

punctured it is only a question of hours when the strongest man must die! But I only surmise Mr. Whitmore's intentions from the facts of the case, for I never saw him alive after I left him in front of the opera house."

Beard sat down, wearied and worn from the strain of his recital. Miss Burden joined him and pressed a hand against his cheek. She did not repel the arm he slipped about her waist.

Now that Beard had finished, everyone experienced a welcome sense of relief, as if a heavy burden had been lifted off their minds.

"I've come across many cases of wonderful nerve, but nothing to equal the pluck of that man Whitmore!" exclaimed Manning, unable to contain his growing admiration for the dead merchant.

"And he was one of the mildest-mannered men I ever met!" joined Beard.

The coroner, who had been making notes, now looked up at Britz. The detective's face had relaxed into an expression of mingled pity and contentment. Through the sorrow which the suffering of Mrs. Collins aroused in him, shone the satisfaction which he could not but feel at having finally squeezed all the mystery out of the Whitmore case.