

The Long Arm



LEDROIT CONNERS

The Long Arm

By

Samuel M. Gardenhire

Author of

"The Silence of Mrs. Harrold"

"Lux Crucis"

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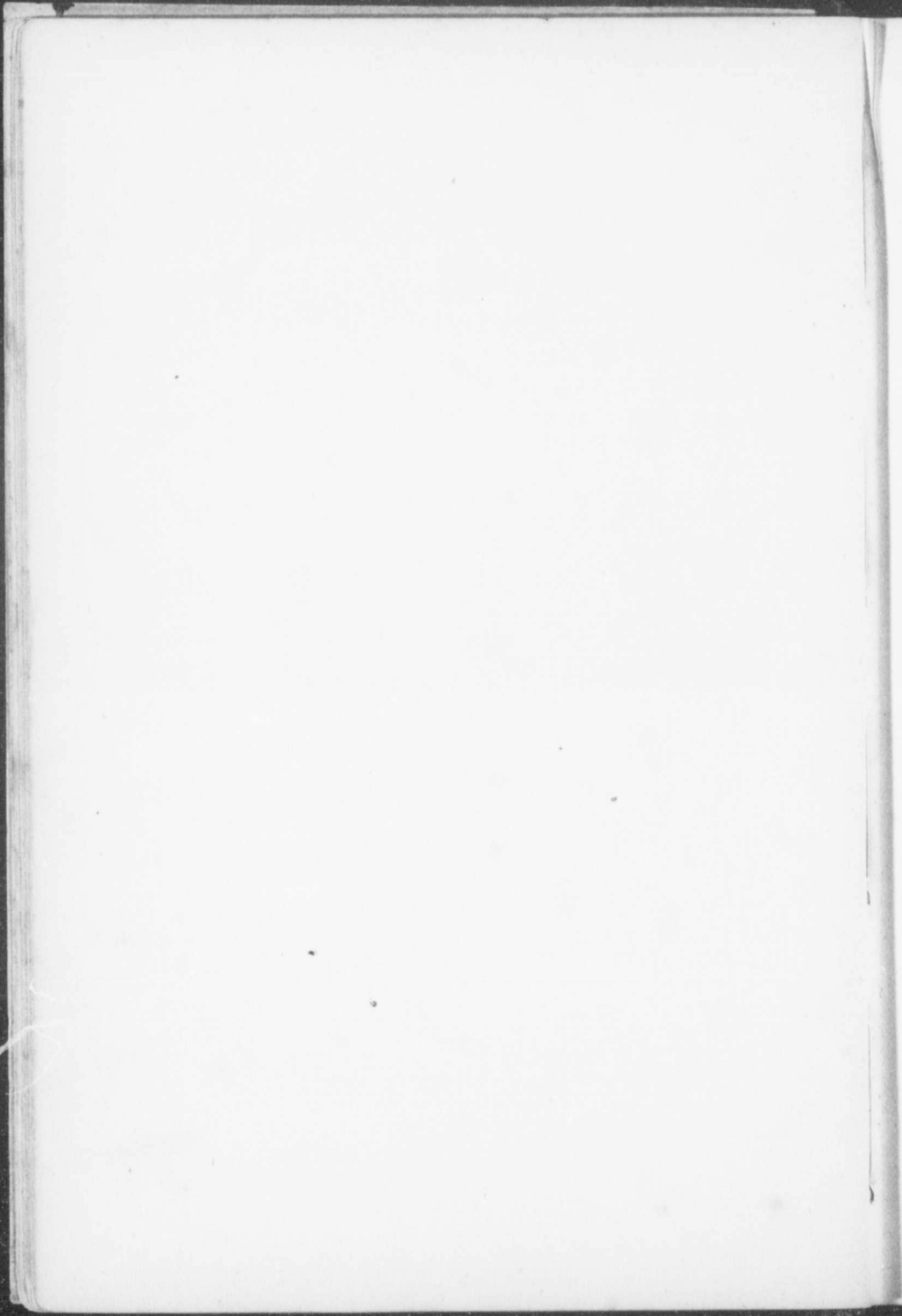
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I

A Brother of the Heart

MY home was a modest one on Staten Island, where I lived happily with my wife and her mother. We had a small income from a competency invested in real-estate securities, and I was thus relieved from the necessity of arduous labor and had ample leisure in the transaction of a small brokerage business, which I conducted in one of those modern up-town buildings of steel and stone which make up the sky-line of New York. This building was north of Twenty-third Street, and my office was on the top floor.

My neighbor was probably the handsomest man I had ever seen. I met him frequently in the elevators and the halls, passing backward and forward to his rooms beyond my own, square-shouldered and abrupt of movement, but with his dark face so set in soberness that I had never seen him smile. His eyes were large and black, his quick glance so keen as

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almost to awaken a feeling of surprise when suddenly encountered. It did not linger; it pierced and fell.

Apparently he had no associates. Once when he lifted his hat, startled by a rare greeting from a stranger in the marble corridor of the ground floor, I noticed that his hair was long, and curled slightly at the temples; also that it had a strange tint of red in its darkness. He was retiring almost to taciturnity, and beyond his scarcely perceptible response to the salutations of the elevator-boys, I had never heard him speak. I had mentioned this to Jennie, describing the man who had so impressed me. I was surprised to see how the mere suggestion of such a personality had power to excite an interest in her gentle disposition. She begged me to learn more of him, but I was never able to carry to her laughing curiosity anything beyond the fact of his presence, and its intimation of mystery.

One morning in early spring I entered my office somewhat before the coming of young Jefferies, who served me in the capacity of clerk. My mail lay in a disordered heap upon the floor, where it had been pushed through the slit in the door by the carrier. I gathered it up, throwing the letters upon my desk until I had lifted the blinds and put away my hat and cane. Then, tearing the envelopes open, I scanned the various missives carelessly. All related to my business but one, and this immediately riveted my attention. It was

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written upon a plain white sheet from which a letter-head had been neatly cut, with no suggestion of date, its lines firm and strong. It ran as follows:

MY FRIEND,—These words are from a lost and desperate man, but one who has conquered his fate and accomplished his revenge. I have seen the passion in which you hold her—have seen your eyes devour her and your breast heave as a sense of her beauty filled your being—pitying you, as I have pitied myself. Be comforted—she will shortly be no more. On the 20th of the present month, promptly at the hour of six, as the bell sounds over the waves, her spirit will join mine in the eternal blue, and from the spheres we will together send your faithful heart a greeting. Since we both lose her here, I shall win her in the heavens.

This letter is induced by a knowledge of your love, and that pride which is boastful as the end draws near. I am safe, as she is safe, but on *Land* or *Sea* no earthly power can intervene between my deed and its fulfilment.

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I gazed upon this singular epistle with mingled curiosity and repulsion. Some madman, I thought at first. But why had he selected me as the object of his interest? I turned the page over and over in my hand seeking vainly a clew to the mystery, and thinking of any one who might be prompted to send me so strange a missive. I read it again. The firm strokes, its precision, and the steady tendency to detail which would be presumably understood, contradicted the idea of a hoax. It meant something—yes; but why to me?

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I reached down in the waste-paper basket to recover in the litter the envelope, which might throw some light upon the matter; its date and post-mark might offer help towards solution. I found it among the others I had thrown away and started as I looked at the address. Above the direction number and street were the words:

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It was not to me; it was to my neighbor of the rooms beyond. The postman had by mistake pushed it through my door, and among my own letters I had opened it unheedingly.

With a sense of relief, but with curiosity unabated, I looked at it again, and holding the envelope in my hand thought of what I must do. The letter should go to its rightful owner, and I smiled again as I scanned it, thinking of its contents and wondering if he would understand them. To me or to my neighbor, the letter was anonymous; it was fantastic—something to laugh at, but a strange feeling crept over me as I read the signature once more, remembering the dark countenance and grim habits of the man next door. If such a letter must come to any one and bear significance, it might be to such a man.

Hesitating no longer I left my office, and stepping along the hall I paused before the entrance to the rooms beyond. Upon the white of the ground

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glass, against a green background which an inner curtain suggested, was his name in gold:

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Studio

I did not at once open the door, as one might freely do in any office which the great building afforded; I stood irresolute, and knocked. His voice came in response, and I entered.

He was sitting before his easel, his palette and mahl-stick in his hand, his brush poised above the canvas confronting him. He had thrown aside the precise garments which he wore without, and his habit was that of the artist at his ease; a short smoking-jacket, with an embroidered cap upon his dark locks. The picture before him was the face of a woman.

My eyes made a quick note of his surroundings. His quarters disclosed an excess of luxury, his trappings far beyond the usual gorgeous fancy of his fellows. Rich settees were ranged under heavy draperies, and costly rugs were thrown about the floor. The walls, covered with the work of his hands, showed everywhere the faces of women—women in profile, single or in groups, confronting us in every posture of form and outline. His fancy had gone rioting to the theme of beauty, expressing itself in sombre backgrounds, but the faces gleamed white, with tint of flesh and rose where

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his deft brush had set its mark of truth. In a corner, reared almost as upon an altar, was a bust in bronze upon a base, and over it swung a raven with out-stretched wings. Here was a departure from the prevailing custom of the apartment. Three pictures of a single man were grouped about the bust, all of a common likeness but expressive of different moods or impressions, as the artist had painted some character that had laid hold upon his fancy. I recognized the bust as that of Edgar Allan Poe, and upon the three pictures was the word "Dupin," painted in strong characters in the lower corner of the canvas. This particular circumstance did not impress me at the time, but I remembered later that the Chevalier Dupin was an astute character of several fascinating romances of the great author, in which he displayed a singular and deductive skill in the discovery of crime.

Stepping forward, the letter in my hand, I answered his gaze of inquiry with some confusion.

"I must beg your pardon for a stupid action," I said, "but the postman is in part at fault. A letter, addressed to you was mixed with my mail and I inadvertently opened it."

I had approached closely, to save him the necessity of rising, and handed him the letter, as he swung about on his stool.

"Don't mention it," he said, good-naturedly, taking it from me. "The error was a natural one."

"It might be," I replied, with a laugh, "if I had

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not further to confess that I read the letter through. You will see why, when you have read it yourself. I knew of my mistake only when I recovered the envelope from the waste-paper basket, and saw that it was yours."

I do not think he heard me. Already he was poring over the contents, and I watched his dark countenance change in expression and color as he proceeded. He finished it finally and turned it slowly in his hand, looking at the back, and scanning the envelope as I had done. Then his hands fell slow to his knees, as he thought intently.

Remembering now that I had no excuse for remaining, I turned to go. The action drew his attention and he started to his feet.

"Pardon me," he said, speaking my name. "I did not mean to be discourteous, and something is due a curiosity which you must feel. We need not be formal with each other. You see"—and a suggestion of a smile flashed in his face and vanished instantly as it resumed its serious expression, "we are neighbors."

Flattered to discover that he had observed me, even to the extent of ascertaining my name, I waited.

"This letter doubtless bewilders you," he continued, his voice collected and grave. "It would bewilder any one—yes, and frighten them, too."

"Why?" I asked. "Surely it is the work of some demented person who is not responsible for what he says?"

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He looked again at the letter, and after a pause, spoke slowly.

"Demented—yes. Mad, most truly. Mad, when living, poor wretch!"

"Do you know the writer?"

Again he scanned the singular epistle.

"No," he answered, finally. "But I guess the purport of the letter and am alarmed. The writer is dead."

"He intimates suicide," I said; "but I am not impressed. It is incoherent, and does not suggest sincerity. It looks like a foolish attempt to mystify."

He lifted the letter, his face solemn. The sheet touched my lips, and I started at a perceptible odor.

"The scent of bitter-almonds," he said. "Penetrating and not to be misunderstood. An acid as deadly as its smell is permanent. The poison was near him when he wrote."

I grew as grave as he, in the presence of this suggestion.

"Poor devil!" I gasped.

"Poor devil, indeed," he repeated, with some bitterness, "since he veils here a threat, terrible in its malevolence. It is no idle boast; and the ingenuity of a madman is always to be feared."

"What does it mean?" I asked.

"I only suspect, but the suspicion is frightful," he replied.

I looked at him for an instant, and my eyes wan-

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dered again about his rooms; to the dark pictures, the elaborate appointments, the rich carpets of the inner chambers, through the doors of which came a glimpse of his heavy brass bed, draped, Turkish fashion, like the settees. The person and his surroundings were such as to win my interest.

"You say that you do not know the writer?" I observed.

"No, but the letter tells me much. Since you now share its contents with me, I will explain my suspicion. It brings no direct responsibility except in the common interest of humanity, but it appeals to a certain skill which I possess. Some time since I saw a young lady of unusual beauty near the entrance to the Art Museum in Central Park. I am an artist, and her face attracted me. I was not obtrusive in my interest, nor did I venture to follow her, but upon the succeeding day I went again to the spot and she passed along the walk. I thought that it might be her habit to come frequently there, and I verified this upon several successive days. I kept near her, without attracting her attention, studying her features in an effort to fix them in my memory. The task was not difficult; they are here."

He indicated the unfinished picture upon his easel.

"My taste inclines to this character of work," he continued, "and I was prompted by no motive other than an artistic one. But while I took care

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that the young lady should not observe my actions, they were noted by a watcher more eager than myself. Not two weeks since, when near the familiar spot, a carriage appeared as by appointment and the young lady entered it. The family coachman had evidently received instructions to follow her. As she drove away and I stood looking after her, a hand was laid upon my shoulder. I turned to confront a man, who, while he looked at me, cast nervous glances towards the retreating vehicle.

"She is beautiful, isn't she?" he said. "I have seen you, never fear—yes, and I've pitied you."

"I shook his hand from my arm, ashamed and confused, but my impulse of anger vanished at his demeanor. He was probably about my own age, a gentleman in dress and appearance, but with that singular light in his eyes and that unsteady quaver in his voice that spoke instantly of an unsettled mind. This was emphasized by drink, and while I thought of an explanation, or whether I should offer one at all, he laughed strangely and turned away. I watched him as he walked rapidly towards the entrance leading to Fifth Avenue, regarding me at times over his shoulder with a mixture of mirth and cunning. It is evident that in some manner he has learned my name and address."

"This letter is from him?"

