his nostrils in two long feathers. There was a glow of taunting triumph in his malignant stare.

"There is the Señorita McAndrew," he said, and the Saint's face suddenly went very meek.

"What of her?"

"It was the Señor Shannet," said De Villega, enjoying his moment, "who first suggested that you were the man behind the war. We did not believe him, but now I see that he is a wise man. He left us over half an hour ago to take her as hostage. You gave me no chance to explain that when the guards entered the room just

now. But I told them to remain within call for that reason—so that I could summon them as soon as you surrendered. Now it is my turn to make an offer. Stop this war, and deliver yourself and your accomplices to justice, and I will save the Señorita McAndrew. Otherwise——" Don Manuel shrugged. "Am I answerable for the affections of the Señor Shannet?"

A throaty chuckle of devilish merriment shook him, and he bowed to the motionless Saint with a leering mock humility.

"I, in my turn, await your decision, *señor,*" he said.

10

THE Saint leaned on his sword.

He was cursing himself for the fool he was. Never before in his career had he been guilty of such an appalling lapse. Never would he have believed that he could be capable of overlooking the probability of such an obvious counter-attack. Now his brain was whirling like the flywheel of a great dynamo, and he was considering, calculating, readjusting, summarizing everything in the light of this new twist that De Villega had given to the affair. Yet his face showed nothing of the storm behind it.

"And how do I know that you will keep your bargain?" he asked.

"You do not know," replied De Villega brazenly. "You only know that, if you do not agree to my terms, the Señor Shannet will certainly take reprisals. I offer you a hope."

So that was the strength of it. And, taken by and large, it didn't strike the Saint as a proposition to jump at. It offered him exactly nothing—except the opportunity to go nap on Don Manuel's honour and Shannet's generosity, two bets which no one could have called irresistibly attractive. Also, it involved Kelly and Sheridan, who hadn't been consulted. And it meant, in the end, that all three of them would most certainly be executed, whatever De Villega decided to do about Lilla McAndrew, whom Shannet would probably claim, and be allowed, as a reward for his share in suppressing the revolution. No. . . .

Where were Kelly and Sheridan? The Saint was reckoning it

out rapidly, taking into consideration the age of Kelly's Ford and the reported abominable state of the roads between Esperanza and Santa Miranda. And, checking his calculation over, the Saint could only get one answer, which was that Kelly and Sheridan were due to arrive at any minute. They would learn of the abduction. . . .

"The Señora Kelly?" asked the Saint. "What of her?"

De Villega shrugged.

"She is of no importance."

Yes, Mrs. Kelly would be left behind—if she had not been shot. She was middle-aged and stout and past her attractiveness, and no one would have any interest in abducting her. So that Kelly and Sheridan, arriving at the bungalow, would hear the tale from her.

And then—there was no doubt about it—they would come storming down to the palace, *guardias* and sentries notwithstanding, with cold murder in their hearts.

The Saint came erect, and De Villega looked up expectantly. But there was no sign of surrender in the Saint's poise, and nothing relenting about the way in which he stepped up to the minister and set the point of his sword at his breast.

"I said I came for your resignations," remarked the Saint with a deadly quietness. "That was no idle talk. Write now, De Villega, or, by the vixen that bore thee, thou diest!"

"Fool! Fool!" Don Manuel raved. "It cannot help you!"

"I take the risk," said the Saint icily. "And do not speak so loud —I might think you were trying to attract the attention of the guards. Write!"

He thrust the sword forward the half of an inch, and De Villega started back with a cry.

"You would murder me?"

"With pleasure," said the Saint. "Write!"

Then there was sudden silence, and everyone was quite still, listening. For from the courtyard below the windows came the rattle of urgent hoofs.

The Saint leaped to the windows. There were three horses held by the sentries. He saw Shannet and two other men dismounting —and saw, being lifted down from Shannet's saddlebow, Lilla McAndrew with her hands tied.

He could have shouted for joy at the justification of his bold

defiance. And yet, if he had thought a little longer, he might have foreseen that the girl would be brought to the palace. She was not the victim of Shannet's privateering, but an official hostage. But even if the Saint hadn't forseen it, there it was, and he could have prayed for nothing better. He saw all the trump cards coming into his hands. . . .

Then he whipped round, in time to frustrate De Villega's stealthy attack, and the minister's raised arm dropped to his side.

The Saint speared the sword into the floor and slipped the revolvers out of his sash. For the second time he dodged behind the opening door. He saw the girl thrust roughly into the room, and Shannet followed, closing the door again behind him.

"Fancy meeting you again, honeybunch!" drawled the Saint, and Shannet spun round with an oath.

The Saint leaned against the wall, the presidential and ministerial revolvers in his hands. On his lips was a smile so broad as to be almost a laugh, and there was a laugh in his voice.

"Take that hand away from your hip, Shannet, my pet!" went on the Saint, in that laughing voice of sheer delight. "I've got you covered—and even if I'm not very used to these toys, I could hardly miss you at this range. . . . That's better. . . . Oh, Shannet, my sweet and beautiful gargoyle, you're a bad boy, frightening that child. Take the cords off her wrists, my angel. . . . No, Señor de Villega, you needn't edge towards that sword. I may want it again myself in a minute. *Gracias!* . . . Is that more comfortable, Lilla, old dear?"

"Oh," cried the girl, "thank God you're here! Where's Archie?"

"On his way, old darling, on his way, as the actress said of the bishop," answered the Saint. "Are you all right?"

She shuddered a little.

"Yes, I'm all right," she said. "Except for the touch of his filthy hands. But I was very frightened. . . ."

"Archie will deal with that when he arrives," said the Saint. "It's his business—he'd never forgive me if I interfered. Come here, my dear, keeping well out of the line of fire, while I deal with the specimens. I'm not the greatest revolver shot in the world, and I want to be sure that it won't matter who I hit."

He steered her to safety in a corner, and turned to Don Manuel.

"When we were interrupted," said the Saint persuasively, "you were writing. The interruption has now been disposed of. Proceed, *señor!*"

De Villega lurched back to the table, the fight gone out of him. He could never have envisaged such an accumulation and culmination of misfortunes. It was starting to seem to him altogether like a dream, a nightmare rather—but there was nothing ethereal about the revolver that was levelled so steadily at him. The only fantastic part of the whole catastrophe was the man who had engineered it—the Saint himself, in his extraordinary borrowed clothes, and the hell-for-leather light of laughing recklessness in his blue eyes. That was the last bitter pill which De Villega had to swallow. He might perhaps have endured defeat by a man whom he could understand—a cloaked and sinister conspirator with a personality of impressive grimness. But this lunatic who *laughed. . . . Que diablos!* It was impossible. . . .

And then, from outside, drifted a grinding, screaming, metallic rattle that could only be made by one instrument in the world.

"Quick!" said the Saint. "Slither round behind Master Shannet, Lilla, darling, and slip the gat out of his hip pocket. . . . That's right. . . . Now d'you mind sticking up the gang for a sec. while I hail the troops? Blaze away if anybody gets funny."

The girl handled Shannet's automatic as if she'd been born with her finger crooked round a trigger, and the Saint, with a nod of approval, crossed over to the window.

Kelly's Ford was drawn up in the courtyard, and both Kelly and Sheridan were there. Kelly was just disposing of a sentry who had ventured to question his right of way.

"Walk right in, souls!" the Saint hailed them cheerily. "You're in time to witness the abdication of the government."

"Have you seen Lilla?" shouted a frantic Sheridan.

The Saint grinned.

"She's safe here, son."

The report of an automatic brought him round with a jerk.

With the Saint's back turned, and the Saint's victory now an accomplished fact, Shannet had chanced everything on one mad gamble against the steadiness of nerve and aim of the girl who for

a moment held the situation in her small hands. While Lilla McAndrew's attention was distracted by the irresistible impulse to try to hear what Archie Sheridan was saying he had sidled closer . . . made one wild leaping grab . . . missed. . . .

The Saint stooped over the still figure and made a swift examination. He straightened up with a shrug, picking up his revolvers again as the first of the guards burst into the room.

"Quietly, *amigos,*" he urged; and they saw sudden death in each of his hands, and checked.

The next instant the crowd stirred again before the berserk rush of Archie Sheridan, who had heard the shot as he raced up the palace steps. A yard behind him followed Kelly, breaking through like a bull, his red head flaming above the heads of the guards.

"All clear, Archie!" called the Saint. "It was Shannet who got it."

But Lilla McAndrew was already in Archie Sheridan's arms.

"Here, Kelly," rapped the Saint. "Let's get this over. Take these guns and keep the guards in order while I dispose of the government."

Kelly took over the weapons, and the Saint stepped back and wrenched the sword out of the floor. He advanced towards the President and De Villega, who stood paralyzed by the table.

"You have written?" he asked pleasantly.

De Villega passed over a piece of paper, and the Saint read it and handed it back.

"You have omitted to nominate your successors," he said. "That will be the Señor Kelly and those whom he appoints to help him. Write again."

"Half a minute," Kelly threw back over his shoulder, with his eyes on the shuffling guards. "I don't fancy being President myself —it's too risky. I'll be Minister of the Interior. and the President can stay on, if he behaves himself."

The President bowed.

"I am honoured, señor," he assented with alacrity.

"Write accordingly," ordered the Saint, and it was done.

The Saint took the document and addressed the guards.

"By this," he said, "you know that the President dismisses Señor

Manuel Concepcion de Villega, the Minister of the Interior, and his government, and appoints the Señor Kelly in his place. To celebrate his appointment, the Señor Kelly will in a few days announce the removal of a number of taxes which have hitherto oppressed you. Now take this paper and cause it to be embodied in a proclamation to the free people of Pasala. Let to-morrow be a public holiday and a day of rejoicing for this reason, and also because it is now proved that there is no war with Maduro. That was a rumour spread by certain malicious persons for their own ends. See that a *radiógrafo* is sent to *Estados Unidos,* explaining that, and saying that they may recall the warship they were sending. You may go, *amigos.*"

There was a silence of a few seconds; and then, as the full meaning of the Saint's speech was grasped, the room rang and echoed again to a great crash of *Vivas!*

When Kelly had driven the cheering guards out into the passage and closed the door in their faces, Simon Templar thought of something and had the door opened again to send for the governor of the prison. The man was brought quickly.

"*Señor,*" said the Saint, "I apologize for the way I treated you just now. It happened to be necessary. But the revolution is now completed, and you are a free man. I bear you no malice—although I am going to insist that you disinfect your prison."

He explained the circumstances, and the prison governor bowed almost to the floor.

"It is nothing, *ilustrisimo señor,*" he said. "But if I had known I would have seen to it that your honour was given better accommodation. Another time, perhaps. . . ."

"God forbid," said the Saint piously.

Then he turned and pointed to the now terrified De Villega.

"Take this man with you," he directed. "He is to leave Pasala by the next boat, and meantime he is to be closely guarded. He will probably attempt either to fight or to bribe his escape. My answer to that is that if he is not delivered to me when I send for him, your life and the lives of all your warders will answer for it."

"It is understood, *señor.*"

Kelly watched the departure of the governor and his prisoner open-mouthed; and when they were gone he turned to the Saint with a blank expression.

"Look here," he said, as if the thought had just struck him—"where's all this fightin' I've been told so much about?"

The Saint smiled.

"There is no fighting," he said. "This has been what I hoped it would be—a bloodless revolution. It was undertaken in the name of a justice which the law could not administer, to ruin a man more than six thousand miles away, back in London, England. He had ruined thousands, but the law could not touch him. This was my method. Your first duty as Minister of the Interior will be to revoke the original oil concession and to make out a fresh one, assigning the rights, in perpetuity, to Miss McAndrew and her heirs." He laid a hand on Kelly's shoulder. "I'm sorry to give you such a disappointment, son; and if you must have a fight, I'll have a round or two with you myself before dinner. But I had to do it this way. Any other kind of revolution would have meant the sacrifice of many lives, and I didn't really want that."

For a moment Kelly was silent and perplexed before the Saint's sudden seriousness; then he shrugged, and laughed, and took Simon Templar's hand in a huge grip.

"I don't confess to know what yez are talkin' about," he said. "And I don't care. I suppose it's been worth it—if only to see the look on De Villega's ugly face whin yez sent him to prison. And, anyway, a laughin' devil who can run a show like yez have run this one deserves to be allowed to work things his own way."

"Good scout!" smiled the Saint. "Was Mrs. Kelly all right?"

"A bit scared, but no harm done. It was Lilla she was afraid for. They just tied the missus up in a chair and left her. An' that reminds me—there was a cable waitin' for me up at the bungalow, and I can't make head or tale of it. Maybe it's something to do with you."

Kelly fumbled in his pocket and produced the form. The Saint took it over, and one glance told him that it was meant for him.

"It's from an agent of mine in London," he explained. "He wouldn't have addressed it to Archie or me in case anything had gone wrong and it was intercepted."

He knew the code almost perfectly, and he was able to write the translation in between the lines at once.

Pops down trumped twelve thousand . . .

The Saint wrote:

P. O. P.'s fell heavily. Cleared twelve thousand pounds. Campard committed suicide this morning.

It was signed with the name of Roger Conway.

"Archie!" called the Saint, thoughtfully; and again: "Archie!"

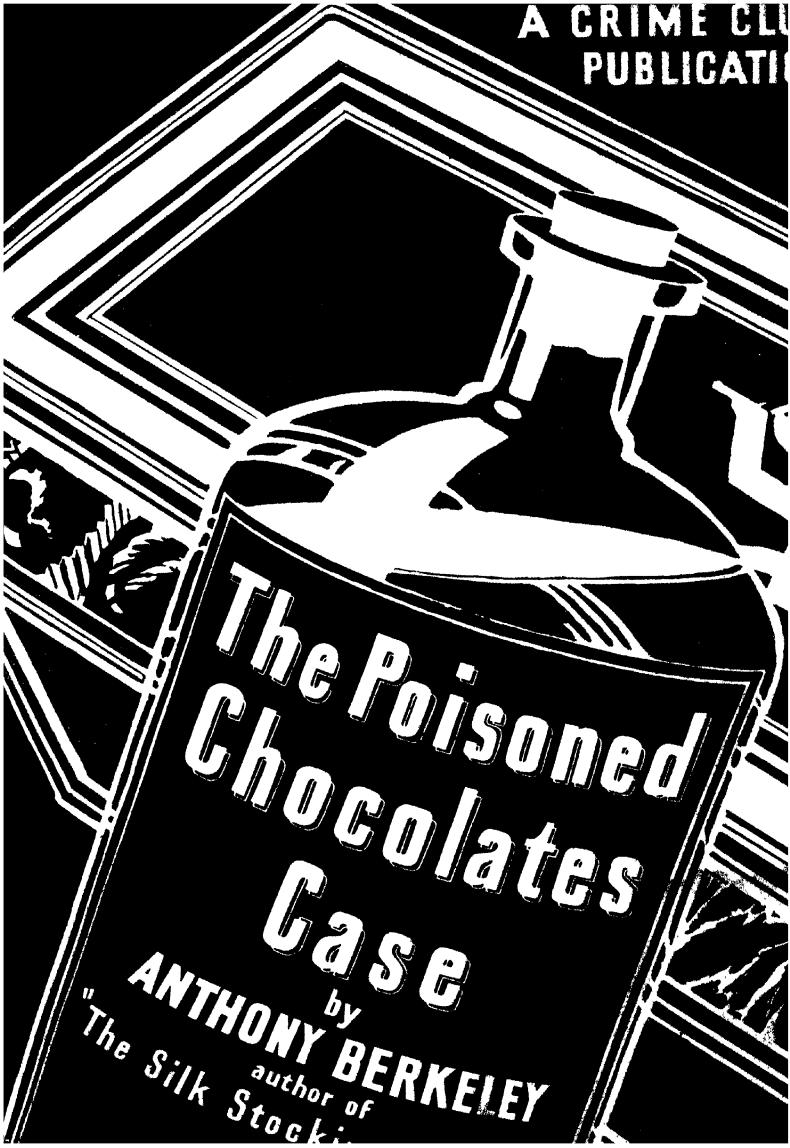
"They sneaked out minutes ago," said Kelly. "She's a sweet girl, that Lilla McAndrew."

And it was so, until evening.

And at even the Saint went forth and made a tour of a number of disreputable cafés, in each of which he bought much liquor for the clientele. They did not recognize him until he started to sing —a strange and barbarous song that no one could understand. But they recognized it, having heard it sung before, with many others like it, by a certain *peón*:

"The bells of Hell go ting-a-ling-al-ing,
For you but not for me;
For me the angels sing-a-ling-a-ling,
They've got the goods for me,
O death, where is thy sting-a-ling-a-ling,
Where, grave, thy victory . . ."

To this day you will hear that song sung by the peasants of Santa Miranda. And if you should ask one of them why he sings it, he will answer, with courteous surprise at your ignorance: "That, *señor,* is one of the songs of freedom. . .


A CRIME CL
PUBLICATI
The Poisoned Chocolates Case
by
ANTHONY BERKELEY
author of
"The Silk Stocki

THE POISONED CHOCOLATES CASE

ANTHONY BERKELEY IS THE AUTHOR OF THE FOLLOWING DETECTIVE NOVELS:

Murder in the Basement
Top Story Murder
The Second Shot
The Piccadilly Murder
The Poisoned Chocolates Case
The Silk Stocking Murders
Roger Sheringham and the Vane Mystery
The Wychford Poisoning Case
The Layton Court Mystery

TO BE ISSUED SHORTLY:

Dead Mrs. Stratton

WHY do I write detective stories? Well, I wrote my first one (*The Layton Court Mystery*) for pure amusement, just to see if I could. That was a few years ago now, when detective stories had not reached the high standard expected of them today, and it was a common thing to read an otherwise good book in which one was irritated to find that a vital clue, which made the solution

of the whole puzzle quite clear to the detective in charge, had been completely withheld from the reader till the end of the book. I was doing quite different work then, writing regularly for *Punch* and other humorous papers, but I was an eager reader of detective stories, and having been annoyed and disappointed in this way so often, I wondered whether I could not manage to write a story in which the reader should know just as much as my detective, and yet not be able to detect quite so well as he could. The book happened to sell just about twenty times as many copies as any of my previous ones, so I just bought a new typewriter and got down to it in real earnest. That is why I am still writing detective stories today.

I'm glad the idea did occur to me, because detective stories really are fun to write. All the time one is having a game with the reader-to-be, trying to trick him into thinking evidence is important which has no importance at all, giving him quite fairly the really important evidence but in such a way that he will miss its significance, and generally doing one's best, as one says in England, to lead him down the garden path. Of course the idea of giving the reader all the available evidence is an old one now, and no detective story which does not do so is considered worth anything at all. In fact it is the first rule of the English Detection Club, of which Mr. G. K. Chesterton is President and of which I was the first Honorary Secretary, that no detective writer is eligible for membership who wilfully withholds vital information from the reader—but detective-story fans would be surprised to learn what big-selling names have been excluded from the club under this rule!

The reason why detective stories are so popular is simple enough. They are, after all, only a glorified puzzle; and everyone enjoys a puzzle. To read a detective story as it should be read is really a test of intel-

ligence; in fact one might say that whereas the ordinary novel appeals only to the emotions, the detective story appeals to the intellect, which surely should be the more important. People, highly superior people, occasionally say to me, in their highly superior voices: "Oh, yes? But of course, I *never* read detective stories." I try not to point out that in this admission they are confessing that they have not got the necessary brain power which a detective story demands.

How long can the detective story expect to maintain its present popularity? Always, I think, provided that it moves with the times. That is, so long as those who write them will recognize that the convention of yesterday will not suit the requirements of tomorrow. In other words, the days of pure puzzle story, without living characters, an interesting setting, or some kind of resemblance to real life are over. Already, without sacrificing the puzzle element, authors are paying far more attention to character and atmosphere. Already the detective story is becoming altogether more sophisticated. Its development on these lines is, I think, inevitable. The detective story of the next decade will be not the infant prodigy of literature that it has been hitherto, but a real, true-to-life novel with a detective interest. And this, I submit, is just what it should be.

Anthony Berkeley

THE POISONED CHOCOLATES CASE

A ROGER SHERINGHAM DETECTIVE STORY

To

S. H. J. COX

BECAUSE FOR ONCE HE
DID NOT GUESS IT

CHAPTER I

ROGER SHERINGHAM took a sip of the old brandy in front of him and leaned back in his chair at the head of the table.

Through the haze of cigarette-smoke eager voices reached his ears from all directions, prattling joyfully upon this and that connected with murder, poisons and sudden death. For this was his own, his very own Crimes Circle, founded, organised, collected, and now run by himself alone; and when at the first meeting five months ago he had been unanimously elected its president, he had been as full of proud delight as on that never-to-be-forgotten day in the dim past when a cherub disguised as a publisher had accepted his first novel.

He turned to Chief Inspector Moresby, of Scotland Yard who, as the guest of the evening, was sitting on his right, engaged, a little uneasily, with a positively enormous cigar.

"Honestly, Moresby, without any disrespect to your own institution, I do believe that there's more solid criminological genius in this room (intuitive genius, I mean; not capacity for taking pains) than anywhere in the world outside of the *Sûreté* in Paris."

"Do you, Mr. Sheringham?" said Chief Inspector Moresby tolerantly. Moresby was always kind to the strange opinions of others. "Well, well." And he applied himself again to the lighted end of his cigar, which was so very far from the other that Moresby could never tell by mere suction at the latter whether the former were still alight or not.

Roger had some grounds for his assertion beyond mere parental pride. Entry into the charmed Crimes Circle's dinners was not to be gained by all and hungry. It was not enough for a would-be member to profess an adoration for murder and let it go at that; he or she had got to prove that they were capable of worthily wearing their criminological spurs.

Not only must the interest be intense in all branches of the science, in the detection side, for instance, just as much as the side of criminal psychology, with the history of all cases of the least importance at the applicant's finger-tips, but there must be constructive ability too; the candidate must have a brain and be able to use it. To this end, a paper had to be written, from a choice of subjects suggested by members, and submitted to the president, who passed on such as he considered worthy to the members in conclave, who thereupon voted for or against the suppliant's election; and a single adverse vote meant rejection.

It was the intention of the club to acquire eventually thirteen members, but so far only six had suc-

ceeded in passing their tests, and these were all present on the evening when this chronicle opens. There was a famous lawyer, a scarcely less famous woman dramatist, a brilliant novelist who ought to have been more famous than she was, the most intelligent (if not the most amiable) of living detective-story writers, Roger Sheringham himself, and Mr. Ambrose Chitterwick, who was not famous at all, a mild little man of no particular appearance who had been even more surprised at being admitted to this company of personages than they had been at finding him amongst them.

With the exception of Mr. Chitterwick, then, it was an assembly of which any organiser might have been proud. Roger this evening was not only proud but excited too, because he was going to startle them; and it is always exciting to startle personages. He rose to do so.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he proclaimed, after the welcome of glasses and cigarette-cases drummed on the table had died away. "Ladies and gentlemen, in virtue of the powers conferred by you the president of our Circle is permitted to alter at his discretion the arrangements made for any meeting. You all know what arrangements were made for this evening. Chief Inspector Moresby, whom we are so glad to welcome as the first representative of Scotland Yard to visit us"—more drumming on the table—"Chief Inspector

Moresby was to be lulled by rich food and sound wine into being so indiscreet as to tell us about such of his experiences as could hardly be given to a body of pressmen." More and longer drumming.

Roger refreshed himself with a sip of brandy and continued. "Now I think I know Chief Inspector Moresby pretty well, ladies and gentlemen, and the occasions are not a few on which I too have tried, and tried very hard, to lure him similarly into the paths of indiscretion; but never once have I succeeded. I have therefore little hope that this Circle, lure it never so cooingly, will succeed in getting from the Chief Inspector any more interesting stories than he would mind being published in *The Daily Courier* tomorrow. Chief Inspector Moresby, I am afraid, ladies and gentlemen, is unlurable.

"I have therefore taken upon myself the responsibility of altering our entertainment for this evening; and the idea that has occurred to me in this connection will, I both hope and believe, appeal to you very considerably. I venture to think that it is both novel and enthralling." Roger paused and beamed on the interested faces around him. Chief Inspector Moresby, a little puce below the ears, was still at grips with his cigar.

"My idea," Roger said, "is connected with Mr. Graham Bendix." There was a little stir of interest. "Or rather," he amended, more slowly, "with Mrs.

Graham Bendix." The stir subsided into a still more interested hush.

Roger paused, as if choosing his words with more care. "Mr. Bendix himself is personally known to one or two of us here. Indeed, his name has actually been mentioned as that of a man who might possibly be interested, if approached, to become a member of this Circle. By Sir Charles Wildman, if I remember rightly."

The barrister inclined his rather massive head with dignity. "Yes, I suggested him once, I think."

"The suggestion was never followed up," Roger continued. "I don't quite remember why not; I think somebody else was rather sure that he would never be able to pass all our tests. But in any case the fact that his name was ever mentioned at all shows that Mr. Bendix is to some extent at least a criminologist, which means that our sympathy with him in the terrible tragedy that has befallen him is tinged with something of a personal interest, even in the case of those who, like myself, are not actually acquainted with him."

"Hear, hear," said a tall, good-looking woman on the right of the table, in the clear tones of one very well accustomed to saying "hear, hear" weightily at appropriate moments during speeches, in case no one else did. This was Alicia Dammers, the novelist, who ran Women's Institutes for a hobby, listened to

other people's speeches with genuine and altruistic enjoyment, and, in practice the most staunch of Conservatives, supported with enthusiasm the theories of the Socialist party.

"My suggestion is," Roger said simply, "that we turn that sympathy to practical uses."

There was no doubt that the eager attention of his audience was caught. Sir Charles Wildman lifted his bushy gray brows, from under which he was wont to frown with menacing disgust at the prosecution's witnesses who had the bad taste to believe in the guilt of his own client, and swung his gold-rimmed eyeglasses on their broad black ribbon. On the other side of the table Mrs. Fielder Flemming, a short, round, homely-looking woman who wrote surprisingly improper and most successful plays and looked exactly like a rather superior cook on her Sunday out, nudged the elbow of Miss Dammers and whispered something behind her hand. Mr. Ambrose Chitterwick blinked his mild blue eyes and assumed the appearance of an intelligent nanny-goat. The writer of detective-stories alone sat apparently unmoved and impassive; but in times of crisis he was wont to model his behaviour on that of his own favourite detective, who was invariably impassive at the most exciting moments.

"I took the idea to Scotland Yard this morning," Roger went on, "and though they never encourage

that sort of idea there, they were really unable to discover any positive harm in it; with the result that I came away with a reluctant, but nevertheless official permission to try it out. And I may as well say at once that it was the same cue that prompted this permission as originally put the whole thing into my head"—Roger paused impressively and glanced round—"the fact that the police have practically given up all hope of tracing Mrs. Bendix's murderer."

Ejaculations sounded on all sides, some of dismay, some of disgust, and some of astonishment. All eyes turned upon Moresby. That gentleman, apparently unconscious of the collective gaze fastened upon him, raised his cigar to his ear and listened to it intently, as if hoping to receive some intimate message from its depths.

Roger came to his rescue. "That information is quite confidential, by the way, and I know none of you will let it escape beyond this room. But it is a fact. Active inquiries, having resulted in exactly nothing, are to be stopped. There is always hope of course that some fresh fact may turn up, but without it the authorities have come to the conclusion that they can get no farther. My proposal is, therefore, that this Club should take up the case where the authorities have left it." And he looked expectantly round the circle of upturned faces.

Every face asked a question at once.

Roger forgot his periods in his enthusiasm and became colloquial.

"Why, you see, we're all keen, we're not fools, and we're not (with apologies to my friend Moresby) tied to any hard-and-fast method of investigation. Is it too much to hope that, with all six of us on our mettle and working quite independently of each other, one of us might achieve some result where the police have, to put it bluntly, failed? I don't think it's outside the possibilities. What do you say, Sir Charles?"

The famous counsel uttered a deep laugh. " 'Pon my word, Sheringham, it's an interesting idea. But I must reserve judgment till you've outlined your proposal in a little more detail."

"I think it's a wonderful idea, Mr. Sheringham," cried Mrs. Fielder Flemming, who was not troubled with a legal mind. "I'd like to begin this very evening." Her plump cheeks positively quivered with excitement. "Wouldn't you, Alicia?"

"It has possibilities," smiled that lady.

"As a matter of fact," said the writer of detective-stories, with an air of detachment, "I'd formed a theory of my own about this case already." His name was Percy Robinson, but he wrote under the pseudonym of Morton Harrogate Bradley, which had so impressed the more simple citizens of the United States of America that they had bought three editions of his first book on the strength of that alone. For

some obscure psychological reason Americans are always impressed by the use of surnames for Christian, and particularly when one of them happens to be the name of an English watering-place.

Mr. Ambrose Chitterwick beamed in a mild way, but said nothing.

"Well," Roger took up his tale, "the details are open to discussion, of course, but I thought that, if we all decide to make the trial, it would be more amusing if we worked independently. Moresby here can give us the plain facts as they're known to the police. He hasn't been in charge of the case himself, but he's had one or two jobs in connection with it and is pretty well up in the facts; moreover he has very kindly spent most of the afternoon examining the dossier at Scotland Yard so as to be sure of omitting nothing this evening.

"When we've heard him some of us may be able to form a theory at once; posibly lines of investigation may occur to others which they will wish to follow up before they commit themselves. In any case, I suggest that we allow ourselves a week in which to form our theories, verify our hypotheses, and set our individual interpretations on the facts that Scotland Yard has collected, during which time no member shall discuss the case with any other member. We may achieve nothing (most probably we shall not), but in any case it will be a most interesting

criminological exercise; for some of us practical, for others academical, just as we prefer. And what I think should be most interesting will be to see if we all arrive at the same result or not. Ladies and gentlemen, the meeting is open for discussion, or whatever is the right way of putting it. In other words: what about it?" And Roger dropped back, not reluctantly, into his seat.

Almost before his trousers had touched it the first question reached him.

"Do you mean that we're to go out and act as our own detectives, Mr. Sheringham, or just write a thesis on the facts that the Chief Inspector is going to give us?" asked Alicia Dammers.

"Whichever each one of us preferred, I thought," Roger answered. "That's what I meant when I said that the exercise would be practical for some of us and academic for others."

"But you've got so much more experience than us on the practical side, Mr. Sheringham," pouted Mrs. Fielder Flemming (yes, pouted).

"And the police have so much more than me," Roger countered.

"It will depend whether we use deductive or inductive methods, no doubt," observed Mr. Morton Harrogate Bradley. "Those who prefer the former will work from the police-facts and won't need to make any investigations of their own, except perhaps

to verify a conclusion or two. But the inductive method demands a good deal of inquiry."

"Exactly," said Roger.

"Police-facts and the deductive method have solved plenty of serious mysteries in this country," pronounced Sir Charles Wildman. "I shall rely on them for this one."

"There's one particular feature of this case," murmured Mr. Bradley to nobody, "that ought to lead one straight to the criminal. I've thought so all the time. I shall concentrate on that."

"I'm sure I haven't the remotest idea how one sets about investigating a point, if it becomes desirable," observed Mr. Chitterwick uneasily; but nobody heard him, so it did not matter.

"The only thing that struck me about this case," said Alicia Dammers, very distinctly, "regarded, I mean, as a pure case, was its complete absence of any psychological interest whatever." And without actually saying so, Miss Dammers conveyed the impression that if that were so, she personally had no further use for it.

"I don't think you'll say that when you've heard what Moresby's got to tell us," Roger said gently. "We're going to hear a great deal more than has appeared in the newspapers, you know."

"Then let's hear it," suggested Sir Charles, bluntly.

"We're all agreed, then?" said Roger, looking round as happily as a child who has been given a new toy. "Everybody is willing to try it out?"

Amid the ensuing chorus of enthusiasm, one voice alone was silent. Mr. Ambrose Chitterwick was still wondering, quite unhappily, how, if it ever became necessary to go a-detecting, one went. He had studied the reminiscences of a hundred ex-detectives, the real ones, with large black boots and bowler hats; but all he could remember at that moment, out of all those scores of fat books (published at eighteen and sixpence, and remaindered a few months later at eighteen-pence), was that a real, *real* detective, if he means to attain results, never puts on a false moustache but simply shaves his eyebrows. As a mystery-solving formula, this seemed to Mr. Chitterwick inadequate.

Fortunately in the buzz of chatter that preceded the very reluctant rising of Chief Inspector Moresby, Mr. Chitterwick's poltroonery went unnoticed.

CHAPTER II

CHIEF INSPECTOR MORESBY, having stood up and blushingly received his tribute of hand-claps, was invited to address the gathering from his chair and thankfully retired into that shelter. Consulting the sheaf of notes in his hand, he began to enlighten his very attentive audience as to the strange circumstances connected with Mrs. Bendix's untimely death. Without reproducing his own words, and all the numerous supplementary questions which punctuated his story, the gist of what he had to tell was as follows:—

On Friday morning, the fifteenth of November, Graham Bendix strolled into his club, the Rainbow, in Piccadilly, at about ten-thirty and asked if there were any letters for him. The porter handed him a letter and a couple of circulars, and he walked over to the fireplace in the hall to read them.

While he was doing so another member entered the club. This was a middle-aged baronet, Sir Eustace Pennefather, who had rooms just round the corner, in Berkeley Street, but spent most of his time at the Rainbow. The porter glanced up at the clock, as he

did every morning when Sir Eustace came in, and, as always, it was exactly half-past ten. The time was thus definitely fixed by the porter beyond any doubt.

There were three letters and a small parcel for Sir Eustace, and he, too, took them over to the fireplace to open, nodding to Bendix as he joined him there. The two men knew each other only very slightly and had probably never exchanged more than half-a-dozen words in all. There were no other members in the hall just then.

Having glanced through his letters, Sir Eustace opened the parcel and snorted with disgust. Bendix looked at him enquiringly, and with a grunt Sir Eustace thrust out the letter which had been enclosed in the parcel, adding an uncomplimentary remark upon modern trade methods. Concealing a smile (Sir Eustace's habits and opinions were a matter of some amusement to his fellow-members), Bendix read the letter. It was from the firm of Mason & Sons, the big chocolate manufacturers, and was to the effect that they had just put on the market a new brand of liqueur-chocolates designed especially to appeal to the cultivated palates of Men of Taste. Sir Eustace being, presumably, a Man of Taste, would he be good enough to honour Mr. Mason and his sons by accepting the enclosed one-pound box, and any criticisms or appreciation that he might have to make concerning them would be esteemed almost more than a favour.

"Do they think I'm a blasted chorus-girl," fumed Sir Eustace, a choleric man, "to write 'em testimonials about their blasted chocolates? Blast 'em! I'll complain to the blasted committee. That sort of blasted thing can't blasted well be allowed here." For the Rainbow Club, as every one knows, is a very proud and exclusive club indeed, with an unbroken descent from the Rainbow Coffee-House, founded in 1734. Not even a family founded by a king's bastard can be quite so exclusive to-day as a club founded on a coffee-house.

"Well, it's an ill wind so far as I'm concerned," Bendix soothed him. "It's reminded me of something. I've got to get some chocolates myself, to pay an honourable debt. My wife and I had a box at the Imperial last night, and I bet her a box of chocolates to a hundred cigarettes that she wouldn't spot the villain by the end of the second act. She won. I must remember to get them. It's not a bad show. *The Creaking Skull.* Have you seen it?"

"Not blasted likely," replied the other, unsoothed. "Got something better to do than sit and watch a lot of blasted fools messing about with phosphorescent paint and pooping off blasted pop-guns at each other. Want a box of chocolates, did you say? Well, take this blasted one."

The money saved by this offer had no weight with Bendix. He was a very wealthy man, and probably

had enough on him in actual cash to buy a hundred such boxes. But trouble is always worth saving. "Sure you don't want them?" he demurred politely.

In Sir Eustace's reply only one word, several times repeated, was clearly recognisable. But his meaning was plain. Bendix thanked him and, most unfortunately for himself, accepted the gift.

By an extraordinarily lucky chance the wrapper of the box was not thrown into the fire, either by Sir Eustace in his indignation or by Bendix himself when the whole collection, box, covering letter, wrapper and string, was shovelled into his hands by the almost apoplectic baronet. This was the more fortunate as both men had already tossed the envelopes of their letters into the flames.

Bendix however merely walked over to the porter's desk and deposited everything there, asking the man to keep the box for him. The porter put the box aside, and threw the wrapper into the waste-paper basket. The covering letter had fallen unnoticed from Bendix's hand as he walked across the floor. This the porter tidily picked up a few minutes later and put in the waste-paper basket too, whence, with the wrapper, it was retrieved later by the police.

These two articles, it may be said at once, constituted two of the only three tangible clues to the murder, the third of course being the chocolates themselves.

Of the three unconscious protagonists in the impending tragedy, Sir Eustace was by far the most remarkable. Still a year or two under fifty, he looked, with his flaming red face and thickset figure, a typical country squire of the old school, and both his manners and his language were in accordance with tradition. There were other resemblances too, but they were equally on the surface. The voices of the country squires of the old school were often slightly husky towards late middle age, but it was not with whisky. They hunted, and so did Sir Eustace, with avidity; but the country squires confined their hunting to foxes, and Sir Eustace was far more catholic in his predatory tastes. Sir Eustace in short, without doubt, was a thoroughly bad baronet. But his vices were all on the large scale, with the usual result that most other men, good or bad, liked him well enough (except perhaps a few husbands here and there, or a father or two), and women openly hung on his husky words.

In comparison with him Bendix was rather an ordinary man, a tall, dark, not unhandsome fellow of eight-and-twenty, quiet and somewhat reserved, popular in a way but neither inviting nor apparently reciprocating anything beyond a somewhat grave friendliness.

He had been left a rich man on the death five years ago of his father, who had made a fortune out of land-sites, which he had bought up in undeveloped

areas with an uncanny foresight to sell later, at never less than ten times what he had given for them, when surrounded by houses and factories erected with other people's money. "Just sit tight and let other people make you rich," had been his motto, and a very sound one it proved. His son, though left with an income that precluded any necessity to work, had evidently inherited his father's tendencies, for he had a finger in a good many business pies just (as he explained a little apologetically) out of sheer love of the most exciting game in the world.

Money attracts money. Graham Bendix had inherited it, he made it, and inevitably he married it too. The orphaned daughter of a Liverpool shipowner she was, with not far off half-a-million in her own right to bring to Bendix, who needed it not at all. But the money was incidental, for he needed her if not her fortune, and would have married her just as inevitably (said his friends) if she had had not a farthing.

She was so exactly his type. A tall, rather serious-minded, highly-cultured girl, not so young that her character had not had time to form (she was twenty-five when Bendix married her, three years ago), she was the ideal wife for him. A bit of a Puritan, perhaps, in some ways, but Bendix himself was ready enough to be a Puritan by then if Joan Cullompton was.

For in spite of the way he developed later Bendix had sown as a youth a few wild oats in the normal way. Stage-doors, that is to say, had not been entirely strange to him. His name had been mentioned in connection with that of more than one frail and fluffy lady. He had managed, in short, to amuse himself, discreetly but by no means clandestinely, in the usual manner of young men with too much money and too few years. But all that, again in the ordinary way, had stopped with his marriage.

He was openly devoted to his wife and did not care who knew it, while she too, if a trifle less obviously, was equally said to wear her heart on her sleeve. To make no bones about it, the Bendixes had apparently succeeded in achieving that eighth wonder of the modern world, a happy marriage.

And into the middle of it there dropped, like a clap of thunder, the box of chocolates.

"After depositing the box of chocolates with the porter," Moresby continued, shuffling his papers to find the right one, "Mr. Bendix followed Sir Eustace into the lounge, where he was reading the *Morning Post.*"

Roger nodded approval. There was no other paper that Sir Eustace could possibly have been reading but the *Morning Post.*

Bendix himself proceeded to study *The Daily Telegraph.* He was rather at a loose end that morning.

There were no board meetings for him; and none of the businesses in which he was interested called him out into the rain of a typical November day. He spent the rest of the morning in an aimless way, read the daily papers, glanced through the weeklies, and played a hundred up at billiards with another member equally idle. At about half-past twelve he went back to lunch to his house in Eaton Square, taking the chocolates with him.

Mrs. Bendix had given orders that she would not be in to lunch that day, but her appointment had been cancelled and she too was lunching at home. Bendix gave her the box of chocolates after the meal as they were sitting over their coffee in the drawing-room, explaining how they had come into his possession. Mrs. Bendix laughingly teased him about his meanness in not buying her a box, but approved the make and was interested to try the firm's new variety. Joan Bendix was not so serious-minded as not to have a healthy feminine interest in good chocolates.

Their appearance, however, did not seem to impress her very much.

"Kümmel, Kirsch, Maraschino," she said, delving with her fingers among the silver-wrappered sweets, each bearing the name of its filling in neat blue lettering. "Nothing else, apparently. I don't see anything new here, Graham. They've just taken those three kinds out of their ordinary liqueur-chocolates."

"Oh?" said Bendix, who was not particularly interested in chocolates. "Well, I don't suppose it matters much. All liqueur-chocolates taste the same to me."

"Yes, and they've even packed them in their usual liqueur-chocolate box," complained his wife, examining the lid.

"They're only a sample," Bendix pointed out. "They may not have got the right boxes ready yet."

"I don't believe there's the slightest difference," Mrs. Bendix pronounced, unwrapping a Kümmel. She held the box out to her husband. "Have one?"

He shook his head. "No, thank you, dear. You know I never eat the things."

"Well, you've got to have one of these, as a penance for not buying me a proper box. Catch!" She threw him one. As he caught it she made a wry face. "Oh! I was wrong. These are different. They're twenty times as strong."

"Well, they can bear at least that," Bendix smiled, thinking of the usual anæmic sweetmeat sold under the name of chocolate-liqueur.

He put the one she had given him in his mouth and bit it up; a burning taste, not intolerable but far too pronounced to be pleasant, followed the release of the liquid. "By Jove," he exclaimed, "I should think they are strong. I believe they've filled them with neat alcohol."

"Oh, they wouldn't do that, surely," said his wife, unwrapping another. "But they are very strong. It must be the new mixture. Really, they almost burn. I'm not sure whether I like them or not. And that Kirsch one tasted far too strongly of almonds. This may be better. You try a Maraschino too."

To humour her he swallowed another, and disliked it still more. "Funny," he remarked, touching the roof of his mouth with the tip of his tongue. "My tongue feels quite numb."

"So did mine at first," she agreed. "Now it's tingling rather. Well, I don't notice any difference between the Kirsch and the Maraschino. And they do burn! I can't make up my mind whether I like them or not."

"I don't," Bendix said with decision. "I think there's something wrong with them. I shouldn't eat any more if I were you."

"Well, they're only an experiment, I suppose," said his wife.

A few minutes later Bendix went out, to keep an appointment in the City. He left his wife still trying to make up her mind whether she liked the chocolates or not, and still eating them to decide. Her last words to him were that they were making her mouth burn again so much that she was afraid she would not be able to manage any more.

"Mr. Bendix remembers that conversation very

clearly," said Moresby, looking round at the intent faces, "because it was the last time he saw his wife alive."

The conversation in the drawing-room had taken place approximately between a quarter-past and half-past two. Bendix kept his appointment in the City at three, where he stayed for about half-an-hour, and then took a taxi back to his club for tea.

He had been feeling extremely ill during his business-talk, and in the taxi he very nearly collapsed; the driver had to summon the porter to help get him out and into the club. They both describe him as pale to the point of ghastliness, with staring eyes and livid lips, and his skin damp and clammy. His mind seemed unaffected, however, and once they had got him up the steps he was able to walk, with the help of the porter's arm, into the lounge.

The porter, alarmed by his appearance, wanted to send for a doctor at once, but Bendix, who was the last man to make a fuss, absolutely refused to let him, saying that it could only be a bad attack of indigestion and that he would be all right in a few minutes; he must have eaten something that disagreed with him. The porter was doubtful, but left him.

Bendix repeated this diagnosis of his own condition a few minutes later to Sir Eustace Pennefather, who was in the lounge at the time, not having left the club at all. But this time Bendix added: "And I believe

it was those infernal chocolates you gave me, now I come to think of it. I thought there was something funny about them at the time. I'd better go and ring up my wife and find out if she's been taken like this too!"

Sir Eustace, a kind-hearted man, who was no less shocked than the porter at Bendix's appearance, was perturbed by the suggestion that he might in any way be responsible for it, and offered to go and ring up Mrs. Bendix himself as the other was in no fit condition to move. Bendix was about to reply when a strange change came over him. His body, which had been leaning limply back in his chair, suddenly heaved rigidly upright; his jaws locked together, the livid lips drawn back in a hideous grin, and his hands clenched on the arms of the chair. At the same time Sir Eustace became aware of an unmistakable smell of bitter almonds.

