

"Not another thing. There wasn't so much as a pin out of place. No sign of any weapon. The only fingerprints were those of the dead woman herself on the chair-arm and on the table. The carpet yielded nothing. There was no trace of ash in the fire. The fire, by the way, must have been built up shortly before the murder. The kettle had been set on top, presumably in preparation for a cup of tea. But our search was not exhaustive. Ridley had O'Toole with him, and I think O'Toole is about the best searcher that ever happened. We left him to go over everything microscopically, and he will report any find to us. He is quite safe to be trusted with the routine. But I fancy he won't find much. Everything looked so undisturbed and normal. It was as if someone had called in for a chat and a cup of tea and decided on murder instead. There are only three things which bear the slightest emphasis—A-chew! Great Scott, I've got a cold!—and the three things are: the dated coins, the baby's slip and the look on the woman's face. If you can make anything out of them, you're welcome. I can't."

"That's the proper state of mind," grinned Gregory. "When discouraged, remember that you're not the whole show. To my mind those three things look distinctly promising, and you're wrong about there being nothing else. There is a very interesting something else which will be this-half-of-the-firm's contribution. But I shan't tell you what it is until your case is all in. What outside evidence did you get?"

"Surprisingly little. The house is a corner one, unfortunately, and the room in which the shot was fired does not face another house, but faces a strip of lawn and the side street. The woman who lives in the next-door house on Richly Road thinks that she heard a noise about five o'clock when she went into the kitchen to brisk up the fire for supper, but she thought it was a bursting auto tire and did not even look out of the window. None

of the other neighbours saw or heard anything. They are busy people and know very little about the tenant of No. 3. She never made herself popular in the neighbourhood, and the houses being rented, the occupants change quite often. No one has anything very definite to say for or against Mrs. Simmons, but on the whole I think I detected traces of a vague dislike of her. One woman said she had disagreeable eyes, and that her cats gave her the creeps. She kept herself to herself, they say, but seemed to have some fashionable friends, for smartly dressed ladies have been seen to visit her at different times. In fact, nearly all her few visitors appear to have been prosperous people. But they have never been known to make very lengthy stays, nor to return. It is the opinion of Richly Road that Mrs. Simmons had been some sort of upper servant whose former employers continue to take an interest in her."

"Not very likely. Former employers do not display such touching loyalty, as a rule—and certainly not in quantities. If her visitors had been the same people coming at intervals there might be something in it, but I gather that all these prosperous people were different?"

"Yes. I questioned rather closely upon that point."

"Besides, if her former home was in England—"

"She gave out that she came from England, but Richly Road doesn't believe it."

"Does Richly Road give any reason for its disbelief?"

"None whatever. But every woman I questioned said that although Mrs. Simmons spoke 'kind of English' she didn't believe that the deceased had ever been in England in her life."

"That's odd. Strange how these popular beliefs form themselves without a trace of evidence, and stranger still how often they turn out to be correct. It is just possible that the lady was not fond of her past and