"I can think of no other," he replied. "The poor wretch has mistaken my interest for a passion such

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as he doubtless cherished himself. He certainly refers to the young lady in question."

"I think I understand," I replied. "He is some disappointed lover, made frantic by his unsuccessful suit, and he imagines you to be a brother in misfortune."

"A brother of the heart," he said, grimly, while his eyes fastened themselves upon the lines. "You are right. Standing at the verge of eternity, in the loneliness of such a moment, his memory adverted to me. He had seen me observing a countenance which jealous infatuation had pictured upon his heart. All suicides estimate greatly the importance of what they are about to do; hence, he must leave some message to the living."

I looked at him, following his words closely and realizing their truth. He was truly a man who would so attract attention; especially that of an unsuccessful lover who watched and followed the object of his passion.

"But the thought of his fatal act is lost in the suggestion which he makes," continued Connors, his voice significant. Lifting the letter, he read:

"On the 20th of the present month, promptly at the hour of six, as the bell sounds over the waves, her spirit will join mine in the eternal blue."

"What of it?" I asked. "At such a time the poor fellow would naturally have visions."

"To-day is the 20th," he muttered. "He might

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have said 'to-morrow' but for the vein that sees things from his point of view."

I stood in silence, mystified under the influence of his voice.

"What can he do, being dead?" I asked.

"What could any desperate man do, were he living?" he replied, gravely. "What could I do, were I mad? A thousand things of which a fair and helpless creature might be the victim. It is the fact that he *is* dead that fills me with fear. The import is frightful, coming as it does from such a source."

"But what source?" I asked, in dismay. "An anonymous letter, fantastically worded and strangely signed, with neither date nor suggestion upon which one may fix a clew. It is as though it had dropped from the clouds. Where among the millions outside may we look for this solitary unknown—this mad maker of threats through the mail?"

"Where, indeed?" he answered, his dark eyes reflective. "And yet I have a duty."

"You may count on me fully," I said, but with a pitiful sense of helplessness. "If you have a duty, I am ready to share it, since chance has made me familiar with this strange matter."

"Thank you," he said, and I observed a sudden energy creep into his face. "We will not stand idly here, at all events. The wretch was unwise to write of his design. But he was excited, triumphant, and boastful; he had done something in which

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he exulted. With the confidence of the wicked, he proclaims a purpose, thinking, with the cunning of his diseased mind, that the disclosure is safe."

"The disclosure?" I protested. "Why, you do not know who he is, nor have you any means to find him. To do so would be useless, even were he living, and worse than useless since he is dead."

"Scarcely," he replied.

"You are doubtless right as to the author of the letter and the lady to whom he alludes. But they are strangers."

"Yes."

"If your conclusions are correct, the man has killed himself, and has arranged some means to kill the lady at a definite time to-day?"

"Yes."

I stood in silence, thinking long and deeply. I was impressed, and yet I saw the apparent futility of effort. He was silent also, waiting patiently upon my meditation.

"What are we to do?" I asked, at length.

"We are to learn who was the man, and who is the woman. We must discover the method he has taken to harm her and be present to prevent it."

I laughed with impolite scorn.

"Is that within the power of any human being?"

"Yes, although success is not assured. We can only try."

I shook my head.

"How can we discover the writer of this strange

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epistle? Neither carrier, post-office, stationer, nor any known agency can serve us. The task is hopeless."

"No," he replied. "There is something in the very challenge to discovery. I have lived an isolated life, and made a study of such problems. Solitude is a wise tutor. By accident we know much already, and, given a fact to start from, we may work to the conclusion. Let us first find the man."

"I am ready," I replied; "but how?"

He stepped to the telephone and rang the bell.

"Is this police headquarters?" he asked, after an interval of waiting. "Thank you—yes, I wish to speak to Inspector Paul."

He stood with the receiver at his ear, and listened intently.

"Good-morning, Inspector," he continued, after a moment. "This is Connors. Have any suicides been reported to-day?"

Another wait followed and then he spoke again.

"Ah, a sailor in North River, and a woman on the East Side. Yes, a matter that wouldn't interest you. If it should, I'll call again. Thank you. Come to the studio when you have leisure. Good-morning."

He hung up the receiver, and, coming to me, took the letter from his pocket.

"Observe," he said, "that this sheet is heavy and of fine material. It had a printed head, but the writer cut it off. It was written just prior to the

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taking of the poison, hence it was done at his office or at his rooms. Since it came this morning, it was probably written last night, presumably at his rooms. If at his office, the body would have been discovered by this time. As he used a letter-head, and at his rooms, we may infer that he lived at a hotel, which would account for the fact that his quarters have not been molested, and hence his death remains undiscovered. His body may be found by to-night, possibly, but that will not serve us; we have only until six o'clock this afternoon in which to work."

I nodded my assent. All this might be shrewd reasoning, but it did not mean the discovery of the lady; the dead man might have known many ladies, and his lips were closed. Again, we were presuming upon the theory of suicide; and so little could be accomplished in the brief time mentioned. We were two fools, awed by a mystery and speculating about the impossible.

"You may not have observed," continued Conners, "that the letter is written with India-ink. That points to an artist."

"Or an architect," I supplemented, thinking how natural it was that he should have noted that.

"Yes, or an engineer. The writing has the precision of a draughtsman. Though dead, he has invented some means in which he had absolute confidence of killing his victim at a definite time. Certainly, an engineer."

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"How could he possibly do that?"

"I do not know. If I did, I would be more hopeful of defeating his plans. He might send her an infernal machine, but that is so likely to miscarry that I am sure he designed something else. Whatever his method, it is devilish and deadly; of that I am assured. To find the method and save the lady we must first find her, and to find her we must find the man."

I thought again of the millions of human beings in the dense mass about us, and then of the unfortunate girl whose fate hung upon our gropings in the darkness. I had adopted his theory, and the picture distressed me. My mind reverted to my sweet wife—my Jennie—and a disappointed suitor over whom I had triumphed. I had fancied *him* to be a man capable of any deed of evil, and now I shuddered. To what lengths would a thwarted passion carry a relentless mind!

"It would be useless to get a carriage and make the round of the hotels?" I suggested.

"Quite so, if you will think of the number," he replied. "But we will make a visit, notwithstanding," he continued, as he threw off his jacket and pulled on his street-coat. "The man's writing is known to some one. If he is an engineer or draughtsman, he has dealt with Eiman & Pohlmann, who make a specialty of inks, engineering stationery, and supplies. If we fail there, we will drive to the Engineers' Club and submit the envelope to the

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attendant at the desk. He has lived here long enough to know and love the girl whom he threatens, consequently he must be known to some one else."

The suggestion was so simple that I wondered that I had not thought of it. I lost for the moment the fact as to how we had concluded that he was an engineer. But, then, Connors had seen him; some men have a distinctive appearance, and Connors had sharp eyes.

We left his apartments, and I stopped at my office long enough to procure my hat and gloves, telling Jefferies of my contemplated absence. I would be gone for the day.

Entering a carriage at the curb, we gave the driver directions, and, after a trip that took us as far south as Fulton Street, we stopped before an establishment known to every draughtsman in New York. Alighting and pushing through the door, Connors passed back to a desk near the centre of the salesroom. He was known to the place himself, for I discovered that several clerks who were disengaged regarded him with respectful interest. A man at the office arose as he approached and greeted him. Connors produced the envelope of the singular letter and passed it to him.

"Do you know that handwriting, Mr. Levy?" he asked. "It has occurred to me that if the author of that superscription is among the customers of your house, so marked a style would be known to you."

The man made a deliberate inspection of the en-

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velope and then laid it down. Turning to a file-case, he drew from it a drawer, and, running down a list of initial letters, he extracted an order to which was attached a bill. Comparing the order with the inscription on the envelope, he looked at Conners with a smile.

"I am correct," he said. "You may see for yourself. The writer is Mr. Howard Corbin."

I gave a start of surprise. The conclusion of my new acquaintance had been unerring.

"Truly," observed Conners, inspecting the two papers. "I thank you very much, Mr. Levy. In writing to me, Mr. Corbin neglected to sign his name, and the contents of the letter, though important, were not such as to indicate the identity or address of the sender."

"That is like Corbin," laughed the clerk. "He'd forget his head if it wasn't fastened on. That is not intended as a reflection, however; he's a good enough fellow."

"Professionally, or morally?"

"I should think both, although he's a trifle eccentric. I guess you'll find him all right."

"Thank you. Tell me something of him, since you know him."

"There's little to tell. I know him only in a business way. I've met him at the club. He's an engineer, formerly with the English Steamship Line, and later with the Midland Jersey Railroad. He's an inventor, too, I believe."

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"Do you know his social connections?"

"No, sir; but he's all right there, too, I guess. He lives at the Blankford in Forty-sixth Street."

"Thank you," said Conners, and, staying only for a few additional, formal words, we returned to the carriage.

"You see, my friend," he remarked, as we were whirled away, "how slight a clew may yield so much."

"I see how clever a deduction may be made from so slight a clew. What do you expect to find now?"

"Perhaps nothing, and yet, if it be Corbin and we find him dead—"

He sank back in an attitude of reflection, making no movement until the carriage stopped before the Blankford Hotel, to which we had directed the driver.

Again alighting, we entered the lower hall of the building, one of those great structures peculiar to New York, devoted mainly to the accommodation of single gentlemen. Here we were accosted by the hall-man, and Conners delivered his card.

"We wish to see Mr. Howard Corbin," he said.

The man took the card, departed, and, after a period of waiting on our part, returned.

"Mr. Corbin is out," he said.

"Out?" queried Conners.

"I have rung up his rooms repeatedly, and can get no answer."

Conners looked at me meaningly.

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"Try again," he said.

"It is useless," answered the man. "He's out, or he'll not be disturbed."

"Look him up," said Conners, in his direct manner. "We must see him. Mr. Corbin has not been well lately."

The man left us, and after another interval returned once more.

"We can get no answer, gentlemen," he said. "I have knocked on his door loud enough to wake a dead man."

"Not quite, I fear," said Conners, his dark eyes on him. "Have the chambermaids been in his apartments this morning, or has he been seen about the office or the corridors?"

The hall-man was experienced, and evidently an old hotel employé; the question made him serious.

"It may be that he is ill," suggested Conners, meaningly. "We will go with you to his rooms."

"Here—where's the superintendent?" called the man, turning hastily towards the office. "Quick!"

He left hurriedly in search of his superior, and they shortly returned together. Conners explained that Mr. Corbin had written him a letter which impelled our visit, and the failure of the hall-man to get a response from his rooms looked strange. Without a word the superintendent led the way to the elevator, and on the fourth floor we stopped before a suite of apartments. I was impressed now. The knock upon the panel sounded ominous, and

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its echo seemed muffled in the silence which gave no answer.

"Make an entrance in some manner," directed Conners. "If it is found that he is absent, we will be responsible."

The superintendent was thoroughly alive to the suggestion in Conners's words. He sent below for a duplicate key. Upon its coming, he inserted it in the key-hole with a hand that trembled. The lock turned, but the door did not yield. It was bolted within.

The manner of authority which Conners had assumed met with no protest upon the part of the hotel employés. The superintendent listened gravely to his suggestions and sent below for a man with implements with which to force an entrance. They came in time (an interminable wait it seemed to me), and as the lock was torn apart and the door fell open, we entered together.

The chamber was one of three, consisting of a bedroom, a small parlor, and a larger apartment used as a work-room or office. We had entered the parlor, which was in perfect order, and through the door between we saw that the bed had not been disturbed during the night before. When we entered the office, the superintendent, who preceded us, stopped with a quick exclamation.

At a desk near the window and in the strong light the occupant of the chamber sat in his chair. His head had fallen forward, and his arms hung to

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the floor. His face was livid and his eyes glazed, while his lips, parted in agony, told the story that the empty bottle on the rug served scarcely better to explain. We had read the letter aright, and he had kept the first grim pledge of its suggestive contents. So far as he could further testify, was the promise that he would keep the rest.

I stood aghast, while the superintendent was speechless.

"Go," said Conners, addressing him quietly. "Telephone to the police. We will wait here."

The men fled in a panic from the rooms, and Conners turned to me. From his manner I knew that the suicide was his man of the park.

"Let them think we are friends," he commanded. "I know the Inspector of this district; how well, I'll tell you sometime. So far our analysis has been faultless. This dead man has recorded the fact that no earthly power can intervene between his victim and his purpose, whatever that may be. Does it suggest nothing to you?"

"Nothing," I answered, in my bewilderment. "Nothing, except the possible truth of his words and our inability to offer aid."

"At least we can improve the time at our command," he returned.

Scarcely able to gather my wandering wits together, I watched him as he approached the body. He scanned it attentively, the distorted features, the drawn, agonized lips, the eyes, pathetic almost

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in their last, wild gaze at the vanished world, taking on their look of horror as darkness settled over them. Doubtless the lost wretch would have suffered anew to have recalled his desperate act, and, with an awakened consciousness which brought its better vision in the dread present that saw more clearly, would have given his life again to have undone the work of his frenzy. Who can tell?

If Conners read anything in this poor and pitiful spectacle, he said nothing. He examined the desk and then left the chamber to search the inner bedroom.

The apartment in which the body lay was in fair general order. Upon the ledge of the window was a box of tools of fine design and workmanship; so delicate were they that they might have been the instruments of a jeweler's craft. Near this box was a hammer, and resting upon some sheets of queer-looking paper was what appeared to be a roll of brown cloth. There was, besides the other furniture, a bookcase with its shelves well filled, its door partly ajar. Upon the desk a book lay open, face downward as though to preserve the place. Under the prostrate head of the dead man were some scattered sheets upon a desk pad.

Conners came from the bedroom now, looking eagerly about. Going to the window he picked up the roll which I had observed, and examined it minutely. He gathered the paper sheets together and folding them about the roll, dropped the

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bundle into his pocket. He examined the hammer, and turning once more to the desk he lifted the book, noting the page at which it had been left open. As he scanned a written sheet between its leaves he was as one absorbed.