Thoroughly alarmed now, believing indeed that Bendix was dying under his eyes, he raised a shout for the porter and a doctor. There were two or three other men at the further end of the big room (in which a shout had probably never been heard before in the whole course of its history) and these hurried up at once. Sir Eustace sent one off to tell the porter to get hold of the nearest doctor without a second's delay, and enlisted the others to try to make the convulsed body a little more comfortable. There was no

doubt among them that Bendix had taken poison. They spoke to him, asking how he felt and what they could do for him, but he either would not or could not answer. As a matter of fact, he was completely unconscious.

Before the doctor had arrived, a telephone messake was received from an agitated butler asking if Mr. Bendix was there, and if so would he come home at once as Mrs. Bendix had been taken seriously ill.

At the house in Eaton Square matters had been taking much the same course with Mrs. Bendix as with her husband, though a little more rapidly. She remained for half-an-hour or so in the drawing-room after the latter's departure, during which time she must have eaten about three more of the chocolates. She then went up to her bedroom and rang for her maid, to whom she said that she felt very ill and was going to lie down for a time. Like her husband, she ascribed her condition to a violent attack of indigestion.

The maid mixed her a draught from a bottle of indigestion-powder, which consisted mainly of bicarbonate of soda and bismuth, and brought her a hot-water bottle, leaving her lying on the bed. Her description of her mistress's appearance tallied exactly with the porter's and taxi-man's description of Bendix, but unlike them she did not seem to have been alarmed by it. She admitted later to the opinion

that Mrs. Bendix, though anything but a greedy woman, must have overeaten herself at lunch.

At a quarter past three there was a violent ring from the bell in Mrs. Bendix's room.

The girl hurried upstairs and found her mistress apparently in a cataleptic fit, unconscious and rigid. Thoroughly frightened now, she wasted some precious minutes in ineffectual attempts to bring her round, and then hurried downstairs to telephone for the doctor. The practitioner who regularly attended the house was not at home, and it was some time before the butler, who had found the half-hysterical girl at the telephone and taken matters into his own hands, could get into communication with another. By the time the latter did get there, nearly half-an-hour after Mrs. Bendix's bell had rung, she was past help. Coma had set in, and in spite of everything the doctor could do she died in less than ten minutes after his arrival.

She was, in fact, already dead when the butler telephoned to the Rainbow Club.

CHAPTER III

HAVING reached this stage in his narrative Moresby paused, for effect, breath and refreshment. So far, in spite of the eager interest with which the story had been followed, no fact had been brought out of which his listeners were unaware. It was the police investigations that they wanted to hear, for not only had no details of these been published but not so much as a hint had been given even as to the theory that was officially held.

Perhaps Moresby had gathered something of this sentiment, for after a moment's rest he resumed with a slight smile. "Well, ladies and gentlemen, I shan't keep you much longer with these preliminaries, but it's just as well to run through everything while we're on it, if we want to get a view of the case as a whole.

"As you know, then, Mr. Bendix himself did not die. Luckily for himself he had eaten only two of the chocolates, as against his wife's seven, but still more luckily he had fallen into the hands of a clever doctor. By the time her doctor saw Mrs. Bendix it was too late for him to do anything; but the smaller amount of poison that Mr. Bendix had swallowed meant that

its progress was not so rapid, and the doctor had time to save him.

"Not that the doctor knew then what the poison was. He treated him chiefly for prussic acid poisoning, thinking from the symptoms and the smell that Mr. Bendix must have taken oil of bitter almonds, but he wasn't sure and threw in one or two other things as well. Anyhow, it turned out in the end that he couldn't have had a fatal dose, and he was conscious again by about eight o'clock that night. They'd put him into one of the club bedrooms, and by the next day he was convalescent."

At first, Moresby went on to explain, it was thought at Scotland Yard that Mrs. Bendix's death and her husband's narrow escape were due to a terrible accident. The police had of course taken the matter in hand as soon as the woman's death was reported to them and the fact of poison established. In due course a District Detective Inspector arrived at the Rainbow Club, and as soon as the doctor would permit after Bendix's recovery of consciousness held an interview with the still very sick man.

The fact of his wife's death was kept from him in his doubtful condition and he was questioned solely upon his own experience, for it was already clear that the two cases were bound up together and light on one would equally clarify the other. The Inspector told Bendix bluntly that he had been poisoned and

pressed him as to how the stuff could have been taken: could he account for it in any way?

It was not long before the chocolates came into Bendix's mind. He mentioned their burning taste, and he mentioned having already spoken to Sir Eustace about them as the possible cause of his illness.

This the Inspector already knew.

He had spent the time before Bendix came round in interviewing such people as had come into contact with him since his return to the club that afternoon. He had heard the porter's story and he had taken steps to trace the taxi-man; he had spoken with the members who had gathered round Bendix in the lounge, and Sir Eustace had reported to him the remark of Bendix about the chocolates.

The Inspector had not attached very much importance to this at the moment, but simply as a matter of routine had questioned Sir Eustace closely as to the whole episode and, again as a matter of routine, had afterwards rummaged through the waste-paper basket and extricated the wrapper and the covering-letter. Still as a matter of routine, and still not particularly impressed, he now proceeded to question Bendix on the same topic, and then at last began to realise its significance as he heard how the two had shared the chocolates after lunch and how, even before Bendix had left home, the wife had eaten more than the husband.

The doctor now intervened, and the Inspector had to leave the sick-room. His first action was to telephone to his colleague at the Bendix home and tell him to take possession without delay of the box of chocolates which was probably still in the drawing-room; at the same time he asked for a rough idea of the number of chocolates that were missing. The other told him, nine or ten. The Inspector, who on Bendix's information had only accounted for six or seven, rang off and telephoned what he had learnt to Scotland Yard.

Interest was now centred on the chocolates. They were taken to Scotland Yard that evening, and sent off at once to be analysed.

"Well, the doctor hadn't been far wrong," said Moresby. "The poison in those chocolates wasn't oil of bitter almonds; as a matter of fact, it was nitrobenzene; but I understand that isn't so very different. If any of you ladies or gentlemen have a knowledge of chemicals, you'll know more about the stuff than I do, but I believe it's used occasionally in the cheaper sorts of confectionery (less than it used to be, though) to give an almond-flavour as a substitute for oil of bitter almonds, which I needn't tell you is a powerful poison too. But the most usual way of employing nitrobenzene commercially is in the manufacture of aniline dyes."

When the analyst's preliminary report came

through Scotland Yard's initial theory of accidental death was strengthened. Here definitely was a poison used in the manufacture of chocolates and other sweets. A terrible mistake must have been made. The firm had been employing the stuff as a cheap substitute for genuine liqueurs and too much of it had been used. The fact that the only liqueurs named on the silver wrappings were Maraschino, Kümmel and Kirsch, all of which carry a greater or lesser flavour of almonds, supported this conception.

But before the firm was approached by the police for an explanation, other facts had come to light. It was found that only the top layer of chocolates contained any poison. Those in the lower layer were completely free from anything harmful. Moreover in the lower layer the fillings inside the chocolate cases corresponded with the description on the wrappings, whereas in the top layer, besides the poison, each sweet contained a blend of the three liqueurs mentioned and not, for instance, plain Maraschino and poison. It was further remarked that no Maraschino, Kirsch or Kümmel was to be found in the two lower layers.

The interesting fact also emerged, in the analyst's detailed report, that each chocolate in the top layer contained, in addition to its blend of the three liqueurs, exactly six minims of nitrobenzene, no more and no less. The cases were a fair size and there was

plenty of room for quite a considerable quantity of the liqueur-blend besides this fixed quantity of poison. This was significant. Still more so was the further fact that in the bottom of each of the noxious chocolates there were distinct traces of a hole having been drilled in the case and subsequently plugged up with a piece of melted chocolate.

It was now plain to the police that foul play was in question.

A deliberate attempt had been made to murder Sir Eustace Pennefather. The would-be murderer had acquired a box of Mason's chocolate liqueurs; separated those in which a flavour of almonds would not come amiss; drilled a small hole in each and drained it of its contents; injected, probably with a fountain-pen filler, the dose of poison; filled the cavity up from the mixture of former fillings; carefully stopped the hole, and re-wrapped it in its silver-paper covering. A meticulous business, meticulously carried out.

The covering letter and wrapper which had arrived with the box of chocolates now became of paramount importance, and the inspector who had had the foresight to rescue these from destruction had occasion to pat himself on the back. Together with the box itself and the remaining chocolates, they formed the only material clues to this cold-blooded murder.

Taking them with him, the Chief Inspector now in charge of the case called on the managing director of

Mason and Sons, and without informing him of the circumstances as to how it had come into his possession, laid the letter before him and invited him to explain certain points in connection with it. How many of these (the managing director was asked) had been sent out, who knew of this one, and who could have had a chance of handling the box that was sent to Sir Eustace?

If the police had hoped to surprise Mr. Mason, the result was nothing compared with the way in which Mr. Mason surprised the police.

"Well, sir?" prompted the Chief Inspector, when it seemed as if Mr. Mason would go on examining the letter all day.

Mr. Mason adjusted his glasses to the angle for examining Chief Inspectors instead of letters. He was a small, rather fierce, elderly man who had begun life in a back street in Huddersfield, and did not intend any one to forget it.

"Where the devil did you get this?" he asked. The papers, it must be remembered, had not yet got hold of the sensational aspect of Mrs. Bendix's death.

"I came," replied the Chief Inspector with dignity, "to ask you about your sending it out, sir, not tell you about my getting hold of it."

"Then you can go to the devil," replied Mr. Mason with decision. "And take Scotland Yard with you," he added, by way of a comprehensive afterthought.

"I must warn you, sir," said the Chief Inspector, somewhat taken aback but concealing the fact beneath his weightiest manner, "I must warn you that it may be a serious matter for you to refuse to answer my questions."

Mr. Mason, it appeared, was exasperated rather than intimidated by this covert threat. "Get out o' ma office," he replied in his native tongue. "Are ye druffen, man? Or do ye just think you're funny? Ye know as well as I do that that letter was never sent out from 'ere."

It was then that the Chief Inspector became surprised. "Not—not sent out by your firm at all?" he yammered. It was a possibility that had not occurred to him. "It's—forged, then?"

"Isn't that what I'm telling ye?" growled the old man, regarding him fiercely from under bushy brows. But the Chief Inspector's evident astonishment had mollified him somewhat.

"Sir," said that official, "I must ask you to be good enough to answer my questions as fully as possible. It's a case of murder I'm investigating, and—" he paused and thought cunningly "—and the murderer seems to have been making free use of your business to cloak his operations."

The cunning of the Chief Inspector prevailed. "The devil 'e 'as!" roared the old man. "Damn the

blackguard. Ask any questions thou wants, lad; I'll answer right enough."

Communication thus being established, the Chief Inspector proceeded to get to grips.

During the next five minutes his heart sank lower and lower. In place of the simple case he had anticipated it became rapidly plain to him that the affair was going to be very difficult indeed. Hitherto he had thought (and his superiors had agreed with him) that the case was going to prove one of sudden temptation. Somebody in the Mason firm had a grudge against Sir Eustace. Into his (or more probably, as the Chief Inspector had considered, her) hands had fallen the box and letter addressed to him. The opportunity had been obvious, the means, in the shape of nitrobenzene in use in the factory, ready to hand; the result had followed. Such a culprit would be easy enough to trace.

But now, it seemed, this pleasant theory must be abandoned, for in the first place no such letter as this had ever been sent out at all; the firm had produced no new brand of chocolates, if they had done so it was not their custom to dispense sample boxes among private individuals, the letter was a forgery. But the notepaper on the other hand (and this was the only remnant left to support the theory) was perfectly genuine, so far as the old man could tell. He could not

say for certain, but was almost sure that this was a piece of old stock which had been finished up about six months ago. The heading might be forged, but he did not think so.

"Six months ago?" queried the Inspector unhappily.

"About that," said the other, and plucked a piece of paper out of a stand in front of him. "This is what we use now." The Inspector examined it. There was no doubt of the difference. The new paper was thinner and more glossy. But the heading looked exactly the same. The Inspector took a note of the firm who had printed both.

Unfortunately no sample of the old paper was available. Mr. Mason had a search made on the spot, but not a sheet was left.

"As a matter of fact," Moresby now said, "it had been noticed that the piece of paper on which the letter was written was an old one. It is distinctly yellow round the edges. I'll pass it round and you can see for yourselves. Please be careful of it." The bit of paper, once handled by a murderer, passed slowly from each would-be detective to his neighbour.

"Well, to cut a long story shorter," Moresby went on, "we had it examined by the firm of printers, Webster's, in Frith Street, and they're prepared to swear that it's their work. That means the paper was genuine, worse luck."

"You mean, of course," put in Sir Charles Wildman impressively, "that had the headings been a copy, the task of discovering the printers who executed it should have been comparatively simple?"

"That's correct, Sir Charles. Except if it had been done by somebody who owned a small press of their own; but that would have been traceable too. All we've actually got is that the murderer is someone who had access to Mason's notepaper up to six months ago; and that's pretty wide."

"Do you think it was stolen with the actual intention of putting it to the purpose for which it was used?" asked Alicia Dammers.

"It seems like it, madam. And something kept holding the murderer up."

As regards the wrapper, Mr. Mason had been unable to help at all. This consisted simply of a piece of ordinary, thin brown paper, such as could be bought anywhere, with Sir Eustace's name and address hand-printed on it in neat capitals. Apparently there was nothing to be learnt from it at all. The postmark showed that it had been despatched by the nine-thirty P. M. post from the post office in Southampton Street, Strand.

"There is a collection at 8.30 and another at 9.30," Moresby explained, "so it must have been posted between those two times. The packet was quite small enough to go into the opening for letters. The stamps

make up the right value. The post office was shut by then, so it could not have been handed in over the counter. Perhaps you'd care to see it." The piece of brown paper was handed gravely round.

"Have you brought the box too, and the other chocolates?" asked Mrs. Fielder-Flemming.

"No, madam. It was one of Mason's ordinary boxes, and the chocolates have all been used for analysis."

"Oh!" Mrs. Fielder-Flemming was plainly disappointed. "I thought there might be finger-prints on it," she explained.

"We have already looked for those," replied Moresby without a flicker.

There was a pause while the wrapper passed from hand to hand.

"Naturally, we've made inquiries as to any one seen posting a packet in Southampton Street between half-past eight and half-past nine," Moresby continued, "but without result. We've also carefully interrogated Sir Eustace Pennefather to discover whether he could throw any light on the question why any one should wish to take his life. Sir Eustace can't give us the faintest idea. Of course we followed up the usual line of inquiry as to who would benefit by his death, but without any helpful results. Most of his possessions go to his wife, who has a divorce suit pending against him; and she's out of the country.

We've checked her movements and she's out of the question. Besides," added Moresby unprofessionally, "she's a very nice lady.

"And as to facts, all we know is that the murderer probably had some connection with Mason and Sons up to six months ago, and was almost certainly in Southampton Street at some time between eight-thirty and nine-thirty on that particular evening. I'm very much afraid we're up against a brick wall." Moresby did not add that so were the amateur criminologists in front of him too, but he very distinctly implied it.

There was a silence.

"Is that all?" asked Roger.

"That's all, Mr. Sheringham," Moresby agreed.

There was another silence.

"Surely the police have a theory?" Mr. Morton Harrogate Bradley threw out in a detached manner.

Moresby hesitated perceptibly.

"Come along, Moresby," Roger encouraged him. "It's quite a simple theory. I know it."

"Well," said Moresby, thus stimulated, "we're inclined to believe that the crime was the work of a lunatic, or semi-lunatic, possibly quite unknown personally to Sir Eustace. You see . . ." Moresby looked a trifle embarrassed. "You see," he went on bravely, "Sir Eustace's life was a bit, well, we might say hectic, if you'll excuse the word. We think at the Yard that

some religious or social maniac took it on himself to rid the world of him, so to speak. Some of his escapades had caused a bit of talk, as you may know.

"Or it might just be a plain homicidal lunatic, who likes killing people at a distance.

"There's the Horwood case, you see. Some lunatic sent poisoned chocolates to the Commissioner of Police himself. That caused a lot of attention. We think this case may be an echo of it. A case that creates a good deal of notice is quite often followed by another on exactly the same lines, as I needn't remind you.

"Well, that's our theory. And if it's the right one, we've got about as much chance of laying our hands on the murderer as—as——" Chief Inspector Moresby cast about for something really scathing.

"As we have," suggested Roger.

CHAPTER IV

THE Circle sat on for some time after Moresby had gone. There was a lot to discuss, and everybody had views to put forward, suggestions to make, and theories to advance.

One thing emerged with singular unanimity: the police had been working on the wrong lines. Their theory must be mistaken. This was not a casual murder by a chance lunatic. Somebody very definite had gone methodically about the business of helping Sir Eustace out of the world, and that somebody had behind him an equally definite motive. Like almost all murders, in fact, it was a matter of *cherchez le motif.*

On the exposition and discussion of theories Roger kept a firmly quelling hand. The whole object of the experiment, as he pointed out more than once, was that everybody should work independently, without bias from any other brain, form his or her own theory, and set about proving it in his or her own way.

"But oughtn't we to pool our facts, Sheringham?" boomed Sir Charles. "I should suggest that though we pursue our investigations independently, any new facts we discover should be placed at once at the dis-

posal of all. The exercise should be a mental one, not a competition in routine-detection."

"There's a lot to be said for that view, Sir Charles," Roger agreed. "In fact, I've thought it over very carefully. But on the whole I think it will be better if we keep any new facts to ourselves after this evening. You see, we're already in possession of all the facts that the police have discovered, and anything else we may come across isn't likely to be so much a definite pointer to the murderer as some little thing, quite insignificant in itself, to support a particular theory."

Sir Charles grunted, obviously unconvinced.

"I'm quite willing to have it put to the vote," Roger said handsomely.

A vote was taken. Sir Charles and Mrs. Fielder-Flemming voted for all facts being disclosed: Mr. Bradley, Alicia Dammers, Mr. Chitterwick (the last after considerable hesitation) and Roger voted against.

"We retain our own facts," Roger said, and made a mental note of who had voted for each. He was inclined to guess that the voting indicated pretty correctly who was going to be content with general theorising, and who was ready to enter so far into the spirit of the game as to go out and work for it. Or it might simply show who already had a theory and who had not.

Sir Charles accepted the result with resignation.

"We start equal as from now, then," he announced.

"As from the moment we leave this room," amended Morton Harrogate Bradley, rearranging the set of his tie. "But I agree so far with Sir Charles's proposition as to think that any one who can at this moment add anything to the Chief Inspector's statement should do so."

"But can any one?" asked Mrs. Fielder-Flemming.

"Sir Charles knows Mr. and Mrs. Bendix," Alicia Dammers pointed out impartially. "And Sir Eustace. And I know Sir Eustace too, of course."

Roger smiled. This statement was a characteristic meiosis on the part of Miss Dammers. Everybody knew that Miss Dammers had been the only woman (so far as rumour recorded) who had ever turned the tables on Sir Eustace Pennefather. Sir Eustace had taken it into his head to add the scalp of an intellectual woman to those other rather unintellectual ones which already dangled at his belt. Alicia Dammers, with her good looks, her tall, slim figure, and her irreproachable sartorial taste, had satisfied his very fastidious requirements so far as feminine appearance was concerned. He had laid himself out to fascinate.

The results had been watched by the large circle of Miss Dammers's friends with considerable joy. Miss

Dammers had apparently been only too ready to be fascinated. It seemed that she was continually on the point of succumbing to Sir Eustace's blandishments. They had dined, visited, lunched and made excursions together without respite. Sir Eustace, stimulated by the daily prospect of surrender on the following one, had exercised his ardour with every art he knew.

Miss Dammers had then retired serenely, and the next autumn published a book in which Sir Eustace Pennefather, dissected to the last ligament, was given to the world in all the naked unpleasingness of his psychological anatomy.

Miss Dammers never talked about her "art," because she was a really brilliant writer and not just pretending to be one, but she certainly held that everything had to be sacrificed (including the feelings of the Sir Eustace Pennefathers of this world) to whatever god she worshipped privately in place of it.

"Mr. and Mrs. Bendix are quite incidental to the crime, of course, from the murderer's point of view," Mr. Bradley now pointed out to her, in the gentle tones of one instructing a child that the letter A is followed in the alphabet by the letter B. "So far as we know, their only connection with Sir Eustace is that he and Bendix both belonged to the Rainbow."

"I needn't give you my opinion of Sir Eustace,"

remarked Miss Dammers. "Those of you who have read *Flesh and the Devil* know how I saw him, and I have no reason to suppose that he has changed since I was studying him. But I claim no infallibility. It would be interesting to hear whether Sir Charles's opinion coincides with mine or not."

Sir Charles, who had not read *Flesh and the Devil,* looked a little embarrassed. "Well, I don't see that I can add much to the impression the Chief Inspector gave of him. I don't know the man well, and certainly have no wish to do so."

Everybody looked extremely innocent. It was common gossip that there had been the possibility of an engagement between Sir Eustace and Sir Charles's only daughter, and that Sir Charles had not viewed the prospect with any perceptible joy. It was further known that the engagement had even been prematurely announced and promptly denied the next day.

Sir Charles tried to look as innocent as everybody else. "As the Chief Inspector hinted, he is something of a bad lot. Some people might go so far as to call him a blackguard. Women," explained Sir Charles bluntly. "And he drinks too much," he added. It was plain that Sir Charles Wildman did not approve of Sir Eustace Pennefather.

"I can add one small point, of purely psychological value," amplified Alicia Dammers. "But it shows the dullness of his reactions. Even in the short time since

the tragedy rumour has joined the name of Sir Eustace to that of a fresh woman. I was somewhat surprised to hear that," added Miss Dammers drily. "I should have been inclined to give him credit for being a little more upset by the terrible mistake, and its fortunate consequences to himself, even though Mrs. Bendix was a total stranger to him."

"Yes, by the way, I should have corrected that impression earlier," observed Sir Charles. "Mrs. Bendix was not a total stranger to Sir Eustace, though he may probably have forgotten ever meeting her. But he did. I was talking to Mrs. Bendix one evening at a first night (I forget the play) and Sir Eustace came up to me. I introduced them, mentioning something about Bendix being a member of the Rainbow. I'd almost forgotten."

"Then I'm afraid I was completely wrong about him," said Miss Dammers, chagrined. "I was far too kind." To be too kind in the dissecting-room was evidently, in Miss Dammers's opinion, a far greater crime than being too unkind.

"As for Bendix," said Sir Charles rather vaguely, "I don't know that I can add anything to your knowledge of him. Quite a decent, steady fellow. Head not turned by his money in the least, rich as he is. His wife too, charming woman. A little serious perhaps. Sort of woman who likes sitting on committees. Not that that's anything against her though."

"Rather the reverse, I should have said," observed Miss Dammers, who liked sitting on committees herself.

"Quite, quite," said Sir Charles hastily, remembering Miss Dammers's curious predilections. "And she wasn't too serious to make a bet, evidently, although it was a trifling one."

"She had another bet, that she knew nothing about," chanted in solemn tones Mrs. Fielder-Flemming, who was already pondering the dramatic possibilities of the situation. "Not a trifling one: a grim one. It was with Death, and she lost it." Mrs. Fielder-Flemming was regrettably inclined to carry her dramatic sense into her ordinary life. It did not go at all well with her culinary aspect.

She eyed Alicia Dammers covertly, wondering whether she could get in with a play before that lady cut the ground away from under her with a book.

Roger, as chairman, took steps to bring the discussion back to relevancies. "Yes, poor woman. But after all, we mustn't let ourselves confuse the issue. It's rather difficult to remember that the murdered person has no connection with the crime at all, so to speak, but there it is. Just by accident the wrong person died; it's on Sir Eustace that we have to concentrate. Now, does anybody else here know Sir Eustace, or anything about him, or any other fact bearing on the crime?"

Nobody responded.

"Then we're all on the same footing. And now, about our next meeting. I suggest that we have a clear week for formulating our theories and carrying out any investigations we think necessary, that we then meet on consecutive evenings, beginning with next Monday, and that we now draw lots as to the order in which we are to read our several papers or give our conclusions. Or does any one think we should have more than one speaker each evening?"

After a little talk it was decided to meet again on Monday, that day week, and for purposes of fuller discussion allot one evening to each member. Lots were then drawn, with the result that members were to speak in the following order: (1) Sir Charles Wildman, (2) Mrs. Fielder-Flemming, (3) Mr. Morton Harrogate Bradley, (4) Roger Sheringham, (5) Alicia Dammers, and (6) Mr. Ambrose Chitterwick.

Mr. Chitterwick brightened considerably when his name was announced as last on the list. "By that time," he confided to Morton Harrogate, "somebody is quite sure to have discovered the right solution, and I shall therefore not have to give my own conclusions. If indeed," he added dubiously, "I ever reach any. Tell me, how *does* a detective really set to work?"

Mr. Bradley smiled kindly and promised to lend

Mr. Chitterwick one of his own books. Mr. Chitterwick, who had read them all and possessed most of them, thanked him very gratefully.

Before the meeting finally broke up, Mrs. Fielder-Flemming could not resist one more opportunity of being mildly dramatic. "How strange life is," she sighed across the table to Sir Charles. "I actually saw Mrs. Bendix and her husband in their box at the Imperial the night before she died. (Oh, yes; I knew them by sight. They often came to my first nights.) I was in a stall almost directly under their box. Indeed life is certainly stranger than fiction. If I could have guessed for one minute at the dreadful fate hanging over her, I——"

"You'd have had the sense to warn her to steer clear of chocolates, I hope," observed Sir Charles, who did not hold very much with Mrs. Fielder-Flemming.

The meeting then broke up.

Roger returned to his rooms in the Albany feeling exceedingly pleased with himself. He had a suspicion that the various attempts at a solution were going to be almost as interesting to him as the problem itself.

Nevertheless he was on his mettle. He had not been very lucky in the draw and would have preferred the place of Mr. Chitterwick, which would have meant that he would have the advantage of already knowing the results achieved by his rivals before having

to disclose his own. Not that he intended to rely on others' brains in the least; like Mr. Morton Harrogate Bradley he already had a theory of his own; but it would have been pleasant to be able to weigh up and criticise the efforts of Sir Charles, Mr. Bradley and particularly Alicia Dammers (to these three he gave credit for possessing the best minds in the Circle) before irrevocably committing himself. And more than any other crime in which he had been interested, it seemed to him, he wanted to find the right solution of this one.

To his surprise when he got back to his rooms he found Moresby waiting in his sitting-room.

"Ah, Mr. Sheringham," said that cautious official. "Thought you wouldn't mind me waiting here for a word with you. Not in a great hurry to go to bed, are you?"

"Not in the least," said Roger, doing things with a decanter and syphon. "It's early yet. Say when."

Moresby looked discreetly the other way.

When they were settled in two huge leather armchairs before the fire Moresby explained himself. "As a matter of fact, Mr. Sheringham, the Chief's deputed me to keep a sort of unofficial eye on you and your friends over this business. Not that we don't trust you, or think you won't be discreet, or anything like that, but it's better for us to know just what's going on with a massed-detective attack like this."

"So that if any of us finds out something really important, you can nip in first and make use of it," Roger smiled. "Yes, I quite see the official point."

"So that we can take measures to prevent the bird from being scared," Moresby corrected reproachfully. "That's all, Mr. Sheringham."

"Is it?" said Roger, with unconcealed scepticism. "But you don't think it very likely that your protecting hand will be required, eh, Moresby?"

"Frankly, sir, I don't. We're not in the habit of giving up a case so long as we think there's the least chance of finding the criminal; and Detective-Inspector Farrar, who's been in charge of this one, is a capable man."

"And that's his theory, that it's the work of some criminal lunatic, quite untraceable?"

"That's the opinion he's been led to form, Mr. Sheringham, sir. But there's no harm in your Circle amusing themselves," added Moresby magnanimously, "if they want to and they've got the time to waste."

"Well, well," said Roger, refusing to be drawn.

They smoked their pipes in silence for a few minutes.

"Come along, Moresby," Roger said gently.

The Chief Inspector looked at him with an expression that indicated nothing but bland surprise. "Sir?"

Roger shook his head. "It won't wash, Moresby; it won't wash. Come along, now; out with it."

"Out with what, Mr. Sheringham?" queried Moresby, the picture of innocent bewilderment.

"Your real reason for coming round here," Roger said nastily. "Wanted to pump me, for the benefit of that effete institution you represent, I suppose? Well, I warn you, there's nothing doing this time. I know you better than I did eighteen months ago at Ludmouth, remember."

"Well, what can have put such an idea as that into your head, Mr. Sheringham, sir?" positively gasped that much misunderstood man, Chief Inspector Moresby, of Scotland Yard. "I came round because I thought you might like to ask me a few questions, to give you a leg up in finding the murderer before any of your friends could. That's all."

Roger laughed. "Moresby, I like you. You're a bright spot in a dull world. I expect you try to persuade the very criminals you arrest that it hurts you more than it does them. And I shouldn't be at all surprised if you don't somehow make them believe it. Very well, if that's all you came round for I'll ask you some questions, and thank you very much. Tell me this, then. Who do *you* think was trying to murder Sir Eustace Pennefather?"

Moresby sipped delicately at his whisky-and-soda. "You know what I think, Mr. Sheringham, sir."

"Indeed I don't," Roger retorted. "I only know what you've told me you think."

"I haven't been in charge of the case at all, Mr. Sheringham," Moresby hedged.

"Who do you really think was trying to murder Sir Eustace Pennefather?" Roger repeated patiently. "Is it your own opinion that the official police theory is right or wrong?"

Driven into a corner, Moresby allowed himself the novelty of speaking his unofficial mind. He smiled covertly, as if at a secret thought. "Well, Mr. Sheringham, sir," he said with deliberation, "our theory is a useful one, isn't it? I mean, it gives us every excuse for not finding the murderer. We can hardly be expected to be in touch with every half-baked creature in the country who may have homicidal impulses.

"Our theory will be put forward at the conclusion of the adjourned inquest, in about a fortnight's time, with reason and evidence to support it, and any evidence to the contrary not mentioned, and you'll see that the coroner will agree with it, and the jury will agree with it, and the papers will agree with it, and every one will say that really, the police can't be blamed for not catching the murderer this time, and everybody will be happy."

"Except Mr. Bendix, who doesn't get his wife's murder avenged," added Roger. "Moresby, you're being positively sarcastic. And from all this I deduce

that you personally will stand aside from this general and amicable agreement. Do you think the case has been badly handled by your people?"

Roger's last question followed so closely on the heels of his previous remarks that Moresby had answered it almost before he had time to reflect on the possible indiscretion of doing so. "No, Mr. Sheringham, I don't think that. Farrar's a capable man, and he'd leave no stone unturned—no stone, I mean, that he *could* turn." Moresby paused significantly.

"Ah!" said Roger.

Having committed himself to this lamb, Moresby seemed disposed to look about for a sheep. He resettled himself in his chair and recklessly drank a gill from his tumbler. Roger, scarcely daring to breathe too audibly for fear of scaring the sheep, studiously examined the fire.

"You see, this is a very difficult case, Mr. Sheringham," Moresby pronounced. "Farrar had an open mind, of course, when he took it up, and he kept an open mind even after he'd found out that Sir Eustace was even a bit more of a daisy than he'd imagined at first. That is to say, he never lost sight of the fact that it *might* have been some outside lunatic who sent those chocolates to Sir Eustace, just out of a general socialistic or religious feeling that he'd be doing a favour to society or Heaven by putting him out of the world. A fanatic, you might say."

"Murder from conviction," Roger murmured. "Yes?"

"But naturally what Farrar was concentrating on was Sir Eustace's private life. And that's where we police-officers are handicapped. It's not easy for us to make enquiries into the private life of a baronet. Nobody wants to be helpful; everybody seems anxious to put a spoke in our wheel. Every line that looked hopeful to Farrar led to a dead end. Sir Eustace himself told him to go to the devil, and made no bones about it."

"Naturally, from his point of view," Roger said thoughtfully. "The last thing he'd want would be a sheaf of his peccadillos laid out for a harvest festival in court."

"Yes, and Mrs. Bendix lying in her grave on account of them," retorted Moresby with asperity. "No, he was responsible for her death, though indirectly enough I'll admit, and it was up to him to be as helpful as he could to the police-officer investigating the case. But there Farrar was; couldn't get any further. He unearthed a scandal or two, it's true, but they led to nothing. So—well, he hasn't admitted this, Mr. Sheringham, and you'll realise I ought not to be telling you; it's to go no further than this room, mind."

"Good heavens, no," Roger said eagerly.

"Well then, it's my private opinion that Farrar was

driven to the other conclusion in self-defence. And the chief had to agree with it in self-defence too. But if you want to get to the bottom of the business, Mr. Sheringham (and nobody would be more pleased if you did than Farrar himself) my advice to you is to concentrate on Sir Eustace's private life. You've a better chance than any of us there; you're on his level, you'll know members of his club, you'll know his friends personally, and the friends of his friends. And that," concluded Moresby, "is the tip I really came round to give you."

"That's very decent of you, Moresby," Roger said with warmth. "Very decent indeed. Have another spot."

"Well, thank you, Mr. Sheringham, sir," said Chief Inspector Moresby. "I don't mind if I do."

Roger was meditating as he mixed the drinks. "I believe you're right, Moresby," he said slowly. "In fact, I've been thinking along those lines ever since I read the first full account. The truth lies in Sir Eustace's private life, I feel sure. And if I were superstitious, which I'm not, do you know what I should believe? That the murderer's aim misfired and Sir Eustace escaped death for an express purpose of Providence: so that he, the destined victim, should be the ironical instrument of bringing his own intended murderer to justice."

"Well, Mr. Sheringham, would you really?" said

the sarcastic Chief Inspector, who was not superstitious either.

Roger seemed rather taken with the idea. "*Chance, the Avenger*. Make a good film title, wouldn't it? But there's a terrible lot of truth in it.

"How often don't you people at the Yard stumble on some vital piece of evidence out of pure chance? How often isn't it that you're led to the right solution by what seems a series of mere coincidences? I'm not belittling your detective work; but just think how often a piece of brilliant detective work which has led you most of the way but not the last vital few inches, meets with some remarkable stroke of sheer luck (thoroughly well-deserved luck, no doubt, but *luck*), which just makes the case complete for you. I can think of scores of instances. The Milsom and Fowler murder, for example. Don't you see what I mean? Is it chance every time, or is it Providence avenging the victim?"

"Well, Mr. Sheringham," said Chief Inspector Moresby, "to tell you the truth, I don't mind what it is, so long as it lets me put my hands on the right man."

"Moresby," laughed Roger, "you're hopeless."

CHAPTER V

SIR CHARLES WILDMAN, as he had said, cared more for honest facts than for psychological fiddle-faddle.

Facts were very dear to Sir Charles. More, they were meat and drink to him. His income of roughly thirty thousand pounds a year was derived entirely from the masterful way in which he was able to handle facts. There was no one at the bar who could so convincingly distort an honest but awkward fact into carrying an entirely different interpretation from that which any ordinary person (counsel for the prosecution, for instance) would have put upon it. He could take that fact, look it boldly in the face, twist it round, read a message from the back of its neck, turn it inside out and detect auguries in its entrails, dance triumphantly on its corpse, pulverise it completely, remould it if necessary into an utterly different shape, and finally, if the fact still had the temerity to retain any vestige of its primary aspect, bellow at it in the most terrifying manner. If that failed he was quite prepared to weep at it in open court.

No wonder that Sir Charles Wildman, K.C., was paid that amount of money every year to transform facts of menacing appearance to his clients into so

many sucking-doves, each cooing those very clients' tender innocence. If the reader is interested in statistics it might be added that the number of murderers whom Sir Charles in the course of his career had saved from the gallows, if placed one on top of the other, would have reached to a very great height indeed.

Sir Charles Wildman had rarely appeared for the prosecution. It is not considered etiquette for prosecuting counsel to bellow, and there is scant need for their tears. His bellowing and his public tears were Sir Charles Wildman's long suit. He was one of the old school, one of its very last representatives; and he found that the old school paid him handsomely.

When therefore he looked impressively round the Crimes Circle on its next meeting, one week after Roger had put forward his proposal, and adjusted the gold-rimmed pince-nez on his somewhat massive nose, the other members could feel no doubt as to the quality of the entertainment in store for them. After all, they were going to enjoy for nothing what amounted to a thousand-guinea brief for the prosecution.

Sir Charles glanced at the note-pad in his hand and cleared his throat. No barrister could clear his throat quite so ominously as Sir Charles.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he began, in weighty tones, "it is not unnatural that I should have been

more interested in this murder than perhaps any one else, for personal reasons which will no doubt have occurred to you already. Sir Eustace Pennefather's name, as you must know, has been mentioned in connection with that of my daughter; and though the report of their engagement was not merely premature, but utterly without foundation, it is inevitable that I should feel some personal connection, however slight, with this attempt to assassinate a man who has been mentioned as a possible son-in-law to myself.

"I do not wish to stress this personal aspect of the case, which otherwise I have tried to view as impersonally as any other with which I have been connected; but I put it forward more as an excuse than anything. For it has enabled me to approach the problem set us by our President with a more intimate knowledge of the persons concerned than the rest of you could have, and with, too, I fear, information at my disposal which goes a long way towards indicating the truth of this mystery.

"I know that I should have placed this information at the disposal of my fellow-members last week, and I apologise to them wholeheartedly for not having done so; but the truth is that I did not realise then that this knowledge of mine was in any way germane to the solution, or even remotely helpful, and it is only since I began to ponder over the case with a view to clearing up the tragic tangle, that the vital import

of this information has impressed itself upon me." Sir Charles paused and allowed his resounding periods to echo round the room.

"Now, with its help," he pronounced, looking severely from face to face, "I am of opinion that I have read this riddle."

A twitter of excitement, no less genuine because obviously awaited, ran round the faithful Circle.

Sir Charles whisked off his pince-nez and swung them, in a characteristic gesture, on their broad ribbon. "Yes, I think, in fact I am sure, that I am about to elucidate this dark business to you. And for this reason I regret that the lot has fallen upon me to speak first. It would have been more interesting perhaps had we been permitted to examine some other theories first, and demonstrate their falsity, before we probed to the truth. That is, assuming that there are other theories to examine.

"It would not surprise me, however, to learn that you had all leapt to the conclusion to which I have been driven. Not in the least. I claim no extraordinary powers in allowing the facts to speak to me for themselves; I pride myself on no super-human insight in having been able to see further into this dark business than our official solvers of mysteries and readers of strange riddles, the trained detective force. Very much the reverse. I am only an ordinary human being, endowed with no more powers than any of my

fellow-creatures. It would not astonish me for an instant to be apprised that I am only following in the footsteps of others of you in fixing the guilt on the individual who did, as I submit I am about to prove to you beyond any possibility of doubt, commit this foul crime."

Having thus provided for the improbable contingency of some other member of the Circle having been so clever as himself, Sir Charles cut some of the cackle and got down to business.

"I set about this matter with one question in my mind and one only—the question to which the right answer has proved a sure guide to the criminal in almost every murder that has ever been committed, the question which hardly any criminal can avoid leaving behind him, damning though he knows the answer must be: the question—*cui bono?*" Sir Charles allowed a pregnant moment of silence. "Who," he translated obligingly, "was the gainer? Who," he paraphrased, for the benefit of any possible half-wits in his audience, "would, to put it bluntly, *score* by the death of Sir Eustace Pennefather?" He darted looks of enquiry from under his tufted eyebrows, but his hearers dutifully played the game; nobody undertook to enlighten him prematurely.

Sir Charles was far too practised a rhetorician to enlighten them prematurely himself. Leaving the

question as an immense query-mark in their minds, he veered off on another track.

"Now there were, as I saw it, only three definite clues in this crime," he continued, in almost conversational tones. "I refer of course to the forged letter, the wrapper, and the chocolates themselves. Of these the wrapper could only be helpful so far as its post-mark. The hand-printed address I dismissed as useless. It could have been done by any one, at any time. It led, I felt, nowhere. And I could not see that the chocolates or the box that contained them were of the least use as evidence. I may be wrong, but I could not see it. They were specimens of a well-known brand, on sale at hundreds of shops; it would be fruitless to attempt to trace their purchaser. Moreover any possibilities in that direction would quite certainly have been explored already by the police. I was left, in short, with only two pieces of material evidence, the forged letter and the post-mark on the wrapper, on which the whole structure of proof must be erected."

Sir Charles paused again, to let the magnitude of this task sink into the minds of the others; apparently he had overlooked the fact that his problem must have been common to all. Roger, who with difficulty had remained silent so long, interposed a gentle question.

"Had you already made up your mind as to the criminal, Sir Charles?"

"I had already answered to my own satisfaction the question I had posed to myself, to which I made reference a few minutes ago," replied Sir Charles, with dignity but without explicitness.

"I see. You had made up your mind," Roger pinned him down. "It would be interesting to know, so that we can follow better your way of approaching the proof. You used inductive methods then?"

"Possibly, possibly," said Sir Charles testily. Sir Charles strongly disliked being pinned down.

He glowered for a moment in silence, to recover from this indignity.

"The task, I saw at once," he resumed, in a sterner voice, "was not going to be an easy one. The period at my disposal was extremely limited, far-reaching enquiries were obviously necessary, my own time was far too closely engaged to permit me to make, in person, any investigations I might find advisable. I thought the matter over and decided that the only possible way in which I could arrive at a conclusion was to consider the facts of the case for a sufficient length of time till I was enabled to formulate a theory which would stand every test I could apply to it out of such knowledge as was already at my disposal, and then make a careful list of further points which were outside my own knowledge but which must be facts if my theory were correct; these points could then be investigated by persons acting on my behalf and, if

they were substantiated, my theory would be conclusively proved." Sir Charles drew a breath.

"In other words," Roger murmured with a smile to Alicia Dammers, turning a hundred words into six, " 'I decided to employ inductive methods.' " But he spoke so softly that nobody but Miss Dammers heard him.

She smiled back appreciatively. The art of the written word is not that of the spoken one.

"I formed my theory," announced Sir Charles, with surprising simplicity. Perhaps he was still a little short of breath.

"I formed my theory. Of necessity much of it was guesswork. Let me give an example. The possession by the criminal of a sheet of Mason & Sons' notepaper had puzzled me more than anything. It was not an article which the individual I had in mind might be expected to possess, still less to be able to acquire. I could not conceive any method by which, the plot already decided upon and the sheet of paper required for its accomplishment, such a thing could be deliberately acquired by the individual in question without suspicion being raised afterwards.

"I therefore formed the conclusion that it was the actual ability to obtain a piece of Mason's notepaper in a totally unsuspicious way, which was the reason of the notepaper of that particular firm being em-

ployed at all." Sir Charles looked triumphantly round as if awaiting something.

Roger supplied it; no less readily for all that the point must have occurred to every one as being almost too obvious to need any comment. "That's a very interesting point indeed, Sir Charles. Most ingenious."

Sir Charles nodded his agreement. "Sheer guesswork, I admit. Nothing but guesswork. But guesswork that was justified in the result." Sir Charles was becoming so lost in admiration of his own perspicacity that he had forgotten all his love of long, winding sentences and smooth-rolling subordinate clauses. His massive head positively jerked on his shoulders.

"I considered how such a thing might come into one's possession, and whether the possession could be verified afterwards. It occurred to me at last that many firms insert a piece of notepaper with a receipted bill, with the words 'With Compliments' or some such phrase typed on it. That gave me three questions. Was this practice employed at Mason's? Had the individual in question an account at Mason's, or more particularly, to explain the yellowed edge of the paper, had there been such an account in the past? Were there any indications on the paper of such a phrase having been carefully erased?

"Ladies and gentlemen," boomed Sir Charles, puce with excitement, "you will see that the odds

against those three questions being answered in the affirmative were enormous. Overwhelming. Before I posed them I knew that, should it prove to be the case, no mere chance could be held responsible." Sir Charles dropped his voice. "I knew," he said slowly, "that if those three questions of mine were answered in the affirmative, the individual I had in mind must be as guilty as if I had actually watched the poison being injected into those chocolates."

He paused and looked impressively round him, riveting all eyes on his face.

"Ladies and gentlemen, those three questions *were* answered in the affirmative."

Oratory is a powerful art. Roger knew perfectly well that Sir Charles, out of sheer force of habit, was employing on them all the usual and hackneyed forensic tricks. It was with difficulty, Roger felt, that he refrained from adding "of the jury" to his "Ladies and gentlemen." But really this was only what might have been expected. Sir Charles had a good story to tell, and a story in which he obviously sincerely believed, and he was simply telling it in the way which, after all these years of practice, came most naturally to him. That was not what was annoying Roger.

What did annoy him was that he himself had been plodding on the scent of quite a different hare and, convinced as he had been that his must be the right one, had at first been only mildly amused as Sir

Charles flirted round the skirts of his own quarry. Now he had allowed himself to be influenced by mere rhetoric, cheap though he knew it to be, into wondering.

But was it only rhetoric that had made him begin to doubt? Sir Charles seemed to have some substantial facts to weave into the airy web of his oratory. And pompous old fellow though he might be, he was certainly no fool. Roger began to feel distinctly uneasy. For his own hare, he had to admit, was a very elusive one.

