

and slender figure stood in a pose of arrested action, holding a goblet half-full of brandy and water. Her features were but indistinctly suggested in the penumbra of the dome, but beneath this her bare arms and shoulders, rising out of an elaborate evening gown, shone with a soft warm lustre. Matthias remembered that gown: Joan Thursday had worn it in the last act of "Mrs. Mixer." But she neither moved nor spoke, and for the time being he paid her no further heed, giving his attention entirely to Marbridge.

Sitting low in a deeply upholstered wing-chair — out of place in the dining-room and evidently dragged in for the emergency — Marbridge breathed heavily, chin on his chest, his coarse mouth ajar, his face ghastly with a stricken pallor. His feet sprawled uncouthly. The dress coat and waistcoat he had worn lay in a heap on the floor, near the chair, and both shirt and undershirt had been ripped and cut away from his right shoulder, exposing his swarthy and hairy bosom and a sort of temporary bandage which, like his linen, was darkly stained. Closed when Matthias entered, his eyes opened almost instantly and fixed upon the man a heavy and lacklustre stare which at first failed to indicate recognition.

Matthias heard himself crying out in a voice of horror: "Good God, Marbridge! How did this happen?"

The man stirred, grunted with pain, and made a deprecatory gesture with his left hand.

"Need n't yell," he said thickly: "I've been shot . . . done for . . ."

His gaze shifted heavily to the woman. With effort he enunciated one word more: "Drink . . ."

As though by that monosyllable freed from an enchaining spell, Joan started, moved quickly to his side and held the goblet to his lips.

He drank noisily, gulping and slobbering; overflowing at either corner of his mouth, the liquor dripped twin streams upon his naked bosom.