Fascinated, I drew near. The face of the dead man held that horrible magnetism exercised by the eyes of a serpent, but the presence of Conners was reassuring. The hand which hung to the floor was empty, but in the clinched fingers of the other, doubled convulsively near the gaping countenance, gleamed a tiny spot of light. A bottle, nearly empty, sat upon the desk. Its bottom contained a granulated powder of the consistency of sand, its color a deep pink. Conners shook a portion of its contents into his hand, spreading the particles under his fingers, smelling them, and then tasting them with his tongue. His significant countenance drew from me a question. He did not answer except by a look, but going to the window he emptied a few grains into a little heap, to which he applied a match. A slight explosion followed and a blue smoke rose to the ceiling. He laughed, grimly, holding the bottle aloft.

"There's enough left," he said, "to blow out this apartment."

My state of mind precluded consecutive thought. I could only stare.

"There's something in the hand of the dead man," I said, finally.

A Brother of the Heart

Conners leaned forward and took from the set fingers a diminutive object. It was a golden key of minute pattern; some keepsake, as I thought, to which the memory of the suicide clung in his final hour.

This tiny jewel, pathetic in its connection to the tragic event, touched a hidden chord in the breast of my companion. He held it for an instant in his clasp while he cast upon the distorted face a look of pity; then he laid the golden object reverently down near the pale hand from which he had taken it. It was insignificant; perhaps a gift in childhood from a mother; and as the suicide faced the world to which she might have gone, he could have dreamed that it would unlock for him some celestial door by the side of which she prayed.

The superintendent returned, entering breathlessly.

"The police will be here in a minute," he said. "I notified the station by telephone and found the Inspector there. He's coming."

"We can do nothing further," said Conners, to me. "We will wait for the officers. Tell me," and he now addressed the superintendent, "had Mr. Corbin visitors yesterday?"

"I don't know, sir. He lived much alone," was the answer. "But I can find out. As you said, he's been ill much, recently."

"Do you know if he sent something from his rooms?"

The Long Arm

"Yes, sir," returned the man, in surprise. "There was an expressman here in the afternoon for a package. Mr. Corbin stored some goods."

"Yesterday?"

"Yes, sir."

"Sent them to some warehouse?" suggested Conners.

"Yes, sir, precisely. It was a box, white in color and clasped with iron bands. It was brought in empty several days ago, and Mr. Corbin filled it; I think, with some of his implements. He was working at it for three days. Have you been friends of his, long?"

"I fear he had few friends, poor fellow!" was the reply of Conners. "Here are the officers."

Almost instantly three men entered from the hall; they were the Inspector and two plain-clothes men.

"Why, good day, Mr. Conners," cried the Inspector. "What is all this?"

Conners pointed to the body, which the two detectives were now regarding with professional interest.

"I see—the old story."

"Yes. We came to see Mr. Corbin, and our visit resulted in this discovery. You can get the facts from the superintendent here, and if you want us for the inquest, you know where to send. Inspector Paul, this is my friend," he continued, mentioning my name, "a broker, who has his office adjoining my studio."

A Brother of the Heart

Inspector Paul shook hands with me, and then joined his men at the desk.

"I'm going now," said Connors. "Good-day."

The Inspector nodded, and we left the room. I breathed a sigh of relief when we stood again in the street. Directing the driver to our address, we entered the waiting carriage.

"What prompted the question as to the storing of the goods?" I asked, as we drove away.

"I wish the whole matter was as easy," answered Connors. "Corbin's coat lay upon the bed in his sleeping-room, and I found a paper in the pocket. I'll show it to you when we reach our quarters."

"Of course," I observed. "A warehouse receipt of the date of yesterday. I'm stupid."

He did not reply, and I was silent until we reached our building. Connors instructed the man to wait and we went together to his rooms. Immediately he laid upon the table the dark roll, the strange paper and the book, which he had taken from the apartments of the suicide.

"I trust you will not light a cigar, my friend, if you are to approach this object," he said, with precise deliberation. I had noticed that he seemed to speak with the accuracy with which he thought. "Or," he continued, "if you see fit to examine it, you will be careful not to drop it to the floor. I suspect you will understand me if you will take a look at it, which I advise you to do."

Thus directed, I hastened to inspect the roll.

The Long Arm

It was not cloth, but a coarse paper, wrapped about a circular substance which at one end I could see resembled a mixture of fat and sand compressed into a mass; the paper was greasy and I took it to be an explosive cartridge of the kind used for blasting. The several pieces of dark paper looked like that used by chemists for the purpose of filtering liquids. The book was in German, but I understood the language. I saw that it was a work on mechanics, and Connors had turned down a leaf at the place where it had been opened. It was at a chapter on explosives.

Speculating as to what it all meant, I sank back upon a settee, regarding Connors with eyes of inquiry. I was wearied by the rapid movement of the events of the morning.

"Well," I observed, after an interval; "what progress have we made? We are back in this chamber whence we started, a little wiser only. We know now the writer of the letter, and we know that he is dead. What more?"

He disappeared in his inner room and in a moment returned, bearing in his hand a phial with a glass stopper; then he took from his pocket the bottle of pink powder. Going to the marble slab of the wash-stand he poured some of it upon the stone, and covering it with a sheet of the queer paper, he dropped upon the surface a tiny portion of the liquid from the phial. This done, he returned to where I sat.

A Brother of the Heart

"We might have found the name of the young lady in question, in the first instance," he said, waving his hand towards the portrait upon his easel. "That would have taken time, however, and this is better."

He handed me a photograph, continuing: "I found it on the floor of his bedroom. It bears the mark of the heel which he set on it in his rage and despair; but you can recognize it."

I regarded the picture curiously. It was that of a girl of exquisite beauty, and evidently of high position. The dress, the jewels, together with a conscious air of dominance and pride, proclaimed it.

"It is she," said Connors, quietly. "I felt certain we would find her picture in his rooms. We can now know the original. It was taken at the gallery of Blandell, Fifth Avenue, only five short blocks from here."

I read the imprint upon the card.

"I have something else," he continued, handing me a yellow slip of paper. "It is not a warehouse receipt, as you will observe; it is a bill of lading. Yesterday Howard Corbin consigned to Gregg & Brothers, Liverpool, the box which he sent from his apartments. It was shipped by express and is on board the *Lysander*."

I listened, shocked and stupefied; the thought that crept into my mind frightened me. At that instant a blinding flash lighted the room and I sprang to my feet as Connors swung quickly about.

The Long Arm

"It is as I thought," he said, gravely, pointing with his finger to the wash-stand where the smoke curled above a blackened spot on the marble. "The acid which I dropped upon the absorbent paper has eaten through and ignited the powder. Come, we'll now go to the photographer's."

My new acquaintance was an enigma, but I followed him blindly. A short drive took us to the establishment of Blandell, the entrance to which was upon the lower floor of the building immediately upon the street. We entered, and I perceived that Conners was known here, also. We passed through the reception-room and stopped at a counter at the back, where he accosted the young lady in charge.

"Is this picture the only style of photograph which you have taken of this young lady?" he asked, handing her the card.

"Certainly not," was the quick response, as her eye fell upon the subject. "Miss Courtney is a regular patron and we have taken her in many styles."

"The daughter of Amos Courtney, the banker," I murmured, involuntarily.

"Of course," muttered Conners. "She has been absent much in Washington, or I should have known."

"Of course," said the young woman, also, with a smile speaking to me. "She was married yesterday, as you doubtless know."

A Brother of the Heart

I knew. The morning papers had set it forth in a blaze of splendor, and Jennie and her mother had devoured each detail over the morning coffee—the flowers, the gowns, and the presents which represented a princely fortune. And Conners knew it, also. The papers had told everything, omitting only the portraits of the bride and groom. Had these been published, we should have been saved much time, labor, and speculation. Miss Courtney had married Harvey Van Arden, a young lawyer of high repute, and a son of one of the first families of Manhattan. I recalled, further, a statement which followed the account of the wedding, and started back as it flashed to my mind. The newly married couple were to spend their honeymoon abroad, and had sailed this very day upon the *Lysander*.

Conners noted my agitation and guessed its cause; his face was full of stern significance.

We did not tarry long at the establishment of Blandell; time was precious now. With a bow that expressed his thanks to the young woman who looked after us with some wonder, he led the way to the carriage without.

“You understand it, don’t you?” he asked, having given an order that we be driven to the office of the English line and taken his seat beside me.

I turned my dull eyes upon him, sickened at the thought that oppressed me.

“Here is the story told by the letter,” he con-

The Long Arm

tinued: "Howard Corbin, angered at the loss of Miss Courtney, and suffering from other adversities which came upon him at this critical time, jealous of Van Arden, his successful rival, and impotent to do other than inflict some revenge, thought to kill both the object of his hatred and the girl whom he had won. He was an engineer; a person skilled in a knowledge of devices, and he conceived the cruel idea of destroying the ship upon which they sailed. Their design to go abroad and the name of the vessel upon which they would sail were doubtless known to many of their friends. He loaded a box with some form of explosive, and timed it to ignite at a designated moment to blow the ship and all on board into eternity. In this view, the letter is intelligible. The book which lay upon his desk before him is well known to me. I have read often the chapter from which he gleaned the infernal suggestion as to how he could best proceed. The explosive cartridge in the window, with the absorbent paper; the hammer with which he had fastened in his charge, bearing upon its head the white paint from the box; the splinters upon the floor, also of white, knocked from the edge under his blows—all speak eloquently of his design. One fragment showed me where he had held a protecting board between the nails and his strokes to muffle their force, when he had turned about the box its clasping bands of iron. The acid with which he destroyed himself, or another of kindred chemical power, is

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the means by which he set his devilish trap. There was a trace of potash upon his desk and about the floor, in addition to the powder I found in the bottle. He needed no infernal mechanism, the clicking of which might tell the story of his attempt and possibly prevent it. He wrapped a bottle of acid, uncorked, in absorbent paper, and, placing it among the cartridges of his box, he could estimate to the eventful minute when it would eat its way through to the powder to produce combustion and consequent explosion. His ingenuity is without fault. He gives them one day of happiness; he lets them start forward upon life's journey, which for him has ended, and when hope is highest his malice overtakes them and they are gone. This was the tremendous secret which tortured his last hour. He would share it. His jealous eye, which had covered her every movement, possibly for weeks, had found me within Miss Courtney's life. A casual figure, but he saw the interest she excited in me and mistook it. He followed me, and found my name and address. In pitying himself, he pitied me. 'A brother of the heart,' he writes, poor wretch! His bosom swelling at the ingenuity with which he had accomplished his revenge, he enjoyed the thought of giving me something to ponder over. He guessed that when the fragments of the lost *Lysander* should be found upon the ocean, I would then know what his cunning hand had accomplished."

I groaned aloud, horror-stricken as I listened.

The Long Arm

There was no resisting his pitiless logic. This was the first-fruits of my acquaintance with this interesting stranger; and in the quiet of my home, when I should recite the events of the day, I must tell my laughing Jennie of a tragedy beyond all human aid to avert. Every line of the cruel letter was now clear.

The passage of our vehicle through the streets was lost to me. I was borne down by the heavy weight of my knowledge, struggling with a sense of pity for the helpless ship. Who were the voyagers? How high were their hopes! How joyous the prospect of vacation, pleasure, or home-going! How many Jennies would weep hopelessly for those who came no more because disappointment had made a desperate villain mad!

Conners probably suspected the trend of my thoughts, for his voice broke in upon my painful reverie.

"Are you wondering at the wickedness that could conceive and execute a scheme like this? Hatred and revenge are absorbing. Aside from his disappointment in love, a sentiment which makes a chaos of some human hearts, this man fostered an enmity against the steamship company which he once served. The enormity of the crime he had designed filled him with exultation. He knew that his act would startle by its consequences. I discovered a crumpled letter in a waste-basket in his inner chamber; it was addressed to the president of

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the company and declared his malice. Perhaps he was checked by the thought that a wireless message might intervene to frustrate his plan, and hence he refrained from sending it."

"Merciful Heavens!" I exclaimed, as the thought struck me. "This may save them."

"It's unnecessary," he replied, "since a portion of his scheme has failed ignobly. I see that your memory doesn't attach itself to details. The papers of this morning state that the *Lysander* is not to sail to-day."

"Not to sail?"

"No; a coal-barge in the convoy of an uncertain tug bent a plate of her propeller late yesterday. In consequence we have a fortunate delay."

A great load lifted itself from my breast. His words were overwhelming.

"Man proposes," continued Connors. "At such a moment a sense of piety is inherent in human nature. To that extent the villain has been foiled. Our present task is to secure the box."

I grasped the full significance of his words. The ingenious madman had been defeated by one of those incidents that play havoc with the calculations and fortunes of mankind.

With the sense of relief came an appreciation of what it all meant. As the *Van Ardens* had not sailed, they were never in danger, and I marvelled at the serious countenance which my companion maintained. He should have felt something of the

The Long Arm

relief that made my own spirits light. His wonderful acumen had detected the guilty plot, and, laying it bare in every detail, we could now secure the deadly package and avert the danger of an explosion at the dock. Perhaps the box was yet upon the wharf?

Our call at the office of the company was brief. Connors immediately sought a telephone-box to send a message, and when he came again to my side his countenance had in a measure cleared. He had few explanations for the clerks. He stated that he possessed a bill of lading for a package which had been consigned in error, and, on being directed to the dock, we were driven there at full speed. We suffered no delay. The box was express matter, within easy reach, and the value given was not such as to provoke many questions. Such matters were lost in the more serious affair of the delay of the vessel.

I was conscious of a thrill of both dismay and satisfaction as the white package, its ghastly color suggestive of the fatal secret it concealed, was brought from the dock and relinquished to our care. With trembling hands I assisted Connors to place it on the front seat of the carriage. It fascinated me during the drive to our building, and Connors smiled as I cautioned the porter who carried it to the elevator and thence to the studio.

Throwing aside his coat, Connors secured some tools and together we began an examination of the

A Brother of the Heart

fateful package. We removed the lid carefully, and then stared solemnly at its contents. It was as Connors had declared; here was a charge to have strewn the *Lysander* to the waves, set with the acid as described, as though my companion had seen it actually in preparation.

He smiled faintly at the countenance I turned towards him.

"So far we have done well," he observed.

"So far!" I cried, enthusiastically. "Why, you have saved hundreds of innocent lives. If the ship had sailed, all on board must have perished. They had only the chance of a wireless message, or, one more remote, the failure of the machine."