As Sir Charles proceeded to develop his thesis, Roger's uneasiness began to turn into downright unhappiness.

"There can be no doubt about it. I ascertained through an agent that Mason's, an old-fashioned firm, invariably paid such private customers as had an account with them (nine-tenths of their business of course is wholesale) the courtesy of including a statement of thanks, just two or three words typed in the middle of a sheet of notepaper. I ascertained that this individual had had an account with the firm, which was apparently closed five months ago; that is to say, a cheque was sent then in settlement and no goods have been ordered since.

"Moreover I found time to pay a special visit myself to Scotland Yard in order to examine that letter again. By looking at the back I could make out quite

distinct though indecipherable traces of former typewritten words in the middle of the page. These latter cut halfway down one of the lines of the letter and so prove that they could not have been an erasure from that; they correspond in length to the statement I expected; and they show signs of the most careful attempts, by rubbing, rolling and re-roughening the smoothed paper, to eradicate not only the typewriter-ink but even the actual indentations caused by the metal letter-arms.

"This I held to be conclusive proof that my theory was correct, and at once I set about clearing up such other doubtful points as had occurred to me. Time was short, and I had recourse to no less than four firms of trustworthy inquiry-agents among whom I divided the task of providing the data I was seeking. This not only saved me considerable time, but had the advantage of not putting the sum-total of the information obtained into any hands but my own. Indeed I did my best so to split up my queries as to prevent any of the firms from even guessing what object I had in mind; and in this I am of the opinion that I have been successful.

"My next care was the post-mark. It was necessary for my case that I should prove that my suspect had actually been in the neighbourhood of the Strand at the time in question. You will say," suggested Sir Charles, searching the interested faces round him,

and apparently picking upon Mr. Morton Harrogate Bradley as the raiser of this futile objection. "You will say," said Sir Charles sternly to Mr. Bradley, "that this was not necessary. The parcel might have been posted quite innocently by an unwitting accomplice to whom it had been entrusted, so that the actual criminal had an unshakable alibi for that period; the more so as the individual to whom I refer was actually not in this country, so that it would be all the easier to request a friend who might be travelling to England to undertake the task of posting the parcel in this country and so saving the cost of the foreign postage, which on parcels is not inconsiderable.

"I do not agree," said Sir Charles to Mr. Bradley, still more severely. "I have considered that point, and I do not think the individual I have in mind would undertake such a very grave risk. For the friend would almost certainly remember the incident when she read of the affair in the papers, as would be almost inevitable.

"No," concluded Sir Charles, finally crushing Mr. Bradley once and for all, "I am convinced that the individual I am thinking of would realise that nobody else must handle that parcel till it had passed into the keeping of the post-office."

"Of course," said Mr. Bradley academically, "Lady Pennefather may have had not an innocent accomplice but a guilty one. You've considered that,

of course?" Mr. Bradley managed to convey that the matter was of no real interest, but as Sir Charles had been addressing these remarks directly to him it was only courteous to comment on them.

Sir Charles purpled visibly. He had been priding himself on the skilful way in which he had been withholding his suspect's name, to bring it out with a lovely plump right at the end after proving his case, just like a real detective story. And now this wretched scribbler of the things had spoilt it all.

"Sir," he intoned, in proper Johnsonian manner, "I must call your attention to the fact that I have mentioned no names at all. To do such a thing is most imprudent. Do I need to remind you that there is such a thing as a law of libel?"

Morton Harrogate smiled his maddeningly superior smile (he really was a most insufferable young man). "Really, Sir Charles!" he mocked, stroking his little sleek object he wore on his upper lip. "I'm not going to write a story about Lady Pennefather trying to murder her husband, if that's what you're warning me against. Or could it possibly be that you were referring to the law of slander?"

Sir Charles, who had meant slander, enveloped Mr. Bradley in a crimson glare.

Roger sped to the rescue. The combatants reminded him of a bull and a gadfly, and that is a contest which it is often good fun to watch. But the Crimes Circle

had been founded to investigate the crimes of others, not to provide opportunities for new ones. Roger did not particularly like either the bull or the gadfly, but both amused him in their different ways; he certainly disliked neither. Mr. Bradley on the other hand disliked both Roger and Sir Charles. He disliked Roger the more of the two because Roger was a gentleman and pretended not to be, whereas he himself was not a gentleman and pretended he was. And that surely is cause enough to dislike any one.

"I'm glad you raised that point, Sir Charles," Roger now said smoothly. "It's one we must consider. Personally I don't see how we're to progress at all unless we come to come arrangement concerning the law of slander, do you?"

Sir Charles consented to be mollified. "It is a difficult point," he agreed, the lawyer in him immediately swamping the outraged human being. A born lawyer will turn aside from any other minor pursuit, even briefs, for a really knotty legal point, just as a born woman will put on her best set of underclothes and powder her nose before inserting the latter in the gas-oven.

"I think," Roger said carefully, anxious not to wound legal susceptibilities (it was a bold proposition for a layman to make), "that we should disregard that particular law. I mean," he added hastily, observing the look of pain on Sir Charles's brow at being

asked to condone this violation of a *lex intangenda,* "I mean, we should come to some such arrangement as that anything said in this room should be without prejudice, or among friends, or—or not in the spirit of the adverb," he plunged desperately, "or whatever the legal wriggle is." On the whole it was not a tactful speech.

But it is doubtful whether Sir Charles heard it. A dreamy look had come into his eyes, as of a Lord of Appeal crooning over a piece of red tape. "Slander, as we all know," he murmured, "consists in the malicious speaking of such words as render the party who speaks them in the hearing of others liable to an action at the suit of the party to whom they apply. In this case, the imputation being of a crime or misdemeanour which is punishable corporeally, pecuniary damage would not have to be proved, and, the imputation being defamatory, its falsity would be presumed and the burden of proving its truth would be laid upon the defendant. We should therefore have the interesting situation of the defendant in a slander action becoming, in essence, the plaintiff in a civil suit for murder. And really," said Sir Charles in much perplexity, "I don't know what would happen then."

"Er—what about privilege?" suggested Roger feebly.

"Of course," Sir Charles disregarded him, "there

would have to be stated in the declaration the actual words used, not merely their meaning and general inference, and failure to prove them as stated would result in the plaintiff being nonsuited; so that unless notes were taken here and signed by a witness who had heard the defamation, I do not quite see how an action could lie."

"Privilege?" murmured Roger despairingly.

"Moreover I should be of the opinion," said Sir Charles, brightening, "that this might be regarded as one of those proper occasions upon which statements, in themselves defamatory, and even false, may be made if from a perfectly proper motive and with an entire belief in their truth. In that case the presumption would be reversed and the burden would be on the plaintiff to prove, and that to the satisfaction of a jury, that the defendant was actuated by express malice. In that case I rather fancy that the court would be guided almost wholly by considerations of public expediency, which would probably mean that——"

"Privilege!" said Roger loudly.

Sir Charles turned on him the dull eye of a red-ink fiend. But this time the word had penetrated. "I was coming to that," he reproved. "Now in our case I hardly think that a plea of public privilege would be accepted. As to private privilege, the limits are of course exceedingly difficult to define. It would be

doubtful if we could plead successfully that all statements made here are matters of purely private communication, because it is a question whether this Circle does constitute, in actual fact, a private or a public gathering. One could," said Sir Charles with much interest, "argue either way. Or even, for the matter of that, that it is a private body meeting in public, or, *vice versa,* a public gathering held in private. The point is a very debatable one." Sir Charles swung his glasses for a moment to emphasise the extreme debatability of the point.

"But I do feel inclined to venture the opinion," he plunged at last, "that on the whole we might be justified in taking up our stand upon the submission that the occasion *is* privileged in so far as it is concerned entirely with communications which are made with no *animus injuriandi* but solely in performance of a duty not necessarily legal but moral or social, and any statements so uttered are covered by a plea of *veritas convicii* being made within proper limits by persons in the *bona fide* prosecution of their own and the public interest. I am bound to say, however," Sir Charles immediately proceeded to hedge as if horrified at having committed himself at last, "that this is not a matter of complete certainty, and a wiser policy might be to avoid the direct mention of any name, while holding ourselves free to indicate in some unmistakable manner, such as by signs, or possibly

by some form of impersonation or acting, the individual to whom we severally refer."

"Still," pursued the President, faint but persistent, "on the whole you do think that the occasion may be regarded as privileged, and we may go ahead and mention any name we like?"

Sir Charles's glasses described a complete and symbolical circle. "I think," said Sir Charles very weightily indeed (after all it was an opinion which would have cost the Circle such a surprisingly round sum had it been delivered in chambers that Sir Charles need not be grudged a little weight in the delivering of it). "I think," said Sir Charles, "that we might take that risk."

"Right-ho!" said the President with relief.

CHAPTER VI

"I DARE say," resumed Sir Charles, "that many of you will have already reached the same conclusion as myself, with regard to the identity of the murderer. The case seems to me to afford so striking a parallel with one of the classical murders, that the similarity can hardly have passed unnoticed. I refer of course, to the Marie Lafarge case."

"Oh!" said Roger, surprised. So far as he was concerned the similarity had passed unnoticed. He wiggled uncomfortably. Now one came to consider it, of course the parallel was obvious.

"There too we have a wife, accused of sending a poisoned article to her husband. Whether the article was a cake or a box of chocolates is beside the point. It will not do perhaps to——"

"But nobody in their sane senses still believes that Marie Lafarge was guilty," Alicia Dammers interrupted, with unusual warmth. "It's been practically proved that the cake was sent by the foreman, or whatever he was. Wasn't his name Dennis? His motive was much bigger than hers, too."

Sir Charles regarded her severely. "I think I said,

accused of sending. I was referring to a matter of fact, not of opinion."

"Sorry," nodded Miss Dammers, unabashed.

"In any case, I just mention the coincidence for what it is worth. Let us now go back to resume our argument at the point we left it. In that connection, the question was raised just now," said Sir Charles, determinedly impersonal, "as to whether Lady Pennefather may have had not an innocent accomplice but a guilty one. That doubt had already occurred to me. I have satisfied myself that it is not the case. She planned and carried through this affair alone." He paused, inviting the obvious question.

Roger tactfully supplied it.

"How could she, Sir Charles? We know that she was in the South of France the whole time. The police investigated that very point. She has a complete alibi."

Sir Charles positively beamed at him. "She *had* a complete alibi. I have destroyed it.

"This is what actually happened. Three days before the parcel was posted Lady Pennefather left Mentone and went, ostensibly, for a week to Avignon. At the end of the week she returned to Mentone. Her signature is in the hotel-register at Avignon, she has the receipted bill, everything is quite in order. The only curious thing is that apparently she did not take her maid, a very superior young woman of smart ap-

pearance and good manners, to Avignon with her, for the hotel-receipt is for one person only. And yet the maid did not stay at Mentone. Did the maid then vanish into thin air?" demanded Sir Charles indignantly.

"Oh!" nodded Mr. Chitterwick, who had been listening intently. "I see. How ingenious."

"Highly ingenious," agreed Sir Charles, complacently taking the credit for the erring lady's ingenuity. "The maid took the mistress's place; the mistress paid a secret visit to England. And I have verified that beyond any doubt. An agent, acting on telegraphic instructions from me, showed the hotel-proprietor at Avignon a photograph of Lady Pennefather and asked whether such a person had ever stayed in the hotel; the man averred that he had never seen her in his life. My agent showed him a snapshot which he had obtained of the maid; the proprietor recognized her instantly as Lady Pennefather. Another 'guess' of mine had proved only too accurate." Sir Charles leaned back in his chair and swung his glasses in silent tribute to his own astuteness.

"Then Lady Pennefather did have an accomplice?" murmured Mr. Bradley, with the air of one discussing *The Three Bears* with a child of four.

"An innocent accomplice," retorted Sir Charles. "My agent questioned the maid tactfully, and learned that her mistress has told her that she had to go over

to England on urgent business but, having already spent six months of the current year in that country, would have to pay British income-tax if she so much as set foot in England again that year. A considerable sum was in question, and Lady Pennefather suggested this plan as a means of getting round the difficulty, with a handsome bribe to the girl. Not unnaturally the offer was accepted. Most ingenious; most ingenious." He paused again and beamed round, inviting tributes.

"How very clever of you, Sir Charles," murmured Alicia Dammers, stepping into the breach.

"I have no actual proof of her stay in this country," regretted Sir Charles, "so that from the legal point of view the case against her is incomplete in that respect, but that will be a matter for the police to discover. In all other respects, I submit, my case is complete. I regret, I regret exceedingly, having to say so, but I have no alternative: Lady Pennefather is Mrs. Bendix's murderess."

There was a thoughtful silence when Sir Charles had finished speaking. Questions were in the air, but nobody seemed to care to be the first to put one. Roger gazed into vacancy, as if looking longingly after the spoor of his own hare. There was no doubt that, as matters stood at present, Sir Charles seemed to have proved his case.

Mr. Ambrose Chitterwick plucked up courage to

break the silence. "We must congratulate you, Sir Charles. Your solution is as brilliant as it is surprising. Only one question occurs to me, and that is the one of motive. Why should Lady Pennefather desire her husband's death when she is actually in process of divorcing him? Had she any reason to suspect that a decree would not be granted?"

"None at all," replied Sir Charles blandly. "It was just because she was so certain that a decree would be granted that she desired his death."

"I—I don't quite understand," stammered Mr. Chitterwick.

Sir Charles allowed the general bewilderment to continue for a few more moments before he condescended to dispel it. He had the orator's feeling for atmosphere.

"I referred at the beginning of my remarks to a piece of knowledge which had come into my possession and which had helped me materially towards my solution. I am now prepared to disclose, in strict confidence, what that piece of knowledge was.

"You already know that there was talk of an engagement between Sir Eustace and my daughter. I do not think I shall be violating the secrets of the confessional if I tell you that not many weeks ago, Sir Eustace came to me and formally asked me to sanction an engagement between them as soon as his wife's decree *nisi* had been pronounced.

"I need not tell you all that transpired at that interview. What is relevant is that Sir Eustace informed me categorically that his wife had been extremely unwilling to divorce him, and he had only succeeded in the end by making a will entirely in her favour, including his estate in Worcestershire. She had a small private income of her own, and he was going to make her such allowance in addition as he was able; but with the interest on the mortgage on his estate swallowing up nearly all the rent he was getting for it, and his other expenses, this could not be a large one. His life, however, was heavily insured in accordance with Lady Pennefather's marriage settlements, and the mortgage on the estate was in the nature of an endowment policy, and lapsed with his death. He had therefore, as he candidly admitted, very little to offer my daughter.

"Like myself," said Sir Charles impressively, "you cannot fail to grasp the significance of this. According to the will then in existence, Lady Pennefather from being not even comfortably off would become a comparatively rich woman on her husband's death. But rumours are reaching her ears of a possible marriage between that husband and another woman as soon as the divorce is complete. What is more probable than that when such an engagement is actually concluded, a new will will be made?

"Her character is already shown in a strong

enough light by her willingness to accept the bribe of the will as an inducement to divorce. She is obviously a grasping woman, greedy for money. Murder is only another step for such a woman to take. And murder is her only hope. I do not think," concluded Sir Charles, "that I need to labour the point any further." His glasses swung deliberately.

"It's uncommonly convincing," Roger said, with a little sigh. "Are you going to hand this information over to the police, Sir Charles?"

"I conceive that failure to do so would be a gross dereliction of my duty as a citizen," Sir Charles replied, with a pomposity that in no way concealed how pleased he was with himself.

"Humph!" observed Mr. Bradley, who evidently was not going to be so pleased with Sir Charles as Sir Charles was. "What about the chocolates? Is it part of your case that she prepared them over here, or brought them with her?"

Sir Charles waved an airy hand. "Is that material?"

"I should say that it would be very material to connect her at any rate with the poison."

"Nitrobenzene? One might as well try to connect her with the purchase of the chocolates. She would have no difficulty in getting hold of that. I regard her choice of poison, in fact, as on a par with the ingenuity she has displayed in all the other particulars."

"I see." Mr. Bradley stroked his little moustache and eyed Sir Charles combatively. "Come to think of it, you know, Sir Charles, you haven't really proved a case against Lady Pennefather at all. All you've proved is motive and opportunity."

An unexpected ally ranged herself beside Mr. Bradley. "Exactly!" cried Mrs. Fielder-Flemming. "That's just what I was about to point out myself. If you hand over the information you've collected to the police, Sir Charles, I don't think they'll thank you for it. As Mr. Bradley says, you haven't proved that Lady Pennefather's guilty, or anything like it. I'm quite sure you're altogether mistaken."

Sir Charles was so taken aback that for a moment he could only stare. *"Mistaken?"* he managed to ejaculate. It was clear that such a possibility had never entered Sir Charles's orbit.

"Well, perhaps I'd better say—wrong," amended Mrs. Fielder-Flemming, quite drily.

"But my dear madam——" For once words did not come to Sir Charles. "But why?" he fell back upon, feebly.

"Because I'm sure of it," retorted Mrs. Fielder-Flemming, most unsatisfactorily.

Roger had been watching this exchange with a gradual change of feeling. From being hypnotised by Sir Charles's persuasiveness and self-confidence into something like reluctant agreement, he was swinging

round now in reaction to the other extreme. Dash it all, this fellow Bradley had kept a clearer head after all. And he was perfectly right. There were gaps in Sir Charles's case that Sir Charles himself, as counsel for Lady Pennefather's defence, could have driven a coach-and-six through.

"Of course," he said thoughtfully, "the fact that before she went abroad Lady Pennefather may have had an account at Mason's isn't surprising in the least. Nor is the fact that Mason's send out a complimentary chit with their receipts. As Sir Charles himself said, very many old-fashioned firms of good repute do. And the fact that the sheet of paper on which the letter was written had been used previously for some such purpose is not only not surprising, when one comes to consider; it's even obvious. Whoever the murderer, the same problem of getting hold of the piece of notepaper would arise. Yes, really, that Sir Charles's three initial questions should have happened to find affirmative answers, does seem little more than a coincidence."

Sir Charles turned on this new antagonist like a wounded bull. "But the odds were enormous against it!" he roared. "If it was a coincidence, it was the most incredible one in the whole course of my experience."

"Ah, Sir Charles, but you're prejudiced," Mr. Bradley told him gently. "And you exaggerate dread-

fully, you know. You seem to be putting the odds at somewhere round about a million to one. I should put them at six to one. Permutations and combinations, you know."

"Damn your permutations, sir!" riposted Sir Charles with vigour. "And your combinations too."

Mr. Bradley turned to Roger. "Mr. Chairman, is it within the rules of this club for one member to insult another member's underwear? Besides, Sir Charles," he added to that fuming knight, "I don't wear the things. Never have done, since I was an infant."

For the dignity of the chair Roger could not join in the delighted titters that were escaping round the table; in the interests of the Circle's preservation he had to pour oil on these very seething waters.

"Bradley, you're losing sight of the point, aren't you? I don't want to destroy your theory necessarily, Sir Charles, or detract in any way from the really brilliant manner in which you've defended it; but if it's to stand its ground it must be able to resist any arguments we can bring against it. That's all. And I honestly do think that you're inclined to attach a little too much importance to the answers to those three questions. What do you say, Miss Dammers?"

"I agree," Miss Dammers said crisply. "The way Sir Charles emphasised their importance reminded me at the time of a favourite trick of detective-story

writers. He said, if I remember rightly, that if those questions were answered in the affirmative he knew that his suspect was guilty just as much as if he'd seen her with his own eyes putting the poison into the chocolates, because the odds against a coincidental affirmative to all three of them were incalculable. In other words he simply made a strong assertion, unsupported by evidence or argument."

"And that is what detective-story writers do, Miss Dammers?" queried Mr. Bradley, with a tolerant smile.

"Invariably, Mr. Bradley. I've often noticed it in your own books. You state a thing so emphatically that the reader does not think of questioning the assertion. 'Here,' says the detective, 'is a bottle of red liquid and here is a bottle of blue. If these two liquids turn out to be ink, then we know that they were purchased to fill up the empty ink-pots in the library as surely as if we had read the dead man's very thoughts.' Whereas the red ink might have been bought by one of the maids to dye a jumper, and the blue by the secretary for his fountain-pen; or a hundred other such explanations. But any possibilities of that kind are silently ignored. Isn't that so?"

"Perfectly," agreed Bradley, unperturbed. "Don't waste time on unessentials. Just tell the reader very loudly what he's to think, and he'll think it all right. You've got the technique perfectly. Why don't you

try your hand at it? It's quite a paying game, you know."

"I may one day. And anyhow I will say for you, Mr. Bradley, that your detectives do detect. They don't just stand about and wait for somebody else to tell them who committed the murder, as the so-called detectives do in most of the so-called detective-stories I read."

"Thank you," said Mr. Bradley. "Then you actually read detective-stories, Miss Dammers?"

"Certainly," said Miss Dammers, crisply. "Why not?" She dismissed Mr. Bradley as abruptly as she had answered his challenge. "And the letter itself, Sir Charles? The typewriting. You don't attach any importance to that?"

"As a detail, of course it would have to be considered; I was only sketching out the broad lines of the case." Sir Charles was no longer bull-like. "I take it that the police would ferret out pieces of conclusive evidence of that nature."

"I think they might have some difficulty in connecting Pauline Pennefather with the machine that typed that letter," observed Mrs. Fielder-Flemming, not without tartness.

The tide of feeling had obviously set in against Sir Charles.

"But the motive," he pleaded, now pathetically on

the defensive. "You must admit that the motive is overwhelming."

"You don't know Pauline, Sir Charles—Lady Pennefather?" Miss Dammers suggested.

"I do not."

"Evidently," commented Miss Dammers.

"You don't agree with Sir Charles's theory, Miss Dammers?" ventured Mr. Chitterwick.

"I do not," said Miss Dammers with emphasis.

"Might one enquire your reason?" ventured Mr. Chitterwick further.

"Certainly you may. It's a conclusive one, I'm afraid, Sir Charles. I was in Paris at the time of the murder, and just about the very hour when the parcel was being posted I was talking to Pauline Pennefather in the foyer of the Opera."

"What!" exclaimed the discomfited Sir Charles, the remnants of his beautiful theory crashing about his ears.

"I should apologize for not having given you this information before, I suppose," said Miss Dammers with the utmost calmness, "but I wanted to see what sort of a case you could put up against her. And I really do congratulate you. It was a remarkable piece of inductive reasoning. If I hadn't happened to know that it was built up on a complete fallacy you would have quite convinced me."

"But—but why the secrecy, and—and the imper-

sonation by the maid, if her visit was an innocent one?" stammered Sir Charles, his mind revolving wildly round private aeroplanes and the time they would take from the *Place de l'Opéra* to Trafalgar Square.

"Oh, I didn't say it was an innocent one," retorted Miss Dammers carelessly. "Sir Eustace isn't the only one who is waiting for the divorce to marry again. And in the interim Pauline, quite rightly, doesn't see why she should waste valuable time. After all, she isn't so young as she was. And there's always a strange creature called the King's Proctor, isn't there?"

Shortly after that the Chairman adjourned the meeting of the Circle. He did so because he did not wish one of the members to die of apoplexy on his hands.

CHAPTER VII

MRS. FIELDER-FLEMMING was nervous. Actually nervous.

She shuffled the pages of her notebook aimlessly, and seemed hardly able to sit through the few preliminaries which had to be settled before Roger asked her to give the solution which she had already affirmed, privately, to Alicia Dammers, to be indubitably the correct one of Mrs. Bendix's murder. With such a weighty piece of knowledge in her mind one would have thought that for once in her life Mrs. Fielder-Flemming had a really heaven-sent opportunity to be impressive, but for once in her life she made no use of it. If she had not been Mrs. Fielder-Flemming, one might have gone so far as to say that she dithered.

"Are you ready, Mrs. Fielder-Flemming?" Roger asked, gazing at this surprising manifestation.

Mrs. Fielder-Flemming adjusted her very unbecoming hat, rubbed her nose (being innocent of powder, it did not suffer under this habitual treatment; just shone a little more brightly in pink embarrassment), and shot a covert glance round the table. Roger continued to gaze in astonishment. Mrs.

Fielder-Flemming was positively shrinking from the lime-light. For some occult reason she was approaching her task with real distaste, and a distaste at that quite out of comparison with the task's significance.

She cleared her throat, nervously. "I have a very difficult duty to perform," she began in a low voice. "Last night I hardly slept. Anything more distasteful to a woman like myself it is impossible to imagine." She paused, moistening her lips.

"Oh, come, Mrs. Fielder-Flemming," Roger felt himself impelled to encourage her. "It's the same for all of us, you know. And I've heard you make a most excellent speech at one of your own first nights."

Mrs. Fielder-Flemming looked at him, not at all encouraged. "I was not referring to that aspect of it, Mr. Sheringham," she retorted, rather more tartly. "I was speaking of the burden which has been laid on me by the knowledge that has come into my possession, the terrible duty I have to perform in consequence of it."

"You mean you've solved the little problem?" enquired Mr. Bradley, without reverence.

Mrs. Fielder-Flemming regarded him sombrely. "With infinite regret," she said, in low, womanly tones, "I have." Mrs. Fielder-Flemming was recovering her poise.

She consulted her notes for a moment, and then began to speak in a firmer voice. "Criminology I have

always regarded with something of a professional eye. Its main interest has always been for me its immense potentialities for drama. The inevitability of murder; the predestined victim, struggling unconsciously and vainly against fate; the predestined killer, moving first unconsciously too and then with full and relentless realization, towards the accomplishment of his doom; the hidden causes, unknown perhaps to both victim and killer, which are all the time urging on the fulfilment of destiny.

"Apart from the action and the horror of the deed itself, I have always felt that there are more possibilities of real drama in the most ordinary or sordid of murders than in any other situation that can occur to man. Ibsenish in the inevitable working out of certain circumstances in juxtaposition that we call fate, no less than Edgar-Wallacish in the καθαρσις undergone by the emotions of the onlooker at their climax.

"It was perhaps natural then that I should regard not only this particular case from something of the standpoint of my calling (and certainly no more dramatic twist could well be invented), but the task of solving it too. Anyhow, natural or not, this is what I did; and the result has terribly justified me. I considered the case in the light of one of the oldest dramatic situations, and very soon everything became only too clear. I am referring to the situation which the gentlemen who pass among us in these days

for dramatic critics, invariably call the Eternal Triangle.

"I had to begin of course with only one of the triangle's three members, Sir Eustace Pennefather. Of the two unknown one must be a woman, the other might be woman or man. So I fell back on another very old and very sound maxim, and proceeded to *chercher la femme*. And," said Mrs. Fielder-Flemming, very solemnly, "I found her."

So far, it must be admitted, her audience was not particularly impressed. Even the promising opening had not stirred them, for it was only to be expected that Mrs. Fielder-Flemming would feel it her duty to emphasise her feminine shrinkings from handing a criminal over to justice. Her somewhat laborious sentences too, obviously learned off by heart for the occasion, detracted if anything from the interest of what she had to convey.

But when she resumed, having waited in vain for a tributary gasp at her last momentous piece of information, the somewhat calculated tenseness of her style had given way to an unrehearsed earnestness which was very much more impressive.

"I wasn't expecting the triangle to be the hackneyed one," she said, with a slight dig at the deflated remains of Sir Charles. "Lady Pennefather I hardly considered for a moment. The subtlety of the crime, I felt sure, must be a reflection of an unusual situa-

tion. And after all a triangle need not necessarily include a husband and wife among its members; any three people, if the circumstances arrange them so, can form one. It is the circumstances, not the three protagonists, that make the triangle.

"Sir Charles has told us that this crime reminded him of the Marie Lafarge case, and in some respects (he might have added) the Mary Ansell case too. It reminded me of a case as well, but it was neither of these. The Molineux case in New York, it seems to me, provides a much closer parallel than either.

"You all remember the details of course. Mr. Cornish, a director of the important Knickerbocker Athletic Club, received in his Christmas mail a small silver cup and a phial of bromo-seltzer, addressed to him at the club. He thought they had been sent by way of a joke, and kept the wrapper in order to identify the humorist. A few days later a woman who lived in the same boarding-house as Cornish complained of a headache and Cornish gave her some of the bromo-seltzer. In a very short time she was dead, and Cornish, who had taken just a sip because she complained of it being bitter, was violently ill but recovered later.

"In the end a man named Molineux, another member of the same club, was arrested and put on trial. There was quite a lot of evidence against him, and it was known that he hated Cornish bitterly, so much so

that he had already assaulted him once. Moreover another member of the club, a man named Barnet, had been killed earlier in the year through taking what purported to be a sample of a well-known headache powder which had also been sent to him at the club and, shortly before the Cornish episode, Molineux married a girl who had actually been engaged to Barnet at the time of his death; he had always wanted her, but she had preferred Barnet. Molineux, as you remember, was convicted at his first trial and acquitted at his second; he afterwards became insane.

"Now this parallel seems to me complete. Our case is to all purposes a composite Cornish-cum-Barnet case. The resemblances are extraordinary. There is the poisoned article addressed to the man's club; there is, in the case of Cornish, the death of the wrong victim; there is the preservation of the wrapper; there is, in Barnet's case, the triangle element (and a triangle, you will notice, without husband and wife). It's quite startling. It is, in fact, more than startling; it's quite significant. Things don't happen like that quite by chance."

Mrs. Fielder-Flemming paused and blew her nose, delicately but with emotion. She was getting nicely worked up now, and so, in consequence, was her audience. If there were no gasps there was at any rate the tribute of complete silence till she was ready to go on.

"I said that this similarity was more than startling, that it was significant. I will explain its particular significance later; at present it is enough to say that I found it very helpful also. The realization of the extreme closeness of the parallel came as quite a shock to me, but once I had grasped it I felt strangely convinced that it was in this very similarity that the clue to the solution of Mrs. Bendix's murder was to be found. I felt this so strongly that I somehow actually *knew* it. These intuitions do come to me sometimes (explain them as you will) and I have never yet known them fail me. This one did not do so either.

"I began to examine this case in the light of the Molineux one. Would the latter help me to find the woman I was looking for in the former? What were the indications, so far as Barnet was concerned? Barnet received his fatal package because he was purposing to marry a girl whom the murderer was resolved he should not marry. With so many parallels between the two cases already, was there—" Mrs. Fielder-Flemming pushed back her unwieldy hat to a still more unbecoming angle and looked deliberately round the table with the air of an early Christian trying the power of the human eye on a doubtfully intimidated covey of lions—*"was there another here?"*

This time Mrs. Fielder-Flemming was rewarded with several real and audible gasps. That of Sir Charles was quite the most audible, an outraged,

indignant gasp that came perilously near to a snort. Mr. Chitterwick gasped apprehensively, as if fearing something like a physical sequel to the sharp exchange of glances between Sir Charles and Mrs. Fielder-Flemming, those of the former positively menacing in their warning, those of the lady almost vocal with her defiance of it.

The Chairman gasped too, wondering what a Chairman should do if two members of his circle, and of opposite sexes at that, should proceed to blows under his very nose.

Mr. Bradley forgot himself so far as to gasp as well, in sheer, blissful ecstasy. Mrs. Fielder-Flemming looked as if she were to prove a better hand at bull-baiting than himself, but Mr. Bradley did not grudge her the honour so long as he was to be allowed to sit and hug himself in the audience. Not in his most daring toreador-like antics would Mr. Bradley have ever dared to postulate the very daughter of his victim as the cause of the murder itself. Could this magnificent woman really bring forward a case to support so puncturing an idea? And what if it should actually turn out to be true? After all, such a thing was conceivable enough. Murders have been committed for the sake of lovely ladies often enough before; so why not for the lovely daughter of a pompous old silk? Oh God, oh Montreal.

Finally Mrs. Fielder-Flemming gasped too, at herself.

Alone without a gasp sat Alicia Dammers, her face alight with nothing but an intellectual interest in the development of her fellow-member's argument, determinedly impersonal. One was to gather that to Miss Dammers it was immaterial whether her own mother had been mixed up in the murder, so long as her part in it had provided opportunities for the sharpening of wits and the stimulation of intelligence. Without ever acknowledging her recognition that a personal element was being introduced into the Circle's investigations, she yet managed to radiate the idea that Sir Charles ought, if anything, to be detachedly delighted at the possibility of such enterprise on the part of his daughter.

Sir Charles however was far from delighted. From the red swelling of the veins on his forehead it was obvious that something was going to burst out of him in a very few seconds. Mrs. Fielder-Flemming leapt, like an agitated but determined hen, for the gap.

"We have agreed to waive the law of slander here," she almost squawked. "Personalities don't exist for us. If the name crops up of any one personally known to us, we utter it as unflinchingly, in whatever connection, as if it were a complete stranger's. That is the definite arrangement we came to last night, Mr. President, isn't it? We are to do what we conceive to be

our duty to society quite irrespective of any personal considerations?"

For a moment Roger indulged his tremors. He did not want his beautiful Circle to explode in a cloud of dust, never again to be re-united. And though he could not but admire the flurried but undaunted courage of Mrs. Fielder-Flemming, he had to be content to envy it so far as Sir Charles was concerned, for he certainly did not possess anything like it himself. On the other hand there was no doubt that the lady had right on her side, and what can any President do but administer justice?

"Perfectly correct, Mrs. Fielder-Flemming," he had to admit, hoping his voice sounded as firm as he would have wished.

For a moment a blue glare, emanating from Sir Charles, enveloped him luridly. Then, as Mrs. Fielder-Flemming, evidently heartened by this official support, took up her bomb again, the rays of the glare were switched again on to her. Roger, nervously watching the two of them, could not help reflecting that blue rays are things which should never be directed on to bombs.

Mrs. Fielder-Flemming juggled featly with her bomb. Often though it seemed about to slip through her fingers, it never quite reached the ground or detonated. "Very well, then. I will go on. My triangle now had the second of its members. On the analogy

of the Barnet murder, where was the third to be found? Obviously, with Molineux as the prototype, in some person who was anxious to prevent the first member from marrying the second.

"So far, you will see, I am not out of harmony with the conclusions Sir Charles gave us last night, though my method of arriving at them was perhaps somewhat different. He gave us a triangle also, without expressly defining it as such (perhaps even without recognising it as such). And the first two members of his triangle are precisely the same as the first two of mine."

Here Mrs. Fielder-Flemming made a notable effort to return something of Sir Charles's glare, in defiant challenge to contradiction. As she had simply stated a plain fact, however, which Sir Charles was quite unable to refute without explaining that he had not meant what he had meant the evening before, the challenge passed unanswered. Also the glare visibly diminished. But for all that (patently remarked Sir Charles's expression) a triangle by any other name does *not* smell so unsavoury.

"It is when we come to the third member," pursued Mrs. Fielder-Flemming, with renewed poise, "that we are at variance. Sir Charles suggested to us Lady Pennefather. I have not the pleasure of Lady Pennefather's acquaintance, but Miss Dammers, who knows her well, tells me that in almost every particu-

lar the estimate given us by Sir Charles of her character was wrong. She is neither mean, grasping, greedy, nor in any imaginable way capable of the awful deed with which Sir Charles, perhaps a little rashly, was ready to credit her. Lady Pennefather, I understand, is a particularly sweet and kindly woman; somewhat broad-minded no doubt, but none the worse for that; indeed as some of us would think, a good deal the better."

Mrs. Fielder-Flemming encouraged the belief that she was not merely tolerant of a little harmless immorality, but actually ready to act as godmother to any particular instance of it. Indeed she went sometimes quite a long détour out of her way in order to propagate this belief among her friends. But unfortunately her friends would persist in remembering that she had refused to have anything more to do with one of her own nieces since the latter, on learning that her middle-aged husband kept, for purposes of convenience, a different mistress in each of the four quarters of England, and just to be on the safe side one in Scotland too, had run away with a young man of her own with whom she happened to be very devotedly in love.

"Just as I differ from Sir Charles over the identity of the third person in the triangle," went on Mrs. Fielder-Flemming, happily ignorant of her friends' memories, "so I differ from him in the means by

which that identity is to be established. We are at complete variance in our ideas regarding the very heart of the problem, the motive. Sir Charles would have us think that this was a murder committed (or attempted, rather) for gain; I am convinced that the incentive was, at any rate, a less ignoble one than that. Murder, we are taught, can never be really justifiable; but there are occasions when it comes dangerously near it. This, in my opinion, was one of them.

"It is in the character of Sir Eustace himself that I see the clue to the identity of the third person. Let us consider it for a moment. We are not restricted by any considerations of slander, and we can say at once that, from certain points of view, Sir Eustace is a quite undesirable member of the community. From the point of view of a young man, for the sake of example, who is in love with a girl, Sir Eustace must be one of the very last persons with whom the young man would wish that girl to come into contact. He is not merely immoral, he is without excuse for his immorality, a far more serious thing. He is a rake, a spendthrift, without honour or scruples where women are concerned, and a man moreover who has already made a mess of marriage with a very charming woman and one of no means too narrow to overlook even a more than liberal allowance of the usual male peccadillos and lapses. As a prospective hus-

band for any young girl Sir Eustace Pennefather is a tragedy.

"And as a prospective husband for a young girl whom a man loves with all his heart," intoned Mrs. Fielder-Flemming very solemnly, "it is easy to conceive that, in that particular man's regard, Sir Eustace Pennefather becomes nothing short of an impossibility.

"And a man who *is* a man," added Mrs. Fielder-Flemming, quite mauve with intensity, "does not admit impossibilities."

She paused, pregnantly.

"Curtain, Act I." confided Mr. Bradley behind his hand to Mr. Ambrose Chitterwick.

Mr. Chitterwick smiled nervously.

CHAPTER VIII

SIR CHARLES took the usual advantage of the first interval to rise from his seat. Like so many of us in these days by the time of the first interval (when it is not a play of Mrs. Fielder-Flemming's that is in question) he felt almost physically unable to contain himself longer.

"Mr. President," he boomed, "let us get this clear. Is Mrs. Fielder-Flemming making the preposterous accusation that some friend of my daughter's is responsible for this crime, or is she not?"

The President looked somewhat helplessly up at the bulk towering wrathfully above him and wished he were anything but the President. "I really don't know, Sir Charles," he professed, which was not only feeble but untrue.

Mrs. Fielder-Flemming however was by now quite able to speak up for herself. "I have not yet specifically accused any one of the crime, Sir Charles," she said, with a cold dignity that was only marred by the fact that her hat, which had apparently been sharing its mistress's emotions, was now perched rakishly over her left ear. "So far I have been simply developing a thesis."

To Mr. Bradley Sir Charles would have replied, with Johnsonian scorn of evasion: "Sir, damn your thesis." Hampered now by the puerilities of civilized convention regarding polite intercourse between the sexes, he could only summon up once more the blue glare.

With the unfairness of her sex Mrs. Fielder-Flemming promptly took advantage of his handicap. "And," she added pointedly, "I have not yet finished doing so."

Sir Charles sat down, the perfect allegory. But he grunted very naughtily to himself as he did so.

Mr. Bradley restrained an impulse to clap Mr. Chitterwick on the back and then chuck him under the chin.

Her serenity so natural as to be patently artificial, Mrs. Fielder-Flemming proceeded to call the interval closed and ring up the curtain on her second act.

"Having given you my processes towards arriving at the identity of the third member of the triangle I postulated, in other words towards that of the murderer, I will go on to the actual evidence and show how that supports my conclusions. Did I say 'supports'? I meant, confirms them beyond all doubt."

"But what are your conclusions, Mrs. Fielder-Flemming?" Bradley asked, with an air of bland interest. "You haven't defined them yet. You only

hinted that the murderer was a rival of Sir Eustace's for the hand of Miss Wildman."

"Exactly," agreed Alicia Dammers. "Even if you don't want to tell us the man's name yet, Mabel, can't you narrow it down a little more for us?" Miss Dammers disliked vagueness. It savoured to her of the slipshod, which above all things in this world she detested. Moreover she really was extremely interested to know upon whom Mrs. Fielder-Flemming's choice had alighted. Mabel, she knew, might look like one sort of fool, talk like another sort, and behave like a third; and yet really she was not a fool at all.

But Mabel was determined to be coy. "Not yet, I'm afraid. For certain reasons I want to prove my case first. You'll understand later, I think."

"Very well," sighed Miss Dammers. "But do let's keep away from the detective-story atmosphere. All we want to do is to solve this difficult case, not mystify each other."

"I have my reasons, Alicia," frowned Mrs. Fielder-Flemming, and rather obviously proceeded to collect her thoughts. "Where was I? Oh yes, the evidence. Now this is very interesting. I have succeeded in obtaining two pieces of quite vital evidence which I have never heard brought forward before.

"The first is that Sir Eustace was not in love with—" Mrs. Fielder-Flemming hesitated; then, as

the plunge had already been taken for her, followed the intrepid Mr. Bradley into the deeps of complete candour "—with Miss Wildman at all. He intended to marry her simply for her money—or rather, for what he hoped to get of her father's money. I hope, Sir Charles," added Mrs. Fielder-Flemming frostily, "that you will not consider me slanderous if I allude to the fact that you are an exceedingly rich man. It has a most important bearing on my case."

Sir Charles inclined his massive, handsome head. "It is hardly a matter of slander, madam. Simply one of taste, which is outside my professional orbit. I fear it would be a waste of time for me to attempt to advise you on it."

"That is very interesting, Mrs. Fielder-Flemming," Roger hastily interposed on this exchange of pleasantries. "How did you discover it?"

"From Sir Eustace's man, Mr. Sheringham," replied Mrs. Fielder-Flemming not without pride. "I interrogated him. Sir Eustace had made no secret of it. He seems to confide most freely in his man. He expected, apparently, to be able to pay off his debts, buy a racehorse or two, provide for the present Lady Pennefather, and generally make a fresh and no doubt discreditable start. He had actually promised Barker (that is his man's name) a present of a hundred pounds on the day he 'led the little filly to the altar,' as he phrased it. I am sorry to hurt your feelings,

Sir Charles, but I have to deal with facts, and feelings must go down before them. A present of ten pounds bought me all the information I wanted. Quite remarkable information, as it turned out." She looked round triumphantly.

"You don't think, perhaps," ventured Mr. Chitterwick with an apologetic smile, "that information from such a tainted source might not be entirely reliable? The source seems so very tainted. Why, I don't think my own man would sell me for a ten-pound note."

"Like master like man," returned Mrs. Fielder-Flemming shortly. "His information was perfectly reliable. I was able to check nearly everything he told me, so that I think I am entitled to accept the small residue as correct too.

"I should like to quote another of Sir Eustace's confidences. It is not pretty, but it is very, very illuminating. He had made an attempt to seduce Miss Wildman in a private room at the Pug-Dog Restaurant (that, for instance, I checked later), apparently with the object of ensuring the certainty of the marriage he desired. (I am sorry again, Sir Charles, but these facts must be brought out.) I had better say at once that the attempt was unsuccessful. That night Sir Eustace remarked (and to his valet of all people, remember); 'You can take a filly to the altar, but you can't make her drunk.' That, I think, will show you better than

any words of mine just what manner of man Sir Eustace Pennefather is. And it will also show you how overwhelmingly strong was the incentive of the man who really loved her to put her for ever out of the reach of such a brute.

"And that brings me to the second piece of my evidence. This is really the foundation stone of the whole structure, the basis on which the necessity for murder (as the murderer saw it) rested, and the basis at the same time of my own reconstruction of the crime. Miss Wildman was hopelessly, unreasonably, irrevocably infatuated with Sir Eustace Pennefather."

As an artist in dramatic effect, Mrs. Fielder-Flemming was silent for a moment to allow the significance of this information to sink into the minds of her audience. But Sir Charles was far too personally preoccupied to be interested in significances.

"And may one ask how you found *that* out, madam?" he demanded, swelling with sarcasm. "From my daughter's maid?"

"From your daughter's maid," responded Mrs. Fielder-Flemming sweetly. "Detecting, I discover, is an expensive hobby, but one mustn't regret money spent in a good cause."

Roger sighed. It was plain that, once this ill-fortuned child of his invention had died a painful death, the Circle (if it had not been completely squared by then) would be found to be without either Mrs.

Fielder-Flemming or Sir Charles Wildman; and he knew which of the two it would be. It was a pity. Sir Charles, besides being such an asset from the professional point of view, was the only leavening apart from Mr. Ambrose Chitterwick of the literary element; and Roger, who had attended a few literary parties in his earlier days, was quite sure he would not be able to face a gathering that consisted of nothing but people who made their livings by their typewriters.

Besides, Mrs. Fielder-Flemming really was being a little hard on the old man. After all, it was his daughter who was in question.

"I have now," said Mrs. Fielder-Flemming, "established an overwhelming motive for the man who is in my mind to eliminate Sir Eustace. In fact it must have seemed to him the only possible way out of an intolerable situation. Let me now go on to connect him with the few facts allowed us by the anonymous murderer.

"When the Chief Inspector the other evening permitted us to examine the forged letter from Mason and Sons I examined it closely, because I know something about typewriters. That letter was typed on a Hamilton machine. The man I have in mind has a Hamilton typewriter at his place of business. You may say that might be only a coincidence, the Hamilton being so generally used. So it might; but if you get

enough coincidences lumped together, they cease to become coincidences at all and become certainties.

