

AN END AND A BEGINNING

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"But you said that you had no enemies."

"None that I knew of—none who would do *that*. But a man in my position must have enemies of whom he does not know, and it seems that I have had one enemy at least, a cruel one." His tone was so controlled that the detective marvelled. "Read this," he went on, handing him an envelope. "It is all there, all that we shall ever know."

The detective took the envelope eagerly—at last there was a clue! It was an ordinary envelope, not too clean. It had come by post, stamped the previous day, and contained a single sheet of paper. The paper was of the cheap, ruled variety, with nothing to distinguish it in any way. The writing on it was blurred and sprawling—either the production of a good writer trying to write badly, and succeeding very well, or of a poor writer doing his best to be legible and succeeding but poorly. From the general sloppiness of the letter, it was more probably the latter.

This was the letter :

"MR. TORRANCE, SIR,—You and your father ruined my father and us. My girl had to go into Angers' Store. I was sick and couldn't help. She couldn't make enough to live. She was so pretty, and pretty girls get hungry just like ugly ones. She's dead now, and a good thing for her she is. I don't need to speak plainer. You and your Stores killed her—and worse. I've lived to pay you back, and I've done it. I found out that you was Angers and Son, the devil that owns the Stores that don't pay a living wage. I've got your baby. We're even now. You'll never see her again. She's dead. I've paid you out."