He shook his head.

"Is it possible that you are disappointed at not having done Mrs. Van Arden a more specific service?" I said, with a laugh. "As the vessel did not sail, she was never in peril. Do you regret that fact?"

He smiled again, more faintly than before.

"No, you do me an injustice," he answered. "The position of Mrs. Van Arden is as perilous as before. It is now four o'clock, and the appointed time is six."

"Is not the peril here?" I asked, blankly, pointing to the box.

"I believe there is not one man in a thousand but would say so; but not I," he replied. "The letter contains the words 'on land or sea,' and he that

The Long Arm

penned them knew their meaning. Corbin would not fail to estimate so palpable a chance as that which served us."

I looked at him with my jaw falling.

"While he hated the company, and was willing to commit a deed that would ring through the press of the country, he did not forget the fact of his wounded heart," continued Connors. "His letter disclosed that as his crowning motive. As certain as fate, in her case, he has made assurance sure. At six o'clock she was to die with the ship; but, at all events, *at six o'clock she was to die!*"

"What is her danger now?" I asked, regarding him stupidly.

"How is it possible to know that, in view of what we have discovered," he answered, with some impatience. "How is it possible for a man to kill another at an appointed time when he himself is dead and he has not the power to control the movements or actions of that other or any other? By an agent, perhaps; but the agent may prove false. By a trap set in a given spot, as in the case of the ship; but the victim may avoid it."

I thought for an instant, and then laughed in relief.

"It is not possible," I said. "No man could make a design like that a certain one."

Connors shook his head.

"The peril is there; of that I'm sure," he said. "Our only method of averting it is to be present on the hour and seek to intervene."

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"It is after four o'clock," I cried, looking at my watch. "With time so precious, we have been wasting it."

He smiled again, his smile of significance.

"No," he answered. "I telephoned the police from the steamship office, and asked them to locate the Van Ardens without delay. Paul knows that I am never emphatic without reason, and every agency at his command has been at work. He has had an hour, and I am anxiously waiting now."

"I see," I said. "If they should have left the city?"

"It is that fear that makes me tremble," he said. "They may have gone to Newport. Van Arden's mother lives there at this season. No message that we could send would be effective. In their ignorance of what it could mean, they would slight it. Had I time, I might do something, but now the minutes fly."

As he ceased, there was a clatter at the telephone, and he rushed to it. Breathlessly I waited as he listened.

"Thank you," was his brief response as he hung up the receiver. Then he stepped towards me, brisk with energy.

"Come," he said; "fortune favors us. They are at the Manhattan."

I followed him, wondering what he would do. Finding another carriage below, a short drive took us to the great hotel. I looked at my watch as we

The Long Arm

sprang up the steps of the entrance; it was a quarter to five.

We waited in the office, and our cards, with Conners's imperious summons, shortly brought down a slender, nervous gentleman, somewhat annoyed but curious to know our errand.

Conners drew him to one side and spoke rapidly in a low voice. There was a fascination in his manner that compelled attention, and his appearance and demeanor commanded respect. But, most of all, his story was effective. I heard the muttered exclamations that interrupted it, and could see the pale features of his auditor change under the recital.

"An instant, sir, only," he said, when Conners had finished. "I shall not wait to express my gratitude nor lose time."

He hurried in the direction of the elevator, while Conners returned to my side.

"He has gone to prepare his wife," he said, in explanation, and now it was he who looked at his watch.

Within a short space of time a boy came to summon us, and, following, we were conducted to a suite of apartments on one of the upper floors.

The Van Ardens were waiting for us, Mr. Van Arden standing beside his wife. I recognized her at once as the original of the picture, observing her curiously as we approached and our names were spoken.

A Brother of the Heart

"I do not understand what my husband means, gentlemen," she said, in an agitated voice. "Is it true that something frightful would have happened to us had we sailed on the steamer?"

"I fear so," answered Conners. "For some reason, Mr. Corbin wished to do you an injury. He had prepared and shipped an infernal machine on the *Lysander*, for the purpose of blowing up the ship in the open sea. This was discovered and prevented; but we are still afraid."

"Most wonderfully discovered!" exclaimed Van Arden. "We should certainly have been lost."

"This is perfectly terrible!" cried his wife. "But how can we be harmed now?" And she turned to her husband. "Did you say Mr. Corbin was dead?"

"Yes," and Van Arden nodded towards Conners, as though to assure himself. "These gentlemen would not deceive us. He was always a singular fellow."

"It is frightful!" repeated his wife. "But we are safe now."

"I fear not, madam," said Conners, solemnly. "Corbin did not stop with his effort against the ship, and it becomes our duty to warn you. We are present at this time for the purpose of defeating whatever means he may have taken to harm you. I have explained to your husband that we come with authority from Inspector Paul, of the police."

"You are very good, I'm sure. But how can he injure me?" she asked. "I never liked him," she

The Long Arm

continued, with a look at her husband, "and his attentions were always distasteful. I told him so; but I was a friend of his sister's, who is dead, and did not slight him wholly. I am sorry he has killed himself, but I'll never believe that he lost his mind on my account."

"He must have had a malevolent heart," said Conners. "We do not know the method he has taken to reach you, other than by the explosive box on the ship. But he alleges that you are to die by means of his at six o'clock to-day, and that's why we are here. If that hour passes and you are safe, we may know that his effort has miscarried, or that his boast was that of a madman."

"Six o'clock!" she exclaimed, turning pale and reclining against her husband. "Was there ever anything so perfectly frightful and silly!"

"We feared that he might have arranged to send you some dangerous gift, some confection which you might innocently accept," went on Conners; "or some agent, vindictive but attached to him, might seek to carry out a command that he had left. Anything can happen in these days."

At the word "gift" the lady looked with a startled gaze at him, and then at her husband. She lifted her arm and placed her hand upon her sleeve, drawing it up slightly.

"What is that bracelet on your wrist, madam?" exclaimed Conners, in a sharp voice.

My attention was drawn at once to an ornament

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of gold of unusual size. It was a massive band, curiously carved, of great width and thickness, from the centre of which, near a heavy clasp, sparkled a jewel of exceeding brilliancy. Its chief beauty lay in its evident cost and richness, to which its cumbersome and ponderous character attracted attention.

Mrs. Van Arden clasped it nervously, tugging at it vainly as her pallor increased.

"It was a wedding gift from Mr. Corbin," she replied, turning her eyes again upon her husband's face. "He begged me to let him place it on my arm. He fastened it there, and I cannot get it off. He told me he would release it himself when I said farewell to him at the ship. He promised to be there. My husband examined it last evening, and we both admired its beauty. What do you mean, Mr. Connors?"

He sprang to her side, taking the bracelet in his hand and lifting it to the light. Frightened, Mrs. Van Arden submitted, and a moment later Connors exhibited the only strong emotion I was ever destined to observe in him at a time of crisis. His impassive face was convulsed.

"Quick!" he cried, to me. "Look about the room—find some implement by which this devilish thing may be removed."

"What is it?" asked Van Arden, excitedly, while his wife, nearly fainting with fear at the danger she did not understand, leaned so heavily against him as to call for all his strength.

The Long Arm

"We have no time to lose—I understand it now," said Conners, drawing his knife from his pocket. "Step here, my friend. No—stand back. You have responsibilities of your own. Open this blade for me, and then stand away."

I rushed to aid him. As I did his bidding and he took the knife from my hand, he paused with an instant's irresolution and motioned me again. I saw that it was a warning to leave the room, but fascinated, I stood by him.

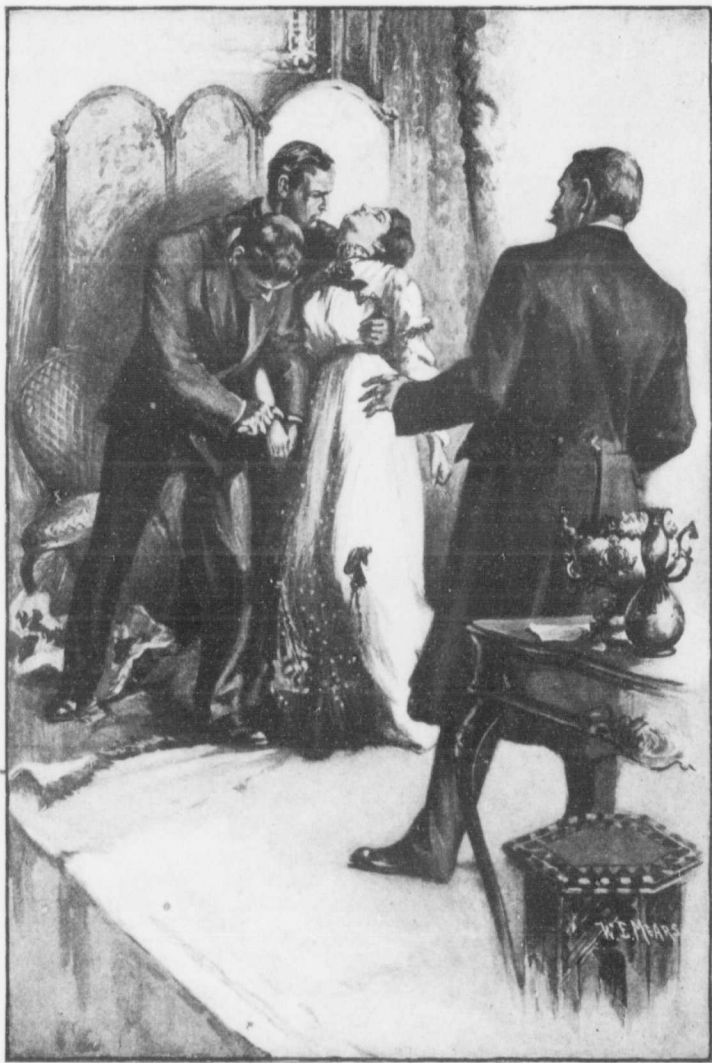
Grasping the bracelet firmly, he drew Mrs. Van Arden's arm beneath his own, holding her hand in front of him, as though to interpose his body between the bracelet and herself.

"Stand away," he repeated to me, sternly, as I drew nearer to observe him. "The point of my knife may precipitate the danger, but I must risk it."

He set the steel to the massive band, and I saw him compress his lips as his strength went to his effort. There was a sharp snap—the blade had broken.

"Useless—useless!" he exclaimed, with an expression which I shall never forget. Then he turned his eyes, fierce with anger, upon the lock that defied his efforts.

"Fool!" he muttered. "How frail is human knowledge—how guilty to yield my judgment to a sentiment. A glimpse of that fatal key should have warned me of this moment."



"HE SET THE STEEL TO THE MASSIVE BAND"

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A Brother of the Heart

"The key!" I shouted, stepping back as he stood looking at me in wonder, still holding the arm of the fainting woman.

I blushed, stammered, and placed my hand in my pocket.

"I have a weakness for keepsakes—tokens—and such things," I said. "You were taking other things and I thought you foolish to leave this. The suicide was horrible, and the key in his dead hand impressed me. I meant to show it to Jennie, and then return it to you, or the police, if you thought proper."

I extended my hand, holding the tiny jewel that I had discovered in the clasp of the dead man.

With a half-suppressed cry Connors seized it, dropping his useless knife. In a moment the bracelet was in his grasp and Mrs. Van Arden's arm was free.

Connors did not pause. Without a word he vanished from the room, and I heard his steps along the hall without. I looked at the wondering faces of the pair before me, and stood myself in such a state of mind that I could hardly collect my thoughts. An interval passed and then there came to our ears the sound of a distant explosion. It was quick and sharp, rising above the muffled noises of the street like the burst of a miniature cannon. Mechanically I looked at my watch; the hour was six.

"What is it?" asked Van Arden.

The Long Arm

The door opened and Connors reappeared. His eyes gleamed with mingled triumph and relief.

"I threw it from the window at the end of the hall," he said. "It exploded harmlessly below. There was a vacant lot to the north, fortunately, which I remembered. There is a gaping hole where it struck the earth, and a wondering crowd peering into it. This room would have been torn to fragments."

"Was it the bracelet?" I gasped.

"Yes. It was charged with his infernal powder, and doubtless set with the acid with which we have become familiar. His calculations, the result of study and experiment, were unerring as to time. When I saw the bracelet I understood. It was a close call."

Van Arden was now supporting his helpless wife and I had gone to his assistance. Connors took my place, and collecting my scattered faculties as best I could, I obeyed his command to summon the hotel physician. He came shortly, and surrendering Mrs. Van Arden to his care, with a promise of further and later explanations to the excited husband, we left the room.

"I should have saved you the key," said Connors, as we passed through the office to inspect the scene of the explosion in the lot north of the building. "I had little time, however, and the bracelet seemed to burn my fingers in those last eventful seconds. It exploded upon touching the ground,

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and it was not the fall, either. But I have learned a valuable lesson, which tells me that chance, and a personal habit, as for tokens for instance, may sometimes avail more than the very depths of human wisdom."

II

The Park Slope Mystery

THE proximity of his office to my studio enabled me to see LeDroit Connors almost daily, and I consequently soon came to be on terms of intimacy with this remarkable man. Yet it was a tragedy which touched my own little family that first cemented our association and made me, in the end, his companion in so many curious adventures.

Upon the occasion to which I allude I had finished my morning bath and was standing before the mirror, razor in hand, when a cry from the dining-room below startled me. It was followed by such confusion, that before I could collect my startled wits I had inflicted a sharp wound upon my cheek, yet, scarcely conscious of any pain, I ran to the head of the stairs to send down an answering call. Then, razor and all, with my features besmeared with blood and lather, I made my appearance in the breakfast-room, where my wife, Jennie, stood with the morning paper in her grasp, and her mother, Mrs. Barrister, with pallid face and staring eyes, sat rigid upon the sofa.

The Park Slope Mystery

"What is it?" I asked, excitedly, dashing the razor among the breakfast things and going to Jennie's side.