"In the same way we have the further coincidence of Mason's notepaper. This man has a definite connection with Mason's. Three years ago, as you may remember, Mason's were involved in a big lawsuit. I forget the details, but I think they brought an action against one of their rivals. You may remember, Sir Charles?"

Sir Charles nodded reluctantly, as if unwilling to help his antagonist even with this unimportant information. "I ought to," he said shortly. "It was against the Fearnley Chocolate Company for infringement of copyright in an advertisement figure. I led for Mason's."

"Thank you. Yes, I thought it was something like that. Very well, then. This man was connected with that very case. He was helping Mason's, on the legal side. He must have been in and out of their office. His opportunities for possessing himself of a piece of their notepaper would have been legion. The chances by which he might have found himself three years later in possession of a piece would be innumerable. The paper had yellowed edges; it must have been quite three years old. It had an erasure. That erasure, I suggest, is the remains of a brief note on the case jotted down one day in Mason's office. The thing is obvious. Everything fits.

"Then there is the matter of the post-mark. I agree with Sir Charles that we may take it for granted that the murderer, cunning though he is, and anxious though he might be to establish an alibi, would not entrust the posting of the fatal parcel to any one else. Apart from a confederate, which I am sure we may rule out of the question, it would be far too dangerous; the name of Sir Eustace Pennefather could hardly escape being seen, and the connection later established. The murderer, secure in his conviction that suspicion will never fall on himself of all people (just like all murderers that have ever been), gambles a possible alibi against a certain risk and posts the thing himself. It is therefore advisable, just to clinch the case against him, to connect the man with the neighbourhood of the Strand between the hours of eight-thirty and nine-thirty on that particular evening.

"Surprisingly enough I found this task, which I had expected to be the most difficult, the easiest of all. The man of whom I am thinking actually attended a public dinner that night at the Hotel Cecil, a re-union dinner to be exact of his old school. The Hotel Cecil, I need not remind you, is almost opposite Southampton Street. The Southampton Street post-office is the nearest one to the hotel. What could be easier for him than to slip out of his seat for the five minutes which is all that would be required, and be back again almost before his neighbours had noticed his action?"

"What indeed?" murmured the rapt Mr. Bradley.

"I have two final points to make. You remember that in pointing out the resemblance of this case to the Molineux affair, I remarked that this similarity was more than surprising, it was significant. I will explain what I meant by that. What I meant was that the parallel was far too close for it to be just a coincidence. This case is a deliberate *copy* of that one. And if it is, there is only one inference. This murder is the work of a man steeped in criminal history—of a criminologist. And the man I have in mind *is* a criminologist.

"My last point concerns the denial in the newspaper of the rumoured engagement between Sir Eustace Pennefather and Miss Wildman. I learnt from his valet that Sir Eustace did not send that denial himself. Nor did Miss Wildman. Sir Eustace was furiously angry about it. It was sent, on his own initiative without consulting either of them, by the man whom I am accusing of having committed this crime."

Mr. Bradley stopped hugging himself for a moment. "And the nitrobenzene? Were you able to connect him with that too?"

"That is one of the very few points on which I agree with Sir Charles. I don't think it in the least necessary, or possible, to connect him with such a common commodity, which can be bought anywhere without the slightest difficulty or remark."

Mrs. Fielder-Flemming was holding herself in with a visible effort. Her words, so calm and judicial to read, had hitherto been spoken too with a strenuous attempt towards calm and judicial delivery. But with each sentence the attempt was obviously becoming more difficult. Mrs. Fielder-Flemming was clearly getting so excited that a few more such sentences seemed likely to choke her, though to the others such intensity of feeling seemed a little unnecessary. She was approaching her climax, of course, but even that seemed hardly an excuse for such a very purple face and a hat that had now managed somehow to ride to the very back of her head where it trembled agitatedly in sympathy with its mistress.

"That is all," she concluded jerkily. "I submit that I have proved my case. This man is the murderer."

There was complete silence.

"Well?" said Alicia Dammers impatiently. "Who is he, then?"

Sir Charles, who had been regarding the orator with a frown that grew more and more lowering every minute, thumped quite menacingly on the table in front of him. "Precisely," he growled. "Let us get out in the open. Against whom are these ridiculous insinuations of yours directed, madam?" One gathered that Sir Charles did not find himself in agreement with the lady's conclusions, even before knowing what they were.

"Accusations, Sir Charles," Mrs. Fielder-Flemming squeaked correction. "You—you pretend you don't know?"

"Really, madam," retorted Sir Charles, with massive dignity, "I'm afraid I have no idea."

And then Mrs. Fielder-Flemming became regrettably dramatic. Rising slowly to her feet like a tragedy queen (except that tragedy queens do not wear their hats tremblingly on the very backs of their heads, and if their faces are apt to go brilliant purple with emotion disguise the tint with appropriate grease paints), heedless of the chair overturning behind her with a dull, doom-like thud, her quivering finger pointing across the table, she confronted Sir Charles with every inch of her five-foot nothing.

"Thou!" shrilled Mrs. Fielder-Flemming. "Thou art the man!" Her outstretched finger shook like a ribbon on an electric fan. "The brand of Cain is on your forehead! Murderer!"

In the silence of ecstatic horror that followed Mr. Bradley clung deliriously to the arm of Mr. Chitterwick.

Sir Charles succeeded in finding his voice, temporarily mislaid. "The woman's mad," he gasped.

Finding that she had not been shot on the spot, or even blasted by blue lightning from Sir Charles's eyes, either of which possibilities it seemed that she had been dreading, Mrs. Fielder-Flemming pro-

ceeded rather less hysterically to amplify her charge.

"No, I am not mad, Sir Charles; I am very, very sane. You loved your daughter, and with the two-fold love that a man who has lost his wife feels for the only feminine thing left to him. You considered that any lengths were justified to prevent her from falling into the hands of Sir Eustace Pennefather—from having her youth, her innocence, her trust exploited by such a scoundrel.

"Out of your own mouth I convict you. Already you've told us that it was not necessary to mention everything that took place at your interview with Sir Eustace. No; for then you would have had to give away the fact that you informed him you would rather kill him with your own hands than see your daughter married to him. And when matters reached such a pass, what with the poor girl's infatuation and obstinacy and Sir Eustace's determination to take advantage of them, that no means short of that very thing was left to you to prevent the catastrophe, you did not shrink from employing them. Sir Charles Wildman, may God be your judge, for I cannot." Breathing heavily, Mrs. Fielder-Flemming retrieved her inverted chair and sat down on it.

"Well, Sir Charles," remarked Mr. Bradley, whose swelling bosom was threatening to burst his waistcoat. "Well, I wouldn't have thought it of you. Murder, indeed. Very naughty; very, very naughty."

For once Sir Charles took no notice of his faithful gadfly. It is doubtful whether he even heard him. Now that it had penetrated into his consciousness that Mrs. Fielder-Flemming really intended her accusation in all seriousness and was not the victim of a temporary attack of insanity, his bosom was swelling just as tumultuously as Mr. Bradley's. His face, adopting the purple tinge that Mrs. Fielder-Flemming's was relinquishing, took on the aspect of the frog in the fable who failed to realize his own bursting-point. Roger, whose emotions on hearing Mrs. Fielder-Flemming's outburst had been so mixed as to be almost scrambled, began to feel quite alarmed for him. But Sir Charles found the safety-valve of speech just in time. "Mr. President," he exploded through it, "if I am not right in assuming this to be a jest on this lady's part, even though a jest in the worst possible taste, am I to be expected to take this preposterous nonsense seriously?"

Roger glanced at Mrs. Fielder-Flemming's face now set in flinty masses, and gulped. However preposterous though Sir Charles might term it, his antagonist had certainly made out a case, and not a flimsy, unsupported case either. "I think," he said, as carefully as he could, "that if it had been any one but yourself in question, Sir Charles, you would agree that a charge of this kind, when there is real evidence

to support it, does at least require to be taken seriously so far as to need refuting."

Sir Charles snorted and Mrs. Fielder-Flemming nodded her head several times with vehemence.

"If refuting is possible," observed Mr. Bradley. "But I must admit that, personally, I am impressed. Mrs. Fielder-Flemming seems to me to have made out her case. Would you like me to go and telephone for the police, Mr. President?" He spoke with an air of earnest endeavour to do his duty as a citizen, however distasteful it might be.

Sir Charles glared, but once more seemed bereft of words.

"Not yet, I think," Roger said gently. "We haven't heard yet what Sir Charles has to answer."

"Well, I suppose we may as well *hear* him," conceded Mr. Bradley.

Five pairs of eyes glued themselves on Sir Charles, five pairs of ears were strained.

But Sir Charles, struggling mightily with himself, was silent.

"As I expected," murmured Mr. Bradley. "There is no defence. Even Sir Charles, who has snatched so many murderers from the rope, can find nothing to say in such a glaring case. It's very sad."

From the look he flashed at his tormentor it was to be deduced that Sir Charles might have found

plenty to say had the two of them been alone together. As it was, he could only rumble.

"Mr. President," said Alicia Dammers, with her usual brisk efficiency, "I have a proposal to make. Sir Charles appears to be admitting his guilt by default, and Mr. Bradley, as a good citizen, wishes to hand him over to the police."

"Hear, hear!" observed the good citizen.

"Personally I should be sorry to do that. I think there is a good deal to be said for Sir Charles. Murder, we are taught, is invariably anti-social. But is it? I am of the opinion that Sir Charles's intention, that of ridding the world (and incidentally his own daughter of Sir Eustace Pennefather, was quite in the world's best interests. That his intention miscarried and an innocent victim was killed is quite beside the point. Even Mrs. Fielder-Flemming seemed to be doubtful whether Sir Charles ought to be condemned, as a jury would certainly condemn him, though she added in conclusion that she did not feel competent to judge him.

"I differ from her. Being a person of, I hope, reasonable intelligence, I feel perfectly competent to judge him. And I consider further that all five of us are competent to judge him. I therefore suggest that we do in fact judge him ourselves. Mrs. Fielder-Flemming could act as prosecutor; somebody (I propose Mr. Bradley) could defend him; and all five of us

constitute a jury, the finding to be by majority in favour or against. We would bind ourselves to abide by the result, and if it is against him we send for the police; if it is in his favour we agree never to breathe a word of his guilt outside this room. May this be put to the meeting?"

Roger smiled at her reprovingly. He knew quite well that Miss Dammers no more believed in Sir Charles's guilt than he, Roger, did himself, and he knew that she was only pulling that eminent counsel's leg; a little cruelly, but no doubt she thought it was good for him. Miss Dammers professed herself a strong believer in seeing the other side, and held that it would be a very good thing for the cat occasionally to find itself chased by the mouse; certainly therefore it was most salutory for a man who had prosecuted other men for their lives to find himself for once in the dock on just such a terrifying charge. Mr. Bradley, on the other hand, though he, too, obviously did not believe that Sir Charles was the murderer, mocked not out of conviction but because only so could he get a little of his own back against Sir Charles for having made more of a success of his life than Mr. Bradley was likely to do.

Nor, Roger thought, had Mr. Chitterwick any serious doubts as to the possibility of Sir Charles being guilty, though he was still looking so alarmed at Mrs. Fielder-Flemming's temerity in suggesting such

a thing that it was not altogether possible to say what he did think. Indeed Roger was quite sure that nobody entertained the least suspicion of Sir Charles's innocence except Mrs. Fielder-Flemming—and perhaps, from the look of him, Sir Charles himself. As that outraged gentleman had pointed out, such an idea, looked at in sober reflection, was plainly the most preposterous nonsense. Sir Charles could not be guilty because—well, because he was Sir Charles, and because such things don't happen, and because he obviously couldn't be.

On the other hand Mrs. Fielder-Flemming had very neatly proved that he was. And Sir Charles had not even attempted yet to prove that he wasn't.

Not for the first time Roger wished, very sincerely, that anybody were sitting in the presidential chair but himself.

"I think," he now repeated, "that before we take any steps at all we ought to hear what Sir Charles has to say. I am sure," added the President kindly, remembering the right phrase, "that he will have a complete answer to all charges." He looked expectantly towards the criminal.

Sir Charles appeared to jerk himself out of the haze of his wrath. "I am really expected to defend myself against this—this hysteria?" he barked. "Very well. I admit I am a criminologist, which Mrs. Fielder-Flemming appears to think so damning. I

admit that I attended a dinner at the Hotel Cecil on that night, which it seems is enough to put the rope round my neck. I admit, since it appears that my private affairs are to be dragged into public, regardless of taste or decency, that I would rather have strangled Sir Eustace with my own hands than see him married to my daughter."

He paused, and passed his hand rather wearily over his high forehead. He was no longer formidable, but only a rather bewildered old man. Roger felt intensely sorry for him. But Mrs. Fielder-Flemming had stated her case too well for it to be possible to spare him.

"I admit all this, but none of it is evidence that would have very much weight in a court of law. If you want me to prove that I did not actually send those chocolates, what am I to say? I could bring my two neighbours at the dinner, who would swear that I never left my seat till—well, it must have been after ten o'clock. I can prove by means of other witnesses that my daughter finally consented, on my representations, to give up the idea of marriage with Sir Eustace and has gone voluntarily to stay with relations of ours in Devonshire for a considerable time. But there again I have to admit that this has happened since the date of posting the chocolates.

"In short, Mrs. Fielder-Flemming has managed, with considerable skill, to put together a *prima facie*

case against me, though it was based on a mistaken assumption (I would point out to her that counsel is never constantly in and out of his client's premises, but meets him usually only in the presence of his solicitor, either at the former's place of business or in his own chambers), and I am quite ready, if this meeting thinks it advisable, for the matter to be investigated officially. More, I welcome such investigation in view of the slur that has been cast upon my name. Mr. President, I ask you, as representing the members as a whole, to take such action as you think fit."

Roger steered a wary course. "Speaking for myself, Sir Charles, I am quite sure that Mrs. Fielder-Flemming's reasoning, exceedingly clever though it was, has been based as you say upon an error, and really, as a matter of mere probability, I cannot see a father sending poisoned chocolates to the would-be fiancé of his own daughter. A moment's thought would show him the practical inevitability of the chocolates reaching eventually the daughter herself. I have my own opinion about this crime, but even apart from that I feel quite certain in my own mind that the case against Sir Charles has not really been proved."

"Mr. President," cut in Mrs. Fielder-Flemming, not without heat, "you may say what you like, but in the interests of——"

"I agree, Mr. President," Miss Dammers inter-

rupted incisively. "It is unthinkable that Sir Charles could have sent those chocolates."

"Humph!" said Mr. Bradley, unwilling to have his sport spoiled quite so soon.

"Hear, hear!" Mr. Chitterwick, with surprising decision.

"On the other hand," Roger pursued, "I quite see that Mrs. Fielder-Flemming is entitled to the official investigation which Sir Charles asks for, no less than is Sir Charles himself on behalf of his good name. And I agree with Sir Charles that she has certainly made out a *prima facie* case for investigation. But what I should like to stress is that so far only two members out of six have spoken, and it is not outside possibility that such startling developments may have been traced out by the time we have all had our turn, that the one we are discussing now may (I do not say that it will, but it *may*) have faded into insignificance."

"Oho!" murmured Mr. Bradley. "What has our worthy President got up his sleeve?"

"I therefore propose, as a formal motion," Roger concluded, disregarding the somewhat sour looks cast on him by Mrs. Fielder-Flemming, "that we shelve the question regarding Sir Charles entirely, for discussion or report either inside or outside this room, for one week from to-day, when any member who wishes may bring it up again for decision, fail-

ing which it passes into oblivion for good and all. Shall we vote on that? Those in favour?"

The motion was carried unanimously. Mrs. Fielder-Flemming would have liked to vote against it, but she had never yet belonged to any committee where all motions were not carried unanimously and habit was too strong for her.

The meeting then adjourned, rather oppressed.

CHAPTER IX

ROGER sat on the table in Moresby's room at Scotland Yard and swung his legs moodily. Moresby was being no help at all.

"I've told you, Mr. Sheringham," said the Chief Inspector, with a patient air. "It's not a bit of good you trying to pump me. I've told you all we know here. I'd help you if I could, as you know"—Roger snorted incredulously—"but we're simply at a dead end."

"So am I," Roger grunted. "And I don't like it."

"You'll soon get used to it, Mr. Sheringham," consoled Moresby, "if you take on this sort of job often."

"I simply can't get any further," Roger lamented. "In fact I don't think I want to. I'm practically sure I've been working on the wrong tack altogether. If the clue really does lie in Sir Eustace's private life, he's shielding it like the very devil. But I don't think it does."

"Humph!" said Moresby, who did.

"I've cross-examined his friends, till they're tired of the sight of me. I've cadged introductions to the friends of his friends, and the friends of his friends of his friends, and cross-examined them too. I've

haunted his club. And what have I discovered? That Sir Eustace was not only a daisy, as you'd told me already, but a perfectly indiscreet daisy at that; the quite unpleasant type, fortunately very much rarer than women suppose, that talks of his feminine successes, with names—though I think that in Sir Eustace's case this was simply through lack of imagination and not any natural caddishness. But you see what I mean. I've collected the names of scores of women, and they all lead—nowhere! If there is a woman at the bottom of it, I should have been sure to have heard of her by this time. And I haven't."

"And what about that American case, which we thought such an extraordinary parallel, Mr. Sheringham?"

"That was cited last night by one of our members," said Roger gloomily. "And a very pretty little deduction she drew from it."

"Ah, yes," nodded the Chief Inspector. "That would be Mrs. Fielder-Flemming, I suppose. She thinks Sir Charles Wildman is the guilty party, doesn't she?"

Roger stared at him. "How the devil did you know that? Oh! The unscrupulous old hag. She passed you the wink, did she?"

"Certainly not, sir," retorted Moresby with a virtuous air, as if half the difficult cases Scotland Yard solves are not edged in the first place along the right

path by means of "information received." "She hasn't said a word to us, though I'm not saying it wouldn't have been her duty to do so. But there isn't much that your members are doing which we don't know about, and thinking too for that matter."

"We're being shadowed," said Roger, pleased. "Yes, you told me at the beginning that we were to have an eye kept on us. Well, well. So in that case, are you going to arrest Sir Charles?"

"Not yet, I think, Mr. Sheringham," Moresby returned gravely.

"What do you think of the theory, then? She made out a very striking case for it."

"I should be very surprised," said Moresby with care, "to be convinced that Sir Charles Wildman had taken to murdering people himself instead of preventing us from hanging other murderers."

"Less paying, certainly," Roger agreed. "Yes, of course there can't be anything in it really, but it's a nice idea."

"And what theory are you going to put forward, Mr. Sheringham?"

"Moresby, I haven't the faintest idea. And I've got to speak to-morrow night, too. I suppose I can fake up something to pass muster, but it's a disappointment." Roger reflected for a moment. "I think the real trouble is that my interest in this case is simply academic. In all the others it has been personal,

and that not only gives one such a much bigger incentive to get to the bottom of a case but somehow actually helps one to do so. Bigger gleanings in the way of information, I suppose. And more intimate sidelights on the people concerned."

"Well, Mr. Sheringham," remarked Moresby, a little maliciously, "perhaps you'll admit now that we people here, whose interest is never personal (if you mean by that looking at a case from the inside instead of from the outside), have a bit of an excuse when we do come to grief over a case. Which, by the way," Moresby added with professional pride, "is precious seldom."

"I certainly do," Roger agreed feelingly. "Well, Moresby, I've got to go through the distressing business of buying a new hat before lunch. Do you feel like shadowing me to Bond Street? I might afterwards walk into a neighbouring hostelry, and it would be nice for you to be able to shadow me in there too."

"Sorry, Mr. Sheringham," said Chief Inspector Moresby pointedly, "but *I* have some work to do."

Roger removed himself.

He was feeling so depressed that he took a taxi to Bond Street instead of a 'bus, to cheer himself up. Roger, having been in London occasionally during the war-years and remembering the interesting habits cultivated by taxi-drivers during that period, had never taken one since when a 'bus would do as well.

The public memory is notoriously short, but the public's prejudices are equally notoriously long.

Roger had reason for his depression. He was, as he had told Moresby, not only at a dead end, but the conviction was beginning to grow in him that he had actually been working completely on the wrong lines; and the possibility that all the labour he had put into the case had simply been time wasted was a sad one. His initial interest in the affair, though great, had been as he had just realised only an academic one, such as he would feel in any cleverly planned murder; and in spite of the contacts established with persons who were acquainted with various of the protagonists he still felt himself awkwardly outside the case. There was no personal connection somehow to enable him really to get to grips with it. He was beginning to suspect that it was the sort of case, necessitating endless inquiries such as a private individual has neither the skill, the patience nor the time to prosecute, which can really only be handled by the official police.

It was hazard, two chance encounters that same day and almost within an hour, which put an entirely different complexion on the case to Roger's eyes, and translated at last his interest in it from the academic into the personal.

The first was in Bond Street.

Emerging from his hat-shop, the new hat at just

the right angle on his head, he saw bearing down on him Mrs. Verreker-le-Mesurer. Mrs. Verreker-le-Mesurer was small, exquisite, rich, comparatively young, and a widow, and she coveted Roger. Why, even Roger, who had his share of proper conceit, could not understand, but whenever he gave her the opportunity she would sit at his feet (metaphorically of course; he had no intention of giving her the opportunity to do so literally) and gaze up at him with her big brown eyes melting in earnest uplift. But she talked. She talked, in short, and talked, and talked. And Roger, who rather liked talking himself, could not bear it.

He tried to dart across the road, but there was no opening in the traffic stream. He was cornered. With a gay smile that masked a vituperative mind he spoilt the angle of his beautiful new hat.

Mrs. Verreker-le-Mesurer fastened on him gladly. "Oh, Mr. Sheringham! Just the very person I wanted to see. Mr. Sheringham, *do* tell me. In the strictest confidence of course. *Are* you taking up this dreadful business of *poor* Joan Bendix's death? Oh, don't—*don't* tell me you're not." Roger tried to tell her that he had hoped to do so, but she gave him no chance. "Oh, aren't you really? But it's too dreadful. You ought, you know, you really *ought* to try and find out who sent those chocolates to Sir Eustace Pennefather. I do think it's naughty of you not to."

Roger, the frozen grin of civilised intercourse on his face, again tried to edge a word in; without result.

"I was horrified when I heard of it. Simply horrified." Mrs. Verreker-le-Mesurer registered horror. "You see, Joan and I were such *very* close friends. Quite intimate. In fact we were at school together.—Did you say anything, Mr. Sheringham?"

Roger, who had allowed a faintly incredulous groan to escape him, hastily shook his head.

"And the awful thing, the truly *terrible* thing is that Joan brought the whole thing on herself. Isn't that appalling, Mr. Sheringham?"

Roger no longer wanted to escape. "What did you say?" he managed to insert, again incredulously.

"I suppose it's what they call tragic irony," Mrs. Verreker-le-Mesurer chattered happily. "Certainly it was tragic enough and I've never heard of anything so terribly ironical. You know about that bet she made with her husband, of course, so that he had to get her a box of chocolates and if he hadn't Sir Eustace would never have given him the poisoned ones but would have eaten them and died himself, and from all I hear about him good riddance? Well, Mr. Sheringham ——" Mrs. Verreker-le-Mesurer lowered her voice to a conspirator-like whisper and glanced about her in the approved manner. "I've never told any one else this, but I'm telling you because I know you'll appreciate it. You *are* interested in irony aren't you?"

"I adore it," Roger said mechanically. "Yes?"

"Well—*Joan wasn't playing fair!*"

"How do you mean?" Roger asked, bewildered.

Mrs. Verreker-le-Mesurer was artlessly pleased with her sensation. "Why, she ought not to have made that bet at all. It was a judgment on her. A terrible judgment of course, but the appalling thing is that she did bring it on herself, in a way. I'm so terribly distressed about it. Really, Mr. Sheringham, I can hardly bear to turn the light out when I go to bed. I see Joan's face simply looking at me in the dark. It's awful." And for a fleeting instant Mrs. Verreker-le-Mesurer's face did for once really mirror the emotion she professed: it looked quite haggard.

"Why oughtn't Mrs. Bendix to have made the bet?" Roger asked patiently.

"Oh! Why, because she'd seen the play before. We went together, the very first week it was on. She *knew* who the villain was all the time."

"By Jove!" Roger was as impressed as Mrs. Verreker-le-Mesurer could have wished. "The Avenging Chance again, eh? We're none of us immune from it."

"Poetic justice, you mean?" twittered Mrs. Verreker-le-Mesurer, to whom these remarks had been a trifle obscure. "Yes it was, in a way, wasn't it? Though really, the punishment was out of all proportion to the crime. Good gracious, if every woman

who cheats over a bet is to be killed for it, where would any of us be?" demanded Mrs. Verreker-le-Mesurer with unconscious frankness.

"Umph!" said Roger tactfully.

Mrs. Verreker-le-Mesurer glanced rapidly up and down the pavement, and moistened her lips. Roger had an odd impression that she was talking not as usual just for the sake of talking, but in some recondite way to escape from not talking. It was as if she was more distressed over her friend's death than she cared to show and found some relief in babbling. It interested Roger also to notice that fond though she had probably been of the dead woman, she now found herself driven as if against her will to hint at blame even while praising her. It was as though she was able thus to extract some subtle consolation for the actual death.

"But Joan Bendix of all people! That's what I can't get over, Mr. Sheringham. I should never have thought Joan *would* do a thing like that. Joan was such a nice girl. A little close with money perhaps, considering how well-off she was, but that isn't anything. Of course I know it was only fun, and pulling her husband's leg, but I always used to think Joan was such a *serious* girl, if you know what I mean."

"Quite," said Roger, who could understand plain English as well as most people.

"I mean, ordinary people don't talk about honour,

and truth, and playing the game, and all those things one takes for granted. But Joan did. She was always saying that this wasn't honourable, or that wouldn't be playing the game. Well, she paid herself for not playing the game, poor girl, didn't she? Still, I suppose it all goes to prove the truth of the old saying."

"What old saying?" asked Roger, almost hypnotised by this flow.

"Why, that still waters run deep. Joan must have been deep after all, I'm afraid." Mrs. Verreker-le-Mesurer sighed. It was evidently a grave social error to be deep. "Not that I want to say anything against her now she's dead, poor darling, but—well, what I mean is, I do think psychology is so very interesting, don't you, Mr. Sheringham?"

"Quite fascinating," Roger agreed gravely. "Well, I'm afraid I must be——"

"And what does that man, Sir Eustace Pennefather, think about it all?" demanded Mrs. Verreker-le-Mesurer, with an expression of positive vindictiveness. "After all, he's as responsible for Joan's death, as anybody."

"Oh, really." Roger had not conceived any particular love for Sir Eustace, but he felt constrained to defend him against this charge. "Really, I don't think you can say that, Mrs. Verreker-le-Mesurer."

"I can, and I do," affirmed that lady. "Have you ever met him, Mr. Sheringham? I hear he's a horrible

creature. Always running after some woman or other, and when he's tired of her just drops her—biff!—like that. Is it true?"

"I'm afraid I can't tell you," Roger said coldly. "I don't know him at all."

"Well, it's common talk who he's taken up with now," retorted Mrs. Verreker-le-Mesurer, perhaps a trifle more pink than the delicate aids to nature on her cheeks would have warranted. "Half-a-dozen people have told me. That Bryce woman, of all people. You know, the wife of the oil man, or petrol, or whatever he made his money in."

"I've never heard of her," Roger said, quite untruthfully.

"It began about a week ago, they say," rattled on this red-hot gossiper. "To console himself for not getting Dora Wildman, I suppose. Well, thank goodness Sir Charles had the sense to put his foot down there. He did, didn't he? I heard so the other day. Horrible man! You'd have thought that such a dreadful thing as being practically responsible for poor Joan's death would have sobered him up a little, wouldn't you? But not a bit of it. As a matter of fact I believe he——"

"Have you seen any shows lately?" Roger asked in a loud voice.

Mrs. Verreker-le-Mesurer stared at him, for a

moment nonplussed. "Shows? Yes, I've seen almost everything, I think. Why, Mr. Sheringham?"

"I just wondered. The new revue at the Pavilion's quite good, isn't it? Well, I'm afraid I must——"

"Oh, don't!" Mrs. Verreker-le-Mesurer shuddered delicately. "I was there the night before Joan's death." (Can no subject take us away from that for a moment? thought Roger). "Lady Cavelstoke had a box and asked me to join her party."

"Yes?" Roger was wondering if it would be considered rude if he simply handed the lady off, as at rugger, and dived for the nearest opening in the traffic. "Quite a good show," he said at random, edging restlessly towards the curb. "I liked that sketch, *The Sempiternal Triangle,* particularly."

"*The Sempiternal Triangle?*" repeated Mrs. Verreker-le-Mesurer vaguely.

"Yes, quite near the beginning."

"Oh! Then I may not have seen it. I got there a few minutes late, I'm afraid. But then," said Mrs. Verreker-le-Mesurer with pathos, "I always do seem to be late for everything." Roger noted mentally that the few minutes was by way of a euphemism, as were most of Mrs. Verreker-le-Mesurer's statements regarding herself. *The Sempiternal Triangle* had certainly not been in the first half-hour of the performance.

"Ah!" Roger looked fixedly at an oncoming 'bus.

"I'm afraid you'll have to excuse me, Mrs. Verrekerle-Mesurer. There's a man on that 'bus who wants to speak to me. *Scotland Yard!*" he hissed, in an impressive whisper.

"Oh! Then—then does that mean you *are* looking into poor Joan's death, Mr. Sheringham? *Do* tell me! I won't breathe it to a soul."

Roger looked round him with a mysterious air and frowned in the approved manner, "Yes!" he nodded, his finger to his lips. "But not a word, Mrs. Verrekerle-Mesurer."

"Of course not, I promise." But Roger was disappointed to notice that the lady did not seem quite so impressed as he had hoped. From her expression he was almost ready to believe that she suspected how unavailing his efforts had been, and was a little sorry that he had taken on more than he could manage.

But the 'bus had now reached them, and with a hasty "Good-bye" Roger swung himself on to the step as it lumbered past. With awful stealth, feeling those big brown eyes fixed in awe on his back, he climbed the steps and took his seat, after an exaggerated scrutiny of the other passengers, beside a perfectly inoffensive little man in a bowler hat. The little man, who happened to be a clerk in the employment of a monumental mason at Tooting, looked at him resentfully. There were plenty of quite empty seats all round them.

The 'bus swung into Piccadilly, and Roger got off at the Rainbow club. He was lunching once again with a member. Roger had spent most of the last ten days asking such members of the Rainbow club as he knew, however remotely, out to lunch in order to be asked to the club in return. So far nothing helpful had arisen out of all this wasted labour, and he anticipated nothing more to-day.

Not that the member was at all reluctant to talk about the tragedy. He had been at school with Bendix, it appeared, and was as ready to adopt responsibility for him on the strength of this tie as Mrs. Verreker-le-Mesurer had been for Mrs. Bendix. He plumed himself more than a little therefore on having a more intimate connection with the business than his fellow-members. Indeed one gathered that the connection was even a trifle closer than that of Sir Eustace himself. Roger's host was that kind of man.

As they were talking a man entered the dining-room and walked past their table. Roger's host became abruptly silent. The newcomer threw him an abrupt nod and passed on.

Roger's host leant forward across the table and spoke in the hushed tones of one to whom a revelation has been vouchsafed. "Talk of the devil! That was Bendix himself. First time I've seen him in here since it happened. Poor devil! It knocked him all to pieces, you know. I've never seen a man so devoted to

his wife. It was a byword. Did you see how ghastly he looked?" All this in a tactful whisper that must have been far more obvious to the subject of it had he happened to be looking their way than the loudest bellowing.

Roger nodded shortly. He had caught a glimpse of Bendix's face and been shocked by it even before he learned his identity. It was haggard and pale and seamed with lines of bitterness, prematurely old. "Hang it all," he now thought, much moved, "somebody really must make an effort. If the murderer isn't found soon it will kill that chap too."

Aloud he said, somewhat at random and certainly without tact: "He didn't exactly fall on your neck. I thought you two were such bosom friends?"

His host looked uncomfortable. "Oh, well, you must make allowances just at present," he hedged. "Besides, we weren't *bosom* friends exactly. As a matter of fact he was a year or two senior to me. Or it might have been three even. We were in different houses too. And he was on the modern side of course (can you imagine the son of his father being anything else?), while I was a classical bird."

"I see," said Roger quite gravely, realising that his host's actual contact with Bendix at school had been limited, at most, to that of the latter's toe with the former's hinder parts.

He left it at that.

For the rest of lunch he was a little inattentive. Something was nagging at his brain, and he could not identify it. Somewhere, somehow, during the last hour, he felt, a vital piece of information had been conveyed to him and he had never grasped its importance.

It was not until he was putting on his coat half-an-hour later, and for the moment had given up trying to worry his mind into giving up its booty, that the realisation suddenly came to him unbidden, in accordance with its usual and maddening way. He stopped dead, one arm in his coat-sleeve, the other in act to fumble.

"By Jove!" he said softly.

"Anything the matter, old man?" asked his host, now mellowed by much port.

"No, thanks; nothing," said Roger hastily, coming to earth again.

Outside the club he hailed a taxi.

For probably the first time in her life Mrs. Verreker-le-Mesurer had given somebody a constructive idea.

For the rest of the day Roger was very busy indeed.

CHAPTER X

THE president called on Mr. Bradley to hold forth.

Mr. Bradley stroked his moustache and mentally shot his cuffs.

He had begun his career (when still Percy Robinson) as a motor-salesman, and had discovered that there is more money in manufacturing. Now he manufactured detective stories, and found his former experience of the public's gullibility not unhelpful. He was still his own salesman, but occasionally had difficulty in remembering that he was no longer mounted on a stand at Olympia. Everything and everybody in this world, including Morton Harrogate Bradley, he heartily despised, except only Percy Robinson. He sold, in tens of thousands.

"This is rather unfortunate for me," he began, in the correct gentlemanly drawl, as if addressing an audience of morons. "I had rather been under the impression that I should be expected to produce as a murderer the most unlikely person, in the usual tradition; and Mrs. Fielder-Flemming has cut the ground away from under my feet. I don't see how I can possibly find you a more unlikely murderer than Sir Charles here. All of us who have the misfortune to

speak after Mrs. Fielder-Flemming will have to be content to pile up so many anti-climaxes.

"Not that I haven't done my best. I studied the case according to my own lights, and it led me to a conclusion which certainly surprised myself quite a lot. But as I said, after the last speaker it will probably seem to everybody else a dismal anti-climax. Let me see now, where did I begin? Oh, yes; with the poison.

"Now the use of nitrobenzene as the poisoning agent interested me quite a lot. I find it extremely significant. Nitrobenzene is the last thing one would expect inside those chocolates. I've made something of a study of poisons, in connection with my work, and I've never heard of nitrobenzene being employed in a criminal case before. There are cases on record of its use in suicide, and in accidental poisoning, but not more than three or four all told.

"I'm surprised that this point doesn't seem to have struck either of my predecessors. The really interesting thing is that so few people know nitrobenzene as a poison at all. Even the experts don't. I was speaking to a man who got a Science scholarship at Cambridge and specialised in chemistry, and he had actually never heard of it as a poison. As a matter of fact I found I knew a good deal more about it than he did. A commercial chemist would certainly never think of it as among the ordinary poisons. It isn't even

listed as such, and the list is comprehensive enough. Well, all this seems most significant to me.

"Then there are other points about it. It's used most extensively in commerce. In fact it's the kind of thing that might be used in almost any manufacture. It's a solvent, of quite a universal kind. We've been told that its chief use is in making aniline dyes. That may be the most important one, but it certainly isn't the most extensive. It's used a lot in confectionery, as we were also told, and perfumery as well. But really I can't attempt to give you a list of its uses. They range from chocolates to motor-car tyres. The important thing is that it's perfectly easy to get hold of.

"For that matter it's perfectly easy to make too. Any schoolboy knows how to treat benzol with nitric acid to get nitrobenzene. I've done it myself a hundred times. The veriest smattering of chemical knowledge is all that's wanted, and nothing in the way of expensive apparatus. Or, so far as that goes, it could be done equally by somebody without any chemical knowledge at all; that is, the actual process of making it. Oh, and it could be made quite secretly by the way. Nobody need even guess. But I think just a little chemical knowledge at any rate would be wanted, ever to set one about making it at all. At least, for this particular purpose.

"Well, so far as the case as a whole was concerned, this use of nitrobenzene seemed to me not only the

sole original feature but by far the most important piece of evidence. Not in the way that prussic acid is valuable evidence for the reason that prussic acid is so hard to obtain, because once its use was determined anybody could get hold of or make nitrobenzene, and that of course is a tremendous point in favour of it from the would-be murderer's point of view. No, what I mean is that the sort of person who would ever think of employing the stuff at all ought to be definable within surprisingly narrow limits."

Mr. Bradley stopped a moment to light a cigarette, and if he was secretly pleased that his fellow-members showed the extent to which he had engaged their interest by not uttering a word until he was ready to go on, he did not divulge the fact. Surveying them for a moment as if inspecting a class composed entirely of half-wits, he took up his argument again.

"First of all, then, we can credit this user of nitrobenzene with a minimum at any rate of chemical knowledge. Or perhaps I ought to qualify that. Either chemical knowledge, or specialised knowledge. A chemist's assistant, for instance, who was interested enough in his job to read it up after shop-hours would fit the bill for the first case, and a woman employed in a factory where nitrobenzene was used and where the employees had been warned against its poisonous properties would do for an example of the second. There are two kinds of person, it seems to me, who

might think of using the stuff as a poison at all, and the first kind is subdivided into the two classes I've mentioned.

"But it's the second kind that I think we are much more probably dealing with in this crime. This is a more intelligent sort of person altogether.

"In this category the chemist's assistant becomes an amateur dabbler in chemistry, the girl in the factory a woman-doctor, let us say, with an interest in toxicology, or, to get away from the specialist, a highly intelligent lady with a strong interest in criminology particularly on its toxicological side—just, in fact, like Mrs. Fielder-Flemming here." Mrs. Fielder-Flemming gasped indignantly and Sir Charles, though momentarily startled at the unexpected quarter from which was dealt this tit for the tats he had lately suffered at the gasping lady's hands, emitted the next instant a sound which from anybody else could only have been described as a guffaw. "All of them, you understand," continued Mr. Bradley with complete serenity, "the kind of people who might be expected not only to keep a Taylor's Medical Jurisprudence on their shelves but to consult it frequently.

"I agree with you, you see, Mrs. Fielder-Flemming, that the method of this crime does show traces of criminological knowledge. You cited one case which was certainly a remarkable parallel, Sir

Charles cited another, and I am going to cite yet a third. It is a regular jumble of old cases, and I am quite sure, as you are, that this is something more than a mere coincidence. I'd arrived at this conclusion myself, of criminological knowledge, before you mentioned it at all, and I was helped to it as well by the strong feeling that whoever sent those chocolates to Sir Eustace possesses a Taylor. That is a pure guess, I admit, but in my copy of Taylor the article on nitrobenzene occurs on the very next page after cyanide of potassium; and there seems to me food for thought there." The speaker paused a moment.

Mr. Chitterwick nodded. "I think I see. You mean, anybody deliberately searching the pages for a poison that would fulfil certain requirements . . . ?"

"Exactly," Mr. Bradley concurred.

"You lay great stress on this matter of the poison," Sir Charles remarked, almost genial. "Do you tell us that you think you've identified the murderer by deductions drawn from this one point alone?"

"No, Sir Charles, I don't think I can go quite so far as that. I lay so much stress on it because, as I said, it's the only really original feature of the crime. By itself it won't solve the problem, but considered in conjunction with other features I do think it should go a long way towards doing so—or at any rate provide such a check on a person suspected for other reasons as to turn suspicion into certainty.

"Let's look at it for instance in the light of the crime as a whole. I think the first thing one realises is that this crime is the work not only of an intelligent person but of a well-educated one too. Well, you see, that rules out at once the first division of people who might be expected to think of using nitrobenzene as the poisoning agent. Gone are our chemist's assistant and our factory-girl. We can concentrate on our intelligent, well-educated person, with an interest in criminology, some knowledge of toxicology, and, if I'm not very much mistaken (and I very seldom am), a copy of Taylor or some similar book on his or her shelves.

"That, my dear Watsons, is what the criminal's singular choice of nitrobenzene has to tell me." And Mr. Bradley stroked the growth on his upper lip with an offensive complacency that was not wholly assumed. Mr. Bradley took some pains to impress on the world how pleased he was with himself, but the pose was not without its foundation in fact.

"Most ingenious, certainly," murmured Mr. Chitterwick, duly impressed.

"So now let's get on with it," observed Miss Dammers, not at all impressed. "What's your theory? That is, if you've really got one."

"Oh, I've got one all right." Mr. Bradley smiled in a superior manner. This was the first time he had succeeded in provoking Miss Dammers to snap at

him, and he was rather pleased. "But let's take things in their proper order. I want to show you how inevitably I was led to my conclusion, and I can only do that by tracing out my own footsteps, so to speak. Having made my deductions from the poison itself, then, I set about examining the other clues to see if they would lead me to a result that I could check by the other. First of all I concentrated on the notepaper of the forged letter, the only really valuable clue apart from the poison.

"Now this piece of notepaper puzzled me. For some reason, which I couldn't identify, the name of Mason's seemed to strike a reminiscent note to me. I felt sure that I'd heard of Mason's in some other connection than just through their excellent chocolates. At last I remembered.

"I'm afraid I must touch here on the personal, and I apologise in advance, Sir Charles, for the lapse of taste. My sister, before she married, was a shorthand typist." Mr. Bradley's extreme languor all of a sudden indicated that he felt this connection needed some defence and was determined not to give it. The next instant he gave it. "That is to say, her education put her on rather a different level from the usual shorthand-typist, and she was, in point of fact, a trained secretary.

"She had joined an establishment run by a lady who supplied secretaries to business firms to take the

places temporarily of girls in responsible positions who were ill, or away on holiday, or anything like that. Including my sister there were only two or three girls at the place, and the posts they went to only lasted as a rule for two or three weeks. Each girl would therefore have a good many such posts in the course of a year. However, I did remember distinctly that one of the firms to which my sister went while she was there was Mason's, as temporary secretary to one of the directors.

"This seemed to me possibly useful. It wouldn't be likely that she could throw a sidelight on the murder, but at any rate she might be able to give me introductions to one or two members of Mason's staff if necessary. So I went down to see her about it.

"She remembered quite well. It was between three and four years ago, and she liked being there so much that she had thought quite seriously of putting in for a permanent secretaryship with the firm, should one be available. Naturally she hadn't got to know any of the staff really well, but quite enough to give me the introductions if I wanted them.

" 'By the way,' I happened to say to her casually, 'I saw the letter that was sent to Sir Eustace with the chocolates, and not only Mason's name but the actual paper itself struck me as familiar. I suppose you wrote to me on it while you were there?'

" 'I don't know that I ever did that,' she said, 'but

of course the paper was familiar to you. You've played paper-games here often enough, haven't you? You know we always use it. It's such a convenient size.' Paper-games, I should explain, have always been a favourite thing in our family.

"It's funny how a connection will stick in the mind, but not the actual circumstances of it. Of course I remembered then at once. There was quite a pile of the paper, in one of the drawers of my sister's writing-table. I'd often torn it into strips for our paper-games myself.

" 'But how did you get hold of it?' I asked her.

"It seemed to me that she answered rather evasively, just saying that she'd got it from the office when she was working there. I pressed her, and at last she told me that one evening she was just on the point of leaving the office when she remembered that some friends were coming in after dinner at home. We should almost certainly play a paper-game of some kind, and we had run out of suitable paper. She hurried up the stairs again back to the office, dumped her attaché-case on the table and opened it, hastily snatched up some paper from the pile beside her typewriter, and threw it into the case. In her hurry she didn't realise how much she'd taken, and that supply, which was supposed to tide us over one evening, had actually lasted for nearly four years. She must have taken something like half a ream.

"Well, I went away from my sister's house rather startled. Before I left I examined the remaining sheets, and so far as I could see they were exactly like the one on which the letter was typed. Even the edges were a little discoloured too. I was more than startled: I was alarmed. Because I ought to tell you that it had already occurred to me that of all the ways of going about the search for the person who had sent that letter to Sir Eustace, the one that seemed most hopeful was to look for its writer among the actual employees, or ex-employees, of the firm itself.

"As a matter of fact this discovery of mine had a more disconcerting side still. On thinking over the case the idea had struck me that in the two matters of the notepaper and the method itself of the crime it was quite possible that the police, and every one else, had been putting the cart before the horse. It had been taken for granted apparently that the murderer had first of all decided on the method, and then set about getting hold of the notepaper to carry it out.

"But isn't it far more feasible that the notepaper should have been already there, in the criminal's ownership, and that it was the chance possession of it which actually suggested the method of the crime? In that case, of course, the likelihood of the notepaper being traced to the murderer would be very small indeed, whereas in the other case there is al-

ways that possibility. Had that occurred to you for instance, Mr. President?"

