

"Policeman Saunders's story corroborates this, but adds nothing new except that he couldn't hear himself think for the noises 'them blasted cats' were making. They were shut up in a room off the kitchen, which appears to have been used as a sort of cattery. They were probably hungry and smelled the spilt milk, anyway, they got on our policeman's nerves and he had no further investigations, but rang up headquarters from the nearest telephone. There was no telephone in the house. Ridley came down at once and brought Dr. Jones with him.

"Doctor's evidence shows that deceased had been dead only a short time, not more than half an hour. Shot had been fired at close range and passed directly through the heart. Death had been instantaneous. Expression of fear and horror on face quite marked. It is Dr. Jones's opinion that deceased had known that murder was intended, but had been unable through fear to give any alarm.

"So much for the onside evidence. Now for what Ridley and I noticed for ourselves. The most striking thing seemed to be the apparent fact that the woman had died sitting in her accustomed chair, facing her murderer, yet there had been no alarm (that anyone heard), and certainly no struggle. The expression on the face seemed to me almost more of surprise than fear or horror.

"Another strange thing was the nature of the article clasped in the dead woman's hand. It was a baby's hand-made flannelette night-slip. I inspected this very carefully and came to the following conclusions: The slip was old, but had been carefully kept; the material was of the cheapest; the hand-work on it was beautiful; it was a very small slip, seemed almost too small for a baby—"

"How do you know that?" interrupted Gregory.

"I don't. It's just an impression. We'll have to get a woman's opinion."

"Right."

Then I continued reading the note:

"The slip had been washed and ironed, evidently with great care. But it showed no signs of wear. That cheap stuff would show wear quickly. Another odd thing: on the table stood a small tin tea-caddy; the top was off and some of the contents had spilled or been spilled upon the tablecloth. But the contents were not tea. The caddy was half-full of twenty-five-cent pieces, each carefully done up separately in tissue-paper, and each labelled with a date. The dates were irregular and ranged back through the past four years. Sometimes there would be three or four very close together. Sometimes there were quite long intervals between. (I have a list of the dates here). The latest date was only a few days old. There was no other mark of any kind on the coins. The paper in which the coins were wrapped was ordinary white tissue. There was nothing else upon the table, save the afternoon mail, consisting of two or three tradesmen's accounts. She always paid by cheque. But on the floor was an envelope with the end torn open and the contents gone. The envelope was not a business one, nor was the writing that of a tradesman. Here is the envelope—see for yourself. It looks like the writing of an educated woman—the envelope is good style and quality. From the date, it was delivered with the other afternoon letters, but its contents have disappeared. Not a trace of them."

"Anything else?"

"One thing more. As I was coming out I searched the front yard—it's very small—and found this—it's a slip of paper, apparently the address torn off the top of a letter. The address is 'No. 3 Richly Road', and the writing is that of Mrs. Simmons. Probability is she dropped it herself and that it has nothing to do with the case."

"I don't know. Why should she tear her own address off a letter and drop it in her front yard? But no use theorizing yet. Is that all?"