She thrust the paper into my hand, indicating an article under black head-lines, and seated herself beside her mother. Stripped of its sensational introduction, which naturally "featured" the chief events of the tragedy, the article read as follows:

"One day last week a handsome woman, nearing middle age, appeared at the Park Slope Police Station, evidently for the purpose of making a complaint. Her face showed traces of tears, and her manner was that of one suffering from fright. Before she could make her wishes known to the sergeant in charge, an elderly gentleman came upon the scene. He arrived in a carriage which was driven hastily to the door, and as he entered and saw the woman an exclamation either of anger or apprehension escaped him. He was recognized by the sergeant as a prominent citizen of the vicinity, and was not interrupted when he drew the woman to one side and conversed with her in a low tone.

"Mollified or reassured by what was said to her, she recovered her composure and consented to accompany the gentleman from the station. Her companion remained long enough to explain to the officer that the coming of the woman was a mistake, which she regretted, and that both desired no publicity about the matter. These persons were Dr.

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Charles Haslam, an old and well-known resident of the Park Slope, and Mrs. Martha Sands, his house-keeper. The significance of this visit will appear when it is learned that last night, at half-past nine o'clock, Dr. Haslam shot the woman to death. The murder took place at the handsome residence of the doctor on Banning Street, a fashionable thoroughfare in Brooklyn's most aristocratic neighborhood.

"The crime in its details was as gruesome as though committed by some ruffian in the slums, the head of the unfortunate woman being blown to pieces by a charge from a heavily loaded shotgun.

"Immediately prior to the tragedy, officers Flynn and Davis were walking up Banning Street towards the Park, when they were startled by the explosion of a gun, evidently in the second story of the Haslam house. They were at that time directly in front of the entrance. Fearful of either an accident or worse, they ran up the steps to make inquiry. The answer to their ring was delayed, but finally Edward Gray, the butler, opened the door. Pale and frightened, in answer to their questions he informed them that he did not know the meaning of the noise; that Dr. Jerome Sadler, an adopted son of Dr. Haslam, had gone up-stairs to investigate, and that he, Gray, had remained behind only to answer the call at the door. Mystified by the man's demeanor, the officers entered the hall, and immediately encountered Dr. Sadler coming down the main stair-

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way, greatly agitated. In a shaking voice he told them that Dr. Haslam had killed the housekeeper, the murder having taken place in the study on the second floor.

“Proceeding at once to the room in which the tragedy occurred, the officers found the body of the unfortunate woman lying upon the floor, the head in a pool of blood. The face was shattered almost beyond recognition, and death must have been instantaneous. The weapon with which the crime had been committed was leaning against an angle of the mantel. All possibility of an accident was excluded by the high state of feeling which had for some time existed between Dr. Haslam and the woman, and by the fact that Dr. Sadler surprised the murderer standing beside the body of his victim, contemplating his work with malevolent satisfaction.

“The stricken son, in the face of the early arrival of the officers, made no attempt to shield his erring parent. At the exclamation of horror which Dr. Sadler uttered upon entering the room immediately following the crime, the murderer placed the weapon in the position in which it was found, coolly turned away, and, by descending the back stairway, made his escape from the house at the moment the officers entered from the street. A general alarm has been sent out for his apprehension, and he will doubtless be taken before morning. The police feel confident of this, as he was in his dressing-gown and slippers at the moment of departure, and had little

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time to effect a change of garments or make provision for flight.

"Dr. Haslam is a man of wealth and a physician of large practice. Of late he has been something of a recluse, his failing health having caused a partial abandonment of his professional duties, which were largely assumed by his adopted son. Little is known of the unfortunate woman. She was of unusual personal attraction, English, and, so far as known, had no relatives in this country."

Here was the story, told with little elaboration, and I stood aghast and, for a moment, speechless. Dr. Haslam was the brother of Mrs. Barrister and the uncle of my wife.

We were somewhat familiar with his domestic affairs, although there was little cordiality between the fashionable house on Banning Street and my retired residence on Staten Island. The reason lay in Dr. Jerome Sadler. A warm affection had existed between Mrs. Barrister and her brother, but when Dr. Haslam, in his rounds of the hospitals, at which he was a welcome demonstrator, found the young student whom he had taken so closely into his household and subsequently educated, a breach had occurred which had never healed. This, in part, grew out of the fact that the young man became a suitor for Jennie's hand, and her preference for myself greatly disappointed her uncle. But the young man from the first was odious to Mrs. Bar-

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rister, and Jennie shared the feelings of her mother.

Of Mrs. Sands, the murdered woman, we knew little, and yet her presence in the home of Dr. Haslam had been a matter of uneasiness. Neither Mrs. Barrister nor Jennie had lost interest in their relative, and, with that feminine observance which is quick to note details, they suspected coming trouble—not trouble in the nature of the horrible event of which we had just been apprised, but in the possibility of an ill-advised marriage to be followed by the consequences of an old man's folly. They fancied that Dr. Sadler feared this, too, and their hope of seeing it averted lay in the fact of his natural opposition to such a union. They knew him to be selfish, suspected him to be base, and, although both detested him cordially, they held him in nothing like the apprehension with which they regarded the woman, whom Mrs. Barrister did not hesitate to regard as an adventuress. Deep as was our grief, and firm as had been our confidence in the high character of the man to whom both Jennie and her mother bore the relationship of blood, we had no reason to doubt the facts as told so coolly in the columns of the morning paper.

Gathering my scattered wits together, I sought to calm the weeping women, thinking at the time, with some grimness, of how little there was to say. Mrs. Barrister desired to go at once to the scene of the trouble, and Jennie clamored to accompany her,

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but to this I would not consent; my wife's presence could do no good.

Yielding, finally, to my wishes, Jennie helped to make her mother ready, and, oppressed by the gloom of our mission, we set out for Banning Street.

Something of the anticipated horror of our visit was kindly spared us. I had looked forward to a fearful inspection of the body and a pathetic meeting between Mrs. Barrister and her brother—doubtless he was now in custody and would be brought to the scene of his crime. I supposed there might be some judicial proceedings in which we would be called upon to participate, and which must be necessarily trying for Jennie's mother.

But upon our arrival we found the house quiet, with only a few curious figures lingering about the corners of the vicinity. Dr. Sadler greeted us with a fishy clasp, striving to twist his cold countenance into an expression of sympathy; in the shadow of the tragedy he could afford to be polite. The servants stood about like statues, dazed by the event, and Dr. Sadler himself ushered us into the parlor, from which the light was excluded by the closely drawn curtains. But our visit was to be free from any horror; the coroner had held an early inquest, and the body had been taken to the rooms of a neighboring undertaker. Dr. Haslam had not been found.

We met this statement with an exclamation of surprise, and Mrs. Barrister sobbed her relief. Dr. Sadler had a theory; he stated it in a colorless voice

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and with a demeanor which I sought to attribute to the influence of the horrible crime. The papers had spoken truly, he observed, when they said that Dr. Haslam was unprepared for flight; and he could, of course, find no one to harbor him from the authorities. He had made his way to the river, so he believed, and the police would find him when the waters gave up their dead.

The conclusion was a natural one, although it added to Mrs. Barrister's grief. Vainly she sought the cause of such a tragedy in the life of such a man as her brother. What had happened so to change a nature that had been always kind? Was it true that the man had become infatuated with the unfortunate woman whom he had slain?

She plied young Sadler with questions, but he was dumb and stolid. He was as surprised, he said, as she was; he could not understand it; naturally, he shared her grief, and had not yet been able to consider the matter calmly; it was almost useless to find excuses in the light of the horrible facts; he did not know whether his adopted father had left a will, but he did know that there was no insurance; when he could bring himself to think upon the subject he would give these things his attention.

So he answered her, speaking with scarcely a trace of feeling; and, even in my own confusion, I regarded him with increased aversion. He was a hypocrite—but that mattered little.

In response to questions from me, he spoke with

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more directness. Mrs. Sands had been an inmate of the house prior to his coming there; it was only recently that he had suspected an infatuation for her on the part of his adopted father. He had ventured on one occasion to mention the matter to Dr. Haslam, but the suggestion had been received with indignation. He dared say no more, but mentioned the matter to the butler—the servants had observed nothing. The tragedy had fallen upon all like a thunderbolt.

Our visit was over. Dr. Haslam had probably little need of the sympathy or affection of a sister. We returned to our home, and the two women sank under the sense of disgrace which they fancied the tragedy brought upon them. They held a portion of the stain of blood-guiltiness because of their nearness to the murderer, and although I strove to move them from such a feeling, my efforts were without avail. The gloom of the affair oppressed my own spirits in spite of my struggle to throw it off, and for days I remained closely at home, anxious to be near Jennie, who clung to me like a child frightened at the dark.

The papers dealt further with the Park Slope murder, as it came to be called, because of the prominence of Dr. Haslam. Those who had known him best could not reconcile this frantic deed with any propensity of his past life; a man of scrupulous and Christian character, the crime of murder was the last of which they would have suspected him to be guilty. His

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disappearance also caused wonder, for no trace of him could be found. From the frightful moment when he had slipped into the night from his house, the gloom seemed to have swallowed him. The house and stable on Banning Street had both been searched with a thoroughness which satisfied the police that he had not lingered near his home. The lakes in the Park were dragged until no spot was left unexplored. In all the throngs that intervened between his dwelling and the river, or the sea, no eye could be found that had seen an elderly man, strangely garbed for the street, fleeing in gown and slippers from the scene of his crime.

The search of the police brought to light other facts as revealed by the papers, but scarcely essential in view of the known details of the murder and the motive. Dr. Haslam had been ill during the week preceding the crime, and confined closely to his room, this indisposition following his visit to the police station in search of Mrs. Sands. There had been high words between himself and his adopted son growing out of this trouble with the housekeeper; the servants had heard the discussion, and the young man admitted it with sorrow. Dr. Haslam, under the influence of his passion, had been growing irritable. Certain improvements in the stable had necessitated the laying of a cement floor, and the teamsters, in hauling material into the yard, had broken down one of the concrete stone gate-posts at the side entrance. The doctor was furious, ex-

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hibiting unusual rage. He stormed about the premises until the servants were frightened, but under the entreaties of Dr. Sadler he finally grew calm. The young man had promised to see personally to the reconstruction of the damaged post, and at once to order the making of a mould in which the great stone should be cast, with which to replace the broken member of the gate.

Strangely subdued, Dr. Haslam had retired to his chamber, and there seemingly lost interest in the work which had before engrossed his attention. It progressed to completion, and, though he remained indifferent, he consented to accompany Mrs. Sands and Dr. Sadler to inspect it. Confined to his room for several days, they had been anxious to persuade him to take the air. The workmen had gone, but the coachman was present when the three entered the stable, and spoke with them. He also heard the old gentleman give directions to Dr. Sadler as to the demolished post, the stone for which was ready. It lay upon the floor beside the cement barrels and concrete from which it had been fashioned, and with which the stable paving had been done. It was a circumstance that the coachman had absented himself for two days from that time, and the butler deposed that this was Dr. Haslam's last appearance to any member of the household except the murdered woman, until the moment his adopted son had come upon him, standing above the body of his victim.

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Meantime, Dr. Sadler announced the finding of a will among the papers in the study safe, which he had turned over to the family lawyer. No one doubted that the young man was the heir, but the question of the disposition of the property of the fugitive must wait upon the legal knowledge of his death. While his complete disappearance gave color to the belief that he had made away with himself, the police were puzzled, and again searched every nook of his dwelling from attic to cellar.

Personally, I was resentful that Dr. Sadler, an intruder as it seemed to me in a household where he had no moral right, should sit quietly in possession of property in which my people should have had a share. We had inherited the shame and the disgrace, and it seemed unfair that the law should deprive us of some portion of the worldly goods. Of this, Jennie and Mrs. Barrister took no thought, but they continued in a state of such depression that I went with them for a trip South, remaining away for several weeks. The journey brought some of the color back to Jennie's cheeks, and in a measure benefited Mrs. Barrister, so I returned with something of the gloom lifted from my spirits, and finally reappeared at my office.

After greeting Jeffries, and looking at the mail which had accumulated on my desk, I stepped along the hall and opened the door of Connors's studio. An unfinished picture sat as usual on his easel, but he was not before it. The paintings,

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glowing in all the colors of his fancy, looked at me from the walls, and the raven poised above the bust of Poe seemed to extend to me a grim greeting. Alone, I found myself wondering at his fancy for the apostle of the pessimistic, and studying the countenance that he had given to the three pictures near the statue. They were three conceptions of the Chevalier Dupin, a character he much admired.

As I stood waiting he entered from his bedroom and came forward with a smile. His face expressed his welcome, but I knew from his serious eyes that he understood my absence, and had thought of me with sympathy.

"Back at last, my dear fellow?" he cried, cheerily. "You have been missed, of course. I know the anxiety you have experienced, and should have sought you if you had been alone. But I could not intrude upon your family circle. As the trouble was mainly theirs, I let you bear it in their company. I endeavor to avoid women."

I glanced again at his pictures, where sylph and siren, Venus in nature with Venus à la mode, showed every phase of beauty to the eye. He saw my gaze, and understood it.

"These do not count," he smiled, as he waved his hand about him. "You recall the temptation of St. Anthony? I hold discipline to be good for a man. These I may love—none other."

I looked at him curiously, struck by the sudden

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gloom of his manner; but almost immediately his demeanor changed.

"Where have you been?" he inquired.

I told him, and, cheered by the sympathy which looked from his eyes, I spoke of the grief of my wife, and how deeply the matter of our trouble had affected Mrs. Barrister. He listened in silence until I had finished.

"I know it all," he said, finally. "I have the papers here; every detail has been noted, while the articles are arranged in order. I have studied the matter carefully, wondering how much you knew of it."

"I believe all is known," I replied, "except the fate of my wife's unfortunate uncle."

"Sit down," he said, kindly, looking at me with eyes which now displayed another and deeper interest. "You cannot understand how strongly such matters appeal to me. It is a faculty with me almost to know the solution of a crime when the leading circumstances connected with it are revealed. I form my conclusion first, and, confident of its correctness, hunt for evidence to sustain it. I do this because I am never wrong. It is not magic, telepathy, nor any form of mental science; it is a moral consciousness of the meaning of related facts, impressed upon my mind with unerring certainty."

"I do not understand you," I said.

"When I am given certain figures," he replied, "the process of addition is instantaneous and sure."

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So, when I know of established incidents relating to a matter, they group themselves in my mind in such a manner as to reveal to me their meaning. You are grieved that your family must bear the shame of this crime of which Dr. Haslam stands charged, that you can discover no trace of him. May I help you?"