"I must admit that it hadn't," Roger confessed. "And yet, like Holmes's tricks, the possibility's evident enough now it's brought forward. I must say, it strikes me as being a very sound point, Bradley."

"Psychologically, of course," agreed Miss Dammers, "it's perfect."

"Thank you," murmured Mr. Bradley. "Then you'll be able to understand just how disconcerting that discovery of mine was. Because if there was anything in that point at all, anybody who had in his or her possession some old notepaper of Mason's, with slightly discoloured edges, immediately became suspect."

"Hr-r-r-r-mph!" Sir Charles cleared his throat forcibly by way of comment. The implication was obvious. Gentlemen don't suspect their own sisters.

"Dear, dear," clucked Mr. Chitterwick, more humanly.

Mr. Bradley went on to pile up the agony. "And there was another thing, which I could not overlook. My sister before she went in for her training as a secretary, had played with the idea of becoming a hospital nurse. She went through a short course in nursing as a young girl, and was always thoroughly interested in it. She would read not only books on nursing itself, but medical books too. Several times."

said Mr. Bradley solemnly, "I've seen her studying my own copy of Taylor, apparently quite absorbed in it."

He paused again, but this time nobody commented. The general feeling was that this was getting really too much of a good thing.

"Well, I went home and thought it over. Of course it seemed absurd to put my own sister on the list of suspects, and at the very head of it too. One doesn't connect one's own circle with the idea of murder. The two things don't mix at all. Yet I couldn't fail to realise that if it had been anybody else in question but my sister I should be feeling quite jubilant over the prospect of solving the case. But as things were, what was I to do?"

"In the end," said Mr. Bradley smugly, "I did what I thought my duty and faced the situation. I went back to my sister's house the next day and asked her squarely whether she had ever had any kind of relations with Sir Eustace Pennefather, and if so what. She looked at me blankly and said that up till the time of the murder she had never heard of the man. I believed her. I asked her if she could remember what she had been doing on the evening before the murder. She looked at me still more blankly and said that she had been in Manchester with her husband at that time, they had stayed at the Peacock Hotel, and in the evening had been to a cinema wher-

they had seen a film called, so far as she could recall, *Fires of Fate*. Again I believed her.

"As a matter of routine precaution, however, I checked her statements later and found them perfectly correct; for the time of the posting of the parcel she had an unshakable alibi. I felt more relieved than I can say." Mr. Bradley spoke in a low voice, with pathos and restraint, but Roger caught his eye as he looked up and there was a mocking glint in it which made the President feel vaguely uneasy. The trouble with Mr. Bradley was that one never quite knew with him.

"Having drawn a blank with my first ticket, then, I tabulated the conclusions I'd formed to date and set about considering the other points in the case.

"It then struck me that the Chief Inspector from Scotland Yard had been somewhat reticent about the evidence that night he addressed us. So I rang him up and asked him a few questions that had occurred to me. From him I learnt that the typewriter was a Hamilton No. 4, that is, the ordinary Hamilton model; that the hand-printed address on the cover was written with a fountain-pen, almost certainly an Onyx fitted with a medium-broad nib; that the ink was Harfield's Fountain-Pen Ink; and that there was nothing to be learned from the wrapping-paper (ordinary brown) or the string. That there were no finger-prints anywhere we had been told.

"Well, I suppose I ought not to admit it, considering how I earn my living, but upon my soul I haven't the faintest idea how a professional detective goes about a job of work," said Mr. Bradley with candour. "It's easy enough in a book, of course, because there are a certain number of things which the author wants found out and these he lets his detective discover, and no others. In real life, no doubt, it doesn't pan out quite like that.

"Anyhow, what I did was to copy my own detectives' methods and set about the business in as systematic a way as I could. That is to say, I made a careful list of all the available evidence, both as to fact and to character (and it was surprising how much there was when one came to tabulate it), and drew as many deductions as I could from each piece, at the same time trying to keep a perfectly open mind as to the identity of the person who was to hatch out from my nest of completed conclusions.

"In other words," said Mr. Bradley, not without severity, "I did *not* decide that Lady A or Sir Somebody B had such a good motive for the crime that she or he must undoubtedly have done it, and then twist my evidence to fit this convenient theory."

"Hear, hear!" Roger felt constrained to approve.

"Hear, hear!" echoed in turn both Alicia Dammers and Mr. Ambrose Chitterwick.

Sir Charles and Mrs. Fielder-Flemming glanced at

each other and then hastily away again, for all the world like two children in a Sunday-school who have been caught doing quite the wrong thing together.

"Dear me," murmured Mr. Bradley, "this is all very exhausting. May I have five minutes' rest, Mr. President, and half a cigarette?"

The President kindly gave Mr. Bradley an interval in which to restore himself.

CHAPTER XI

"I HAVE always thought," resumed Mr. Bradley, restored, "I have always thought that murders may be divided into two classes, closed or open. By a closed murder I mean one committed in a certain closed circle of persons, such as a house-party, in which it is known that the murderer is limited to membership of that actual group. This is by far the commoner form in fiction. An open murder I call one in which the criminal is not limited to any particular group but might be almost any one in the whole world. This, of course, is almost invariably what happens in real life.

"The case with which we're dealing has this peculiarity, that one can't place it quite definitely in either category. The police say that it's an open murder; both our previous speakers here seem to regard it as a closed one.

"It's a question of the motive. If one agrees with the police that it is the work of some fanatic or criminal lunatic, then it certainly is an open murder; anybody without an alibi in London that night might have posted the parcel. If one's of the opinion that the motive was a personal one, connected with Sir Eustace himself, then the murderer is confined

to the closed circle of people who have had relations of one sort or another with Sir Eustace.

"And talking of posting that parcel, I must just make a diversion to tell you something really interesting. For all I know to the contrary, I might have seen the murderer with my own eyes, in the very act of posting it! As it happened, I was passing through Southampton Street that evening at just about a quarter to nine. Little did I guess, as Mr. Edgar Wallace would say, that the first act of this tragic drama was possibly being unfolded at that very minute under my unsuspecting nose. Not even a premonition of disaster caused me to falter in my stride. Providence was evidently being somewhat close with premonitions that night. But if only my sluggish instincts had warned me, how much trouble I might have saved us all. Alas," said Mr. Bradley sadly, "such is life.

"However, that's neither here nor there. We were discussing closed and open murders.

"I was determined to form no definite opinions either way, so to be on the safe side I treated this as an open murder. I then had the position that every one in the whole wide world was under suspicion. To narrow down the field a little, I set to work to build up the one individual who really did it, out of the very meagre indications he or she had given us.

"I had the conclusions drawn already from the choice of nitrobenzene, which I've explained to you.

But as a corollary to the good education, I added the very significant postscript: but not public-school or university. Don't you agree, Sir Charles? It simply wouldn't be done."

"Public-school men have been known to commit murders before now," pointed out Sir Charles, somewhat at sea.

"Oh, granted. But not in such an underhand way as this. The public-school code does stand for something, surely, even in murder. So, I am sure, any public-school man would tell me. This isn't a gentlemanly murder at all. A public-school man, if he could ever bring himself to anything so unconventional as murder, would use an axe or a revolver or something which would bring him and his victim face to face. He would never murder a man behind his back, so to speak. I'm quite sure of that.

"Then another obvious conclusion is that he's exceptionally neat with his fingers. To unwrap those chocolates, drain them, re-fill them, plug up the holes with melted chocolate, and wrap them up in their silver paper again to look as if they've never been tampered with—I can tell you, that's no easy job. And all in gloves too, remember.

"I thought at first that the beautiful way it was done pointed strongly to a woman. However, I carried out an experiment and got a dozen or so of my friends to try their hands at it, men and women, and

out of the whole lot I was the only one (I say it without any particular pride) who made a really good job of it. So it wasn't necessarily a woman. But manual dexterity's a good point to establish.

"Then there was the matter of the exact six-minim dose in each chocolate. That's very illuminating, I think. It argues a methodical turn of mind amounting to a real passion for symmetry. There are such people. They can't bear that the pictures on a wall don't balance each other exactly. I know, because I'm rather that way myself. Symmetry is synonymous with order, to my mind. I can quite see how the murderer came to fill the chocolates in that way. I should probably have done so myself. Unconsciously.

"Then I think we can credit him or her with a creative mind. A crime like this isn't done on the spur of the moment. It's deliberately created, bit by bit, scene by scene, built up exactly as a play is built up. Don't you agree, Mrs. Fielder-Flemming?"

"It wouldn't have occurred to me, but it may be true."

"Oh, yes; a lot of thought must have gone to the carrying of it through. I don't think we need worry about the plagiarism from other crimes. The greatest creative minds aren't above adapting the ideas of other people to their own uses. I do myself. So do you, I expect, Sheringham; so do you, no doubt, Miss

Dammers; so do you at times, I should imagine, Mrs. Fielder-Flemming. Be honest now, all of you."

A subdued murmur of honesty acknowledged occasional lapses in this direction.

"Of course. Look how Sullivan used to adapt old church music, and turn a Gregorian chant into *A Pair of Sparkling Eyes,* or something equally unchantlike. It's permissible. Well, there's all that to help with the portrait of our unknown and, lastly, there must be present in his or her mental make-up the particular cold, relentless inhumanity of the poisoner. That's all, I think. But it's something, isn't it? One ought to be able to go a fair way towards recognising our criminal if one ever ran across a person with these varied characteristics.

"Oh, and there's one other point I mustn't forget. The parallel crime. I'm surprised nobody's mentioned this. To my mind it's a closer parallel than any we've had yet. It isn't a well-known case, but you've all probably heard of it. The murder of Dr. Wilson, at Philadelphia, just twenty years ago.

"I'll run through it briefly. This man Wilson received one morning what purported to be a sample bottle of ale, sent to him by a well-known brewery. There was a letter with it, written apparently on their official notepaper, and the address-label had the firm's name printed on it. Wilson drank the beer at lunch,

and died immediately. The stuff was saturated with cyanide of potassium.

"It was soon established that the beer hadn't come from the brewery at all, which had sent out no samples. It had been delivered through the local express company, but all they could say was that it had been sent to them for delivery by a man. The printed label and the letter-paper had been forged, printed specially for the occasion.

"The mystery was never solved. The printing-press used to print the letter-heading and label couldn't be traced, though the police visited every printing-works in the whole of America. The very motive for the murder was never even satisfactorily ascertained. A typical open murder. The bottle arrived out of the blue, and the murderer remained in it.

"You see the close resemblance to this case, particularly in the supposed sample. As Mrs. Fielder-Flemming has pointed out, it's almost too good to be a coincidence. Our murderer *must* have had that case in mind, with its (for the murderer) most successful outcome. As a matter of fact there was a possible motive. Wilson was a notorious abortionist, and somebody may have wanted to stop his activities. Conscience, I suppose. There are people who have such a thing. That's another parallel with this affair, you see. Sir Eustace is a notorious evil-liver. And that goes to support the police view, of an anonymous

fanatic. There's a good deal to be said for that view, I think.

"But I must get on with my own exposition.

"Well, having reached this stage I tabulated my conclusions and drew up a list of conditions which this criminal of ours must fulfil. Now I should like to point out that these conditions of mine were so many and so varied that if anybody could be found to fit them the chances, Sir Charles, would not be a mere million to one but several million to one that he or she must be the guilty person. This isn't just haphazard statement, it's cold mathematical fact.

"I have twelve conditions, and the mathematical odds against their all being fulfilled in one person are actually (if my arithmetic stands the test) four hundred and seventy-nine million, one thousand and six hundred to one. And that, mark you, is if all the chances were even ones. But they're not. That he should have some knowledge of criminology is at least a ten to one chance. That he should be able to get hold of Mason's notepaper must be more than a hundred to one against.

"Well, taking it all in all," opined Mr. Bradley, "I should think the real odds must be somewhere about four billion, seven hundred and ninety million, five hundred and sixteen thousand, four hundred and fifty-eight to one. In other words, it's a snip. Does every one agree?"

Every one was far too stunned to disagree.

"Right; then we're all of one mind," said Mr. Bradley cheerfully. "So I'll read you my list."

He shuffled the pages of a little pocket-book and began to read:—

"CONDITIONS TO BE FILLED BY THE CRIMINAL

"1. Must have at least an elementary amount of chemical knowledge.

"2. Must have at least an elementary knowledge of criminology.

"3. Must have had a reasonably good education, but not public school or University.

"4. Must have possession of, or access to, Mason's notepaper.

"5. Must have possession of, or access to, a Hamilton No. 4 typewriter.

"6. Must have been in the neighbourhood of Southampton Street, Strand, during the critical hour, 8.30–9.30, on the evening before the murder.

"7. Must be in possession of, or had access to, an Onyx fountain-pen, fitted with a medium-broad nib.

"8. Must be in possession of, or had access to, Harfield's Fountain-Pen Ink.

"9. Must have something of a creative mind, but not above adapting the creations of others.

"10. Must be more than ordinarily neat with the fingers.

"11. Must be a person of methodical habits, probably with a strong feeling for symmetry.

"12. Must have the cold inhumanity of the poisoner.

"By the way," said Mr. Bradley, stowing away his pocket-book again, "you see that I've agreed with you too, Sir Charles, that the murderer would never have entrusted the posting of the parcel to another person. Oh, and one other point. For purposes of reference. If anybody wants to see an Onyx pen, and fitted with a medium-broad nib as well, take a look at mine. And curiously enough it's filled with Harfield's Fountain-Pen Ink too." The pen circulated round the table while Mr. Bradley, leaning back in his chair, surveyed its progress with a fatherly smile.

"And that," said Mr. Bradley, when the pen had been restored to him, "is that."

Roger thought he saw the explanation of the glint that had appeared from time to time in Mr. Bradley's eye. "You mean, the problem's still to solve. The four billion chances were too much for you. You couldn't find any one to fit your own conditions?"

"Well," said Mr. Bradley, apparently most reluct-

ant all of a sudden, "if you must know, I have found some one who does."

"You have? Good man! Who?"

"Hang it all, you know," said the coy Mr. Bradley, "I hardly like to tell you. It's really too ridiculous."

A chorus of expostulation, cajolement, and encouragement was immediately directed at him. Never had Mr. Bradley found himself so popular.

"You'll laugh at me if I do tell you."

It appeared that everybody would rather suffer the tortures of the Inquisition than laugh at Mr. Bradley. Never can five people less disposed to mirth at Mr. Bradley's expense have been gathered together.

Mr. Bradley seemed to take heart. "Well, it's very awkward. Upon my soul I don't know what to do about it. If I can show you that the person I have in mind not only fulfils each of my conditions exactly, but also had a certain interest (remote I admit, but capable of proof) in sending those chocolates to Sir Eustace, have I your assurance, Mr. President, that the meeting will give me its serious advice as to what my duty is in the matter?"

"Good gracious, yes," at once agreed Roger, much excited. Roger had thought that he might be on the verge of solving the problem himself, but he was quite sure that he and Bradley had not hit upon the same solution. And if the fellow really had got some one . . . "Good Lord, yes!" said Roger.

Mr. Bradley looked round the table in a worried way. "Well, can't you see who I mean? Dear me, I thought I'd told you in almost every other sentence."

Nobody had seen whom he meant.

"The only possible person, so far as I can see, who could ever be expected to fulfil all those twelve conditions?" said this harassed version of Mr. Bradley, dishevelling his carefully flattened hair. "Why, dash it, not my sister at all, but—but—but *me,* of course!"

There was a stupefied silence.

"D-did you say, *you?*" finally ventured Mr. Chitterwick.

Mr. Bradley turned gloomy eyes on him. "Obviously, I'm afraid. *I* have more than an elementary knowledge of chemistry. *I* can make nitrobenzene and often have. *I*'m a criminologist. *I*'ve had a reasonably good education, but not public-school or University. *I* had access to Mason's notepaper. *I* possess a Hamilton No. 4 typewriter. *I* was in Southampton Street itself during the critical hour. *I* possess an Onyx pen, fitted with a medium-broad nib and filled with Harfield's ink. *I* have something of a creative mind, but *I*'m not above adapting the ideas of other people. *I*'m far more than ordinarily neat with my fingers. *I*'m a person of methodical habits, with a strong feeling for symmetry. And apparently *I* have the cold inhumanity of the poisoner.

"Yes," sighed Mr. Bradley, "there's simply no get-

ting away from it. *I* sent those chocolates to Sir Eustace.

"I must have done. I've proved it conclusively. And the extraordinary thing is that I don't remember a single jot about it. I suppose I did it when I was thinking about something else. I've noticed I'm getting a little absent-minded at times."

Roger was struggling with an inordinate wish to laugh. However he managed to ask gravely enough: "And what do you imagine was your motive, Bradley?"

Mr. Bradley brightened a little. "Yes, that was a difficulty. For quite a time I couldn't establish my motive at all. I couldn't even connect myself with Sir Eustace Pennefather. I'd heard of him of course, as anybody who's ever been to the Rainbow must. And I'd gathered he was somewhat savoury. But I'd no grudge against the man. He could be as savoury as he liked so far as I cared. I don't think I'd ever even seen him. Yes, the motive was a real stumbling-block, because of course there must be one. What should I have tried to kill him for otherwise?"

"And you've found it?"

"I think I've managed to ferret out what must be the real cause," said Mr. Bradley, not without pride. "After puzzling for a long time I remembered that I had heard myself once say to a friend, in a discussion on detective-work, that the ambition of my life

was to commit a murder, because I was perfectly certain that I could do so without ever being found out. And the excitement, I pointed out, must be stupendous; no gambling game ever invented can come anywhere near it. A murderer is really making a magnificent bet with the police, I demonstrated, with the lives of himself and his victim as the stakes; if he gets away with it, he wins both; if he's caught, he loses both. For a man like myself, who has the misfortune to be extremely bored by the usual type of popular recreation, murder should be the hobby *par excellence.*"

"Ah!" Roger nodded portentously.

"This conversation, when I recalled it," pursued Mr. Bradley very seriously, "seemed to me significant in the extreme. I at once went to see my friend and asked him if he remembered it and was prepared to swear that it took place at all. He was. In fact he was able to add further details, more damning still. I was so impressed that I took a statement from him.

"Amplifying my notion (according to his statement), I had gone on to consider how it could best be carried out. The obvious thing, I had decided, was to select some figure of whom the world would be well rid, not necessarily a politician (I was at some pains to avoid the obvious, apparently), and simply murder him at a distance. To play the game, one

should leave a clue or two, more or less obscure. Apparently I left rather more than I intended.

"My friend concluded by saying that I went away from him that evening expressing the firmest intention of carrying out my first murder at the earliest opportunity. Not only would the practice make such an admirable hobby, I told him, but the experience would be invaluable to a writer of detective-stories such as myself.

"That, I think," said Mr. Bradley with dignity. "establishes my motive only too certainly."

"Murder for experiment," remarked Roger. "A new category. Most interesting."

"Murder for jaded pleasure-seekers," Mr. Bradley corrected him. "There is a precedent, you know. Loeb and Leopold. Well, there you have it. Have I proved my case, Mr. President?"

"Completely, so far as I can see. I can't detect a flaw in your argument."

"I've been at some pains to make it a good deal more water-tight than I ever bother to do in my books. You could argue a very nasty case against me in court on those lines, couldn't you, Sir Charles?"

"Well, I should want to go into it a little more closely, but at first sight, Bradley, I admit that so far as circumstantial evidence is worth (and in my opinion, as you know, it is worth everything), I can't see

room for very much doubt that you sent those chocolates to Sir Eustace."

"And if I said here and now that in sober truth I *did* send them?" persisted Mr. Bradley.

"I couldn't disbelieve you."

"And yet I didn't. But given time, I'm quite prepared to prove to you just as convincingly that the person who really sent them was the Archbishop of Canterbury, or Sybil Thorndike, or Mrs. Robinson-Smythe of The Laurels, Acacia Road, Upper Tooting, or the President of the United States, or anybody else in this world you like to name.

"So much for proof. I built that whole case up against myself out of the one coincidence of my sister having a few sheets of Mason's notepaper. I told you nothing but the truth. But I didn't tell you the whole truth. Artistic proof is, like artistic anything else, simply a matter of selection. If you know what to put in and what to leave out you can prove anything you like, quite conclusively. I do it in every book I write, and no reviewer has ever hauled me over the coals for slipshod argument yet. But then," said Mr. Bradley modestly, "I don't suppose any reviewer has ever read one of my books."

"Well, it was a very ingenious piece of work," Miss Dammers summed up. "And most instructive."

"Thank you," murmured Mr. Bradley, with gratitude.

"And what it all amounts to," Mrs. Fielder-Flemming delivered a somewhat tart verdict, "is that you haven't the faintest idea who is the real criminal."

"Oh, I know *that,* of course," said Mr. Bradley languidly. "But I can't prove it. So it's not much good telling you."

Everybody sat up.

"You've found some one else, in spite of the odds, to fit those conditions of yours?" demanded Sir Charles.

"I suppose she must," admitted Mr. Bradley, "as she did it. But unfortunately I haven't been able to check them all."

"She!" Mr. Chitterwick caught him up.

"Oh, yes, it was a woman. That was the most obvious thing about the whole case—and incidentally one of the things I was careful to leave out just now. Really, I wonder that's never been mentioned before. Surely if there's anything evident about this affair at all it is that it's a woman's crime. It would never occur to a man to send poisoned chocolates to another man. He'd send a poisoned sample razor-blade, or whisky, or beer like the unfortunate Dr. Wilson's friend. Quite obviously it's a woman's crime."

"I wonder," Roger said softly.

Mr. Bradley threw him a sharp glance. "You don't agree, Sheringham?"

"I only wondered," said Roger, "But it's a very defendable point."

"Impregnable, I should have said," drawled Mr. Bradley.

"Well," said Miss Dammers, impatient of these minor matters, "aren't you going to tell us who did it, Mr. Bradley?"

Mr. Bradley looked at her quizzically. "But I said that it wasn't any good, as I can't prove it. Besides, there's a small matter of the lady's honour involved."

"Are you resuscitating the law of slander, to get you out of a difficulty?"

"Oh, dear me, no. I wouldn't in the least mind giving her away as a murderess. It's a much more important thing than that. She happens to have been Sir Eustace's mistress at one time, you see, and there's a code governing that sort of thing."

"Ah!" said Mr. Chitterwick.

Mr. Bradley turned to him politely. "You were going to say something?"

"No, no. I was just wondering whether you'd been thinking on the same lines as I have. That's all."

"You mean the discarded mistress theory?"

"Well," said Mr. Chitterwick uncomfortably, "yes."

"Of course. You'd hit on that line of research, too?" Mr. Bradley's tone was that of a benevolent headmaster patting a promising pupil on the head.

"It's the right one, obviously. Viewing the crime as a whole, and in the light of Sir Eustace's character, a discarded mistress, radiating jealousy, stands out like a beacon in the middle of it. That's one of the things I conveniently omitted too from my list of conditions—No. 13, the criminal must be a woman. And touching on artistic proof again, both Sir Charles and Mrs. Fielder-Flemming practised it, didn't they? Both of them omitted to establish any connection of nitrobenzene with their respective criminals, though such a connection is vital to both their cases."

"Then you really think jealousy is the motive?" Mr. Chitterwick suggested.

"I'm absolutely convinced of it," Mr. Bradley assured him. "But I'll tell you something else of which I'm not by any means convinced, and that is that the intended victim really was Sir Eustace Pennefather."

"Not the intended victim?" queried Roger, very uneasily. "How do you make that out?"

"Why, I've discovered," said Mr. Bradley, dissembling his pride, "that Sir Eustace had had an engagement for lunch on the day of the murder. He seems to have been very secretive about it, and it was certainly with a woman; and not only with a woman, but with a woman in whom Sir Eustace was more than a little interested. I think probably not Miss Wildman, but somebody of whom he was anxious that

Miss Wildman shouldn't know. But in my opinion the woman who sent the chocolates knew. The appointment was cancelled, but the other woman might not have known that.

"My suggestion (it's only a suggestion, and I can't substantiate it in any way at all except that it makes chocolates still more reasonable) is that those chocolates were intended not for Sir Eustace at all but for the sender's rival."

"Ah!" breathed Mrs. Fielder-Flemming.

"This is quite a new idea," complained Sir Charles.

Roger had been hastily conning over the names of Sir Eustace's various ladies. He had been unable to fit one before into the crime, and he was unable now; yet he did not think that any had escaped him. "If the woman you're thinking of, Bradley, the sender," he said tentatively, "really was a mistress of Sir Eustace, I don't think you need worry about being too punctilious. Her name is almost certainly on the lips of the whole Rainbow Club in that connection, if not of every club in London. Sir Eustace is not a reticent man."

"I can assure Mr. Bradley," said Miss Dammers with irony, "that Sir Eustace's standard of honour falls a good deal short of his own."

"In this case," Mr. Bradley told them, unmoved, "I think not."

"How is that?"

"Because I'm quite sure that apart from my unconscious informant, and Sir Eustace, and myself, there is nobody who knows of the connection at all. Except the lady, of course," added Mr. Bradley punctiliously. "Naturally it would not have escaped her."

"Then how did you find out?" demanded Miss Dammers.

"That," Mr. Bradley informed her equably, "I regret that I'm not at liberty to say."

Roger stroked his chin. Could there be another one of whom he had never heard? In that case, how would this new theory of his continue to stand up?

"Your so close parallel falls to the ground, then?" Mrs. Fielder-Flemming was stating.

"Not altogether. But if it does, I've got another just as good. Christina Edmunds. Almost the same case, with the insanity left out. Jealousy-mania. Poisoned chocolates. What could be better?"

"Humph! The mainstay of your last case, I gathered," observed Sir Charles, "or at any rate the starting-point, was the choice of nitrobenzene. I suppose that, and the deductions you drew from it, are equally important to this one. Are we to take it that this lady is an amateur chemist, with a copy of Taylor on her shelves?"

Mr. Bradley smiled gently. "That, as you rightly

point out, was the mainstay of my last case, Sir Charles. It isn't of this one. I'm afraid my remarks on the choice of poison were rather special pleading. I was leading up to a certain person, you see, and therefore only drew the deductions which suited that particular person. However, there was a good deal of possible truth in them for all that, though I wouldn't rate their probability quite as high as I pretended to do then. I'm quite prepared to believe that nitrobenzene was used simply because it's so easy to get hold of. But it's perfectly true that the stuff's hardly known as a poison at all."

"Then you make no use of it in your present case?"

"Oh, yes, I do. I still think the point that the criminal not so much used it as knew of it to use, is a perfectly sound one. The reason for that knowledge should be capable of being established. I stuck out before for a copy of some such book as Taylor as the reason, and I still do. As it happens this good lady *has* got a copy of Taylor."

"She *is* a criminologist, then?" Mrs. Fielder-Flemming pounced.

Mr. Bradley leaned back in his chair and gazed at the ceiling. "That, I should think, is very much open to question. Frankly, I'm puzzled over the matter of criminology. Myself, I don't see that lady as an '-ist' of any description. Her function in life is perfectly

obvious, the one she fulfilled for Sir Eustace, and I shouldn't have thought her capable of any other. Except to powder her nose rather charmingly, and look extremely decorative; but all that's part and parcel of her real *raison d'être*. No, I don't think she could possibly be a criminologist, any more than a canary-bird could. But she certainly has a smattering of criminology, because in her flat there's a whole bookshelf filled with works on the subject."

"She's a personal friend of yours, then?" queried Mrs. Fielder-Flemming, very casually.

"Oh, no. I've only met her once. That was when I called at her flat with a bran-new copy of a recently published book of popular murders under my arm, and represented myself as a traveller for the publisher soliciting orders for the book; might I have the pleasure of putting her name down? The book had only been out four days, but she proudly showed me a copy of it on her shelves already. Was she interested in criminology, then. Oh, yes, she simply adored it; murder was *too* fascinating, wasn't it? Conclusive, I think."

"She sounds a bit of a fool," commented Sir Charles.

"She looks like a bit of a fool," agreed Mr. Bradley. "She talks like a bit of a fool. Meeting her at a tea-fight, I should have said she *is* a bit of a fool. And

yet she carried through a really cleverly planned murder, so I don't see how she can be a bit of a fool."

"It doesn't occur to you," remarked Miss Dammers, "that perhaps she never did anything of the sort?"

"Well, no," Mr. Bradley had to confess. "I'm afraid it doesn't. I mean, a comparatively recent discarded mistress of Sir Eustace's (well, not more than three years ago, and hope dies hard), who thinks no small champagne of herself and considers murder too fascinating for words. Well, really!

"By the way, if you want any confirmatory evidence that she had been one of Sir Eustace's lady-loves, I might add that I saw a photograph of him in her flat. It was in a frame that had a very wide border. The border showed the word 'Your' and conveniently cut off the rest. Not 'Yours,' notice, but 'Your.' I think it's a reasonable assumption that something quite affectionate lies under that discreet border."

"I have it from his own lips that Sir Eustace changes his mistresses as often as his hats," Miss Dammers said briskly. "Isn't it possible that more than one may have suffered from a jealousy-complex?"

"But not, I think, have possessed a copy of Taylor as well," Mr. Bradley insisted.

"The criminological-knowledge factor seems to

have taken the place in this case of the nitrobenzene factor in the last," meditated Mr. Chitterwick. "Am I right in thinking that?"

"Quite," Mr. Bradley assured him kindly. "That, in my opinion, is the really important clue. It's so emphasized, you see. We get it from two entirely different angles, the choice of poison and the reminiscent features of the case. In fact we're coming up against it all the time."

"Well, well," muttered Mr. Chitterwick, reproving himself as one might who had been coming up against a thing all the time and never even noticed it.

There was a short silence, which Mr. Chitterwick imputed (quite wrongly) to a general condemnation of his own obtuseness.

"Your list of conditions," Miss Dammers resumed the charge. "You said you hadn't been able to check all of them. Which does this woman definitely fulfil, and which haven't you been able to check?"

Mr. Bradley assumed an air of alertness. "No. 1, I don't know whether she has any chemical knowledge. No. 2, I do know that she has at least an elementary knowledge of criminology. No. 3, she is almost certain to have had a reasonably good education (though whether she ever learnt anything is quite a different matter), and I think we may assume that she was never at a public-school. No. 4, I haven't been

able to connect her with Mason's notepaper, except in so far as she has an account at Mason's; and if that is good enough for Sir Charles, it's good enough for me. No. 5, I haven't been able to connect her with a Hamilton typewriter, but that ought to be quite easy; one of her friends is sure to have one.

"No. 6, she could have been in the neighbourhood of Southampton Street. She tried to establish an alibi, but bungled it badly; it's full of holes. She's supposed to have been in a theatre, but she didn't even get there till well past nine. No. 7, I saw an Onyx fountain-pen on her bureau. No. 8, I saw a bottle of Harfield's Fountain-Pen Ink in one of the pigeon-holes of the bureau.

"No. 9, I shouldn't have said she had a creative mind; I shouldn't have said that she had a mind at all; but apparently we must give her the benefit of any doubt there is. No. 10, judging from her face, I should say she was very neat with her fingers. No. 11, if she is a person of methodical habits she must feel it an incriminating point, for she certainly disguises it very well. No. 12, this I think might be amended, to 'must have the poisoner's complete lack of imagination.' That's the lot."

"I see," said Miss Dammers. "There are gaps."

"There are," Mr. Bradley agreed blandly. "To tell the truth, I know this woman must have done it be-

cause really, you know, she must. But I can't believe it."

"Ah!" said Mrs. Fielder-Flemming, putting a neat sentence into one word.

"By the way, Sheringham," remarked Mr. Bradley, "you know the bad lady."

"I do, do I?" said Roger, apparently coming out of a trance. "I thought I might. Look here, if I write a name down on a piece of paper, do you mind telling me if I'm right or wrong?"

"Not in the least," replied the equable Mr. Bradley. "As a matter of fact I was going to suggest something like that myself. I think as President you ought to know who I mean, in case there is anything in it."

Roger folded his piece of paper in two and tossed it down the table. "That's the person, I suppose."

"You're quite right," said Mr. Bradley.

"And you base most of your case on her reasons for interesting herself in criminology?"

"You might put it like that," conceded Mr. Bradley.

In spite of himself Roger blushed faintly. He had the best of reasons for knowing why Mrs. Verreker-le-Mesurer professed such an interest in criminology. Not to put too fine a point on it, the reasons had been almost forced on him.

"Then you're absolutely wrong, Bradley," he said without hesitation. "Absolutely."

"You know definitely?"

Roger suppressed an involuntary shudder. "Quite definitely."

"You know, I never believed she did it," said the philosophical Mr. Bradley.

CHAPTER XII

ROGER was very busy.

Flitting in taxis hither and thither, utterly regardless of what the clocks had to tell him, he was trying to get his case completed before the evening. His activities might have seemed to that artless criminologist, Mrs. Verreker-le-Mesurer, not only baffling but pointless.

On the previous afternoon, for instance, he had taken his first taxi to the Holborn Public Library and there consulted a work of reference of the most uninspiring description. After that he had driven to the offices of Messrs. Weall and Wilson, the well-known firm which exists to protect the trade interests of individuals and supply subscribers with highly confidential information regarding the stability of any business in which it is intended to invest money.

Roger, glibly representing himself as a potential investor of large sums, had entered his name as a subscriber, filled up a number of the special enquiry forms which are headed Strictly Confidential, and not consented to go away until Messrs. Weall and Wilson had promised, in consideration of certain

extra moneys, to have the required information in his hands within twenty-seven hours.

He had then bought a newspaper and gone to Scotland Yard. There he sought out Moresby.

"Moresby," he said without preamble, "I want you to do something important for me. Can you find me a taximan who took up a fare in Piccadilly Circus or its neighbourhood at about ten minutes past nine on the night before the Bendix murder, and deposited same at or near the Strand end of Southampton Street? And/or another taxi who took up a fare in the Strand near Southampton Street at about a quarter-past nine, and deposited same in the neighbourhood of Piccadilly Circus? The second is the more likely of the two; I'm not quite sure about the first. Or one taxi might have been used for the double journey, but I doubt that very much. Do you think you can do this for me?"

"We may not get any results, after all this time," said Moresby doubtfully. "It's really important, is it?"

"Quite important."

"Well, I'll try of course, seeing it's you, Mr. Sheringham, and I know I can take your word for it that it is important. But I wouldn't for any one else."

"That's fine," said Roger with much heartiness. "Make it pretty urgent, will you? And you might

give me a ring at the Albany at about tea-time tomorrow, if you think you've got hold of my man."

"What's the idea, then, Mr. Sheringham?"

"I'm trying to break down a rather interesting alibi," said Roger.

He went back to his rooms to dine.

After the meal his head was buzzing far too busily for him to be able to do anything else but take it for a walk. Restlessly he wandered out of the Albany and turned down Piccadilly. He ambled round the Circus, thinking hard, and paused for a moment out of habit to inspect with unseeing eyes the photographs of the new revue hanging outside the Pavilion. The next thing he realised was that he must have turned down the Haymarket and swung round in a wide circle into Jermyn Street, for he was standing outside the Imperial Theatre in that fascinating thoroughfare, idly watching the last of the audience crowding in.

Glancing at the advertisements of *The Creaking Skull,* he saw that the terrible thing began at half-past eight. Glancing at his watch, he saw that the time was twenty-nine minutes past that hour.

There was an evening to be got through somehow.

He went inside.

The night passed somehow, too.

Early the next morning (or early, that is, for Roger; say half-past ten), in a bleak spot somewhere beyond the bounds of civilisation, in short in Acton,

Roger found himself parleying with a young woman in the offices of the Anglo-Eastern Perfumery Company. The young woman was entrenched behind a partition just inside the main entrance, her only means of communication with the outer world being through a small window fitted with frosted glass. This window she would open (if summoned long and loudly enough) to address a few curt replies to importunate callers, and this window she would close with a bang by way of a hint that the interview, in her opinion, should now be closed.

"Good morning," said Roger blandly, when his third rap had summoned this maiden from the depths of her fastness. "I've called to——"

"Travellers, Tuesdays and Friday mornings, ten to eleven," said the maiden surprisingly, and closed the window with one of her best bangs. That'll teach him to try and do business with a respectable English firm on a Thursday morning, good gracious me, said the bang.

Roger stared blankly at the closed window. Then it dawned on him that a mistake had been made. He rapped again. And again.

At the fourth rap the window flew open as if something had exploded behind it. "I've told you already," snapped the maiden, righteously indignant, "that we only see——"

"I'm not a traveller," said Roger hastily. "At

least," he added with meticulousness, thinking of the dreary deserts he had explored before finding this inhospitable oasis, "at least, not a commercial one."

"You don't want to sell anything?" asked the maiden suspiciously. Impregnated with all that is best in the go-ahead spirit of English business methods, she naturally looked with the deepest distrust on anybody who might possibly wish to do such an unbusinesslike thing as *sell* her firm something.

"Nothing," Roger assured her with the utmost earnestness, impressed in his turn with the revolting vulgarity of such a proceeding.

On these conditions it appeared that the maiden, though by no means ready to take him to her bosom, was prepared to tolerate him for a few seconds. "Well, what *do* you want then?" she asked, with an air of weariness patiently, even nobly borne. From her tone it was to be gathered that very few people penetrated as far as that door unless with the discreditable intention of trying to do business with her firm. Just fancy—business!

"I'm a solicitor," Roger told her now, without truth, "and I'm enquiring into the matter of a certain Mr. Joseph Lea Hardwick, who was employed here. I regret to say that——"

"Sorry, never heard of the gentleman," said the maiden shortly, and intimated in her usual way that the interview had lasted quite long enough.

Once more Roger got busy with his stick. After the seventh application he was rewarded with another view of indignant young English girlhood.

"I've told you already—"

But Roger had had about enough of this. "And now, young woman, let me tell *you* something. If you refuse to answer my questions, let me warn you that you may find yourself in very serious trouble. Haven't you ever heard of contempt of court?" There are times when some slight juggling with the truth is permissible. There are times, too, when even a shrewd blow with a bludgeon may be excused. This time was one of both.

The maiden, though far from cowed, was at last impressed. "Well, what do you want to know then?" she asked, resignedly.

"This man, Joseph Lea Hardwick—"

"I've told you, I've never heard of him."

As the gentleman in question had enjoyed an existence of only two or three minutes, and that solely in Roger's brain, his creator was not unprepared for this. "It is possible that he was known to you under a different name," he said darkly.

The maiden's interest was engaged. More, she looked positively alarmed. She spoke shrilly. "If it's divorce, let me tell you you can't hang anything on *me*. I never even knew he was married. Besides, it

isn't as if there was a cause. I mean to say—well, at least—anyhow, it's a pack of lies. I never——"

"It isn't divorce," Roger hastened to stem the tide, himself scarcely less alarmed at these quite unmaidenly revelations. "It's—it's nothing to do with your private life at all. It's about a man who was employed here."

"Oh!" The late maiden's relief turned rapidly into indignation. "Well, why couldn't you say so?"

"Employed here," pursued Roger firmly, "in the nitrobenzene department. You have a nitrobenzene department, haven't you?"

"Not that I'm aware of, I'm sure."

Roger made the noise that is usually spelt "Tchah! You know perfectly well what I mean. The department which handles the nitrobenzene used here. You are hardly prepared to deny that nitrobenzene *is* used here, I hope? And extensively?"

"Well, and what if it is?"

"It has been reported to my firm that this man met his death through insufficient warning having been issued to the employees here about the dangerous nature of this substance. I should like——"

"What? One of our men died? I don't believe it. I should have been the first to know if——"

"It's been hushed up," Roger inserted quickly. "I should like you to show me a copy of the warning that is hung up in the factory about nitrobenzene."

"Well, I'm sorry then, but I'm afraid I can't oblige you."

"Do you mean to tell me," said Roger, much shocked, "that no warning is issued at all to your employees about this most dangerous substance? They're not even told that it is a deadly poison?"

"I didn't say that, did I? Of course they're warned that it's poisonous. Everybody is. And they're most careful about the way it's handled, I'm sure. It just happens that there isn't a warning hung up. And if you want to know any more about it, you'd better see one of the directors. I'll——"

"Thank you," said Roger, speaking the truth at last, "I've learned all I wanted. Good morning." He retreated jubilantly.

He retreated to Webster's, the printers, in a taxi.

Webster's of course are to printing what Monte Carlo is to the Riviera. Webster's, practically speaking, *are* printing. So where more naturally should Roger go if he wanted some new notepaper printed in a very special and particular way, as apparently he did?

To the young woman behind the counter who took him in charge he specified at great length and in the most meticulous detail exactly what he did want. The young woman handed him her book of specimen pieces and asked him to see if he could find a style there which would suit him. While he looked through

it she turned to another customer. Not to palter with the truth, that young woman had been getting a little weary of Roger and his wants.

Apparently Roger could not find a style to suit him, for he closed the book and edged a little along the counter till he was within the territory of the next young woman. To her in turn he embarked on the epic of his needs, and in turn too she presented him with her book of specimens and asked him to choose one. As the book was only another copy of the same edition, it is not surprising that Roger found himself no further forward.

Once more he edged along the counter, and once more he recited his saga to the third, and last, young woman. Knowing the game, she handed him her book of specimens. But this time Roger had his reward. This book was one of the same edition, but it was not an exact copy.

"Of course I'm sure you'll have what I want," he remarked garrulously as he flicked over the pages, "because I was recommended here by a friend who is really most particular. *Most* particular."

"Is that so?" said the young woman, doing her best to appear extremely interested. She was a very young woman indeed, young enough to study the technique of salesmanship in her spare time; and one of the first rules in salesmanship, she had learned, was to receive a customer's remark that it is a fine day with

the same eager and respectful admiration of the penetrating powers of his observation as she would accord to a fortune-teller who informed her that she would receive a letter from a dark stranger across the water containing an offer of money, on her note of hand alone. "Well," she said, trying hard, "some people are particular, and that's a fact."

"Dear me!" Roger seemed much struck. "Do you know, I believe I've got my friend's photograph on me this very minute. Isn't that an extraordinary coincidence?"

"Well, I never," said the dutiful young woman.

Roger produced the coincidental photograph and handed it across the counter. "There! Recognise it?"

The young woman took the photograph and studied it closely. "So that's your friend! Well, isn't that extrordinary? Yes, of course I recognise it. It's a small world, isn't it?"

"About a fortnight ago, I think my friend was in here last," Roger persisted. "Is that right?"

The young woman pondered. "Yes, it would be about a fortnight ago, I suppose. Yes, just about. Now this is a line we're selling a good deal of just at present."

Roger bought an inordinate quantity of note-paper he didn't want in the least, out of sheer lightness of heart. And because she really was a very nice young

woman, and it was a shame to take advantage of her.

Then he went back to his rooms for lunch.

Most of the afternoon he spent in trying apparently to buy a second-hand typewriter.

Roger was very particular that his typewriter should be a Hamilton No. 4. When the salesmen tried to induce him to consider other makes he refused to look at them, saying that he had had the Hamilton No. 4 so strongly recommended to him by a friend, who had bought a second-hand one just about three weeks ago. Perhaps it was at this very shop? No? They hadn't sold a Hamilton No. 4 for the last two months? How very odd.

But at one shop they had; and that was odder still. The obliging salesman looked up the exact date, and found that it was just a month ago. Roger described his friend, and the salesman at once agreed that Roger's friend and his own customer were one and the same.

"Good gracious, and now I come to think of it," Roger cried, "I actually believe I've got my friend's photograph on me at this very minute. Let me see!" He rummaged in his pockets, and to his great astonishment produced the photograph in question.

The salesman most obligingly proceeded to identify his customer without hesitation. He then went on, just as obligingly, to sell Roger the second-hand Hamilton No. 4 which that enthusiastic detective felt he

had not the face to refuse to buy. Detecting, Roger was discovering, is for the person without official authority to back him, a singularly expensive business. But like Mrs. Fielder-Flemming, he did not grudge money spent in a good cause.

He went back to his rooms to tea. There was nothing more to be done except await the call from Moresby.

It came sooner than he expected.

"Is that you, Mr. Sheringham? There are fourteen taxi-drivers here, littering up my office," said Moresby offensively. "They all took fares from Piccadilly Circus to the Strand, or *vice versa,* at your time. What do you want me to do with 'em?"

"Kindly keep them till I come, Chief Inspector," returned Roger with dignity, and grabbed his hat. He had not expected more than three at the most, but he was not going to let Moresby know that.

The interview with the fourteen was brief enough however. To each grinning man in turn (Roger deduced a little heavy humour on the part of Moresby before he arrived) Roger showed the photograph, taking some pains to hold it so that Moresby could not see it, and asked if he could recognise his fare. Not a single one could.

Moresby dismissed the men with a broad grin. "That's a pity, Mr. Sheringham. Puts a bit of a spoke in the case you're trying to work up, no doubt?"

Roger smiled at him in a superior manner. "On the contrary, my dear Moresby, it just about clinches it."

"It what did you say?" asked Moresby, startled out of his grammar. "What are you up to, Mr. Sheringham, eh?"

"I thought you knew all that. Aren't we being sleuthed?"

