

"Horrible!" The detective's ruddy face had paled. "But you surely do not take this at its face value?"

Adam Torrance, who had sunk into a chair, made no reply for a moment, and then, without looking up, "I think I do, Johnson," he said. "Don't you?"

"No, certainly not. That is—er—" the detective hesitated. "Of course, I can't say definitely, off-hand. It seems too awful. Who is this woman?"

"She doesn't say," listlessly.

"But—was there anyone—"

"Whom my father and I ruined? Probably. In the way of business some always go to the wall. I believe we have always tried to act honourably, however. I think that neither he nor I ever willingly ruined anyone. As to the other—what she says about the girl"—a look of horror came into his tired face—"that can't be true, can it, Johnson? I admit that I have never interfered very much in the management of the Stores, but once I remember reading something about inadequate wages being paid to girls, and I spoke about it to Davies. We went into things a little, and he convinced me that we were paying what we ought, according to profits; but it seemed very little! I told him, then, never to employ any girls but such as had their own homes and something else to depend upon, so as to avoid the possibility of that—that sort of thing. I gave positive orders."

Johnson touched the letter with his fingers. His detective instinct began to assert itself.

"This girl, apparently, had a home," he remarked. "If we are to accept the letter, she lived with her mother—that would come within your orders all right."

The other man's face seemed to grow still whiter.