"Help me, indeed!" I replied, earnestly. "From the facts, as you have read them, would you say that he is dead?"

"Not altogether from the facts as I read them," Connors replied, "but from the facts not to be denied, he is dead without doubt. He was a man of character, made through a series of years, and intimately known to the best people of his vicinity; guilty or not of this crime, he was never a man to flee. He was a physician, and entirely sane—a man who would eagerly seek, rather than avoid, an explanation of any act he might commit. Whatever his connection with this murder, he would have remained to justify or deny it."

"That was, in fact, his character," I replied, eagerly.

"Even though he had fled, his nature suddenly changed, or his mind suffering from a sudden shock," continued Connors, "he would have surrendered himself later to the authorities. He is dead, or detained in some spot against his will. Since the latter theory is scarcely tenable, the conviction is certain that he is dead."

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"You believe, then, that he has made away with himself?" I asked.

"It is the first thing that I doubted," answered Connors, slowly, "and in your interest I hastened to investigate the matter. I found the task a light one. Why should Dr. Haslam flee from his house to make away with himself? He had drugs about him with which he might have made a painless end. The facts as stated were hard to reconcile. Here was a man incapable of murder, who does murder; a man incapable of flight, who flees; a man with every healthy conviction against suicide, drowning himself in the river or ocean—a method of death which required a journey of several miles in night attire through busy thoroughfares or along lighted avenues, against a simpler method of drug or pistol, thus reflecting upon the logic of his whole lifetime. The woman is slain by a gunshot, in the upper story of your kinsman's dwelling; Dr. Sadler is below stairs with the butler, and every inmate of the house but the slayer and his victim is positively accounted for as absent from the scene; and Dr. Haslam disappears at that instant, as is stated, since which time no trace of him is seen."

"Yes," I answered, "and Dr. Sadler saw him at the moment following the commission of his crime."

"The doctor *said* so," returned Connors, significantly. "It seems to have occurred to no one to doubt his statement. The police are not usually so credulous."

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I made an involuntary movement under the influence of the suggestion, the blood mounting to my cheek; then I experienced as quickly a revulsion of feeling.

"Sadler is treacherous enough and possibly a liar, but that has little bearing here," I responded, gloomily. "The woman is dead, Dr. Haslam gone—doubtless dead, also, as you have stated. I can conceive of no possible solution of the matter in view of what we know, other than the conclusion of the police. Sane or mad, Dr. Haslam can never speak in explanation, and, since every witness who can possibly know of the matter has been fully heard, the case is closed to us."

"I confess that it is confusing, in the matter of proof," replied Connors, "but let us investigate. I already know everything that the reporters can tell us. I should like to know something on my own account."

"What?" I asked.

"Let us visit Dr. Sadler, and, if he will permit, inspect the premises."

"Surely," I replied. "Sadler does not love me, and may resent our coming, but we will go."

"Let him resent it," answered Connors, with a peculiar smile. "I think myself that he will do so."

"When shall we go?" I asked.

He laughed as he threw aside his studio-jacket.

"Now," he answered.

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I was silent during our ride to Banning Street, but Connors talked cheerfully of many things. He had seemingly studied the matter, and, having arrived at some conclusion, sought to cheer me as best he could until we reached the place. In spite of this, my spirits fell, and I was not reassured as we mounted the steps of the now depressing house with its chill air and its closed shutters. Dr. Sadler had done nothing to lighten the gloom which hung over it; the blinds were drawn even at the back windows, and the gate, hung to the new stone of the great post, was shut and bolted.

Our ring was answered by the familiar face of Edward Gray. The new master had evidently retained him. He ushered us into the hall, and then into the parlor. I told him to announce me and a friend.

In a few minutes Sadler entered the room, looking with some surprise at my companion, but greeting me with an attempt at warmth. He made inquiry as to the health of Mrs. Barrister and my wife; he had heard of our departure, and expressed his pleasure at our return. Having said so much, he waited to learn my business, eying Connors from under his flabby lids and evidently suspecting an attorney. I could see that he was preparing to meet a declaration of war which might involve some question of property. The subject of the crime with him had become a matter of the past.

He heard my opening statement with evident

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relief, for his manner assumed an unusual frankness.

"Mr. Connors, Doctor, is my friend," I said. "I have told him of the depression under which we continue to labor, and how much Mrs. Barrister and my wife have suffered. He is good enough to sympathize with me. He suggested that by this time you might have something to offer in the way of news. I have, therefore, ventured to bring him with me to visit you."

"He is very welcome, as you are," was the unexpected answer, "but, alas! I have learned nothing. The police were diligent enough at first, and now know that there is really nothing to discover but the remains of our unfortunate relative. Therefore, they seem to have lost interest in the matter."

"You were, of course, much distressed by the occurrence, Doctor?" said Connors.

"Naturally, sir," replied the young man.

"Where were you when the gun was fired?"

"I was in the lower hall, with Edward Gray, the butler. He can testify to that, and has done so. Mrs. Sands entered from the rear of the house and I asked her to go to the study for a book. She met Dr. Haslam there as he came from his apartments. He had evidently heard her step in the hall and, prepared for the fateful moment, stood waiting. He killed her ruthlessly. At the noise of the report I ran up-stairs to find her dead. The explosion seemed to shake the house, and the butler was too frightened

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to accompany me. Two officers were outside, and heard it also. Their ring at the door prevented Gray from following me."

"Did you ask Gray to remain below?"

The young man smiled.

"Why, yes. I saw how he trembled, and my first thought was of burglars. It occurred to me that some one should remain below."

"There were other servants?"

The doctor looked annoyed. He made no reply.

"The butler was spared the terrifying sight which afflicted you," continued Connors, dryly. "May we look over the house, Doctor? The police have done that thoroughly, of course, but I fancy you could tell us graphically of the matter, upon the very scene."

I saw that Sadler now suspected the detective in my companion, and his eyes glittered balefully. The hatred he had always felt for me showed in every line of his face. But apparently he had nothing to conceal, and, wishing to render every assistance in his power to the authorities, he speedily rose to comply with our request.

"I remember it very graphically, at all events," he replied. "Come, gentlemen."

We followed him up the stairs and into the room where the murder had taken place. It was darkened, but he stepped to the window and pulled up the shade.

"There is a stain beneath that rug near you," he

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said. "We have been unable to remove it, even with acids. I shall have to have a section of the floor taken up. It is not a pleasant thing to see."

Conners looked about the chamber critically.

"Where was the gun found?"

"Here," and the doctor indicated the spot at the corner of the mantel.

"How did the piece of brass wire become attached to the stock, which the officers noticed when they first entered the room?"

"Which officer noticed it?" asked Sadler.

"I believe it was Flynn who spoke of it. You were present at the inquest?"

Sadler smiled.

"This is the first I have heard of it," he said.

"Of the wire?"

"No; of the fact that it was noticed. It was a loop used to hold back a refractory shutter yonder, and it must have fallen from the frame about the gun when Dr. Haslam placed it upon the floor. It was not a very gentle deed which he had just perpetrated, and his actions were not studied. The matter has no significance."

"Do you think that Dr. Haslam was concealed—"

"Concealed?" The young man answered quickly, with his note of query.

"I mean, do you think he entered from his rooms at the moment of Mrs. Sands's coming, or was he waiting for her here in the study?"

Dr. Sadler looked at him scornfully.

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"It surely matters little, but Dr. Haslam could come or go at pleasure in his own house; and he had little difficulty in seeing Mrs. Sands at any moment. He would have killed her in the parlor, in the presence of the whole world, having once resolved to do so. He made no attempt at concealment."

"But he fled."

The lids of the young man drooped.

"It is the habit of criminals to flee," he replied.

"Have you learned to think of your benefactor in the light of a criminal?"

The eyes of the young man flashed, but he held his temper in check. I saw, however, that it was by an effort, and that he resented the question.

"I shall always think of him with gratitude," he answered, "criminal or not."

"Did Dr. Haslam speak to you?"

"He said nothing, but looked unutterable things."

"I have thought it strange," observed Conners, musingly, and I fancied his manner assumed, "that the doctor should have escaped so readily from the house."

The young man gave a whiff of disgust.

"Who are here who would have presumed to stop him?" he said. "No one knew of a crime."

I thought the observation a trivial one myself, but my companion continued his questions.

"Did the servants speak to Dr. Haslam as he passed through the kitchen—did they not inquire of him the meaning of the gunshot they had heard?"

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Dr. Sadler hesitated. He fumbled with his handkerchief, which he had taken from his pocket, and stared vacantly at the floor.

"It is difficult to recall all these details," he replied, "but not the one in question. I have thought it strange that the police did not make that inquiry. The truth is that Dr. Haslam left the house unseen. The officers took it for granted that he left the house by the back stairway, because I said so; and I thought so until I found out differently. I did not fail to question the servants as to this."

"Did not the servants ask this question of their fellow, Gray, Doctor? What the murderer said, and how he acted, as he passed through the front?"

The eyes of the young man flashed viciously.

"It is quite possible," he answered. "As I have said, it is difficult to recall these details."

"You appear to have attached some importance to this yourself," persisted Conners.

"Of course," replied Dr. Sadler. "It was natural that I should, since I found that I was mistaken in the manner in which my benefactor, as you designate him, made his escape."

"How *did* he escape?" asked Conners.

The young man did not resent the question, and I listened with intense interest. I could not anticipate what was coming, and I expected little; but the facts were revealing themselves in strangely different form. I knew, of course, that this could matter little, but to me the whole subject was absorbing.

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"The police found every window bolted," said the doctor, speaking slowly, and choosing his words carefully. "As I stated to them that my father passed down the back stairway, they presumed it to be true, and that ended it. I thought it the truth myself until, as I have said, I learned differently from the servants. There was but one other mode of egress, since the windows were bolted, and that was by means of a trap in the attic roof. It is low to the eaves, and a ladder leads from the main structure to the back building. The descent from here to the yard is without difficulty. There is a trellis near, upon which vines grow. I investigated, and found that Dr. Haslam had used this avenue of escape. The vines on the trellis were torn and pulled aside, and I discovered his slipper on the roof of the back building. It is here."

He stepped to a closet and, taking the slipper from a shelf, exhibited it to us.

"You did not think it necessary to correct the erroneous impression of the police?" observed Connors.

"No," returned Sadler, coolly. "It was entirely unimportant, and you must recollect that I was deeply attached to Dr. Haslam. I preferred that it be thought that the deed was done in a moment of aberration of mind, as I in truth believe."

"Very singular," muttered Connors, "when, as you say, Dr. Haslam was master in his own house and could have left by means of the front-door—if he had liked."

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"No," said Sadler, with a smile; "not when you have thought about the matter. Dr. Haslam may have heard the entry of the officers, and—criminals become frightened."

"Did Dr. Haslam look frightened when you saw him?"

"No," replied the young man, reflectively. "But I found the slipper where I stated, and he left by means of the roof. Come, I will show you."

He led us to the attic, and as he ascended the stairs he furtively touched his eyes with his handkerchief. It was done with an obvious effort at concealment, but I was conscious of the fact that he wished us to believe that he was affected.

"Here is the door through which he passed," he said, indicating a trap, before which we paused. "I found it unlatched on the following morning, and took pains to close it."

Conners turned away almost instantly.

"This is unimportant," he said. "Let us go into the yard and inspect the trellis. Dr. Sadler can also point out to us the position of the trap-door from the outside."

The young man led the way down-stairs with evident alacrity, and, passing through the rear of the house, we came to the paved space of yard between the back entrance and the stable. Here the doctor eagerly indicated the trellis and pointed to the mark of the opening in the roof.

"An obvious way of escape," was the comment

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of Conners. "I think the papers stated that Dr. Haslam had been ailing for a week prior to this matter. Was that correct?"

"Quite correct," replied Dr. Sadler. "He ventured down-stairs, however, two days before the killing, coming with me to inspect some paving which had been completed in the stable."

"Was Mrs. Sands with you?"

"Yes," replied the young man, a malevolent light in his eyes; "if the information is of importance to you—Mrs. Sands was with us."

We entered the stable, pausing at the threshold to note a sheet of cemented floor stretching to the farther wall. A great block of white stone lay near the entrance, and about it were some half-filled barrels of lime or composition. A pile of concrete was upon the dirt floor of an adjacent room, and thrown upon it was a huge box. I judged it to be probably ten feet long, with a depth of two or three feet, and perhaps as many wide. All the surroundings appeared to me to be without significance, but Conners tapped the pavement sharply with his heel.

"The police, in their search, would scarcely neglect to remember that a man who has disappeared as completely as has your adopted father might safely lie under so excellent a covering," he said, blandly.

Dr. Sadler smiled.

"They did not forget it," he replied. "They sounded every foot of space here, in spite of the fact that he was seen by every person in the house a day

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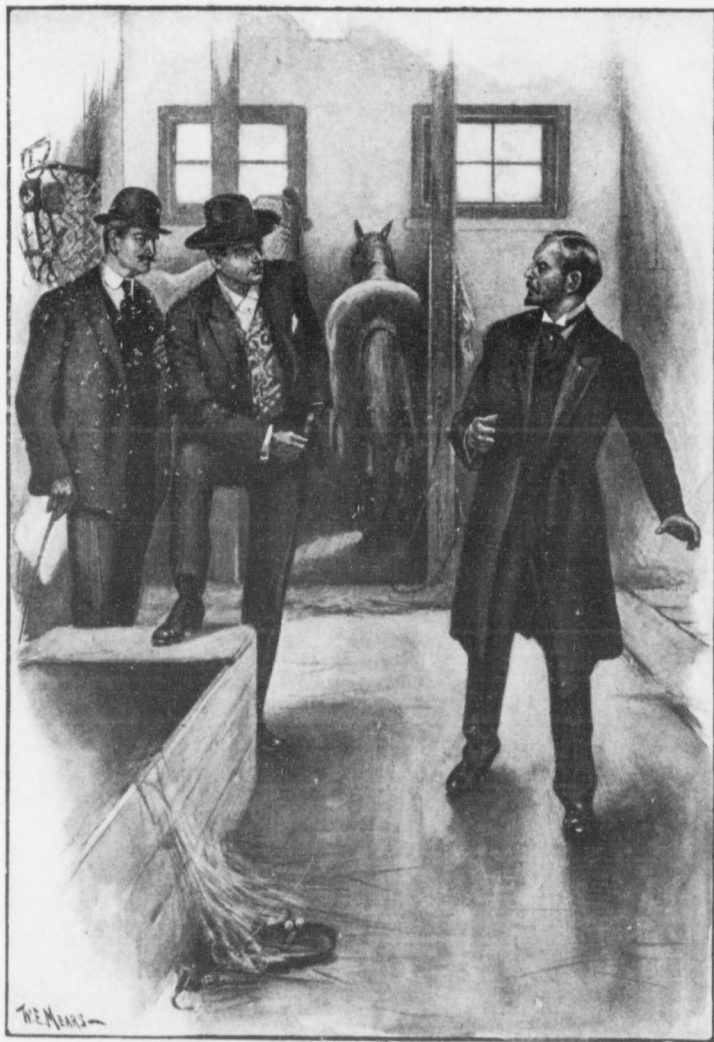
after the job was completed and the workmen gone. Dr. Haslam's visit to the stable was to inspect the work. Why the police did this was a mystery to me; and it remains so, since they have not explained. Having killed himself, Dr. Haslam could hardly bury his own body under a bed of cement that was set and hard while he was yet in the flesh. We should have been glad enough to have found him to bury him in a Christian manner, to say nothing of obtaining peace of mind regarding his fate."

