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and so shall I before quitting this
neighbourhood. It will put an end,
once for all, to gossip, and doubtless
it will prove that the last person who
had possession of the knife was not
Mr. Laurence Pridham."

His arguments prevailed and, with-
out further protest, Mr. Pridham led
the way into the house and upstairs,
to Laurie's room.

"Wait a minute here," he told Law-
son, and went in alone. The nurse
was sitting by the window, reading.
She put down her book and came to-
wards him. Neither of them spoke
for some seconds, but stood by the
bedside, looking down at the thin,
white face, chiselled by suffering into
the appearance of a beautiful Grecian
cameo. Laurie's eyes were closed,
but he sighed occasionally, and some-
times his fingers moved over the
counterpane as if seeking for some-
thing.

Mr. Pridham signed to the nurse to
follow him towards the door, and she
saw the tall man standing outside.

"Another doctor?" she murmured;
and Mr. Pridham answered low, "He
only wants to make a test; it would
not disturb the boy?"

She shook her head. "Oh, no! he
would notice nothing of that sort. But
there is improvement; I am certain of
it—a sort of awakening. I am long-
ing for Dr. Fraser to come again."

Pridham beckoned to the inspector
to enter, and they crossed the room to-
gether. The inspector produced a
long, narrow, flat tablet of rubber, one
side of which he covered with printers'
ink, which he squeezed from a col-
apsible tube on to it, afterwards roll-
ing the ink quite smooth. Then, after
carefully wiping Laurie's thumb and
forefinger with a handkerchief on
which he had sprinkled benzoline, he
rolled them lightly on the tablet until
they were covered with ink, and then
repeated the rolling process on a fin-
ger-print form. The impression was
taken, and particularly clear.

"That will do," said Lawson, as he
laid Laurie's hand in the nurse's and
directed her how to remove the ink.

At this moment it seemed as if some
strange telepathic message reached
Laurie's brain, for he opened his eyes
and looked at them fixedly.

"Tubby!" he said quite loudly, "Tub-
by, old man, I don't mean to give you
away, whatever happens"—there was
a pause, and Lawson moved quietly
towards the door, then stood looking
back, and listening.

Laurie spoke again. "Is it fair to
the girl? You ought not to let her
think—" He broke off into a long
sigh. "Too tired—but did he take
the knife, or was it my—?"

His eyes closed. He had relapsed
into the land of dreams again.

"You see he is beginning to think
and speculate about things now—he
is better," the nurse told Mr. Pridham
earnestly, out in the corridor.

He made no reply, but with bowed
head and slow step went after Lawson
downstairs to the library below.

CHAPTER XIX.

When you say "nineteen to the
dozen," you may imply that someone
has been taken at a disadvantage—or
perchance you may mean that
someone has gone just a bit too fast
and over-reached himself.

THE inspector had crossed to
the big bay window when
Mr. Pridham entered his
library, and he was intent
on examining the imprint of Laurie's
fingers on the paper, and comparing
it, by the aid of his magnifying glass,
with the photographs he had brought
to the house. He frowned and push-
ed out his underlip as if what he saw
was not altogether satisfactory, and
contrary to his expectation.

Mr. Pridham sank down heavily in-
to his customary seat by the bureau
and moved the papers about im-
patiently. At last he could bear the
suspense no longer.

"Well! what's the result? or is
there none?"

Still Lawson remained silent, with
eyes fixed upon the evidence beneath
them.

At last his companion sprang up
from his chair and went over to him,
stretching out his hands to seize

those convincing bits of testimony.
Lawson jerked himself slightly
aside, and by this manoeuvre still re-
tained possession of the prizes.

"Perhaps it would be as well, sir, if
you did not see the result. We have
to make very sure in these cases—it
does not do to go by one or two
similarities. I'll apprise you later on."

Mr. Pridham felt he was being put
off. Either the inspector did not trust
him to handle the precious things, or
else, with professional jealousy, he
wanted to protect this special piece
of information from the eyes of
an outsider.

"I wish to see it now," Mr. Prid-
ham announced firmly, and the set of
his jaw and the hard gleam of his
eyes showed him very much in
earnest.

"I don't know that I have exactly
the right to show it to you," Lawson
was trying to gain time, but the other
man was not to be thwarted.

"You undertook to let me know im-
mediately what was the result, when
I permitted you to go into my son's
room. That was the primary induce-
ment you offered, to relieve Mrs.
Pridham's anxiety and my own. You
won't dare to tell me, to my face, that
you have been playing with me and
making capital out of my trouble
about my son, to gain your point! It's
inhuman! It's devilish!"

The inspector was manifestly at a
loss what to say or do. The unexpect-
ed had happened, and for the moment
he was nonplussed.

"Don't take it that way, sir. I beg
of you not to think me capable of
planning to carry my point by work-
ing on your feelings as a father. That
would be inhuman, indeed, under the
circumstances, and no mistake. When
I asked your permission to let me take
the impression of Mr. Laurence's
hand, I never thought for a moment
that this was in store for us—never,
on my sacred word of honour."

THE man was genuinely concerned.
He looked and spoke as if he
were sorry.

"What are you driving at? I don't
take your meaning."

They confronted each other silently
for a moment, then Lawson answered
deliberately: "Can't you guess what
I mean, Mr. Pridham?"

Horatio Pridham's face had turned
to a sickly, waxy tint. He breathed
hard and eyed his companion with
almost savage intensity. His voice
was thick when he spoke again.

"Show the damned things to me
and have done with it."

Then the inspector put the photo-
graph in his hand, gave him the
magnifying glass, and held the paper
beneath it. He did not part with this
latter paper beneath it. He did not
part with this latter—it was too valu-
able an asset.

Mr. Pridham stared from one object
to the other.

"You see, sir," said the inspector
quietly, "what may seem to you
absolutely conclusive in the similarity
between the finger-marks on the knife
and your son's impression on the
paper, may be open to doubt. Here,
for instance, is the same bifurcation
with an upward line leading off—
three lines away is an island, and
beyond it an arch, just as in the
photo; but we never go by one or
two or several indications. We want
twenty or more—the odds have to be
thousands to one on before we take
it as decisive. In any case it would
not be considered evidence against
your son if the finger-marks do tally.
You see, the knife is in his own
house—he has a right to touch it. If
they were a stranger's finger-marks
that would be very different, and
would constitute a strong and im-
portant clue. But in your son's case
it is no clue at all."

The inspector was talking purpose-
fully at some length to give Mr. Prid-
ham time to recover himself.

A curious sound came from Mr.
Pridham's throat; it might have been
a groan or a smothered curse.
Finally he threw the glass and photo-
graph on to a chair beside him and
walked away towards the fire place.
There, with his back to the other
man, he remained, with working face

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