

— XXIII —

THE WAY OUT

**S**TRANGE scene indeed! Strange antithesis to that other night when these four were gathered in that crime-reeked, sordid room at the Roost — where Pale Face Harry, gaunt, emaciated, coughed, and, trembling, plunged a morphine needle in his arm; where the Flopper, a wretched tatterdemalion from the gutter, licked greedy lips and gloated in his rascality; where Helena, flushed-faced, inhaled her interminable cigarettes and dangled her legs from the table edge; where Madison, suave, flippant, so certain of his own infallibility, glorying in his crooked masterpiece, laid the tribute to genius at his own feet!

Strange scene! Strange antithesis indeed! It was quiet here — very still — only the distant, muffled boom of the pounding surf. And the shrine-room, for the first time since its creation, was locked against the night. It lay now in shadow from the single lamp upon the table — and the light, where it fell in a shortened circle, for the lamp itself had a little green paper shade, was soft, subdued and mellow.

Where he had been wont to sit in the days gone by, the Patriarch sat now in his armchair