"Of course," said Connors. "What is this stone?"

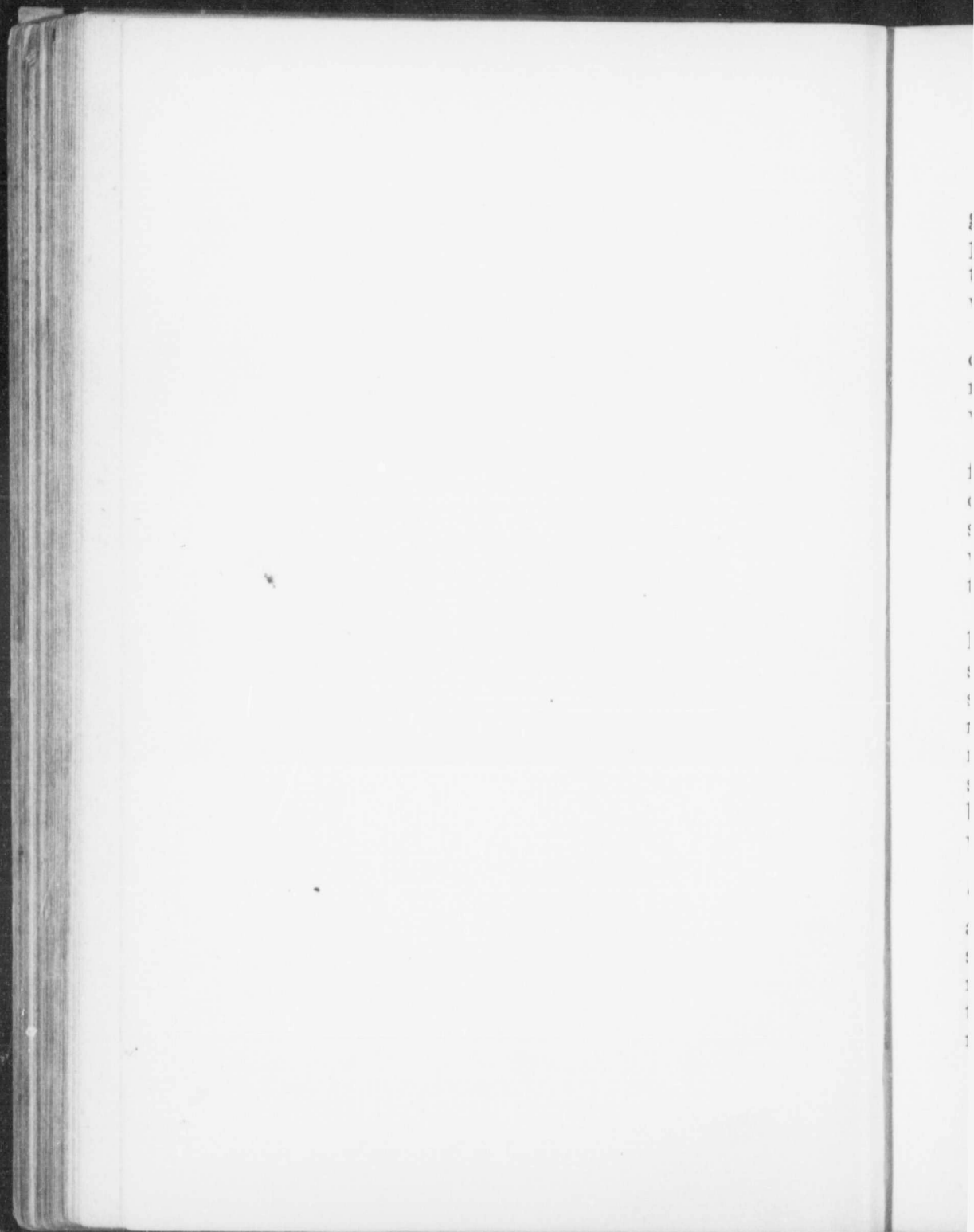
The doctor coughed slightly as Connors kicked a huge block of granite with his foot, and instantly my friend brought him under his keen eyes; they dwelled for a burning moment upon a face that flushed and then paled, while the green orbs that answered his danced shiftily.

"A stone brought to repair a broken gate-post outside. It was a trifle large and white, by comparison with the fellow it was to serve. Dr. Haslam concluded to use it as a carriage-block in front and provide another. There is nothing under it, you may be sure," and the young man paused to laugh softly. "As ponderous as it is, the police turned it over, because they gave attention to every incident which last had Dr. Haslam's attention. But the gate-post was not repaired until after the killing of Mrs. Sands and the disappearance of my adopted father."

"Yes," said Connors, quietly. "I observed the



"HE SWUNG AROUND AS THOUGH STUNG TO THE QUICK"



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gate-post as we passed it, and I also saw some light pieces of a broken framework amid a tangle of wires thrown in a large box in the inner room of the stable we have just left. What is it, Doctor?"

"I cannot say," was the reply. "The servants can perhaps tell you. I observed the fragments myself, and thought they resembled a device upon which to dry clothes."

"Very likely, Doctor," responded Connors, cheerfully. "If you can now tell us what has become of the piece of wire which was wrapped about the stock of the gun when the police first saw it, and whether or not you have ever travelled in Persia, I think we may call our visit over."

I started at the change which took place in Sadler's countenance. He swung around as though stung to the quick, facing Connors with an expression of such rage that I thought for a moment he meant to leap at him. But the calm eyes that met his chilled by their depth, and, shaking himself as though to recover his shattered faculties by some physical exertion, he replied in a voice which trembled in spite of his efforts to steady it:

"I have never travelled in Persia, sir," he said. "The question is a strange one, and has so little application to any of the matters we have considered that I must regard it as an intent to affront me. If so"—and he grew white again with rage that threatened to break through his control—"you may, indeed, consider your visit over."

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"This is very strange," said Conners, still regarding him closely, and nowise abashed. "I have myself travelled in Persia, and while in the study I saw a book there on Eastern travel, with the contents of which I am familiar. Hence, my inquiry was a natural one."

The lids above the shifty eyes again fluttered.

"I beg your pardon," half stammered the young man. "I did not understand."

"I am the more surprised," continued Conners, coolly, "because of the fact that the book in question was the volume for which you sent Mrs. Sands."

The young man uttered a shriek of dismay. He trembled violently and then lifted a menacing finger.

"All this is idle and foolish!" he cried. "But now I know that you are here to annoy and insult me. You show little consideration," he continued, turning on me fiercely, "in bringing this person here in the time of my affliction to pick at me with insane guesses about an incident which we should both treat with delicacy. You will not be welcomed again!"

"Very singular, truly, this sudden rage against us on the part of Dr. Sadler," said Conners, speaking to me, but evidently seeking to disturb the young man further. "Let us go."

"This way," cried Sadler, violently, as Conners turned towards the exit to the side street. "I do not accompany my guests through the rear entrance. This way!"

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He walked behind us to the front hall, and laid his hand on the door as we passed to the front stoop.

"One moment, Doctor!" cried Conners, lifting his hand as though he had forgotten something, and speaking suddenly. "You are a married man, are you not?"

The denial came through set teeth and with a muttered oath.

"Alas!" said Conners, pausing upon the top step. "I have guessed the sad truth: you are a widower."

The door slammed upon another shriek, to me an expression of uncontrollable rage, and my companion chuckled softly as we descended to the sidewalk.

"Come," he said, taking me by the arm and turning about the house from Banning Street. "Let us linger for a moment where you may inspect this gate-post, set reverently up to complete the work which the untimely happenings relating to Dr. Haslam unfortunately delayed. You will observe that it is a made stone, of cement, and of a color not in serious contrast with its older fellow. This is not wholly an excuse to let you understand that I am watching the house, but if you will lift your eyes to the rear upper window you will see that our late host is still interested in our movements."

I followed his suggestion, and instantly an abrupt movement at the upper window brought the curtain

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violently down. My companion laughed softly, and, turning away, bent his steps in the direction of the car-line.

"What does this mean?" I asked, as we waited at a street corner. "I knew already that Sadler was a knave, and I am surprised to find that he was deceitful to the police. Of course he would be insolent to us; we were fortunate to get into the house at all. But what have we discovered?"

Connors's response to my question was entirely irrelevant.

"The Indians have a humane method of disposing of their dead," he observed—"humane in that it does not shock the sensibilities of the living. They do not chill them in a tomb, nor hide them in the earth as food for worms. They wrap them in skins and furs and elevate them upon a platform above the grass to wither and dry in the sunshine."

"What *are* you talking about?" I asked, in astonishment.

"Nothing of the slightest importance," he answered with a laugh. "But I think I am tired, no matter what disposition I may have to be philosophical; and I suspect that you are also. Here comes a car."

He lapsed into one of his customary fits of silence, and I did not speak to him again until we had reached his quarters. Once more in his studio, his demeanor changed. He threw aside his street coat and, donning the loose and comfortable garment

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which he always wore in his rooms, he surveyed his pictures with his wonted fondness.

"Some day," he said, "I shall read you a homily on feminine beauty, but at present I must ask you to admire the countenance of my brave Dupin. Had he been with us we should scarcely have needed a visit to the house on Banning Street. We have three propositions, however, which are certain:

"1. The murderer of Mrs. Sands did not leave the house after the committal of the deed;

"2. Yet the search of the police revealed apparently every person therein;

"3. And Dr. Sadler was undoubtedly below-stairs at the time Mrs. Sands was killed above.

"A confusing array of absolute circumstances, without others to explain them. You are already in comfortable property, I believe, my friend, but Dr. Haslam was reputed rich. Your wife's mother will inherit something."

I stared at him blankly.

"There is a will," I replied, finally. "Of course Sadler is the heir."

"Never, as a matter of fact; but we must not get into questions of law. Even his relatives would scarcely contest with Mrs. Barrister under the circumstances—granting the will to run in his favor."

"Even his rela— Why, my dear Connors, the man is living, and years younger than Mrs. Barrister!"

"Living—perhaps. But let us consider our case.

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Dr. Sadler spoke falsely when he stated that he saw your wife's uncle immediately following the murder. If that were true, the police would have seen him also, for it is clear that they made an immediate and thorough search. He spoke falsely when he stated that Dr. Haslam escaped from the house by means of the trap-door in the roof. Our surprise was that he should flee at all. I left the attic quickly when I discovered at a glance that the trap in question was fastened with a rusty padlock, both lock and hasp covered by the cobwebs of months. There was no possible room for error, and I feared that Dr. Sadler would note this, too; had he done so, and suspected me, he would have grown cautious in consequence. The police, accepting his story as he told it, did not force him to the alternative of the roof-trap theory."

"But, my dear friend," I protested, "where does this lead us? The conclusions which follow cannot possibly be correct, and why did you suggest to Sadler that he was a widower?"

"Because it was true," replied Conners. "I was interested in the case, as I stated to you, and, before your return, I looked it up somewhat. From the facts stated in the newspapers, the significance of which I carefully analyzed, my suspicions were aroused. I went far enough to learn that he was married about six months ago. He subsequently lost his wife very suddenly."

Conners's manner attracted my attention, and he

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looked at me with an expression almost like humor upon his face. I had scarcely anticipated a jest from him on such a subject, and, as he averted his eyes, I said nothing, waiting for him to continue.

"I think we have accomplished enough for today," he said; "I want to assemble the facts as I have gathered them, and perhaps submit them to my friend Inspector Paul. He is a great detective—within limits. You may say to Mrs. Barrister and your wife that your family will not rest long under the stigma which they suppose is attached to it."

"That is cheering," I replied, doubtfully. "I know they have a great deal of confidence in you."

"That is cheering, too," he laughed.

I left the studio, and as I passed along the hall I heard the bell of his telephone ring sharply. Wondering how much he would have to suggest to the Inspector, I entered my office, and shortly after took my way home.

I did not tell Jennie or any one else of my visit to Banning Street, nor did I give them the message sent by Conners. What I had heard only tended to confuse me. Nothing had occurred to indicate the whereabouts of Dr. Haslam or in any wise mitigate the heinous character of his crime. I could not see that the fact that Sadler was a reprobate had anything whatever to do with it.

The night which passed was a restless one for me. Jennie and Mrs. Barrister were both indisposed, and,

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in consequence, I slept late the following morning, appearing with the others in the breakfast-room somewhat ruffled in temper. Our habits seemed to have become demoralized since our return, and I thought, somewhat morosely, of our former state of contentment, and looked regretfully at the sad countenances of the two women at the table.

But the morning paper had another surprise for me in an article which I read aloud, and with an excitement which made my words incoherent, and necessitated many repetitions because of the eager questions and excited exclamations with which my two companions interrupted me. The article in question was under black head-lines. It read as follows:

“The mystery of the disappearance of Dr. Charles Haslam has been solved at last. Far from being the murderer of his housekeeper, Mrs. Martha Sands, as has been generally supposed, Dr. Haslam was himself the victim of an assassin. His body was yesterday discovered in a cement gate-post at his late residence, and Dr. Jerome Sadler, Dr. Haslam’s own adopted son, has, by committing suicide, practically confessed himself guilty of the murder of the man who so befriended him, and of a woman whom, only a short time ago, he made his wife.