"Well!" Moresby actually looked a shade out of countenance. "To tell you the truth, Mr. Sheringham, all your people seemed to be going so far off the lines that I called my men off; it didn't seem worth while keeping 'em on."

"Dear, dear," said Roger gently. "Fancy that. Well, it's a small world, isn't it?"

"So what have you been doing, Mr. Sheringham? You've no objection to telling me that, I suppose?"

"None in the least, Moresby. Your work for you. Does it interest you to know that I've found out who sent those chocolates to Sir Eustace?"

Moresby eyed him for a moment. "It certainly does, Mr. Sheringham. If you really have."

"Oh, I have, yes," said Roger very nonchalantly; even Mr. Bradley himself could not have spoken more so. "I'll give you a report on it as soon as I've got my evidence in order.—It was an interesting case," he added. And suppressed a yawn.

"Was it now, Mr. Sheringham?" said Moresby, in a choked voice.

"Oh, yes; in its way. But absurdly simple once one had grasped the really essential factor. Quite ridiculously so. I'll let you have that report some time. So long, then." And he strolled out.

One cannot conceal the fact that Roger had his annoying moments.

CHAPTER XIII

ROGER called on himself.

"Ladies and gentlemen, as the one responsible for this experiment, I think I can congratulate myself. The three members who have spoken so far have shown an ingenuity of observation and argument which I think could have been called forth by no other agency. Each was convinced before beginning to speak that he or she had solved the problem and could produce positive proof in support of such solution, and each, I think, is still entitled to say that his or her reading of the puzzle has not yet been definitely disproved.

"Even Sir Charles's choice of Lady Pennefather is perfectly arguable, in spite of the positive alibi that Miss Dammers is able to give to Lady Pennefather herself; Sir Charles is quite entitled to say that Lady Pennefather has an accomplice, and to adduce in support of that the rather dubious circumstances attending her stay in Paris.

"And in this connection I should like to take the opportunity of retracting what I said to Bradley last night. I said that I knew definitely that the woman he had in mind could not have committed the murder.

That was a mis-statement. I didn't know definitely at all. I found the idea, from what I personally know of her, to be quite incredible.

"Moreover," said Roger bravely, "I have some reason to suspect the origin of her interest in criminology, and I'm pretty sure it's quite a different one from that postulated by Bradley. What I should have said was, that her guilt of this crime was a psychological impossibility. But so far as facts go, one can't prove psychological possibilities. Bradley is still perfectly entitled to believe her the criminal. And in any case she must certainly remain on the list of suspects."

"I agree with you, Sheringham, you know, about the psychological impossibility," remarked Mr. Bradley. "I said as much. The trouble is that I consider I proved the case against her."

"But you proved the case against yourself too," pointed out Mrs. Fielder-Flemming sweetly.

"Oh, yes; but that doesn't worry me with its inconsistency. That involves no psychological impossibility, you see."

"No," said Mrs. Fielder-Flemming. "Perhaps not."

"Psychological impossibility!" contributed Sir Charles robustly. "Oh, you novelists. You're all so tied up with Freud nowadays that you've lost sight of human nature altogether. When I was a young man nobody talked about psychological impossibilities.

And why? Because we knew very well that there's no such thing."

"In other words, the most improbable person may, in certain circumstances, do the most unlikely things," amplified Mrs. Fielder-Flemming. "Well, I may be old-fashioned, but I'm inclined to agree with that."

"Constance Kent," led Sir Charles.

"Lizzie Borden," Mrs. Fielder-Flemming covered.

"The entire Adelaide Bartlett case," Sir Charles brought out the ace of trumps.

Mrs. Fielder-Flemming gathered the cards up into a neat pack. "In my opinion, people who talk of psychological impossibilities are treating their subjects as characters in one of their own novels—they're infusing a certain percentage of their own mental make-up into them and consequently never see clearly that what they think may be the impossible for themselves may quite well be the possible (however improbable) in somebody else."

"Then there is something to be said after all for the detective story merchant's axiom of the most unlikely person," murmured Mr. Bradley. "Good!"

"Shall we hear what Mr. Sheringham's got to say about the case now?" suggested Miss Dammers.

Roger took the hint.

"I was going on to say how interestingly the experiment had turned out, too, in that the three people

who have already spoken happen each to have hit on a different person for the criminal. I, by the way, am going to suggest another, so even if Miss Dammers and Mr. Chitterwick each agree with one of us, that gives us four entirely different possibilities. I don't mind confessing that I'd hoped something like that would happen, though I hardly looked for such an excellent result.

"Still, as Bradley has pointed out in his remarks about closed and open murders, the possibilities in this case really are almost infinite. That, of course, makes it so much more interesting from our point of view. For instance, I began my own investigations from the point of view of Sir Eustace's private life. It was there, I felt convinced, that the clue to the murder was to be found. Just as Bradley did. And like him, I thought that this clue would be in the form of a discarded mistress; jealousy or revenge, I was sure, would turn out to be the mainspring of the crime Lastly, like him I was convinced from the very first glance at the business that the crime was the work of a woman.

"The consequence was that I began work entirely from the angle of Sir Eustace's women. I spent a good many not too savoury days collecting data, until I was convinced that I had a complete list of all his affairs during the past five years. It was not too difficult. Sir Eustace, as I said last night, is not a reticent

man. Apparently I had not got the full list, for mine hadn't included the lady whose name was not mentioned last night, and if there was one omission it's possible there may be more. At any rate, it seems that Sir Eustace, to do him justice, did have his moments of discretion.

"But now all that is really beside the point. What matters is that at first I was certain that the crime was the work not only of a woman, but of a woman who had comparatively recently been Sir Eustace's mistress.

"I have now changed all my opinions, *in toto.*"

"Oh, really!" moaned Mr. Bradley. "Don't tell me I was wrong all along the line."

"I'm afraid so," said Roger, trying to keep the triumph out of his voice. It is a difficult thing, when one has really and truly solved a problem which has baffled so many excellent brains, to appear entirely indifferent about it.

"I regret to have to say," he went on, hoping he appeared humbler than he felt, "I regret to have to say that I can't claim all credit for this change of view for my own perspicacity. To be quite honest, it was sheer luck. A chance meeting with a silly woman in Bond Street put me in possession of a piece of information, trivial in itself (my informant never for one moment saw its possible significance), but which immediately altered the whole case for me. I saw in a

flash that I'd been working from the beginning on mistaken premises. That I'd been making, in fact, the particular fundamental mistake which the murderer had intended the police and everybody else to make.

"It's a curious business, this element of luck in the solution of crime-puzzles," Roger ruminated. "As it happens I was discussing it with Moresby, in connection with this very case. I pointed out to him the number of impossible problems which Scotland Yard solves eventually through sheer luck—a vital piece of evidence turning up of its own accord so to speak, or a piece of information brought in by an angry woman because her husband happened to have given her grounds for jealousy just before the crime. That sort of thing is happening all the time. *The Avenging Chance,* I suggested as a title, if Moresby ever wanted to make a film out of such a story.

"Well, The Avenging Chance has worked again. By means of that lucky encounter in Bond Street, in one moment of enlightenment it showed me who really had sent those chocolates to Sir Eustace Pennefather."

"Well, well, well!" Mr. Bradley kindly expressed the feelings of the Circle.

"And who was it, then?" queried Miss Dammers, who had an unfortunate lack of dramatic feeling. For that matter Miss Dammers was inclined to plume herself on the fact that she had no sense of construc-

tion, and that none of her books ever had a plot. Novelists who use words like "values" and "reflexes" and "Œdipus-complex" simply won't have anything to do with plots. "Who appeared to you in this interesting revelation, Mr. Sheringham?"

"Oh, let me work my story up a little first," Roger pleaded.

Miss Dammers sighed. Stories, as Roger as a fellow-craftsman ought to have known, simply weren't done nowadays. But then Roger was a best-seller, and anything is possible with a creature like that.

Unconscious of these reflections, Roger was leaning back in his chair in an easy attitude, meditating gently. When he began to speak again it was in a more conversational tone than he had used before.

"You know, this really was a very remarkable case. You and Bradley, Mrs. Fielder-Flemming, didn't do the criminal justice when you described it as a hotch-potch of other cases. Any ideas of real merit in previous cases may have been borrowed, perhaps; but as Fielding says, in *Tom Jones,* to borrow from the classics, even without acknowledgment, is quite legitimate for the purposes of an original work. And this *is* an original work. It has one feature which not only absolves it from all charge to the contrary, but which puts it head and shoulders above all its prototypes.

"It's bound to become one of the classical cases itself. And but for the merest accident, which the criminal for all his ingenuity couldn't possibly have foreseen, I think it would have become one of the classical mysteries. On the whole I'm inclined to consider it the most perfectly-planned murder I've ever heard of (because of course one doesn't hear of the even more perfectly-planned ones that are never known to be murders at all). It's so exactly right—ingenious, utterly simple, and as near as possible infallible."

"Humph! Not so very infallible, as it turned out, Sheringham, eh?" grunted Sir Charles.

Roger smiled at him.

"The motive's so obvious, when you know where to look for it; but you didn't know. The method's so significant, once you've grasped its real essentials; but you didn't grasp them. The traces are so thinly covered, when you've realised just what is covering them; but you didn't realise. Everything was anticipated. The soap was left lying about in chunks, and we all hurried to stuff our eyes with it. No wonder we couldn't see clearly. It really was beautifully planned. The police, the public, the press—everybody completely taken in. It seems almost a pity to have to give the murderer away."

"Really, Mr. Sheringham," remarked Mrs. Fielder-Flemming. "You're getting quite lyrical."

"A perfect murder makes me feel lyrical. If I was this particular criminal I should have been writing odes to myself for the last fortnight."

"And as it is," suggested Miss Dammers, "you feel like writing odes to yourself for having solved the thing."

"I do rather," Roger agreed.

"Well, I'll begin with the evidence. As to that, I won't say that I've got such a collection of detail as Bradley was able to amass to prove his first theory, but I think you'll agree that I've got quite enough. Perhaps I can't do better than run through his list of twelve conditions which the murderer must fulfil, though as you'll see I don't by any means agree with all of them.

"I grant and can prove the first two, that the murderer must have at least an elementary knowledge of chemistry and criminology, but I disagree with both parts of the third; I don't think a good education is really essential, and I should certainly not rule out any one with a public-school or university education, for reasons which I'll explain later. Nor do I agree with the fourth, that he or she must have had possession of or access to Mason's note-paper. It was an ingenious idea of Bradley's that the possession of the notepaper suggested the method of the crime, but I think it mistaken; a previous case suggested the method, chocolates were decided on (for a very good

reason indeed, as I'll show later) as the vehicle, and Mason's as being the most important firm of chocolate manufacturers. It then became necessary to procure a piece of their notepaper, and I'm in a position to show how this was done.

"The fifth condition I would qualify. I don't agree that the criminal must have possession of or access to a Hamilton No. 4 typewriter, but I do agree that such possession must have existed. In other words, I would put that condition in the past tense. Remember that we have to deal with a very astute criminal, and a very carefully planned crime. I thought it most unlikely that such an incriminating piece of evidence as the actual typewriter would be allowed to lie about for anyone to discover. Much more probable that a machine had been bought specially for the occasion. It was clear from the letter that it wasn't a new machine which had been used. With the courage of my deduction, therefore, I spent a whole afternoon making enquiries at second-hand typewriter-shops till I ran down the place where it had been bought, and proved the buying. The shopman was able to identify my murderer from a photograph I had with me."

"And where's the machine now?" asked Mrs. Fielder-Flemming eagerly.

"I expect, at the bottom of the Thames. That's my point. This criminal of mine leaves nothing to chance at all.

"With the sixth condition, about being near the post-office during the critical hour, of course I agree. My murderer has a mild alibi, but it doesn't hold water. As to the next two, the fountain-pen and the ink, I haven't been able to check them at all, and while I agree that their possession would be rather pleasing confirmation I don't attach great importance to them; Onyx pens are so universal, and so is Harfield's ink, that there isn't much argument there either way. Besides, it would be just like my criminal not to own either of them but to have borrowed the pen unobtrusively. Lastly, I agree about the creative mind, and the neatness with the fingers, and of course with the poisoner's peculiar mentality, but not with the necessity for methodical habits."

"Oh, come," said Mr. Bradley, pained. "That was rather a sound deduction, I thought. And it stands to reason, too."

"Not to my reason," Roger retorted.

Mr. Bradley shrugged his shoulders.

"It's the notepaper I'm interested in," said Sir Charles. "In my opinion that's the point on which the case against any one must hang. How do you prove possession of the notepaper, Sheringham?"

"The notepaper," said Roger, "was extracted about three weeks ago from one of Webster's books of sample notepaper-headings. The erasure would be some private mark of Webster's, the price, for

instance: 'This style, 5s. 9d.' There are three books at Webster's, containing exactly the same samples. Two of them include a piece of Mason's paper; from the third it's missing. I can prove contact of my suspect with the book about three weeks ago."

"You can, can you?" Sir Charles was impressed. "That sounds pretty conclusive. What put you on the idea of the sample books?"

"The yellowed edges of the letter," Roger said, not a little pleased with himself. "I didn't see how a bit of paper that had been kept in a pile could get its edges quite so discoloured as all that, so concluded that it must have been an isolated piece. Then it struck me that walking about London, one does see isolated pieces of notepaper stuck on a board in the windows of printing-firms. But this piece showed no drawing-pin holes or any other signs of having been fixed to a board. Besides, it would be difficult to remove it from a board. What was the next best thing? Obviously, a sample-book, such as one usually finds inside the same shops. So to the printers of Mason's notepaper I went, and there, so to speak, my piece wasn't."

"Yes," muttered Sir Charles, "certainly that sounds pretty conclusive." He sighed. One gathered that he was gazing wistfully in his mind's eye at the diminishing figure of Lady Pennefather, and the beautiful case he had built up around her. Then he

brightened. This time one had gathered that he had switched his vision to the figure, equally diminishing, of Sir Charles Wildman, and the beautiful case that had been built up around him too.

"So now," said Roger, feeling he could really put it off no longer, "we come to the fundamental mistake to which I referred just now, the trap the murderer laid for us and into which we all so neatly fell."

Everybody sat up.

Roger surveyed them benignly.

"You got very near seeing it, Bradley, last night, with your casual suggestion that Sir Eustace himself might not have been the intended victim after all. That's right enough. But I go further than that."

"I fell in the trap, though, did I?" said Mr. Bradley, pained. "Well, what is this trap? What's the fundamental mistake we all side-slipped into?"

"Why," Roger brought out in triumph, "that the plan had miscarried—that the wrong person had been killed!"

He got his reward.

"What!" said every one at once. "Good heavens, you don't mean . . . ?"

"Exactly," Roger crowed. "That was just the beauty of it. The plan had *not* miscarried. It had been brilliantly successful. The wrong person had *not* been killed. Very much the right person was."

"What's all this?" positively gaped Sir Charles. "How on earth do you make that out?"

"Mrs. Bendix was the objective all the time," Roger went on more soberly. "That's why the plot was so ingenious. Every single thing was anticipated. It was foreseen that, if Bendix could be brought naturally into Sir Eustace's presence when the parcel was being opened, the latter would hand the chocolates over to him. It was forseen that the police would look for the criminal among Sir Eustace's associates, and not the dead woman's. It was probably even foreseen, Bradley, that the crime would be considered the work of a woman, whereas really, of course, chocolates were employed because it was a woman who was the objective."

"Well, well well!" said Mr. Bradley.

"Then it's your theory," pursued Sir Charles, "that the murderer was an associate of the dead woman's, and had nothing to do with Sir Eustace at all?" He spoke as if not altogether averse from such a theory.

"It is," Roger confirmed. "But first let me tell you what finally opened my eyes to the trap. The vital piece of information I got in Bond Street was this: *that Mrs. Bendix had seen that play, The Creaking Skull, before.* There's no doubt about it; she actually went with my informant herself. You see the extraordinary significance, of course. That means that she al-

ready knew the answer to that bet she made with her husband about the identity of the villain."

A little intake of breath testified to a general appreciation of this information.

"Oh! What a marvellous piece of divine irony." Miss Dammers was exercising her usual faculty of viewing things from the impersonal aspect. "Then she actually brought her own retribution on herself. The bet she won virtually killed her."

"Yes," said Roger. "The irony hadn't failed to strike even my informant. The punishment, as she pointed out, was so much greater than the crime. But I don't think,"—Roger spoke very gently, in a mighty effort to curb his elation—"I don't think that even now you quite see my point."

Everybody looked inquiringly.

"You've all heard Mrs. Bendix quite minutely described. You must all have formed a tolerably close mental picture of her. She was a straightforward, honest girl, making if anything (also according to my informant) almost too much of a fetich of straight dealing and playing the game. Does the making of a bet to which she already knew the answer, fit into that picture or does it not?"

"Ah!" nodded Mr. Bradley. "Oh, very pretty."

"Just so. It is (with apologies to Sir Charles) a psychological impossibility. It really is, you know, Sir Charles; one simply can't see her doing such a

thing, in fun or out of it; and I gather that fun wasn't her strong suit, by any means.

"*Ergo,*" concluded Roger briskly, "she didn't. *Ergo,* that bet was never made. *Ergo,* there never was such a bet. *Ergo,* Bendix was lying. *Ergo,* Bendix wanted to get hold of those chocolates for some reason other than he stated. And the chocolates being what they were, there was only one other reason.

"That's my case."

CHAPTER XIV

WHEN the excitement that greeted this revolutionary reading of the case had died down, Roger went on to defend his theory in more detail.

"It *is* something of a shock, of course, to find oneself contemplating Bendix as the very cunning murderer of his own wife, but really, once one has been able to rid one's mind of all prejudice, I don't see how the conclusion can possibly be avoided. Every item of evidence, however minute, goes to support it."

"But the motive!" ejaculated Mrs. Fielder-Flemming.

"Motive? Good heavens, he'd motive enough. In the first place he was frankly—no, not frankly; secretly!—tired of her. Remember what we were told of his character. He'd sown his wild oats. But apparently he hadn't finished sowing them, because his name has been mentioned in connection with more than one woman even since his marriage, usually, in the good old-fashioned way, actresses. So Bendix wasn't such a solemn stick by any means. He liked his fun. And his wife, I should imagine, was just about the last person in the world to sympathise with such feelings.

"Not that he hadn't liked her well enough when he married her, quite possibly, though it was her money he was after all the time. But she must have bored him dreadfully very soon. And really," said Roger impartially, "I think one can hardly blame him there. Any woman, however charming otherwise, is bound to bore a normal man if she does nothing but prate continually about honour and duty and playing the game; and that, I have on good authority, was Mrs. Bendix's habit.

"Just look at the *ménage* in this new light. The wife would never overlook the smallest peccadillo. Every tiny lapse would be thrown up at him for years. Everything she did would be right and everything he did wrong. Her sanctimonious righteousness would be forever being contrasted with his vileness. She might even work herself into the state of those half-mad creatures who spend the whole of their married lives reviling their husbands for having been attracted by other women before they even met the girl it was their misfortune to marry. Don't think I'm trying to blacken Mrs. Bendix. I'm just showing you how intolerable life with her might have been.

"But that's only the incidental motive. The real trouble was that she was too close with her money, and that too I know for a fact. That's where she sentenced herself to death. He wanted it, or some of it,

badly (it's what he married her for), and she wouldn't part.

"One of the first things I did was to consult a Directory of Directors and make a list of the firms he's interested in, with a view to getting a confidential report on their financial condition. The report reached me just before I left my rooms. It told me exactly what I expected—that every single one of those firms is rocky, some only a little but some within sight of a crash. They all need money to save them. It's obvious, isn't it? He's run through all his own money, and he had to get more. I found time to run down to Somerset House and again it was as I expected: her will was entirely in his favour. The really important point (which no one seems to have suspected) is that he isn't a good business-man at all; he's a rotten one. And half-a-million . . . Well!

"Oh, yes. There's motive enough."

"Motive allowed," said Mr. Bradley. "And the nitrobenzene? You said, I think, that Bendix has some knowledge of chemistry."

Roger laughed. "You remind me of a Wagner opera, Bradley. The nitrobenzene *motif* crops up regularly from you whenever a possible criminal is mentioned. However, I think I can satisfy even you in this instance. Nitrobenzene as you know, is used in perfumery. In the list of Bendix's businesses is the Anglo-Eastern Perfumery Company. I made a

special, and dreadful, journey out to Acton for the express purpose of finding out whether the Anglo-Eastern Company used nitrobenzene at all, and, if so, whether its poisonous qualities were thoroughly recogized. The answer to both questions was in the affirmative. So there can be no doubt that Bendix is thoroughly acquainted with the stuff.

"He might easily enough have got his supply from the factory, but I'm inclined to doubt that. I think he'd be cleverer than that. He probably made the stuff himself, if the process is as easy as Bradley told us. Because I happen to know that he was on the modern side at Selchester (that I heard quite by chance too), which presupposes at any rate an elementary knowledge of chemistry. Do you pass that, Bradley?"

"Pass, friend nitrobenzene," conceded Mr. Bradley.

Roger drummed thoughtfully on the table with his finger-tips. "It was a well-planned affair, wasn't it?" he meditated. "And so extremely easy to reconstruct. Bendix must have thought he'd provided against every possible contingency. And so he very nearly had. It was just that little bit of unlucky grit that gets into the smooth machinery of so many clever crimes: he didn't know that his wife had seen the play before. He'd decided on the mild alibi of his presence at the theatre, you see, just in case suspicion should ever impossibly arise, and no doubt he stressed his desire

to see the play and take her with him. Not to spoil his pleasure, she would have unselfishly concealed from him the fact that she had seen the play before and didn't much want to see it again. That unselfishness let him down. Because it's inconceivable that she would have turned it to her own advantage to win the bet he pretends to have made with her.

"He left the theatre of course during the first interval, and hurried as far as he dare go in the ten minutes at his disposal, to post the parcel. I sat through the dreadful thing myself last night just to see when the intervals came. The first one fits excellently. I'd hoped he might have taken a taxi one way, as time was short, but if he did no driver of such taxis as did make a similar journey that evening can identify him. Or possibly the right driver hasn't come forward yet. I got Scotland Yard to look into that point for me. But it really fits much better with the cleverness he's shown all through, that he should have gone by 'bus or underground. Taxis, he'd know, are traceable. But if so he'd run it very fine indeed, and I shouldn't be surprised if he got back to his box a few minutes late. The police may be able to establish that."

"It seems to me," observed Mr. Bradley, "that we made something of a mistake in turning the man down from membership here. We thought his criminology wasn't up to standard, didn't we? Well, well."

"But we could hardly be expected to know that he

was a practical criminologist rather than a mere theoretical one," Roger smiled. "It was a mistake, though. It would have been pleasant to include a practical criminologist among our members."

"I must confess that I thought at one time that we did," said Mrs. Fielder-Flemming, making her peace. "Sir Charles," she added unnecessarily, "I apologize, without reserve."

Sir Charles inclined his head courteously. "Please don't refer to it, madam. And in any event the experience for me was an interesting one."

"I may have been misled by the case I quoted," said Mrs. Fielder-Flemming, rather wistfully. "It was a strangely close parallel."

"It was the first parallel that occurred to me, too," Roger agreed. "I studied the Molineux case quite closely, hoping to get a pointer from it. But now, if I were asked for a parallel, I should reply with the Carlyle Harris case. You remember, the young medical student who sent a pill containing morphine to the girl Helen Potts, to whom it turned out that he had been secretly married for a year. He was by way of being a profligate and general young rotter too. A great novel, as you know, has been founded on the case, so why not a great crime too?"

"Then why, Mr. Sheringham," Miss Dammers wanted to know, "do you think that Mr. Bendix took

the risk of not destroying the forged letter and the wrapper when he had the chance?"

"He very carefully didn't do so," Roger replied promptly, "because the forged letter and the wrapper had been calculated not only to divert suspicion from himself but actually to point away from him to somebody else—an employee of Mason's, for instance, or an anonymous lunatic. Which is exactly what they did."

"But wouldn't it be a great risk, to send poisoned chocolates like that to Sir Eustace?" suggested Mr. Chitterwick diffidently. "I mean, Sir Eustace might have been ill the next morning, or not offered to hand them over at all. Suppose he had given them to somebody else instead of Bendix."

Roger proceeded to give Mr. Chitterwick cause for his diffidence. He was feeling something of a personal pride in Bendix by this time, and it distressed him to hear a great man thus maligned.

"Oh, really! You must give my man credit for being what he is. He's not a bungler, you know. It wouldn't have had any serious results if Sir Eustace had been ill that morning, or eaten the chocolates himself, or if they'd been stolen in transit and consumed by the postman's favourite daughter, or any other unlikely contingency. Come, Mr. Chitterwick! You don't imagine he'd send the poisoned ones through the post, do you? Of course not. He'd send

harmless ones, and exchange them for the others on the way home. Dash it all, he wouldn't go out of his way to present opportunities to chance."

"Oh! I see," murmured Mr. Chitterwick, properly subdued.

"We're dealing with a very great criminal," went on Roger, rather less severely. "That can be seen at every point. Take the arrival at the club, just for example—that most unusual early arrival (why this early arrival at all, by the way, if he isn't guilty?). Well, he doesn't wait outside and follow his unconscious accomplice in, you see. Not a bit of it. Sir Eustace is chosen because he's known to get there so punctually at half-past ten every morning; takes a pride in it; boasts of it; goes out of his way to keep up the good old custom. So Bendix arrives at ten thirty-five, and there things are. It had puzzled me at the beginning of the case, by the way, to see why the chocolates had been sent to Sir Eustace at his club at all, instead of to his rooms. Now it's obvious."

"Well, I wasn't so far out with my list of conditions," Mr. Bradley consoled himself. "But why don't you agree with my rather subtle point about the murderer not being a public-school or University man, Sheringham? Just because Bendix happens to have been at Selchester and Oxford?"

"No, because I'd make the still more subtle point that where the code of a public-school and University

might influence a murderer in the way he murdered another man, it wouldn't have much effect when a woman is to be the victim. I agree that if Bendix had been wanting to dispose of Sir Eustace, he would probably have put him out of the world in a nice, straightforward, manly way. But one doesn't use nice, straightforward, manly ways in one's dealings with women, if it comes to hitting them on the head with a bludgeon or anything in that nature. Poison, I fancy, would be quite in order. And there's very little suffering with a large dose of nitrobenzene. Unconsciousness soon intervenes."

"Yes," admitted Mr. Bradley, "that is rather too subtle a point for one of my unpsychological attributes."

"I think I dealt with most of your other conditions. As regards the methodical habits, which you deduced from the meticulous doses of poison in each chocolate, my point of course is that the doses were exactly equal in order that Bendix could take any two of the chocolates and be sure of having got the right amount of nitrobenzene into his system to produce the symptoms he wanted, and not enough to run any serious risk. That dosing of himself with the poison really was a master-stroke. And it's so natural that a man shouldn't have taken so many chocolates as a woman. He exaggerated his symptoms considerably, no doubt, but the effect on everybody was tremendous.

"We must remember, you see, that we've only got his word for the conversation in the drawing-room, over the eating of the chocolates, just as we've only got his word for it that there ever was a bet at all. Most of that conversation certainly took place, however. Bendix is far too great an artist not to make all possible use of the truth in his lying. But of course he wouldn't have left her that afternoon till he'd seen her take, or somehow made her take, at least six of the chocolates, which he'd know made up more than a lethal dose. That was another advantage in having the stuff in those exact six-minim quantities."

"In fact," Mr. Bradley summed up, "our Uncle Bendix is a great man."

"He really is," said Roger, quite solemnly.

"You've no doubt at all that he is the criminal?" queried Miss Dammers.

"None at all," said Roger, astonished.

"Um," said Miss Dammers.

"Why, have you?"

"Um," said Miss Dammers.

The conversation then lapsed.

"Well," said Mr. Bradley, "let all tell Sheringham how wrong he is, shall we?"

Mrs. Fielder-Flemming looked tense. "I'm afraid," she said in a hushed voice, "that he is only too right."

But Mr. Bradley refused to be impressed. "Oh, I

think I can find a hole or two to pick at. You seem to attach a good deal of importance to the motive, Sheringham. Don't you exaggerate? One doesn't poison a wife one's tired of; one leaves her. And really, I find some difficulty in believing (*a*) that Bendix should have been so set on getting hold of more money to pour down the drainpipe of his businesses as to commit murder for it, and (*b*) that Mrs. Bendix should have been so close as to refuse to come to her husband's help if he really was badly pressed."

"Then I think you fail to estimate the characters of both of them," Roger told him. "They were both obstinate as the devil. It was Mrs. Bendix, not her husband, who realized that his businesses *were* a drainpipe. I could give you a list a yard long of murders that have been committed with far less motive than Bendix had."

"Motive allowed again, then. Now you remember that Mrs. Bendix had had a lunch appointment for the day of her death, which was cancelled. Didn't Bendix know of that? Because if he did, would he have chosen a day for the delivery of the chocolates when he knew his wife wouldn't be at home for lunch to receive them?"

"Just the point I had thought of putting to Mr. Sheringham myself," remarked Miss Dammers.

Roger looked puzzled. "It seems to me a most unimportant point. If it comes to that, why should he

necessarily want to give the chocolates to his wife at lunch-time?"

"For two reasons," responded Mr. Bradley glibly. "Firstly because he would naturally want to put them to their right purpose as soon as he possibly could, and secondly because his wife being the only person who can contradict his story of the bet, he would obviously want her silenced as soon as practicable."

"You're quibbling," Roger smiled, "and I refuse to be drawn. For that matter, I don't see why Bendix should have known of his wife's lunch-appointment at all. They were constantly lunching out, both of them, and I don't suppose they took any particular care to inform each other beforehand."

"Humph!" said Mr. Bradley, and stroked his chin.

Mr. Chitterwick ventured to raise his recently crushed head. "You really base your whole case on the bet, Mr. Sheringham, don't you?"

"And the psychological deduction I drew from the story of it. Yes, I do. Entirely."

"So that if the bet could be proved after all to have been made, you would have no case left?"

"Why," exclaimed Roger, in some alarm, "have you any independent evidence that the bet was made?"

"Oh, no. Oh, dear me, no. Nothing of the sort. I was merely thinking that if any one did want to disprove your case, as Bradley suggested, it is the bet on which he would have to concentrate."

"You mean, quibbling about the motive, and the lunch-appointment, and such minor matters, is altogether beside the point?" suggested Mr. Bradley amiably. "Oh, I quite agree. But I was only trying to test his case, you know, not disprove it. And for why? Because I think it's the right one. The Mystery of the Poisoned Chocolates, so far as I'm concerned, is at an end."

"Thank you, Bradley," said Mr. Sheringham.

"So three cheers for our sleuth-like President," continued Mr. Bradley with great heartiness, "coupled with the name of Graham Reynard Bendix for the fine run he's given us. Hip, hip——"

"And you say you've definitely proved the purchase of the typewriter, and the contact of Mr. Bendix with the sample-book at Webster's, Mr. Sheringham?" remarked Alicia Dammers, who had apparently been pursuing a train of thought of her own.

"I do, Miss Dammers," said Roger, not without complacence.

"Would you give me the name of the typewriter-shop?"

"Of course," Roger tore a page from his notebook and copied out the name and address.

"Thank you. And can you give me a description of the girl at Webster's who identified the photograph of Mr. Bendix?"

Roger looked at her a little uneasily: she gazed

back with her usual calm serenity. Roger's uneasiness grew. He gave her as good a description of Webster's young woman as he could recall. Miss Dammers thanked him imperturbably.

"Well, what are we going to do about it all?" persisted Mr. Bradley, who seemed to have adopted the rôle of showman for his President. "Shall we send a delegation to Scotland Yard consisting of Sheringham and myself, to break the news to them that their troubles are over?"

"You are assuming that everybody agrees with Mr. Sheringham?"

"Of course."

"Isn't it customary to put this sort of question to a vote?" suggested Miss Dammers coolly.

" 'Carried unanimously,' " quoted Mr. Bradley. "Yes, do let's have the correct procedure. Well, then, Sheringham moves that this meeting do accept his solution of the Poisoned Chocolates Mystery as the right one, and send a delegation of himself and Mr. Bradley to Scotland Yard to talk pretty severely to the police. I second the motion. Those in favour . . . ? Mrs. Fielder-Flemming?"

Mrs. Fielder-Flemming endeavoured to conceal her disapproval of Mr. Bradley in her approval of Mr. Bradley's suggestion. "I certainly think that Mr. Sheringham has proved his case," she said stiffly.

"Sir Charles?"

"I agree," said Sir Charles, in stern tones, equally disproving Mr. Bradley's frivolity.

"Chitterwick?"

"I agree too." Was it Roger's fancy, or did Mr. Chitterwick hesitate just a moment before he spoke, as if troubled by some mental reservation which he did not care to put into words? Roger decided that it was his fancy.

"And Miss Dammers?" concluded Mr. Bradley.

Miss Dammers looked calmly round the table. "I don't agree at all. I think Mr. Sheringham's exposition was exceedingly ingenious, and altogether worthy of his reputation; at the same time I think it quite wrong. To-morrow I hope to be able to prove to you who really committed this crime."

The Circle gaped at her respectfully.

Roger, wondering whether his ears had not really been playing tricks with him, found that his tongue too utterly refused to work. An inarticulate sound oozed from him.

Mr. Bradley was the first to recover himself. "Carried, non-unanimously. Mr. President, I think this is a precedent. Does anybody know what happens when a resolution is not carried unanimiously?"

In the temporary disability of the President, Miss Dammers took it upon herself to decide. "The meeting stands adjourned, I think," she said.

And adjourned the meeting found itself.

CHAPTER XV

ROGER arrived at the Circle's meeting-room the next evening even more agog than usual. In his heart on hearts he could not believe that Miss Dammers would ever to able to destroy his case against Bendix, or even dangerously shake it, but in any event what she had to say could not fail to be of absorbing interest, even without its animadversions of his own solution. Roger had been looking forward to Miss Dammers's exposition more than to that of any one else.

Alicia Dammers was so very much a reflection of the age.

Had she been born fifty years ago, it is difficult to see how she could have gone on existing. It was impossible that she could have become the woman-novelist of that time, a strange creature (in the popular imagination) with white cotton gloves, an intense manner, and passionate, not to say hysterical yearnings towards a romance from which her appearance unfortunately debarred her. Miss Dammers's gloves, like her clothes, were exquisite, and cotton could not have touched her since she was ten (if she ever had been); tensity was for her the depth of bad form; and if she knew how to yearn, she certainly kept it to

herself. Passion and purple, one gathered, Miss Dammers found quite unnecessary to herself, if interesting phenomena in lesser mortals.

From the caterpillar in cotton gloves the woman-novelist has progressed through the stage of cook-like coccoondom at which Mrs. Fielder-Flemming had stuck, to the detached and serious butterfly, not infrequently beautiful as well as pensive, whose decorative pictures the illustrated weeklies are nowadays delighted to publish. Butterflies with calm foreheads, just faintly wrinkled in analytical thought. Ironical, cynical butterflies; surgeon-butterflies thronging the mental dissecting-rooms (and sometimes, if we must be candid, inclined to loiter there a little too long); passionless butterflies, flitting gracefully from one brightly-coloured complex to another. And sometimes completely humourless, and then distressingly boring butterflies, whose gathered pollen seems to have become a trifle mud-coloured.

To meet Miss Dammers and look at her classical, oval face, with its delicately small features and big grey eyes, to glance approvingly over her tall, beautifully dressed figure, nobody whose imagination was still popular would ever have set her down as a novelist at all. And that in Miss Dammers's opinion, coupled with the ability to write good books, was exactly what a properly-minded modern authoress should hope to achieve.

No one had ever been brave enough to ask Miss Dammers how she could hope successfully to analyse in others emotions which she had never experienced in herself. Probably because the plain fact confronted the enquirer that she both could and did. Most successfully.

"We listened last night," began Miss Dammers, at five minutes past nine on the following evening, "to an exceedingly able exposition of a no less interesting theory of this crime. Mr. Sheringham's methods, if I may say so, were a model to all of us. Beginning with the deductive, he followed this as far as it would take him, which was actually to the person of the criminal; he then relied on the inductive to prove his case. In this way he was able to make the best possible use of each method. That this ingenious mixture should have been based on a fallacy and therefore never had any chance of leading Mr. Sheringham to the right solution, is rather a piece of bad luck than his fault."

Roger, who still could not believe that he had not reached the truth, smiled dubiously.

"Mr. Sheringham's reading of the crime," continued Miss Dammers, in her clear, level tones, "must have seemed to some of us novel in the extreme. To me, however, it was perhaps more interesting than novel, for it began from the same starting-point as the

theory on which I myself have been working; namely, that the crime had not failed in its objective."

Roger pricked up his ears.

"As Mr. Chitterwick pointed out, Mr. Sheringham's whole case rested on the bet between Mr. and Mrs. Bendix. From Mr. Bendix's story of that bet, he draws the psychological deduction that the bet never existed at all. That is clever, but it is the wrong deduction. Mr. Sheringham is too lenient in his interpretation of feminine psychology. I began, I think I may say, with the bet too. But the deduction I drew from it, knowing my sister-women perhaps a little more intimately than Mr. Sheringham could, was that Mrs. Bendix was not quite so honourable as she was painted by herself."

"I thought of that, of course," Roger expostulated. "But I discarded it on purely logical grounds. There's nothing in Mrs. Bendix's life to show that she wasn't honest, and everything to show that she was. And when there exists no evidence at all for the making of the bet beyond Bendix's bare word . . ."

"Oh, but there does," Miss Dammers took him up. "I've been spending most of to-day in establishing that point. I knew I should never really be able to shake you till I could definitely prove that there was a bet. Let me put you out of your agony at once, Mr. Sheringham. I've overwhelming evidence that the bet was made."

"You have?" said Roger, disconcerted.

"Certainly. It was a point you really should have verified yourself, you know," chided Miss Dammers gently, "considering its importance to your case. Well, I have two witnesses. Mrs. Bendix mentioned the bet to her maid when she went up to her bedroom to lie down, actually saying (like yourself, Mr. Sheringham) that the violent indigestion from which she thought herself to be suffering was a judgment on her for having made it. The second witness is a friend of my own, who knows the Bendixes. She saw Mrs. Bendix sitting alone in her box during the second interval, and went in to speak to her. In the course of the conversation Mrs. Bendix remarked that she and her husband had a bet on the identity of the villain, mentioning the character in the play whom she herself fancied. But (and this completely confirms my own deduction) Mrs. Bendix did *not* tell my friend that she had seen the play before."

"Oh!" said Roger, now quite crestfallen.

Miss Dammers dealt with him as tenderly as possible. "There were only those two deductions to be made from that bet, and by bad luck you chose the wrong one."

"But how did you know," said Roger, coming to the surface for the third time, "that Mrs. Bendix had seen the play before? I only found that out myself a couple of days ago, and by the merest accident."

"Oh, I've known that from the beginning," said Miss Dammers carelessly. "I suppose Mrs. Verreker-le-Mesurer told you? I don't know her personally, but I know people who do. I didn't interrupt you last night when you were talking about the amazing chance of this piece of knowledge reaching you. If I had, I should have pointed out that the agency by which anything known to Mrs. Verreker-le-Mesurer (as I see her) might become known to her friends too, isn't chance at all, but certainty."

"I see," said Roger, and sank for the third, and final, time. But as he did so he remembered one piece of information which Mrs. Verreker-le-Mesurer had succeeded, not wholly as it seemed but very nearly so, in withholding from her friends; and catching Mr. Bradley's ribald eye knew that his thought was shared. So even Miss Dammers was not quite infallible in her psychology.

"We then," resumed that lady, somewhat didactically, "have Mr. Bendix displaced from his temporary rôle of villain and back again in his old part of second victim." She paused for a moment.

"But without Sir Eustace returning to the cast in his original star part of intended victim of the piece," amplified Mr. Bradley.

Miss Dammers rightly ignored him. "Now here, I think, Mr. Sheringham will find my case as interesting as I found his last night, for though we differ so

vitally in some essentials we agree remarkably in others. And one of the points on which we agree is that the intended victim certainly was killed."

"What, Alicia?" exclaimed Mrs. Fielder-Flemming. "You think too that the plot was directed against Mrs. Bendix from the beginning?"

"I have no doubt of it. But to prove my contention I must demolish yet another of Mr. Sheringham's conclusions.

"You made the point, Mr. Sheringham, that half-past ten in the morning was a most unusual time for Mr. Bendix to arrive at his club and therefore highly significant. That is perfectly true. Unfortunately you attached the wrong significance to it. His arrival at that hour doesn't necessarily argue a guilty intention, as you assumed. It escaped you (as in fairness I must say it seems to have escaped every one else) that if Mrs. Bendix was the intended victim and Mr. Bendix himself not her murderer, his presence at the club at that convenient time might have been secured by the real murderer. In any case I think Mr. Sheringham might have given Mr. Bendix the benefit of the doubt in so far as to ask him if he had any explanation of his own to offer. As I did."

"You asked Bendix himself how it had happened that he arrived at the club at half-past ten that morning?" Mr. Chitterwick said in awed tones. This was certainly the way real detecting should be done. Un-

fortunately his own diffidence seemed to have prevented Mr. Chitterwick from doing any real detecting at all.

"Certainly," agreed Miss Dammers briskly. "I rang him up, and put the point to him. From what I gathered, not even the police had thought to put it before. And though he answered it in a way I quite expected, it was clear that he saw no significance in his own answer. Mr. Bendix told me that he had gone there to receive a telephone message. But why not have had the message telephoned to his home? you will ask. Exactly. So did I. The reason was that it was not the sort of message one cares about receiving at home. I must admit that I pressed Mr. Bendix about this message, and as he had no idea of the importance of my questions he must have considered my taste more than questionable. However, I couldn't help that.

"In the end I got him to admit that on the previous afternoon he had been rung up at his office by a Miss Vera Delorme, who plays a small part in *Heels Up!* at the Regency Theatre. He had only met her once or twice, but was not averse from doing so again. She asked him if he were doing anything important the next morning, to which he replied that he was not. Could he take her out to a quiet little lunch somewhere? He would be delighted. But she was not quite

sure yet whether she was free. She would ring him up the next morning between ten-thirty and eleven o'clock at the Rainbow Club."

Five pairs of brows were knitted.

"I don't see any significance in that either," finally plunged Mrs. Fielder-Flemming.

"No?" said Miss Dammers. "But if Miss Delorme straightly denies having ever rung Mr. Bendix up at all?"

Five pairs of brows unravelled themselves.

"Oh!" said Mrs. Fielder-Flemming.

"Of course that was the first thing I verified," said Miss Dammers coolly.

Mr. Chitterwick sighed. Yes, undoubtedly this was real detecting.

"Then your murderer had an accomplice, Miss Dammers?" Sir Charles suggested.

"He had two," retorted Miss Dammers. "Both unwitting."

"Ah, yes. You mean Bendix. And the woman who telephoned?"

"Well—!" Miss Dammers looked in her unexcited way round the circle of faces. "Isn't it obvious?"

Apparently it was not at all obvious.

"At any rate it must be obvious why Miss Delorme was chosen as the telephonist: because Mr. Bendix hardly knew her, and would certainly not be able to

recognize her voice on the telephone. And as for the real speaker. . . . Well, really!" Miss Dammers looked her opinion of such obtuseness.

"Mrs. Bendix!" squeaked Mrs. Fielder-Flemming catching sight of a triangle.

"Of course. Mrs. Bendix, carefully primed by *somebody* about her husband's minor misdemeanours."

"Then somebody being the murderer of course," nodded Mrs. Fielder-Flemming. "A friend of Mrs. Bendix's then. At least," amended Mrs. Fielder-Flemming in some confusion, remembering that real friends seldom murder each other, "she thought of him as a friend. Dear me, this is getting very interesting, Alicia."

Miss Dammers gave a small, ironical smile. "Yes, it's a very intimate little affair after all, this murder. Tightly closed, in fact, Mr. Bradley.

"But I'm getting on rather too fast. I had better complete the destruction of Mr. Sheringham's case before I build up my own." Roger groaned faintly and looked up at the hard, white ceiling. It reminded him of Miss Dammers, and he looked down again.

"Really, Mr. Sheringham, your faith in human nature is altogether too great, you know," Miss Dammers mocked him without mercy. "Whatever anybody chooses to tell you, you believe. A confirmatory witness never seems necessary to you. I'm sure that if

some one had come to your rooms and told you he'd seen the Shah of Persia injecting the nitrobenzene into those chocolates you would have believed him unhesitatingly."

"Are you hinting that somebody hasn't told me the truth?" groaned the unhappy Roger.

"I'll do more than hint it; I'll prove it. When you told us last night that the man in the typewriter shop had positively identified Mr. Bendix as the purchaser of a second-hand No. 4 Hamilton I was astounded. I took a note of the shop's address. This morning, first thing, I went there. I taxed the man roundly with having told you a lie. He admitted it, grinning.

