

'The facts—yes—of course—the facts. Well'—he spoke rapidly and a little incoherently—'it is true that I worked here—but—oh! it is absurd. I know nothing of any cheque book lying in your safe. I was working at this table'—he went to the table—'sitting in this chair. How could I get up and search about in a safe for an unknown and unsuspected cheque book before your very eyes?'

'I do not know. It seems impossible. I only desire you to consider, with me, the facts.'

Had Mr. Dering spoken just a little less coldly, with just a little less dryness in his manner, what followed would perhaps have been different.

'Yes—the facts,' repeated the young man. 'Well—let us get at the facts. The chief fact is that whoever took that cheque and filled it up must have known the existence of that cheque book more than two years old.'

'It would seem so.'

'Who could know about that old cheque book? Only one who had been about your office more than two years, or one who had had opportunities of examining the safe. Now, you sat there—I sat here'—he seated himself, only turning the chair round. 'How is it possible for a man sitting here to take anything out of that safe without your seeing him? How is it possible for him, without your knowledge, to examine slowly and carefully the contents of the safe?'

'Everything is possible,' said Mr. Dering, still coldly. 'Let us not argue on possibilities. We have certain facts before us. By the help of these, I shall hope to find out others.'

'At five o'clock every day I put the work in the drawer of this table and I go away.' He opened the drawer, as if to illustrate this unimportant fact. He saw in it two or three pieces of paper with writing on them. He took them out. 'Good Heavens!' he cried. 'They are imitations of your handwriting.'

Checkley crossed the room swiftly, snatched them from him, and laid them before his master. 'Imitations of your handwriting,' he said. 'Imitations—exercises in forgery—practice makes perfect. Found in the drawer. Now!'

Mr. Dering looked at the papers and laid them beside the forged cheque. 'An additional fact,' he said. 'These are