"So far as he could make out, all you wanted was a good Hamilton No. 4, and he had a good Hamilton No. 4 to sell. He saw nothing wrong in leading you to suppose that his was the shop where your friend had bought his own good Hamilton No. 4, because he had quite as good a one as any other shop could have. And if it eased your mind that he should recognize your friend from his photograph—well," said Miss Dammers drily, "he was quite prepared to ease it as many times as you had photographs to produce."

"I see," said Roger, and his thoughts dwelt on the eight pounds he had handed over to that sympathetic, mind-easing shopman in return for a Hamilton No. 4 he didn't want.

"As for the girl in Webster's," continued Miss Dammers implacably, "she was just as ready to admit that perhaps she might have made a mistake in recognising that friend of the gentleman who called in yesterday about some notepaper. But really, the gentleman had seemed so anxious she should that it would have seemed quite a pity to disappoint him, like. And if it came to that, she couldn't see the harm in it not even now she couldn't." Miss Dammers's imitation of Webster's young woman was most amusing. Roger did not laugh heartily.

"I'm sorry if I seem to be rubbing it in, Mr. Sheringham," said Miss Dammers.

"Not at all," said Roger.

"But it's essential to my own case, you see."

"Yes, I quite see that," said Roger.

"Then that evidence is disposed of. I don't think you really had any other, did you?"

"I don't think so," said Roger.

"You will see," Miss Dammers resumed, over Roger's corpse, "that I am following the fashion of withholding the criminal's name. Now that it has come to my turn to speak, I am realizing the advantages of this; but really, I can't help fearing that you will all have guessed it by the time I come to my denouement. To me, at any rate, the murderer's identity seems quite absurdly obvious. Before I disclose it officially, however, I should like to deal with a few of

the other points, not actual evidence, raised by Mr. Sheringham in his argument.

"Mr. Sheringham built up a very ingenious case. It was so very ingenious that he had to insist more than once on the perfect planning that had gone to its construction, and the true greatness of the criminal mind that had evolved it. I don't agree," said Miss Dammers crisply. "My case it much simpler. It was planned with cunning but not with perfection. It relied almost entirely upon luck: that is to say, upon one vital piece of evidence remaining undiscovered. And finally the mind that evolved it is not great in any way. But it *is* a mind which, dealing with matters outside its usual orbit, would certainly be imitative.

"That brings me to a point of Mr. Bradley's. I agree with him to the extent that I think a certain acquaintance with criminological history is postulated, but not when he argues that it is the work of a creative mind. In my opinion the chief feature of the crime is its servile imitation of certain of its predecessors. I deduced from it, in fact, the type of mind which is possessed of no originality of its own, is intensely conservative because without the wit to recognize the progress of change, is obstinate, dogmatic, and practical, and lacks entirely any sense of spiritual values. As one who am inclined to suffer myself from something of an aversion from matter, I

sensed my exact antithesis behind the whole atmosphere of this case."

Everybody looked suitably impressed. As for Mr. Chitterwick, he could only gasp before these detailed deductions from a mere atmosphere.

"With another point of Mr. Sheringham's I have already inferred that I agree: that chocolates were used as the vehicle of the poison because they were meant to reach a woman. And here I might add that I am sure no harm was intended to Mr. Bendix himself. We know that Mr. Bendix did not care for chocolates, and it is a reasonable assumption that the murderer knew it too; he never expected that Mr. Bendix would eat any himself.

"It is curious how often Mr. Sheringham hits the mark with small shafts, while missing it with the chief one. He was quite right about the notepaper being extracted from that sample-book at Webster's. I'm bound to admit that the possession of the piece of notepaper had worried me considerably. I was at a complete loss there. Then Mr. Sheringham very handily presented us with his explanation, and I have been able to-day to destroy his application of it to his own theory and incorporate it in my own. The attendant who pretended out of innocent politeness to recognise the photograph Mr. Sheringham showed her, was able to recognise in earnest the one I produced. And not only recognise it," said Miss Dam-

mers with the first sign of complacence she had yet shown, "but identify the original of it actually by name."

"Ah!" nodded Mrs. Fielder-Flemming, much excited.

"Mr. Sheringham made a few other small points, which I thought it advisable to-day to blunt," Miss Dammers went on, with a return to her impersonal manner. "Because most of the small firms in which Mr. Bendix figures on the board of directors are not in a flourishing state, Mr. Sheringham deduced not only that Mr. Bendix was a bad business-man, with which I am inclined to agree, but that he was desperately in need of money. Once again Mr. Sheringham failed to verify his deduction, and once again he must pay the penalty in finding himself utterly wrong.

"The most elementary channels of enquiry would have brought Mr. Sheringham the information that only a very small proportion of Mr. Bendix's money is invested in these concerns, which are really a wealthy man's toys. By far the greater part is still where his father left it when he died, in government stock and safe industrial concerns so large that even Mr. Bendix could never aspire to a seat on the board. And from what I know of him, Mr. Bendix is quite a big enough man to recognise that he is not the business-genius his father was, and has no intention of spending on his toys more than he can comforta-

bly afford. The real motive Mr. Sheringham gave him for his wife's death therefore completely disappears."

Roger bowed his head. For ever afterwards, he felt, would genuine criminologists point the finger of contempt at him as the man who failed to verify his own deductions. Oh, shameful future!

"As for the subsidiary motive, I attach less importance to that but on the whole I am inclined to agree with Mr. Sheringham. I think Mrs. Bendix must have become a dreadful bore to her husband, who after all was a normal man, with a normal man's reactions and scale of values. I should be inclined to think that she morally drove him into the arms of his actresses, in search of a little light companionship. I'm not saying he wasn't deeply in love with her when he married her; no doubt he was. And he'd have had a naturally deep respect for her then.

"But it's an unfortunate marriage," observed the cynical Miss Dammers, "in which the respect outstays its usefulness. A man wants a piece of humanity in his marriage-bed; not an object of deep respect. But I'm bound to say that if Mrs. Bendix did bore her husband before the end, he was gentleman enough not to show it. The marriage was generally considered an ideal one."

Miss Dammers paused for a moment to sip at the glass of water in front of her.

"Lastly, Mr. Sheringham made the point that the letter and wrapper were not destroyed, because the murderer thought they would not only not harm him but definitely help him. With that too I agree. But I do not draw the same deduction from it that Mr. Sheringham did. I should have said that this entirely confirms my theory that the murder is the work of a second-rate mind, because a first-rate mind would never consent to the survival of any clue which could be easily destroyed, however helpful it might be expected to prove, because he would know how often such clues, deliberately left to mislead, have actually led to the criminal's undoing. And I would draw the subsidiary deduction that the wrapper and letter were not expected to be just generally helpful, but that there was some definite piece of misleading information contained in them. I think I know what the piece of information was.

"That is all the reference I have to make to Mr. Sheringham's case."

Roger lifted his bowed head, and Miss Dammers sipped again at her water.

"With regard to this matter of the respect Mr. Bendix had for his wife," Mr. Chitterwick hazarded, "isn't there something of an anomaly there, Miss Dammers? Because I understood you to say at the very beginning that the deduction you had drawn from that bet was that Mrs. Bendix was not quite so

worthy of respect as we had all imagined. Didn't that deduction stand the test, then?"

"It did, Mr. Chitterwick, and there is no anomaly."

"Where a man doesn't suspect, he will respect," said Mrs. Fielder-Flemming swiftly, before her Alicia could think of it.

"Ah, the horrid sepulchre under the nice white paint," remarked Mr. Bradley, who didn't approve of that sort of thing, even from distinguished dramatists. "Now we're getting down to it. Is there a sepulchre, Miss Dammers?"

"There is," Miss Dammers agreed, without emotion. "And now, as you say, Mr. Bradley, we're getting down to it."

"Oh!" Mr. Chitterwick positively bounced on his chair. "If the letter and wrapper *could* have been destroyed by the murderer . . . and Bendix wasn't the murderer . . . and I suppose the porter needn't be considered . . . Oh, *I* see!"

"I wondered when somebody would," said Miss Dammers.

CHAPTER XVI

"FROM the very beginning of this case," Miss Dammers proceeded, imperturbable as ever, "I was of the opinion that the greatest clue the criminal had left was one of which he would have been totally unconscious: the unmistakable indications of his own character. Taking the facts as I found them, and not assuming others as Mr. Sheringham did to justify his own reading of the murderer's exceptional mentality——" She looked challengingly towards Roger.

"Did I assume any facts that I couldn't substantiate?" Roger felt himself compelled to answer her look.

"Certainly you did. You assumed for instance that the typewriter on which the letter was written is now at the bottom of the Thames. The plain fact that it is not, once more bears out my own interpretation. Taking the established facts as I found them, then, I was able without difficulty to form the mental picture of the murderer that I have already sketched out for you. But I was careful not to look for somebody who would resemble my picture and then build up a case against him. I simply hung the picture up in my mind,

so to speak, in order to compare with it any individual towards whom suspicion might seem to point.

"Now, after I had cleared up Mr. Bendix's reason for arriving at his club that morning at such an unusual hour, there remained so far as I could see only one obscure point, apparently of no importance, to which nobody's attention seemed to have been directed. I mean, the engagement Sir Eustace had had that day for lunch, which must subsequently have been cancelled. I don't know how Mr. Bradley discovered this, but I am quite ready to say how I did. It was from that same useful valet who gave Mrs. Fielder-Flemming so much interesting information.

"I must admit in this connection that I have advantages over the other members of this Circle so far as investigations regarding Sir Eustace were concerned, for not only did I know Sir Eustace himself so well but I knew his valet too; and you may imagine that if Mrs. Fielder-Flemming was able to extract so much from him with the aid of money alone, I myself, backed not only by money but by the advantage of a previous acquaintance, was in a position to obtain still more. In any case, it was not long before the man casually mentioned that four days before the crime Sir Eustace had told him to ring up Fellows's Hotel in Jermyn Street and reserve a private room for lunch-time on the day on which the murder subsequently took place.

"That was the obscure point, which I thought it worth while to clear up if I could. With whom was Sir Eustace going to lunch that day? Obviously a woman, but which of his many women? The valet could give me no information. So far as he knew, Sir Eustace actually had not got any women at the moment, so intent was he upon the pursuit of Miss Wildman (you must excuse me, Sir Charles), her hand and her fortune. Was it Miss Wildman herself then? I was very soon able to establish that it wasn't.

"Does it strike you that there is a reminiscent ring about this cancelled lunch-appointment on the day of the crime? It didn't occur to me for a long time, but of course there is. Mrs. Bendix had a lunch-engagement for that day too, which was cancelled for some reason unknown on the previous afternoon."

"Mrs. Bendix!" breathed Mrs. Fielder-Flemming. Here was a juicy triangle.

Miss Dammers smiled faintly. "Yes, I won't keep you on the tenterhooks, Mabel. From what Sir Charles told us I knew that Mrs. Bendix and Sir Eustace at any rate were not total strangers, and in the end I managed to connect them. Mrs. Bendix was to have lunched with Sir Eustace, in a private room, at the somewhat-notorious Fellows's Hotel."

"To discuss her husband's shortcomings, of course?" suggested Mrs. Fielder-Flemming, more charitably than her hopes.

"Possibly, among other things," said Miss Dammers nonchalantly. "But the chief reason, no doubt was because she was his mistress." Miss Dammers dropped this bombshell among the company with as little emotion as if she had remarked that Mrs. Bendix was wearing a jade-green taffeta frock for the occasion.

"Can you—can you substantiate that statement?" asked Sir Charles, the first to recover himself.

Miss Dammers just raised her fine eyebrows. "But of course. I shall make no statements that I can't substantiate. Mrs. Bendix had been in the habit of lunching at least twice a week with Sir Eustace, and occasionally dining too, at Fellows's Hotel, always in the same room. They took considerable precautions and used to arrive not only at the hotel but in the room itself quite independently of each other; outside the room they were never seen together. But the waiter who attended them (always the same waiter) has signed a declaration for me that he recognised Mrs. Bendix, from the photographs published after her death, as the woman who used to come there with Sir Eustace Pennefather."

"He signed a declaration for you, eh?" mused Mr. Bradley. "You must find detecting an expensive hobby too, Miss Dammers."

"One can afford one expensive hobby, Mr. Bradley."

"But just because she lunched with him . . ." Mrs. Fielder-Flemming was once more speaking with the voice of charity. "I mean, it doesn't necessarily mean that she was his mistress, does it? Not, of course, that I think any the less of her if she was," she added hastily, remembering the official attitude.

"Communicating with the room in which they had their meals is a bedroom," replied Miss Dammers, in a desiccated tone of voice. "Invariably after they had gone, the waiter informed me, he found the bedclothes disarranged and the bed showing signs of recent use. I imagine that would be accepted as clear enough evidence of adultery, Sir Charles?"

"Oh, undoubtedly, undoubtedly," rumbled Sir Charles, in high embarrassment. Sir Charles was always exceedingly embarrassed when women used words like "adultery" and "sexual perversions" and even "mistress" to him, out of business hours. Sir Charles was regrettably old-fashioned.

"Sir Eustace, of course," added Miss Dammers in her detached way, "had nothing to fear from the King's Proctor."

She took another sip of water, while the others tried to accustom themselves to this new light on the case and the surprising avenues it illuminated.

Miss Dammers proceeded to illuminate them still further, with powerful beams from her psychological searchlight. "They must have made a curious cou-

ple those two. Their widely differing scales of values. the contrast of their respective reactions to the business that brought them together, the possibility that not even in a common passion could their minds establish any point of real contact. I want you to examine the psychology of the situation as closely as you can, because the murder was derived directly from it.

"What can have induced Mrs. Bendix in the first place to become that man's mistress I don't know. I won't be so trite as to say I can't imagine, because I can imagine all sorts of ways in which it may have happened. There is a curious mental stimulus to a good but stupid woman in a bad man's badness. If she has a touch of the reformer in her, as most good women have, she soon becomes obsessed with the futile desire to save him from himself. And in seven cases out of ten her first step in doing so is to descend to his level.

"Not that she considers herself at first to be descending at all; a good woman invaribly suffers for quite a long time from the delusion that whatever she does, her own particular brand of goodness cannot become smirched. She may share a reprobate's bed with him, because she knows that only through her body at first can she hope to influence him, until contact is established through the body with the soul and he may be led into better ways than a habit of going to bed in the daytime; but the initial sharing doesn't

reflect on her own purity in the least. It is a hackneyed observation but I must insist on it once more: good women have the most astonishing powers of self-deception.

"I do consider Mrs. Bendix as a good woman, before she met Sir Eustace. Her trouble was that she thought herself so much better that she was. Her constant references to honour and playing the game, which Mr. Sheringham quoted, show that. She was infatuated with her own goodness. And so, of course, was Sir Eustace. He had probably never enjoyed the complaisance of a really good woman before. The seduction of her (which was probably very difficult) would have amused him enormously. He must have had to listen to hour after hour's talk about honour, and reform, and spirituality, but he would have borne it patiently enough for the exquisite revenge on which he had set his heart. The first two or three visits to Fellows's Hotel must have delighted him.

"But after that it became less and less amusing. Mrs. Bendix would discover that perhaps her own goodness wasn't standing quite so firm under the strain as she had imagined. She would have begun to bore him with her self-reproaches; bore him dreadfully. He continued to meet her there first because a woman, to his type, is always a woman, and afterwards because she gave him no choice. I can see exactly what must inevitably have happened. Mrs. Ben-

dix begins to get thoroughly morbid about her own wickedness, and quite loses sight of her initial zeal for reform.

"They use the bed now because there happens to be a bed there and it would be a pity to waste it, but she has destroyed the pleasure of both. Her one cry now is that she must put herself right with her own conscience either by running away with Sir Eustace on the spot, or, more probably, by telling her husband, arranging for divorce (for, of course, he will never forgive her, *never*), and marrying Sir Eustace as soon as both divorces are through. In any case, although she almost loathes him by now nothing else can be contemplated but that the rest of her life must be spent with Sir Eustace and his with her. How well I know that type of mind.

"Naturally, to Sir Eustace, who is working hard to retrieve his fortunes by a rich marriage, this scheme has small appeal. He begins by cursing himself for having seduced the damned woman at all, and goes on to curse still more the damned woman for having been seduced. And the more pressing she becomes, the more he hates her. Then Mrs. Bendix must have brought matters to a head. She has heard about the Wildman girl affair. That must be stopped at once. She tells Sir Eustace that if he doesn't break it off himself, she will take steps to break it off for him. Sir Eustace sees the whole thing coming out, his own ap-

pearance in a second divorce-court, and all hopes of Miss Wildman and her fortune gone for ever. Something has got to be done about it. But what can be done? Nothing short of murder will stop the damned woman's tongue.

"Well—it's high time somebody murdered her anyhow.

"Now I'm on rather less sure ground, but the assumptions seem to me sound enough and I can produce a reasonable amount of proof to support them. Sir Eustace decides to get rid of the woman once and for all. He thinks it over carefully, remembers to have read about a case, several cases, in some criminological book, each of which just failed through some small mistake. Combine them, eradicate the small mistake from each, and so long as his relations with Mrs. Bendix are not known (and he is quite certain they aren't) there is no possibility of being found out. That may seem a long guess, but here's my proof.

"When I was studying him, I gave Sir Eustace every chance of plying his blandishments on me. One of his methods is to profess a deep interest in everything that interests the woman. Naturally therefore he discovered a profound, if hitherto latent, interest in criminology. He borrowed several of my books, and certainly read them. Among the ones he borrowed is a book of American poisoning cases. In it is an account of every single case that has been men-

tioned as a parallel by members of this Circle (except of course Marie Lafarge and Christina Edmunds).

"About six weeks ago, when I got in one evening my maid told me that Sir Eustace, who hadn't been near my flat for months, had called; he waited for a time in the sitting-room and then went. Shortly after the murder, having also been struck by the similarity between this and one or two of those American cases, I went to the bookshelf in my sitting-room to look them up. The book was not there. Nor, Mr. Bradley, was my copy of Taylor. But I saw them both in Sir Eustace's rooms the day I had that long conversation with his valet."

Miss Dammers paused for comment.

Mr. Bradley supplied it. "Then the man deserves what's coming to him," he drawled.

"I told you this murder wasn't the work of a highly intelligent mind," said Miss Dammers.

"Well, now, to complete my reconstruction. Sir Eustace decides to rid himself of his encumbrance and arranges what he thinks a perfectly safe way of doing so. The nitrobenzene, which appears to worry Mr. Bradley so much, seems to me a very simple matter. Sir Eustace has decided upon chocolates as the vehicle, and chocolate liqueurs at that. (Mason's chocolate liqueurs, I should say, are a favourite purchase of Sir Eustace's. It is significant that he had bought several one-pound boxes recently.) He is

searching, then, for some poison with a flavour which will mingle well enough with that of the liqueurs. He is bound to come across oil of bitter almonds very soon in that connection, actually used as it is in confectionery, and from that to nitrobenzene, which is more common, easier to get hold of, and practically untraceable, is an obvious step.

"He arranges to meet Mrs. Bendix for lunch, intending to make a present to her then of the chocolates which are to come to him that morning by post, a perfectly natural thing to do. He will already have the porter's evidence of the innocent way in which he acquired them. At the last minute he sees the obvious flaw in this plan. If he gives Mrs. Bendix the chocolates in person, and especially at lunch at Fellows's Hotel, his intimacy with her must be disclosed. He hastily racks his brains and finds a very much better plan. Getting hold of Mrs. Bendix, he tells her some story of her husband and Vera Delorme.

"In characteristic fashion Mrs. Bendix loses sight of the beam in her own eye on learning of this mote in her husband's and at once falls in with Sir Eustace's sugestion that she shall ring Mr. Bendix up, disguising her voice and pretending to be Vera Delorme, and just find out for herself whether or not he will jump at the chance of an intimate little lunch for the following day.

" 'And tell him you'll ring him up at the Rainbow

to-morrow morning between ten-thirty and eleven, Sir Eustace adds carelessly. 'If he goes to the Rainbow, you'll be able to know for certain that he's dancing attendance on her at any hour of the day.' And so she does. The presence of Bendix is therefore assured for the next morning at half-past ten. Who in the world is to say that he was not there by purest chance when Sir Eustace was exclaiming over that parcel?

"As for the bet, which clinched the handing over of the chocolates, I cannot believe that this was just a stroke of luck for Sir Eustace. That seems too good to be true. Somehow, I'm sure, though I won't attempt to show how (that would be mere guesswork), Sir Eustace arranged for that bet in advance. And if he did, the fact in no way destroys my initial deduction from it, that Mrs. Bendix was not so honest as she pretended; for whether it was arranged or whether it wasn't, the plain fact is left that it is dishonest to make a bet to which you know the answer.

"Lastly, if I am to follow the fashion and cite a parallel case, I decide unhesitatingly for John Tawell, who administered prussic acid in a bottle of beer to his mistress, Sarah Hart, when he was tired of her."

The Circle looked at her admiringly. At last, it seemed, they really had got to the bottom of the business.

Sir Charles voiced the general feeling. "If you've

got any solid evidence to support this theory, Miss Dammers. . . ." He implied that in that case the rope was as good as round Sir Eustace's thick red neck.

"Meaning that the evidence I've given already isn't solid enough for the legal mind?" enquired Miss Dammers equably.

"Psy—psychological reconstructions wouldn't carry *very* much weight with a jury," Sir Charles took refuge behind the jury in question.

"I've connected Sir Eustace with a piece of Mason's notepaper," Miss Dammers pointed out.

"I'm afraid on that alone Sir Eustace would get the benefit of the doubt." Sir Charles was evidently deprecating the psychological obtuseness of that jury of his.

"I've shown a tremendous motive, and I've connected him with a book of similar cases and a book of poisons."

"Yes. Oh, quite so. But what I mean is, have you any real evidence to connect Sir Eustace quite definitely with the letter, the chocolates, or the wrapper?"

"He has an Onyx pen, and the inkpot in his library used to be filled with Harfield's Ink," Miss Dammers smiled. "I've no doubt it is still. He was supposed to have been at the Rainbow the whole evening before the murder, but I've ascertained that there is a gap of half-an-hour between nine o'clock and nine-thirty dur-

ing which nobody saw him. He left the dining-room at nine, and a waiter brought him a whisky-and-soda in the lounge at half-past. In the interim nobody knows where he was. He wasn't in the lounge. Where was he? The porter swears he did not see him go out, or come in again; but there is a back way which he could have used if he wanted to be unnoticed, as of course he did. I asked him myself, as if by way of a joke, and he said that he had gone up to the library after dinner to look up a reference in a book of big game hunting. Could he mention the names of any other members in the library? He said there weren't any; there never were; he'd never seen a member in the library all the time he belonged to the club. I thanked him and rang off.

"In other words, he says he was in the library, because he knows there would be no other member there to prove he wasn't. What he really did during that half-hour, of course, was to slip out the backway, hurry down to the Strand to post the parcel (just as Mr. Sheringham saw Mr. Bendix hurrying down), slip in again, run up to the library to make sure nobody was there, and then go down to the lounge and order his whisky-and-soda to prove his presence there later. Isn't that more feasible than your vision of Mr. Bendix, Mr. Sheringham?"

"I must admit that it's no less so," Roger had to agree.

"Then you haven't any solid evidence at all?" lamented Sir Charles. "Nothing that would really impress a jury?"

"Yes, I have," said Miss Dammers quietly. "I've been saving it up till the end because I wanted to prove my case (as I consider I have done) without it. But this is absolutely and finally conclusive. Will everybody examine these, please."

Miss Dammers produced from her bag a brown-paper-covered parcel. Unwrapping it, she brought to light a photograph and a quarto sheet of paper which looked like a typed letter.

"The photograph," she explained, "I obtained from Chief Inspector Moresby the other day, but without telling him the specific purpose for which I wanted it. It is of the forged letter, actual size. I should like everybody to compare it with this typed copy of the letter. Will you look at them first, Mr. Sheringham, and then pass them round? Notice particularly the slightly crooked s's and the chipped capital H."

In dead silence Roger pored over the two. He examined them for a full two minutes, which seemed to the others more like two hours, and then passed them on to Sir Charles on his right.

"There isn't the slightest doubt that those two were done on the same machine," he said soberly.

Miss Dammers showed neither less nor more emo-

tion than she had displayed throughout. Her voice carried exactly the same impersonal inflection. She might have been announcing her discovery of a match between two pieces of dress-material. From her level tone it could never have been guessed that a man's neck depended on her words no less than on the rope that was to hang him.

"You will find the machine in Sir Eustace's rooms," she said.

Even Mr. Bradley was moved. "Then as I said, he deserves all that's coming to him," he drawled, with a quite impossible nonchalance, and even attempted a yawn. "Dear me, what a distressing bungler."

Sir Charles passed on the evidence. "Miss Dammers," he said impressively, "you have rendered a very great service to society. I congratulate you."

"Thank you, Sir Charles," replied Miss Dammers, matter-of-factly. "But it was Mr. Sheringham's idea, you know."

"Mr. Sheringham," intoned Sir Charles, "sowed better than he knew."

Roger, who had hoped to add another feather to his cap by solving the mystery himself, smiled in a somewhat sickly way.

Mrs. Fielder-Flemming improved the occasion. "We have made history," she said with fitting solemnity. "When the whole police-force of a nation had failed, a woman has uncovered the dark mystery.

Alicia, this is a red-letter day, not only for you, not only for this Circle, but for Women."

"Thank you, Mabel," responded Miss Dammers. "How very nice of you to say so."

The evidence passed slowly round the table and returned to Miss Dammers. She handed it on to Roger.

"Mr. Sheringham, I think you had better take charge of these. As President, I leave the matter in your hands. You know as much as I do. As you may imagine, to inform the police officially myself would be extremely distasteful. I should like my name kept out of any communication you make to them, entirely."

Roger was rubbing his chin. "I think that can be done. I could just hand these things over to him, with the information where the machine is, and let Scotland Yard work the case up themselves. These, and the motive, with the evidence of the porter at Fellows's Hotel of which I shall have to tell Moresby, are the only things that will really interest the police, I think. Humph! I suppose I'd better see Moresby to-night. Will you come with me, Sir Charles? It would add weight."

"Certainly, certainly," Sir Charles agreed with alacrity.

Everybody looked, and felt, very serious.

"I suppose," Mr. Chitterwick dropped shyly into

all this solemnity, "I suppose you couldn't put it off for twenty-four hours, could you?"

Roger looked his surprise. "But why?"

"Well, you know . . ." Mr. Chitterwick wriggled with diffidence. "Well—I haven't spoken yet, you know."

Five pairs of eyes fastened on him in astonishment. Mr. Chitterwick blushed warmly.

"Of course. No, of course." Roger was trying to be as tactful as he could. "And—well, that is to say, you want to speak, of course?"

"I have a theory," said Mr. Chitterwick modestly. "I—I don't *want* to speak, no. But I have a theory."

"Yes, yes," said Roger, and looked helplessly at Sir Charles.

Sir Charles marched to the rescue. "I'm sure we shall all be most interested to hear Mr. Chitterwick's theory," he pronounced. "Most interested. But why not let us have it now, Mr. Chitterwick?"

"It isn't quite complete," said Mr. Chitterwick, unhappy but persistent. "I should like another twenty-four hours to clear up one or two points."

Sir Charles had an inspiration. "Of course, of course. We must meet to-morrow and listen to Mr. Chitterwick's theory, of course. In the meantime Sheringham and I will just call in at Scotland Yard and——"

"I'd much rather you didn't," said Mr. Chitter-

wick, now in the deeps of misery. "Really I would."

Again Roger looked helplessly at Sir Charles. This time Sir Charles looked helplessly back.

"Well—I suppose another twenty-four hours wouldn't make *much* difference," said Roger with reluctance. "After all this time."

"Not *very* much difference," pleaded Mr. Chitterwick.

"Well, not very much difference certainly," agreed Sir Charles, frankly puzzled.

"Then have I your word, Mr. President?" persisted Mr. Chitterwick, very mournfully.

"If you put it like that," said Roger, rather coldly.

The meeting then broke up, somewhat bewildered.

CHAPTER XVII

IT WAS quite evident that, as he had said, Mr. Chitterwick did not want to speak. He looked appealingly round the circle of faces the next evening when Roger asked him to do so, but the faces remained decidedly unsympathetic. Mr. Chitterwick, expressed the faces plainly, was being a silly old woman.

Mr. Chitterwick cleared his throat nervously two or three times and took the plunge.

"Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen, I quite realise what you must be thinking, and I must plead for leniency. I can only say in excuse of what you must consider my perversity, that convincing though Miss Dammers's clever exposition was and definite as her proofs appeared, we have listened to so many apparently convincing solutions of this mystery and been confronted with so many seemingly definite proofs, that I could not help feeling that perhaps even Miss Dammers's theory might not prove on reflection to be not quite so strong as one would at first think." Mr. Chitterwick, having surmounted this tall obstacle, blinked rapidly but was unable to recall the next sentence he had prepared so carefully.

He jumped it, and went on a little. "As the one to

whom has fallen the task, both a privilege and a responsibility, of speaking last, you may not consider it out of place if I take the liberty of summing up the various conclusions that have been reached here, so different in both their methods and results. Not to waste time however in going over old ground, I have prepared a little chart which may show more clearly the various contrasting theories, parallels, and suggested criminals. Perhaps members would care to pass it round."

With much hesitation Mr. Chitterwick produced the chart on which he had spent so much careful thought, and offered it to Mr. Bradley on his right. Mr. Bradley received it graciously, and even condescended to lay it on the table between himself and Miss Dammers and examine it. Mr. Chitterwick looked artlessly gratified.

"You will see," said Mr. Chitterwick, with a shade more confidence, "that practically speaking no two members have agreed on any one single matter of importance. The divergence of opinion and method is really remarkable. And in spite of such variations each member has felt confident that his or her solution was the right one. This chart, more than any words of mine could, emphasises not only the extreme openness, as Mr. Bradley would say, of the case before us, but illustrates another of Mr. Bradley's observations too, that is how surprisingly easy it is to prove

anything one may desire, by a process either of conscious or of unwitting selection.

"Miss Dammers, I think," suggested Mr. Chitterwick, "may perhaps find that chart especially interesting. I am not myself a student of psychology, but even to me it was striking to notice how the solution of each member reflected, if I may say so, that particular member's own trend of thought and character. Sir Charles, for instance, whose training has naturally led him to realise the importance of the material, will not mind if I point out that the angle from which he viewed the problem was the very material one of *cui bono*, while the equally material evidence of the note-paper formed for him its salient feature. At the other end of the scale, Miss Dammers herself regards the case almost entirely from a psychological view-point and takes as its salient feature the character, as unconsciously revealed, of the criminal.

"Between these two, other members have paid attention to psychological and material evidence in varying proportions. Then again the methods of building up the case against a suspected person have been widely different. Some of us have relied almost entirely on inductive methods, some almost wholly on deductive; while some, like Mr. Sheringham, have blended the two. In short, the task our President set us has proved a most instructive lesson in comparative detection."

Solver	*Motive*	*Angle of view*	*Salient feature*	*Method of proof*	*Parallel case*	*Criminal*
Sir Charles Wildman	Gain	*Cui bono*	Notepaper	Inductive	Marie Lafarge	Lady Pennefather
Mrs. Fielder-Flemming	Elimination	*Cherchez la femme*	Hidden triangle	Intuitive and Inductive	Molineux	Sir Charles Wildman
Bradley (1)	Experiment	Detective-novelist's	Nitrobenzene	Scientific deduction	Dr. Wilson	Bradley
Bradley (2)	Jealousy	Character of Sir Eustace	Criminological knowledge of murderer	Deductive	Christina Edmunds	Woman unnamed
Sheringham	Gain	Character of Mr. Bendix	Bet	Deductive and Inductive	Carlyle Harris	Bendix
Miss Dammers	Elimination	Psychology of all participants	Criminal's character	Psychological deduction	Tawell	Sir Eustace Pennefather
Police	Conviction, or lust of killing	General	Material clues	Routine	Horwood	Unknown fanatic or lunatic

MR. CHITTERWICK'S CHART

Mr. Chitterwick cleared his throat, smiled nervously, and continued. "There is another chart which I might have made, and which I think would have been no less illuminating than this one. It is a chart of the singularly different deductions drawn by different members from the undisputed facts in the case. Mr. Bradley might have found particular interest in this possible chart, as a writer of detective-stories.

"For I have often noticed," apologised Mr. Chitterwick to the writers of detective-stories *en masse,* "that in books of that kind it is frequently assumed that any given fact can admit of only one single deduction, and that invariably the right one. Nobody else is capable of drawing any deductions at all but the author's favourite detective, and the ones he draws (in the books where the detective is capable of drawing deductions at all which, alas, are only too few) are invariably right. Miss Dammers mentioned something of the kind one evening herself, with her illustration of the two bottles of ink.

"As an example of what really happens therefore, I should like to cite the sheet of Mason's notepaper in this case. From that single piece of paper the following deductions have at one time or another been drawn:

1. That the criminal was an employee or ex-employee of Mason & Sons.

2. That the criminal was a customer of Mason & Sons.
3. That the criminal was a printer, or had access to a printing-press.
4. That the criminal was a lawyer, acting on behalf of Mason & Sons.
5. That the criminal was a relative of an ex-employee of Mason & Sons.
6. That the criminal was a would-be customer of Webster's, the printers.

"There have been plenty of other deductions of course from that sheet of paper, such as that the chance possession of it suggested the whole method of the crime, but I am only calling attention to the ones which were to point directly to the criminal's identity. There are no less than six of them, you see, and all mutually contradictory."

"I'll write a book for you, Mr. Chitterwick," promised Mr. Bradley, "in which the detective shall draw six contradictory deductions from each fact. He'll probably end up by arresting seventy-two different people for the murder and committing suicide because he finds afterwards that he must have done it himself. I'll dedicate the book to you."

"Yes, do," beamed Mr. Chitterwick. "For really, it wouldn't be far from what we've had in this case. For example, I only called attention to the notepaper.

Besides that there were the poison, the typewriter, the postmark, the exactness of the dose—oh, many more facts. And from each one of them not much less than half-a-dozen different deductions have been drawn.

"In fact," Mr. Chitterwick summed up, "it was as much as anything the different deductions drawn by different members that proved their different cases."

"On second thoughts," decided Mr. Bradley, "my detectives in future will be the kind that don't draw any deductions at all. Besides, that will be so much easier for me."

"So with these few remarks on the solutions we have already heard," continued Mr. Chitterwick, "which I hope members will pardon me, I will hurry on to my explanation of why I asked Mr. Sheringham so urgently last evening not to go to Scotland Yard at once."

Five faces expressed silent agreement that it was about time Mr. Chitterwick was heard on that point.

Mr. Chitterwick appeared to be conscious of the thoughts behind the faces, for his manner became a little flurried.

"I must first deal very briefly with the case against Sir Eustace Pennefather, as Miss Dammers gave it us last night. Without belittling her presentation of it in any way at all, I must just point out that her two chief reasons for fixing the guilt upon him seemed to me to be firstly that he was the type of person

whom she had already decided the criminal must be, and secondly that he had been conducting an intrigue with Mrs. Bendix and certainly would have seemed to have some cause for wishing her out of the way—*if* (but only *if*) Miss Dammers's own view of the progress of that intrigue was the correct one."

"But the typewriter, Mr. Chitterwick!" cried Mrs. Fielder-Flemming, loyal to her sex.

Mr. Chitterwick started. "Oh, yes; the typewriter. I'm coming to that. But before I reach it, I should like to mention two other points which Miss Dammers would have us believe are important material evidence against Sir Eustace, as opposed to the psychological. That he should be in the habit of buying Mason's liqueur chocolates for his—his female friends hardly seems to me even significant. If every one who is in the habit of buying Mason's liqueur chocolates is to be suspect, then London must be full of suspects. And surely even so unoriginal a murderer as Sir Eustace would seem to be, would have taken the elementary precaution of choosing some vehicle for the poison which is not generally associated with his name, instead of one that is. And if I may venture the opinion, Sir Eustace is not quite such a dunderhead as Miss Dammers would seem to think.

"The second point is that the girl in Webster's should have recognised, and even identified, Sir Eustace from his photograph. That also doesn't appear

to me, if Miss Dammers doesn't mind my saying so, nearly as significant as she would have us believe. I have ascertained," said Mr. Chitterwick, not without pride (here too was a piece of real detecting) "that Sir Eustace Pennefather buys his notepaper at Webster's, and has done so for years. He was in there about a month ago to order a fresh supply. It would be surprising, considering that he has a title, if the girl who served him had not remembered him; it cannot be considered significant," said Mr. Chitterwick quite firmly, "that she does.

"Apart from the typewriter, then, and perhaps the copies of the criminological books, Miss Dammers's case has no real evidence to support it at all, for the matter of the broken alibi, I am afraid, must be held to be neither here nor there. I don't wish to be unfair," said Mr. Chitterwick carefully, "but I think I am justified in saying that Miss Dammers's case against Sir Eustace rests entirely and solely upon the evidence of the typewriter." He gazed round anxiously for possible objections.

One came, promptly. "But you can't possibly get round that," exclaimed Mrs. Fielder-Flemming impatiently.

Mr. Chitterwick looked a trifle distressed. "Is 'get round' quite the right expression? I'm not trying wilfully or maliciously to pick holes in Miss Dammers's

case just for amusement. You must really believe that. Please think that I am actuated only by a desire to bring this crime home to its real perpetrator. And with that end alone in view, I can certainly suggest an explanation of the typewriter evidence which excludes the guilt of Sir Eustace."

Mr. Chitterwick looked so unhappy at what he conceived to be Mrs. Fielder-Flemming's insinuation that he was merely wasting the Circle's time, that Roger spoke him kindly.

"You can?" he said gently, as one encourages one's daughter on drawing a cow, which if not much like a cow is certainly unlike any other animal on earth. "That's very interesting, Mr. Chitterwick. How do you explain it then?"

Mr. Chitterwick, responding to treatment, shone with pride. "Dear me! You can't see it really? Nobody sees it?"

It seemed that nobody saw it.

"And yet the possibility of such a thing has been before me right from the beginning of the case," crowed the now triumphant Mr. Chitterwick. "Well, well!" He arranged his glasses on his nose and beamed round the circle, his round red face positively aglow.

"Well, what is the explanation, Mr. Chitterwick?" queried Miss Dammers, when it seemed that Mr. Chitterwick was going to continue beaming in silence for ever.

"Oh! Oh, yes; of course. Why, to put it one way, Miss Dammers, that you were wrong and Mr. Sheringham was right, in your respective estimates of the criminal's ability. That there was, in fact, an extremely able and ingenious mind behind this murder (Miss Dammers's attempts to prove the contrary were, I'm afraid another case of special pleading). And that one of the ways in which this ingenuity was shown, was to arrange the evidence in such a way that if only one were to be suspected it would be Sir Eustace. That the evidence of the typewriter, in a word, and of the criminological books was, as I believe the technical word is, *'rigged.'*" Mr. Chitterwick resumed his beam.

Everybody sat up with what might have been a concerted jerk. In a flash the tide of feeling towards Mr. Chitterwick had turned. The man *had* got something to say after all. There actually was an idea behind that untimely request of the previous evening.

Mr. Bradley rose to the occasion, and he quite forgot to speak quite so patronisingly as usual. "I say—dam' good, Chitterwick! But can you substantiate that?"

"Oh, yes. I think so," said Mr. Chitterwick, basking in the rays of appreciation that were being shone on him.

"You'll be telling us next you know who did it," Roger smiled.

Mr. Chitterwick smiled back. "Oh, I know *that.*"

"*What!*" exclaimed five voices in chorus.

"I know that, of course," said Mr. Chitterwick modestly. "You've practically told me that yourselves. Coming last of all, you see, my task was comparatively simple. All I had to do was to sort out the true from the false in everybody else's statements, and—well, there *was* the truth."

The rest of the Circle looked their surprise at having told Mr. Chitterwick the truth without knowing it themselves.

Mr. Chitterwick's face took on a meditative aspect. "Perhaps I may confess now that when our President first propounded his idea to us, I was filled with dismay. I had had no practical experience of detecting, I was quite at a loss as to how to set about it, and I had no theory of the case at all. I could not even see a starting-point. The week flew by, so far as I was concerned, and left me exactly where I had been at its beginning. On the evening Sir Charles spoke he convinced me completely. The next evening, for a short time, Mrs. Fielder-Flemming convinced me too.

"Mr. Bradley did not altogether convince me that he had committed the murder himself, but if he had named any one else then I should have been convinced; as it was, he convinced me that his—his discarded mistress theory," said Mr. Chitterwick

bravely, "must be the correct one. That indeed was the only idea I had had at all, that the crime might be the work of one of Sir Eustace's—h'm!—discarded mistresses.

"But the next evening Mr. Sheringham convinced me just as definitely that Mr. Bendix was the murderer. It was only last night, during Miss Dammers's exposition, that I at last began to realise the truth."

"Then I was the only one who didn't convince you, Mr. Chitterwick?" Miss Dammers smiled.

"I'm afraid," apologised Mr. Chitterwick, "that is so."

He mused for a moment.

"It is really remarkable, quite remarkable, how near in some way or other everybody got to the truth of this affair. Not a single person failed to bring out at least one important fact, or make at least one important deduction correctly. Fortunately, when I realised that the solutions were going to differ so widely, I made copious notes of the preceding ones and kept them up to date each evening as soon as I got home. I thus had a complete record of the productions of all these brains, so much superior to my own."

"No, no," murmured Mr. Bradley.

"Last night I sat up very late, poring over these notes, separating the true from the false. It might perhaps interest members to hear my conclusions in

this respect?" Mr. Chitterwick put forward the suggestion with the utmost diffidence.

Everybody assured Mr. Chitterwick that they would be only too gratified to hear where they had stumbled inadvertently on the truth.

CHAPTER XVIII

MR. CHITTERWICK consulted a page of his notes. For a moment he looked a little distressed. "Sir Charles," he began. "Er—Sir Charles . . ." It was plain that Mr. Chitterwick was finding difficulty in discovering any point at all on which Sir Charles had been right, and he was a kindly man. He brightened. "Oh, yes, of course. Sir Charles was the first to point out the important fact that there had been an erasure on the piece of notepaper used for the forged letter. That was—er—very helpful.

"Then he was right too when he put forward the suggestion that Sir Eustace's impending divorce was really the mainspring of the whole tragedy. Though I am afraid," Mr. Chitterwick felt compelled to add, "that the inference he drew was not the correct one. He was quite right too in feeling that the criminal, in such a clever plot, would take steps to arrange an alibi, and that there was, in fact, an alibi in the case that would have to be circumvented. But then again it was not Lady Pennefather's.

"Mrs. Fielder-Flemming," continued Mr. Chitterwick, "was quite right to insist that the murder was the work of somebody with a knowledge of crimi-

nology. That was a very clever inference, and I am glad," beamed Mr. Chitterwick, "to be able to assure her that it was perfectly correct. She contributed another important piece of information too, just as vital to the real story underlying this tragedy as to her own case, namely that Sir Eustace was not in love with Miss Wildman at all but was hoping to marry her simply for her money. Had that not been the case," said Mr. Chitterwick, shaking his head, "I fear, I very much fear, that it would have been Miss Wildman who met her death instead of Mrs. Bendix."

"Good God!" muttered Sir Charles; and it is perhaps as great a tribute as Mr. Chitterwick was ever to receive that the K. C. accepted this startling news without question.

"That clinches it," muttered Mr. Bradley to Mrs. Fielder-Flemming. "Discarded mistress."

Mr. Chitterwick turned to him. "As for you, Bradley, it's astonishing how near you came to the truth. Amazing!" Mr. Chitterwick registered amazement. "Even in your first case, against yourself, so many of your conclusions were perfectly right. The final result of your deductions from the nitrobenzene, for instance; the fact that the criminal must be neat-fingered and of a methodical and creative mind; even, what appears to be at the time just a trifle far-fetched, that a copy of Taylor would be found on the criminal's shelves.

"Then beyond the fact that No. 4 must be qualified to 'must have had an opportunity of secretly obtaining a sheet of Mason's notepaper,' all twelve of your conditions were quite right, with the exception of 6, which does not admit of an alibi, and 7 and 8, about the Onyx pen and Harfield's ink. Mr. Sheringham was right in that matter with his rather more subtle point of the criminal's probable unobtrusive borrowing of the pen and ink. Which is exactly what happened, of course, with regard to the typewriter.

"As for your second case—well!" Mr. Chitterwick seemed to be without words to express his admiration of Mr. Bradley's second case. "You reached to the truth in almost every particular. You saw that it was a woman's crime, you deduced the outraged feminine feelings underlying the whole affair, you staked your whole case on the criminal's knowledge of criminology. It was really most penetrating."

"In fact," said Mr. Bradley, carefully concealing his gratification, "I did everything possible except find the murderess."

"Well, that is so, of course," deprecated Mr. Chitterwick, somehow conveying the impression that after all finding the murderess was a very minor matter compared with Mr. Bradley's powers of penetration.

"And then we come to Mr. Sheringham."

"Don't!" implored Roger. "Leave him out."

"Oh, but your reconstruction was very clever," Mr.

Chitterwick assured him with great earnestness. "You put a new aspect on the whole affair, you know, by your suggestion that it was the right victim who was killed after all."

"Well, it seems that I erred in good company," Roger said tritely, with a glance at Miss Dammers.

"But you didn't err," corrected Mr. Chitterwick.

"Oh?" Roger showed his surprise. "Then it was all aimed against Mrs. Bendix?"

Mr. Chitterwick looked confused. "Haven't I told you about that? I'm afraid I'm doing this is a very muddle-headed way. Yes, it is partially true to say that the plot was aimed against Mrs. Bendix. But the real position, I think, is that it was aimed against Mrs. Bendix and Sir Eustace jointly. You came very near the truth, Mr. Sheringham, except that you substituted a jealous husband for a jealous rival. Very near indeed. And of course you were entirely right in your point that the method was not suggested by the chance possession of the notepaper or anything like that, but by previous cases."

"I'm glad I was entirely right over something," murmured Roger.

"And Miss Dammers," bowed Mr. Chitterwick, "was most helpful. *Most* helpful."

"Although not convincing," supplemented that lady drily.

"Although I'm afraid I did not find her altogether

convincing," agreed Mr. Chitterwick, with an apologetic air. "But it was really the theory she gave us that at last showed me the truth. For she also put yet another aspect on the crime, with her information regarding the—h'm!—the affair between Mrs. Bendix and Sir Eustace. And that really," said Mr. Chitterwick, with another little bow to the informant, "was the foundation-stone of the whole business."

"I didn't see how it could fail to be," said Miss Dammers. "But I still maintain that my deductions from it are the correct ones."

"Perhaps if I may just put my own forward?" hesitated Mr. Chitterwick, apparently somewhat dashed.

Miss Dammers accorded a somewhat tart permission.

Mr. Chitterwick collected himself. "Oh, yes; I should have said that Miss Dammers was quite right in one important particular, her assumption that it was not so much the affair between Mrs. Bendix and Sir Eustace that was at the bottom of the crime, as Mrs. Bendix's character. That really brought about her own death. Miss Dammers, I should imagine, was perfectly right in her tracing out of the intrigue, and her imaginative insight into Mrs. Bendix's reactions —I think that is the word?" Mr. Chitterwick enquired diffidently of authority. "Mrs. Bendix's reac-

tions to it, but not, I consider, in her deductions regarding Sir Eustace's growing boredom.

"Sir Eustace, I am led to believe, was less inclined to be bored than to share the lady's distress. For the real point, which happened to escape Miss Dammers, is that Sir Eustace was quite infatuated with Mrs. Bendix. Far more so than she with him.

"That," pronounced Mr. Chitterwick, "is one of the determining factors in this tragedy."

Everybody pinned the factor down. The Circle's attitude towards Mr. Chitterwick by this time was one of intelligent expectation. Probably no one really thought that he had found the right solution, and Miss Dammers's stock had not been appreciably lowered. But certainly it seemed that the man had at any rate got something to offer.

"Miss Dammers," proceeded the object of their attention, "was right in another point she made too, namely that the inspiration of this murder, or perhaps I should say the method of it, certainly came from that book of poisoning cases she mentioned, of which her own copy (she tells us) is at present in Sir Eustace's rooms—planted there," added Mr. Chitterwick, much shocked, "by the murderess.

"And another useful fact she established. That Mr. Bendix had been lured (really," apologised Mr. Chitterwick, "I can use no other word) to the Rain-

bow Club that morning. But it was not Mrs. Bendix who telephoned to him on the previous afternoon. Nor was he sent there for the particular purpose of receiving the chocolates from Sir Eustace. The fact that the lunch appointment had been cancelled was altogether outside the criminal's knowledge. Mr. Bendix was sent there to be a witness to Sir Eustace receiving the parcel; that was all.

"The intention was, of course, that Mr. Bendix should have Sir Eustace so connected in his mind with the chocolates that if suspicion should ever arise against any definite person, that of Mr. Bendix would be directed before long to Sir Eustace himself. For the fact of his wife's intrigue would be bound to come to his knowledge, as indeed I understand privately that it has, causing him naturally the most intense distress."

"So that's why he's been looking haggard," exclaimed Roger.

"Without doubt," Mr. Chitterwick agreed gravely. "It was a wicked plot. Sir Eustace, you see, was expected to be dead by then and incapable of denying his guilt, and such evidence as there was had been carefully arranged to point to murder and suicide on his part. That the police never suspected him (that is, so far as we know), simply shows that investigations do not always take the turn that the criminal expects. And in this case," observed Mr. Chitterwick

with some severity, "I think the criminal was altogether too subtle."

"If that was her very involved reason for ensuring the presence of Mr. Bendix at the Rainbow Club," agreed Miss Dammers with some irony, "her subtlety certainly overreached itself." It was evident that not only on the point of psychology did Miss Dammers not find herself ready to accept Mr. Chitterwick's conclusions.

"That, indeed, is exactly what happened," Mr. Chitterwick pointed out mildly. "Oh, and while we are on the subject of the chocolates, I ought to add that the reason why they were sent to Sir Eustace's club was not only so that Mr. Bendix might be a witness of their arrival, but also, I should imagine, so that Sir Eustace would be sure to take them with him to his lunch-appointment. The murderess of course would be sufficiently conversant with his ways to know that he would almost certainly spend the morning at his club and go straight on to lunch from there; the odds were enormous that he would take the box of Mrs. Bendix's favourite chocolates with him.

"I think we may regard it as an instance of the criminal's habitual overlooking of some vital point that is to lead eventually to detection, that this murderess completely lost sight of the possibility that the appointment for lunch might be cancelled. She is a particularly ingenious criminal," said Mr. Chitter-

wick with gentle admiration, "and yet even she is not immune from this failing."

"Who is she, Mr. Chitterwick?" ingenuously asked Mrs. Fielder-Flemming.

Mr. Chitterwick answered her with a positively roguish smile. "Everybody else has withheld the name of the suspect till the right moment. Surely I may be allowed to do so too.

"Well, I think I have cleared up most of the doubtful points now. Mason's notepaper was used, I should say, because chocolates had been decided on as the vehicle and Mason's were the only chocolate manufacturing firm who were customers of Webster's. As it happened, this fitted very well, because it was always Mason's chocolates that Sir Eustace bought for his—er—his friends."

Mrs. Fielder-Flemming looked puzzled. "Because Mason's were the only firm who were customers of Webster's? I'm afraid I don't understand."

"Oh, I *am* explaining all this badly," cried Mr. Chitterwick in much distress, assuming all blame for this obtuseness. "It had to be some firm on Webster's books, you see, because Sir Eustace has his notepaper printed at Webster's, and he was to be identified as having been in there recently if the purloined piece was ever connected with the sample book. Exactly, in fact, as Miss Dammers did."

Roger whistled. "Oh, I see. You mean, we've all been putting the cart before the horse over this piece of notepaper?"

"I'm afraid so," regretted Mr. Chitterwick with earnestness. "Really, I'm very much afraid so."

Insensibly opinion was beginning to turn in Mr. Chitterwick's favour. To say the least, he was being just as convincing as Miss Dammers had been, and that without subtle psychological reconstructions and references to "values." Only Miss Dammers herself remained outwardly sceptical; but that, after all, was only to be expected.

"Humph!" said Miss Dammers, sceptically.

"What about the motive, Mr. Chitterwick?" nodded Sir Charles with solemnity. "Jealousy, did you say? I don't think you've quite cleared up that yet, have you?"

"Oh, yes, of course." Mr. Chitterwick actually blushed. "Dear me, I meant to make that clear right at the beginning. I *am* doing this badly. No, not jealousy, I'm inclined to fancy. Revenge. Or revenge at any rate so far as Sir Eustace was concerned, and jealousy as regards Mrs. Bendix. From what I can understand, you see, this lady is—dear me," said Mr. Chitterwick, in distress and embarrassment, "this is very delicate ground. But I must trespass on it. Well —though she had concealed it successfully from her

friends, this lady had been very much in love with Sir Eustace, and become—er—had become," concluded Mr. Chitterwick bravely, "his mistress. That was a long time ago.

"Sir Eustace was very much in love with her too, and though he used to amuse himself with other women it was understood by both that this was quite permissible so long as there was nothing serious. The lady, I should say, is very modern and broad-minded. It was understood, I believe, that he was to marry her as soon as he could induce his wife (who was quite ignorant of this affair) to divorce him. But when this was at last arranged, Sir Eustace found that owing to his extreme financial stringency, it was imperative that he should marry money instead.

"The lady was naturally very disappointed, but knowing that Sir Eustace did not care at all for—er—was not really in love with Miss Wildman and the marriage would only be, so far as he was concerned, one of convenience, she reconciled herself to the future and, quite seeing Sir Eustace's necessity, did not resent the introduction of Miss Wildman—whom indeed," Mr. Chitterwick felt himself compelled to add, "she considered as quite negligible. It never occurred to her to doubt, you see, that the old arrangement would hold good, and she would still have Sir Eustace's real love with which to content herself.

"But then something quite unforeseen happened. Sir Eustace not only fell out of love with her. He fell unmistakably in love with Mrs. Bendix. Moreover, he succeeded in making her his mistress. That was quite recently, since he began to pay his addresses to Miss Wildman. And I think Miss Dammers has given us a true picture of the results in Mrs. Bendix's case if not in that of Sir Eustace.

"Well, you can see the position then, so far as this other lady was concerned. Sir Eustace was getting his divorce, marriage with the negligible Miss Wildman was now out of the question, but marriage with Mrs. Bendix, tortured in her conscience and seeing in divorce from her husband and marriage with Sir Eustace the only means of solving it—marriage with Mrs. Bendix, the real beloved, and even more eligible than Miss Wildman so far as the financial side was concerned, was to all appearances inevitable. I deprecate the use of hackneyed quotations as much as anybody, but really I feel that if I permit myself to add that hell has no fury like——"

"Can you prove all this, Mr. Chitterwick?" interposed Miss Dammers coolly on the hackneyed quotation.

Mr. Chitterwick started. "I—I think so," he said, though a little dubiously.

"I'm inclined to doubt it," observed Miss Dammers briefly.

Somewhat uncomfortable, under Miss Dammers's sceptical eye, Mr. Chitterwick explained. "Well Sir Eustace, whose acquaintance I have been at some pains to cultivate recently. . . ." Mr. Chitterwick shivered a little, as if the acquaintance had not been his ideal one. "Well, from a few indications that Sir Eustace has unconsciously given me. . . . That is to say, I was questioning him at lunch to-day as adroitly as I could, my conviction as to the murderer's identity having been formed at last, and he did unwittingly let fall a few trifles which . . ."

"I doubt it," repeated Miss Dammers bluntly.

Mr. Chitterwick looked quite nonplussed.

Roger hurried to the rescue. "Well, shelving the matter of proof for the moment, Mr. Chitterwick, and assuming that your reconstruction of the events is just an imaginative one. You'd reached the point where marriage between Sir Eustace and Mrs. Bendix had become inevitable."

"Yes; oh, yes," said Mr. Chitterwick, with a grateful look towards his saviour. "And then of course, this lady formed her terrible decision and made her very clever plan. I think I've explained all that. Her old right of access to Sir Eustace's rooms enabled her to type the letter on his typewriter one day when she knew he was out. She is quite a good mimic, and it was easy for her when ringing up Mr. Bendix to imitate

the sort of voice Miss Delorme might be expected to have."

"Mr. Chitterwick, do any of us know this woman?" demanded Mrs. Fielder-Flemming abruptly.

Mr. Chitterwick looked more embarrassed than ever. "Er—yes," he hesitated. "That is, you must remember it was she who smuggled Miss Dammers's two books into Sir Eustace's rooms too, you know."

"I shall have to be more careful about my friends in future, I see," observed Miss Dammers, gently sarcastic.

"An ex-mistress of Sir Eustace's, eh?" Roger murmured, conning over in his mind such names as he could remember from that lengthy list.

"Well, yes," Mr. Chitterwick agreed. "But nobody had any idea of it. That is— Dear me, this is very difficult." Mr. Chitterwick wiped his forehead with his handkerchief, and looked extremely unhappy.

"She'd managed to conceal it?" Roger pressed him.

"Er—yes. She'd certainly managed to conceal the true state of matters between them, very cleverly indeed. I don't think anybody suspected it at all."

"They apparently didn't know each other?" Mrs. Fielder-Flemming persisted. "They were never seen about together?"

"Oh, at one time they were," said Mr. Chitterwick, looking in quite a hunted way from face to face. "Quite frequently. Then, I understand, they thought

it better to pretend to have quarrelled and—and met only in secret."

"Isn't it time you told us this woman's name, Chitterwick?" boomed Sir Charles down the table, looking judicial.

Mr. Chitterwick scrambled desperately out of this fire of questions. "It's very strange, you know, how murderers never will let well alone, isn't it?" he said breathlessly. "It happens so often. I'm quite sure I should never have stumbled on the truth in this case if the murderess had only left things as they were, in accordance with her own admirable plot. But this trying to fix the guilt on another person.... Really, from the intelligence displayed in this case, she ought to have been above that. Of course her plot *had* miscarried. Been only half-successful, I should say. But why not accept the partial failure? Why tempt Providence? Trouble was inevitable—inevitable——"

Mr. Chitterwick seemed by this time utterly distressed. He was shuffling his notes with extreme nervousness, and wriggling in his chair. The glances he kept darting from face to face were almost pleading. But what he was pleading for remained obscure.

"Dear me," said Mr. Chitterwick, as if at his wits' end. "This is very difficult. I'd better clear up the remaining point. It's about the alibi.

"In my opinion the alibi was an afterthought, ow-

ing to a piece of luck. Southampton Street is near both the Cecil and the Savoy, isn't it? I happen to know that this lady has a friend, another woman, of a somewhat unconventional nature. She is continually away on exploring expeditions and so on, usually quite alone. She never stays in London more than a night or two, and I should imagine she is the sort of woman who rarely reads the newspapers. And if she did, I think she would certainly not divulge any suspicion they might convey to her, especially concerning a friend of her own.

"I have ascertained that immediately preceding the crime this woman, whose name by the way is Jane Harding, stayed for two nights at the Savoy Hotel, and left London, on the morning the chocolates were delivered, for Africa. From there she was going on to South America. Where she may be now I have not the least idea. Nor, I should say, has any one else. But she came to London from Paris, where she had been staying for a week.

"The—er—criminal would know about this forthcoming trip to London, and so hurried to Paris. (I am afraid," apologised Mr. Chitterwick uneasily, "there is a good deal of guess-work here.) It would be simple to ask this other lady to post the parcel in London, as the parcel postage is so heavy from France, and just as simple to ensure it being delivered on the morning of the lunch-appointment with Mrs. Bendix, by

saying it was a birthday present, or some other pretext, and—and—must be posted to arrive on that particular day." Mr. Chitterwick wiped his forehead again and glanced pathetically at Roger. Roger could only stare back in bewilderment.

"Dear me," muttered Mr. Chitterwick distractedly, "this is *very* difficult.—Well, I have satisfied myself that——"

Alicia Dammers had risen to her feet and was unhurriedly picking up her belongings. "I'm afraid," she said, "I have an appointment. Will you excuse me, Mr. President?"

"Of course," said Roger, in some surprise.

At the door Miss Dammers turned back. "I'm so sorry not to be able to stay to hear the rest of your case, Mr. Chitterwick. But really, you know, as I said, I very much doubt whether you'll be able to prove it."

She went out of the room.

"She's perfectly right," whispered Mr. Chitterwick, gazing after her in a petrified way. "I'm quite sure I can't. But there isn't the faintest doubt. I'm afraid, not the faintest."

Stupefaction reigned.

"You—you *can't* mean . . . ?" twittered Mrs. Fielder-Flemming in a strangely shrill voice.

Mr. Bradley was the first to get a grip on himself. "So we did have a practising criminologist amongst

us after all," he drawled, in a manner that was never Oxford. "How quite interesting."

Again silence held the Circle.

"So now," asked the President helplessly, "what the devil do we do?"

Nobody enlightened him.

THREE PROBLEMS FROM THE BAFFLE BOOK

by

Lassiter Wren and Randle McKay

For the amateur of crime; for the person, for instance, who took up the papers on an historic morning in March of 1927 and, reading the curious details of a murder in Queens Village, Long Island, began to ponder the implications of the dead Mr. Snyder, and the living Mrs. Snyder loosely bound with wire, and later the connection of a Mr. Gray with the case—to that person the problems presented by Lassiter Wren and Randle McKay in their series of Baffle Books have had an enormous appeal. The Baffle is, in essence, a problem in crime. You have the story as the detective learns it; your job is to solve the mystery. Here are three of the best and most puzzling of the problems, taken from *The First Baffle Book*, with the answers. The latter are bound in upside down, to help you refrain from turning to them too soon.

No. 1

WHO MURDERED ELLINGTON BREESE?

Suspicion of guilt of the murder is narrowed down to two men. Which of them committed the crime and how do you know it? Examine carefully the following established facts, then answer the questions put at the end of the problem.

Philadelphia was shocked on the morning of June 5, 1925, by the news of the murder of a distinguished citizen. Ellington Breese, founder and president of the Breese Chemical Works of that city, had been murdered by poison gas generated in his bedroom during the night.

The police investigation revealed the following pertinent facts:

Breese had been found dead in his bed at eight o'clock in the morning by his Negro servant, who for years had aroused him at that hour. On the mantelpiece (there was no fireplace) the police found

a glass flask of about one quart capacity. Its stopper was missing. It was the kind of glass vessel familiar to any chemical laboratory. Experts said that one chemical poured upon another would have generated the poison gas immediately, and that diffusion in the room must have followed quickly. Neither on the glass flask nor on other objects were fingerprints found.

Although both windows, screened, had been up eight inches from the bottom, the practically instantaneous effects of the gas had killed every living thing in the bedroom. Breese's pet bullfinch lay dead in its cage. Half a dozen flies and mosquitoes lay dead on the window sills. The dark green shades at the windows were found drawn down nearly to the bottom of the lower window sash, dimming the murder chamber, though the sun shone brightly outside.

The wavering finger of suspicion began to point with equal emphasis at two young men, each of whom was connected with Ellington Breese's business and had had enough laboratory experience to have manufactured the deadly gas.

E. Breese Walters, nephew and only surviving relative of the murdered man, was one suspect. Adam

Boardman, Breese's confidential secretary, was the other. Each protested his innocence, each to a degree had an alibi. According to the police investigation, so far as could be determined, both had good records, no debts or entanglements. Both seemed deeply affected by the tragedy.

Neither man seemed capable of committing such a cowardly crime. Yet the police reflected upon the terms of Breese's will, which divided half his estate —about a half million dollars—between the favorite nephew and the devoted employee. The other half of the estate Breese had bequeathed to charity. The terms, of the will, drawn five years before, had never been a secret.

Walters and Boardman had maintained cordial but not close relations while in the employ of Breese. Each expressed confidence in the innocence of the other.

The coroner examined the body at 9:30 A.M. and declared that Breese had been dead at least four hours, and possibly for as long as ten hours. The position of the body in the bed indicated to a certainty that death had overtaken Breese while in his bed, to which he had been confined by a slight illness.

The police, cherishing a uniform suspicion of Walters and Boardman, decided that they would know the murderer when they knew approximately the hour in which the poison gas was generated in Breese's bedroom.

Boardman, the secretary, had been with Breese until a little after 11:30 P.M. He admitted it, and his leaving the house about a quarter to twelve was confirmed by the testimony of old Mrs. Grew, Breese's boyhood nurse and housekeeper, whose room was near Breese's on the second floor. Boardman had been discussing business matters with his employer, who was laid up in bed convalescing from grippe. He admitted returning to Breese's bedroom for a moment after first leaving it, in order, he said, to secure a briefcase which he had forgotten. At that time, he said, he put out the bedroom light at Breese's request, and closed the door upon leaving. And after leaving Breese's home Boardman went straight to his own. He shared one floor of an old mansion with two other young men. Through the rest of the night and until the body was found his alibi was perfect.

Walters had returned unexpectedly early from Washington, D. C., at one o'clock in the morning. Mrs. Grew heard him enter, came out and spoke to

him on the second floor landing and asked if there was anything she might do. Walters said he was not hungry and would go straight to bed. He asked about his uncle's health, heard that Boardman had been there until nearly midnight attending to details of the business, and observed that his uncle must be recovering nicely from his grippe if he could remain at work so late. He went upstairs to his room on the third floor.

Mrs. Grew, who was suffering from rheumatism, returned to her room on the second floor, read for a while, and then went to sleep—not until 2:30 A.M., she believed. From that time until the discovery of the murder, Walters's claim of innocence, like Boardman's, had no support from other testimony than his own.

In short, the police suspected, and their suspicions proved well founded, that if Breese died before midnight it was Boardman who liberated the gas that killed him; and that if Breese died after midnight, then Walters was the slayer of his uncle.

You have now all the evidence from which the Philadelphia police shrewdly fixed the approximate time of the crime and thereby the identity of the murderer.

These are the questions for you to answer:

1. *Which was the slayer?* (Credit 5.)

2. *How did the police deduce it?* (Credit 5.)

Credit Score:

NOTE

When you have answered the questions, turn to page 1 of the Answer Section for the solution, and rate yourself accordingly. The sense or gist of your answers, not the exact phrasing, determines whether or not you have answered rightly.

Rate yourself in the line above marked "Credit Score."

No. 2

THE EVIDENCE ON THE JAPANNED BOX

The theft of the celebrated Elgin Emerald occurred under circumstances most embarrassing to Mr. Stephen Lerian, owner of the unique gem. Lerian had been entertaining a house party on his Long Island estate near Westbury. The guests were five in number:

Mr. and Mrs. Archibald Hay; their niece, Charlotte Grainger; Colonel Alexander Blue, U. S. A.; and Mrs. Eleanor Standish, widow of one of Lerian's classmates at Harvard.

With what he himself later characterized as inexcusable carelessness, Lerian, the host, had left the emerald in a small black japanned box upon a table in the living room after exhibiting it to the assembled guests one evening. He had been trying for some time to get through a telephone call to Paris, and when finally summoned to the telephone in an adjacent

room absent-mindedly laid the box on the table and hurried out. When he returned in five minutes, the box was empty

Assuming that the party was playing a joke on him, Lerian, in mock-serious tones, demanded that the thief step forward. For several minutes he could hardly believe his senses when each of the company, with the utmost emphasis, denied any knowledge of the missing jewel. Judson, the butler, had been in the room during Lerian's absence, as had Ada Gowan, a maid, but these old servants of good character also denied all knowledge of the matter.

For two hours the entire household was in the throes of an excited search on the theory that the jewel had been accidentally lost. But at last Lerian was compelled to face the truth: *someone had taken it.*

To call in the police on so obviously an "inside job" was revolting to Lerian's nature. Absolving everyone from blame in the matter except himself, and insisting that he must have spilled it from the box, he forbade further discussion of the subject, and with remarkable *sang-froid* swept his guests into a game of bridge. It would "turn up," said Lerian.

Afterward, in his own room, with the japanned

box before him, Lerian, who is something of an amateur detective, examined the box carefully.

Its surface was highly polished. On the outer rim of the inside of the cover he discovered a remarkably clear thumbprint, which he believed was not his own. He sprinkled it with the white powder used to bring out fingerprints on black surfaces and found it another's. Then he set the box carefully aside.

Lerian knew that none of the company had laid hands on the inside when he had first showed it to them. He reasoned (and subsequent events justified his reasoning) that this must be the thumbprint of the thief. But whose thumbprint? The innocent ones must not suffer suspicion. He resorted to a stratagem.

Lerian put the japanned box carefully away in a wall safe. He then took from his Oriental collection a nest of small black lacquered boxes, whose surfaces were even more telltale than the jewel case. The following morning, Lerian contrived to exhibit to each guest and each servant a different one of the lacquered boxes. To each person separately he told an attractive story of the history of the box and got each to test the strength of the apparently fragile sides by squeezing them between finger and thumb of the left hand; for the thief's thumbprint, as placed

on the cover of the case, indicated that a left hand had made it.

Each box, bearing a different thumbmark, Lerian duly secreted in his bureau. When this was done he withdrew to his room and treated the seven small lacquered boxes with white powder. Each, of course, he had subsequently labelled for purposes of identification.

On the next page is a reproduction of the thumbprint on the lid of the japanned jewel case, and the thumbprints on the seven lacquered boxes.

What do you deduce? The questions to be answered are:

1. *Did a guest or a servant steal Stephen Lerian's emerald?* (Credit 5.)

2. *Who was the thief?* (Credit 5.)

Credit Score:

FINGERPRINT OF THE THIEF

ON THE JAPANNED BOX

MRS. HAY'S

MR. HAY'S

JUDSON'S

COL. BLUE'S

MRS. STANDISH'S

MISS GRAINGER'S

ADA GOWAN'S

No. 3

THE ELEVATED TRANSIT MYSTERY

This is a three-part mystery. Solve the first part before trying the second, and both before the third—or you will be baffled indeed.

PART I

While sitting at the window of Cho Sing's Chop Suey Restaurant, at the corner of Tenth Avenue and Forty-eighth Street, early Sunday morning, July 7th, Arthur McGraw and Queenie Walker witnessed the beginning of the celebrated mystery which for eleven days was the sensation of the country. Cho Sing's restaurant occupies the third floor of the building. The table at the window, where the couple sat, is some seven feet below the level of the tracks of the Tenth Avenue Line of the Elevated Transit Company.

As McGraw subsequently testified (corroborated

by Miss Walker) they had been watching anxiously to see if the rain was stopping, so that they might leave. Several times during the previous half hour they had been fascinated by the oncoming roar and rush of the elevated trains, which bore down upon them only to swerve sharply to the left not more than fifteen feet from their window and grind around the curve which marks the turn of the line from Tenth Avenue onto Forty-eighth Street

At approximately 2:28 A.M. they had just noticed that the shower had stopped and were watching the last car of a train swing around the curve when they were startled to see the figure of a man hurtle downward close to the edge of the elevated road and fall on the sidewalk below. McGraw summoned Cho Sing and several men at neighboring tables and rushed downstairs to render aid.

What they found was even more shocking than they had expected. The man had fallen on his side and had rolled over and over onto a dry spot on the sidewalk which had been protected by an awning. He lay prone, and on turning the man over, the would-be rescuers gasped to find a crimson stain which nearly covered the white starched bosom of his evening-dress shirt. He was dead. Indeed, it was

apparent that the man had been dead from stabs even before he struck the sidewalk.

His face was that of a man in his early thirties—dark, handsome, evidently of foreign extraction.

Policeman O'Connor, arriving on the scene at 2:33, immediately isolated the body of the man from the gathering crowd and telephoned headquarters at 2:34. Police headquarters telephoned the news to the Elevated Transit Company officials and ordered the train stopped at the nearest station as quickly as it could be done. The records establish that the train was stopped and held at the Forty-second Street Station on Eighth Avenue at 2:36, pending arrival of detectives.

Several detectives from the Forty-fourth Street police station arrived a few minutes later and made a detailed examination of all guards and passengers on the train. The following facts were established:

There was unanimous testimony that no man in evening clothes had ridden in the train since it started from One Hundred and Eightieth Street. William Murphy, transit guard in charge of the platforms connecting the last and middle cars of the train (it was a three-car train), denied that there could have

Where the Tenth Avenue line of the Elevated Transit turns left on to Forty-eighth Street. Long arrow at right indicates window where McGraw and Queenie sat. X marks spot where body struck sidewalk.

been a stabbing affray on the platform or within either of his cars. He was corroborated by seven reputable witnesses. No testimony gathered revealed any knowledge of the presence of a man answering the description of the dead man. The detectives were baffled.

But since McGraw and Miss Walker, the witnesses of the fall, were certain that they had seen the man fall from the last car, the detectives held Guard Murphy for examination, took the addresses of all fourteen passengers in the rear car, and had the train switched and held. They also picked up "White" Mizzinski, wanted for arson in connection with the Brooklyn apartment house fires. "White" denied any knowledge of the dead man, and his entrance to the train at the Fifty-fourth Street station was substantiated.

The detectives then returned to the scene at Cho Sing's and reëxamined the body. They established the following additional details:

Height, 5 feet 6 inches; approximate weight, 140 pounds; cheap quality of cloth in evening clothes. Label of the maker had been cut from clothes. All marks on linen had been removed. No cuff links,

wallet, paper, money, or watch were found upon the body.

The patent leather shoes on the victim's feet, soles of which first appeared wet with patches of water, upon careful examination proved to have been waxed. The rain, which had thoroughly soaked the back of the coat and of the trousers, the back of the socks, and even the hair on the back of the head, had been warded off the soles of the shoes. The soles were slippery but not wet. The front of the victim's clothes was dry.

The man had been stabbed twice in the heart, apparently with a long, sharp knife. No fingerprints could be found.

Police Captain Danforth, who arrived at Cho Sing's place soon after the fall of the body, had already established from the testimony of a section track walker (who had inspected the tracks only eight minutes before the tragedy) that the body probably could not have been on the tracks before the arrival of the train which passed the curve at 2:28 A.M.

As is now well known, Captain Danforth, by reasoning solely from the evidence up to then available,

reached certain conclusions which were of the greatest importance in the ultimate solution of the mystery. Especially he deduced correctly how the body had come to the sidewalk and what should be done at once.

What do you deduce? These are the questions to be answered:

1. *How came the body to the sidewalk?* (Credit 4.)

2. *Where should the detectives particularly search for clues which might ultimately lead to the catching of the murderer?* (Credit 1.)

Credit Score:

PART II

Have you read and solved the preceding problem—Part I of "The Elevated Transit Mystery"? It is essential to an understanding of the part which follows.

It is a tribute to Captain Danforth's detective ability in seeking the solution of the Elevated Transit

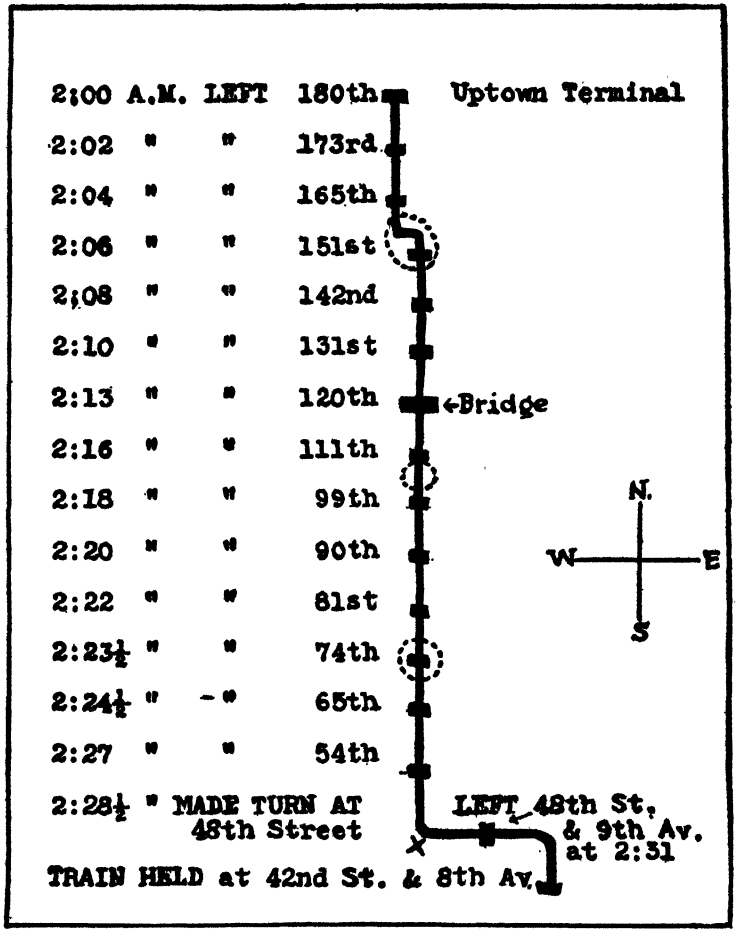
mystery that he called immediately upon the United States Government's local Weather Bureau for data to help him. The body had been seen to fall at approximately 2:28 A.M., and within forty minutes the captain had obtained an official bureau report of the duration of the rainfall in the uptown district where the tragedy had been discovered. The report showed that the shower had burst suddenly at 2:20 A.M. and had continued for seven minutes, then stopping. At no time had the rain been merely a drizzle. And there had been no rain in the city for nineteen hours previous to that time.

With this established fact before him Captain Danforth would be in a position to consider other facts which he had ordered obtained. First, a map of the Elevated Transit Company's Tenth Avenue line, showing the various stations uptown (i.e., above Cho Sing's restaurant) and a schedule of Train No. 34 (from which the body had fallen) from its point of origin down to the Forty-eighth Street region. The train, he had ascertained, had been on time all the way down. Captain Danforth had also ordered that the map be marked to show at which points the tracks of the elevated railroad *ran nearest to* the buildings and apartment houses along the seven-mile

route. These "zones of suspicion" were three in number. They are indicated by dotted rings on the map which is reproduced on page 31.

Most important of all, Captain Danforth had made a personal examination of the roof of the rear-end car of Train No. 34 immediately after he had deduced that the body probably had fallen from there. The evidence clearly confirmed his conclusion. On the still moist roof, near the very rear of the car, was a dry spot roughly shaped like a cross. Obviously it had been made by the sprawled body of a man whose arms had been extended on either side. It was apparent also that he had lain face down, for a patch of blood stained the dry spot just above the center of it. The victim, it will be recalled, had been stabbed in the heart.

Now the most obvious place from which a body could have been thrown conveniently to a train passing below was the bridge at the One Hundred and Twentieth Street station uptown. This bridge connects the uptown and downtown stations at that point. Captain Danforth had therefore dispatched detectives to that station very early in his investigation. Their report, when telephoned to him, proved to be



Map of the elevated line. "Zones of Suspicion" are shown by dotted rings. X marks spot where body was seen to fall.

of the greatest importance in connection with the data which he had assembled.

The detectives had found an important witness in the person of Inspector Monahan of the Elevated Transit Company. His night inspection tours (of the signal light system recently installed) customarily brought him to the One Hundred and Twentieth Street station about 2:10 o'clock. Monahan said that he had been smoking a pipe on the bridge while waiting for Train 106 (bound uptown and then not due for eight minutes) when he observed Train 34 come from uptown, stop at the One Hundred and Twentieth Street Station, and pass on downtown. He was absolutely certain that the body could not have been on the roof of the train at that time, else he would have observed it. The police found his testimony convincing, and indeed it may be said that his testimony was confirmed by later discoveries.

Where should further clues be sought? This was the question confronting Captain Danforth at this stage of the investigation. He proceeded to narrow down the three "zones of suspicion" to one in which the murderer must have operated. What conclusion would you have reached from the available data?

The question to be answered is:

To which "zone of suspicion" did Captain Danforth direct the search for further clues to the murderer? (Credit 2.)

Credit Score:

PART III

Have you read and solved the preceding parts of this mystery? Parts I and II should be done before the following third and final part is attempted.

Under Captain Danforth's directions detectives combed the "zone of suspicion" where it seemed most probable that further clues might be found. The Tenth Avenue line of the Elevated Transit Company in this region ran through a section of the city quite mixed in population and in style of buildings. For eight blocks the dingy avenue squeezed itself into a small canyon scarcely thirty-five feet wide in some parts. Drab tenement houses four and five stories high lined the elevated tracks for much of this distance. A hay-and-feed store loft, remnant of the days of the horse; several pool parlors; a Rumanian restaurant (on a third floor); and the "Rooms of the

One Hundred and Fifth Street Social Club" (on a fourth floor) were conspicuous among the non-residential apartments on the east side of the avenue.

On the west side of the avenue, besides private dwelling apartments in tenement houses, were to be seen the dingy offices of a Russian newspaper; the gaudy, glaring windows of the Palace Gardens, a dance hall; the Calliope Saxophone School; a storage warehouse seven stories high; and several disreputable-looking armchair lunches and cafeterias. All but the latter had windows which opened *above* the level of the roofs of the elevated train cars as they passed.

With the exception of the newspaper office, the hay-and-feed store, and the storage warehouse, all the nonresidential apartments enumerated had been open late that evening. It was obvious that, once located, the building from which the body had been thrown would have to be searched carefully. One place in particular, Captain Danforth decided, was most suspicious of all. He decided on this place by considering certain facts noted in the early stage of the investigation.

In this place his men found clues which led, some ten days later, to discovery and capture of the mur-

derer. Where would you have searched especially?

The questions to be answered are:

1. *In which building did Captain Danforth's men find clues which ultimately led to the detection of the murderer of the victim whose body was thrown upon the roof of Train 34?* (Credit 2.)

2. *How did Captain Danforth deduce that this building rather than any other was worth special investigation?* (Credit 1.)

Credit Score:

Part I :
Part II :
Part III:

ANSWER SECTION

No. 1

WHO MURDEREED ELLINGTON BREESE?

1. Walters, the nephew, murdered Ellington Breese. (Credit 5.)

2. The police deduced that Walters was the murderer from the fact that the flies and the mosquitoes found dead were on the window sills instead of around the room. This indicated that the gas had permeated the room *after* dawn, for the following reasons: a poison gas, powerful enough to kill a human being, would kill instantly such insects as flies and mosquitoes. Therefore they must have been at the windows when overtaken by the gas. From this it can be deduced that it was light at the time, since such insects, in a dark room, are attracted to the windows by the light coming in beneath partially drawn shades. It may be logically considered to be very improbable

that so many insects would have been found on the window sills had the instantaneously fatal gas been released in the darkness of the night. (Credit 5.)

Observation of this clue led the detectives to another terrific grilling of Walters, who eventually broke down and confessed to the crime. He had stolen down at the break of dawn. Desperate losses in wildcat speculation, it later developed, had driven Walters to the deed. He was subsequently convicted and executed early in 1926.

No. 2

THE EVIDENCE ON THE JAPANNED BOX

1. A guest stole the Elgin emerald from the japanned box which the owner, Stephen Lerian, had left carelessly upon the living-room table. (Credit 5.)

2. The thief was Miss Charlotte Grainger, as indicated by the telltale thumbmark on the rim of the inside of the cover of the japanned box. (Credit 5.)

Charlotte Grainger's thumbprint was the only one which was identical in its ridge markings with the thumbprint on the japanned box cover.

The distinctive feature of both prints is the arch formation of the ridges.

The ridges are classified according to types—loops, whorls, arches. For instance Colonel Blue's thumbprint would be classified as distinguished by its whorls; that of Mr. Hay by its loops; and Charlotte Grainger's was the only one distinguished by its arches.

The dangerous aftermath of Stephen Lerian's private investigation into the disappearance of his emerald was no fault of his. The unfortunate girl, whose kleptomaniacal impulses were unknown even to her uncle and aunt, Mr. and Mrs. Archibald Hay, was herself the cause of the unpleasant publicity which the whole case received. Lerian refrained from broaching his shocking discovery to the girl's uncle until she and the Hays had returned to the Hay home. Her uncle decided to search her room. The niece, coming upon her uncle just as he had located the missing jewel in her dresser, flew at him in a desperate assault and seriously injured him with a

paper cutter which she had snatched up. Every effort was made to hush up the affair, but it was revealed to the police through servants who had suffered from the girl's ungovernable bursts of temper. It was this that forced the Hays to agree to her confinement in a private sanitarium. The Hays, it must be recorded, placed no blame whatever upon Lerian for his methods in detecting the theft.

No. 3

THE ELEVATED TRANSIT MYSTERY

PART I

1. The body fell to the sidewalk under Cho Sing's windows from *the roof of the last car* of the elevated railroad train which swung around the curve about 2:28 A.M. (Credit 4.)

Captain Danforth deduced as follows:

The body was not on the tracks, according to the track walker's testimony, just before the train came to the spot. It had not come from the platforms or

windows of the cars of the train, according to all available testimony of passengers and guards. Upon striking the sidewalk the body had enough impetus or spin in it to roll under an awning attached to the building in which Cho Sing's restaurant was housed. Therefore it was highly probable that the snap of the end car of the train making the curve was the cause of the impetus—an impetus *away* from the path of the train and *toward* the building. While it was *possible* that the body might have been flung from a window above Cho Sing's, or from the roof, onto the car's roof, it was extremely improbable that the murderer would have done so, because Cho Sing's restaurant was open and crowded. To have done so would have invited detection. Therefore, Captain Danforth reasoned, it was almost certain that the murder had occurred uptown somewhere, and that the murderer had thrown the body on the roof of the car to get it carried far from the scene of the crime.

2. The roof of the rear end of the train is what should have been searched particularly for clues which might lead to the apprehension of the murderer. (Credit 1.)

How Captain Danforth did search there and what he found and deduced therefrom, you will see in Part II of "The Elevated Transit Mystery" which begins on page 28.

PART II

Captain Danforth directed search immediately to the "zone of suspicion" which lay between One Hundred and Eleventh Street and the Ninety-ninth Street stations of the Elevated Transit Company's Tenth Avenue line. (Credit 2.)

Captain Danforth reasoned thus: He eliminated as *improbable* the "zone of suspicion" nearest the One Hundred and Fifty-first Street station, in view of the testimony of Inspector Monahan. (Monahan had said the body was not on the roof of Train No. 34 when he watched it pass downtown from the bridge at the One Hundred and Twentieth Street station.)

Captain Danforth then eliminated as *impossible* the "zone of suspicion" which centered at the Seventy-fourth Street station. He did this because the Weather Bureau report showed that the shower had burst on the uptown region at 2:20 A.M., at which time Train No. 34 had only reached the Ninetieth

Street station on its downtown journey. The roof of the train must have been thoroughly wetted by the time it reached the "zone of suspicion" at Seventy-fourth Street, and if the body had been thrown on in that zone there could not have been a perfectly dry spot apparent on the otherwise soaked roof of the car. But such a dry spot, in the shape of a sprawled body, *had* been found on the roof of the rear-end car. Therefore, Captain Danforth deduced, the body must have been thrown on *before* the shower began. Hence his selection of the "zone of suspicion" which lay between the One Hundred and Eleventh and the Ninety-ninth Street stations, for the train had passed through it *before* the shower had begun.

How the detectives searched in the suspected zone, what they found there, and how Captain Danforth finally located the murder scene and captured the murderer, you will learn in Part III of "The Elevated Transit Mystery" which begins on page 33.

PART III

1. The building in which the detective found the final clues was that in which the Palace Gardens, a dance hall, was located. (Credit 2.)

2. Captain Danforth deduced that the dance-hall building, rather than any other, was the place of greatest suspicion, thus: the soles of the shoes of the victim had been found dry, not wet; the water which had soaked other parts of his clothing *on the back,* had been warded off the slippery, waxed soles of his shoes, as observed by the police when they first examined him. Almost certainly, then, the man had been dancing just previous to his death, and this pointed to the Palace Gardens. (Credit 1.)

Captain Danforth, after tracing back the body from Cho Sing's at Forty-eighth Street to the Palace Gardens dance-hall region at One Hundred and Sixth Street, began a painstaking examination of all persons known to have been at the dance hall that night. While no clues within the dance hall could be found, either on the roof or on window sills, the proprietors of the hall admitted that the evening had been disturbed by sounds as if of a brawl in the men's washroom a little after 2 A.M. It had quieted down quickly, and the proprietors had thought nothing of it, for such sounds were not uncommon at the Gardens.

Captain Danforth put a young woman detective on the case. She visited the Palace Gardens frequently, posing as the jazziest of flappers, and within a week had learned two important facts. First, several of the girls who had frequented the place and might therefore have been in a position to testify as to events of the night had left town suddenly on Sunday. Second, there had been a Porto Rican chauffeur there that night—dark, handsome, and in a dress suit. No one could be found who had seen him go home.

Meanwhile the victim had been identified by the press as José Racheta, Porto Rican chauffeur and race-track devotee, temporarily out of work. Captain Danforth discovered that Racheta had entered the Palace Gardens alone, in the possession of $550 won that afternoon on a horse race. By tracing the girl habitués of the Palace Gardens to Boston, where they had been sent to get them out of the way, Captain Danforth was able to learn the names of two men seen to have entered the washroom after Racheta did so a little after 2 A.M. on that Sunday.

Both men were arrested in a car on Brooklyn Bridge eleven days after the finding of Racheta's body. In the pockets of Alexander Kargos, the elder,

were found cuff links identified later as Racheta's. Petrino Guido, an Italian window cleaner, living in the Bronx, was the other suspect. Both broke under the third degree and confessed to the robbery and murder of Racheta in the dance-hall washroom.

Quickly cutting out all identification marks from the clothes, Guido, the window cleaner, had clung to the window sill with his knees while he had leaned out and dropped the body on the "L" train as it sped by, scarcely two feet below and three feet away.

Captain Danforth was promoted and the murderers were electrocuted.

No. 4

THE PROBLEM OF THE BANDIT'S TORN NOTE

1. The lobby of the Hotel La Salle was the place named in the note for a meeting of "Red" Sam Gunther's band. (Credit 5.)

2. Date of meeting—Wednesday noon. (Credit 5.)