“As a whole, this tragedy makes one of the most sensational chapters in the criminal history of this city. Seldom has there been chronicled a more horrible and repulsive series of facts than those which

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relate to the killing of Mrs. Martha Sands at the house of Dr. Charles Haslam, on Banning Street, in Brooklyn. The terrible crime that sent the unfortunate woman to her grave has now been followed by a ghastly suicide, and three persons are dead as a result of the evil and ingratitude of a wretch whom a generous and confiding old man took into his confidence and affection. Until yesterday it was believed by the public and police that Mrs. Sands had died at the hands of Dr. Haslam. An obscure page from the records of a Westchester magistrate; a book of Oriental travel pierced by a scarcely perceptible hole through which was drawn a piece of brass wire; an ingenious mechanism constructed to hold a gun at the deadly level of a human head, masked by a green cloth; certain marks where it was attached to the study floor in Dr. Haslam's house; the presence of fragments of brass wire about the breech of the fatal gun while it was yet smoking from its discharge; together with other unearthed evidence—which discloses a depth of human depravity—all shrewdly fitted together, have tended to reveal the truth and tell a story which reads like a page from an Italian romance of the Middle Ages.

“Here are the facts: Nearly two years ago Dr. Charles Haslam, attracted by the person and talents of a young medical student by the name of Jerome Sadler, took him into his household, and later made him his son by adoption. The inmates of the Banning Street house consisted at that time of Dr.

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Haslam and four servants, including the housekeeper, Mrs. Martha Sands, a woman of unusual personal attractions. Although some years older than the young man who was the subject of Dr. Haslam's favor, this difference in age did not prevent the development of a singular regard between them, of which fact Dr. Haslam became recently advised.

"The young man had firmly intrenched himself in the affections of his lonely patron, and by duplicity and adroitness he was enabled to mislead him. He denied the existence of any intimate relationship between himself and the handsome housekeeper, and insisted that the suspicion was a grave injustice to the woman. The displeasure of his benefactor was thus allayed. Later, however, the woman openly declared that the young man had married her; and that since, under the fear of discovery, which might mean the loss of his position in the house of his adopted father, he had attempted her life by poison. She even sought the police with a view of making her charge public, when Dr. Haslam, to save scandal and prevent a rumor of his disturbed domestic relations from becoming known in the neighborhood, intervened as a peacemaker.

"The strain upon the old man resulted in a fit of illness, during which time a reconciliation was apparently effected between himself and his adopted son. Upon this same afternoon Dr. Haslam, feeling better, accompanied Dr. Sadler down-stairs and

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went with him to the stable, where some paving had been finished in the carriage-room. The coachman, who was present, left at that moment, and the stable-hands were absent. The time was propitious for the crime. A fiendish opportunity for concealing the deed appealed to the young man, and he hastened to take advantage of it. Striking his adopted father down from behind by a blow with a hatchet, he killed him instantly. It is believed, and there is evidence to sustain the theory, that he was assisted in this work by the wretched woman who was to suffer death so shortly herself.

“Secure now in the possession of the premises, and while the servants supposed that Dr. Haslam was in the retirement of his chamber, still suffering from the indisposition which had kept him within doors for the previous week, Dr. Sadler erected an infernal trap designed to destroy his unhappy accomplice. This consisted of a framework made of lathing, arranged to carry a gun at the proper height and discharge it by means of a wire. The whole was concealed by a green cloth thrown over the structure. The wire, which connected with the set trigger, passed beneath a table before the muzzle of the concealed weapon attached to a book that was placed thereon. The terrible contrivance was erected so as to make failure impossible, and well calculated to deceive and mislead by its results. A chair and a sofa were placed before the table so that the intended victim, to reach the book, must

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of necessity present herself directly in front of the masked weapon. His trap secure, the murderer set it when alone, and, descending to the lower floor of the house, he remained in the company of the butler while Mrs. Sands was carelessly requested to fetch him a book lying on the table in the study above. The woman obeyed and met her instant death.

"Frightened by the explosion, the butler readily obeyed the injunction of his master to wait below while the cause of the disturbance was investigated by himself; and, hurrying to the scene of his work, Dr. Sadler removed the deadly mechanism from before the body of his victim, and calmly asserted that the deed was done by his adopted father.

"Here follows a statement which must beggar human belief. When Dr. Haslam was murdered in the stable every facility was at hand for a remarkable concealment of the body. It immediately suggested itself to the unnatural murderer, if, indeed, he had not reasoned it out before and beguiled the old man to the spot for the very purpose of perpetrating the crime. A large box-mould, used by the workmen in mixing the cement for a broken gate-post, lay in the stable. Its form was strangely appropriate for the fell purpose for which it was subsequently used, and its bottom was well covered with the liquid mixture. Into this the murderer threw the body, and, covering it carefully with the sand and cement that lay about, smoothed the plastic mass in the mould.

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“Here the body lay within the hardening cement until the following day, when the murderer had the now solid block removed from the box. The workmen who had laid the cement floor of the stable were recalled, and the block was erected at the entrance to the yard.

“The unravelling of the mystery attached to the murder of the woman, and the discovery of the appalling crime which makes this murder distinctive, were due to the marvellous detective skill of Inspector Paul. This efficient officer, from the first, was dissatisfied with the conclusion that Dr. Haslam was guilty of the killing of his housekeeper. The high character of the doctor was at variance with both the crime and the guilty flight.

“The strange hiding-place selected by the murderer for the body of his victim was discovered in a manner to reflect lasting credit upon the deductive mind that reasoned it out, and will rank Inspector Paul among the safest of our secret guardians of the public safety. During a visit to the house in Banning Street he happened carelessly upon a book of Oriental travel pierced by a piece of brass wire. Remembering that this was similar to the wire which enveloped the breech of the fatal shotgun, he was enabled to connect it with the broken fragments of the trap found in the stable, and later to put together the theory which the facts proved to be true. But in the book in question he found a well-thumbed chapter which told a grim story of a

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method of torture in Persia; it detailed a practice on the part of the cruel authorities of enveloping criminals in a mould of plaster of Paris, or cement, and letting the substance set about their bodies until the unfortunate victims were lost, entombed forever in a solid mass. Inquiry developed that the book was a favorite one of Dr. Sadler's.

"Dr. Jerome Sadler killed himself by taking prussic acid in the library of the Banning Street residence late yesterday afternoon, immediately following the demolition of the gate-post by the authorities. The coroner will hold an inquest this morning."

III

The Adventure of the Counterfeiters

“OF what are you thinking?” asked LeDroit Connors. He sat before his familiar easel, his brush poised as usual above an unfinished picture. He had painted with more avidity of late, because there had been seemingly nothing beyond the routine of his life to distract his attention. Now, as always, his art busied itself with the face of a woman, like the many that adorned the walls of his studio. The light from the colored window above fell upon his thoughtful face, emphasizing its sadness, and showing, with the long lashes which shaded his eyes, the arch of sable brow. There was nothing effeminate about him, notwithstanding his diletanteism; he was compact of form and of unquestioned strength.

“Primarily, I was thinking of you,” I replied, “and also a story by Poe which I was reading last night. My wife never tires hearing about you, of your studio with its bust of the great poet, the raven stretched above it, and your pictures of the Chevalier Dupin.”

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"Your wife is very good to speak of me and think of me. Ah! the Chevalier! A great man, sir. You know my views as to crime—the germ of the beast in our blood, which under stress constantly breaks down the barriers called laws, erected by society to guard itself. 'And Liberty plucks Justice by the nose, the baby beats its nurse, and quite athwart goes all decorum,' as Shakespeare has it. What a study! So long as men love women, wealth, and wine, so long will they err to the very shadow of death. None better understood this than the unhappy poet of whom you spoke. He had the gift of divination also. You have often heard me say so."

"You say 'also' with more than your customary frankness," I replied. "The implication is unmistakable; *you* have the gift so marvellously developed that there was a sufficient reason for my thought."

He paused in his work; his brow contracted. I shifted uneasily in my seat in the fear that I had offended him, but his tone reassured me.

"You say a gift developed; perhaps. Rather an instinct, as the faculty of scent to the blood-hound and the acute ear to the hare, an unflinching sight to the hawk and a sense of touch to the serpent. Deductive knowledge depends on reason, but inspiration is an exalted — no, perhaps I should say an acute sense of something else. The beasts, unclothed except by nature and unfed except by sea-

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son and conquest, must make existence out of an absolute impression of certainty that is neither analytical nor deductive. I fear I am in that category, my dear fellow. I know things because I know them—that is, some things.”

He laughed at the look I fixed upon him.

“Do you know Edgar Parton?” he asked, as if to change the subject.

“A young man in the bank, down below?”

“Yes.”

I knew him slightly: a handsome, well-mannered young paying-teller in the Eagle National Bank, an institution which occupied the great offices on the ground-floor of the structure in which we were housed. I nodded.

“Well, he was a central figure yesterday, with interest attaching to him yet. Perhaps the excitement occurred after you left, since you have not mentioned it. Didn't you see an account of the matter in the papers this morning?”

“I missed it,” I replied. “What was it?”

“He was arrested in the bank—had the handcuffs put on him right before his fellow-clerks, and doubtless spent last night in jail.”

“What charge?” I asked. “Theft?”

“No,” said Connors—“worse. The charge might be theft, for he has robbed the bank pretty heavily, but the arrest was for counterfeiting. The government officers have been watching him for weeks, and yesterday they caught him. They had evi-

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dence to justify his arrest some time ago, but deferred it in the hope of getting his confederates also. They wanted the plates from which he worked, but his methods were so strenuous that they couldn't wait—he wouldn't permit it."

"This is a surprise," I said, in a shocked voice. "He certainly didn't look the part."

"No," said Conners, with an air of meditation; "I was surprised myself. I have nothing more than the facts as stated by the papers, slightly supplemented by a brief word with the cashier this morning. I went in to cash a check, and, of course, the clerks were full of it."

"What did he get?"

"More than the bank cares to tell. The counterfeit bills are of its own issue; that's where his people are mad. They got wind of it yesterday, and reported it to the police by telephone; then they learned that the government already had him under surveillance. His method was ingenious. He brought the spurious bills into the bank, paid them out to unsuspecting customers, and took their face value in good money. His bogus paper thus wandered out into the community to get into hands that could never trace it back to its source."

"Shrēwd, indeed, if the counterfeit was a good one," I said. "How was he found out?"

Conners laughed.

"A singular fatality. A customer received a payment and went to the desk to count it. He saw

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two bills which so excited his interest that he stepped into the president's office to mention the matter. The incident was entirely fortuitous, and the customer suspected nothing but a mistake. The president at once discovered a counterfeit. A 'good one,' do you say? Why, the spurious bills were so excellently done that they could not be distinguished from the genuine. A dangerous bill, that?"

"Surely—if I understood you," I replied.

"There were several of these bills," Conners continued, "of the character of which I spoke. The president knew that some were spurious, but he could not detect which."

"Impossible," I said.

"No," persisted Conners, smiling; "the bills disclosed a counterfeit, but not *the* counterfeit."

I shook my head incredulously.

"The truth," he continued. "The only difficulty with the bills was in their numbers—they were duplicated. This was what the customer discovered, and it disclosed either error or fraud. A mistake of that character being impossible, the president was at once alarmed."

"I see," I said.

"The bank detective was immediately summoned, and he stated with some confusion that he was familiar with the matter; that the federal and local authorities had told him several days since to watch Parton closely, but to say nothing to his

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superiors, a command which he was bound to obey. Parton was instantly called to the president's office and questioned. He was frightened, confused, and finally broke down, but vehemently protested his innocence. The detective then brought to the private office from the teller's desk a package of new bills in the familiar wrapper of the bank. They were carefully inspected, and it was decided that they were undoubtedly spurious. Parton was then arrested. I am sorry for him, for he promised better than that."

"This is interesting," I said, "for the man is interesting. I rather liked him. How about your intuitions now? Have you suspected him for a thief?"

"I thought little about him at first," replied Conners, carelessly, "but, as all such matters appeal to me, I have thought about him since."

"To what effect?" I asked, smiling. "Remember your rule as to making up a conclusion and finding the facts to fit it. Is he guilty or not guilty?"

"You have not quite stated my rule," Conners laughed; "but I have not allowed myself an impression. I am as yet not sufficiently informed to justify it."

There came a faint tap on the door.

"They always knock," he muttered. "Come in!" he cried.

Two women entered. One was tall, and dressed in black. She was elderly, evidently a widow, with

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an attractive face in spite of its expression of care, and now showing traces of tears. Her companion was scarcely more than a girl. I could see that Connors was startled, as I was, at her singular beauty. She was slight, petite, with golden hair and eyes of deepest blue. She, also, was dressed in black, but the dark clothes only enhanced her loveliness—their effect was not sombre, being lightened at the throat and showing here and there an evidence of color.

The couple regarded us hesitatingly and with some embarrassment as we both arose to greet them. Then the elder woman came forward eagerly.

“Mr. Connors?” she said.

“Yes,” responded my companion with a bow, looking at her inquiringly.

“Oh, Mr. Connors!” she exclaimed. “I am Mrs. Parton. My son, Edgar, has been arrested.”

She gave way to a flood of tears, her face buried in her handkerchief. Connors instantly pushed a chair before him and assisted her to a seat. He then gave his attention to her companion, who displayed an increased confusion, standing helplessly at the side of the other. She was affected by the grief of the elderly woman, but, in spite of this, her gaze wandered about the room, resting curiously on the ornamented walls, the draperies, and the strange appointments.

I felt that I ought to withdraw and made a motion to do so, but a gesture from Connors halted me. I

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was glad of an excuse to remain, and therefore seated myself again.

"Mr. Conners," resumed the lady, when she had sufficiently recovered her composure to speak, "I have just seen my son in prison—a dreadful place. He is in deep distress, and begged me to come to you."

"To me?" exclaimed Conners, in surprise. He looked at me with a glance of inquiry, but I shook my head. I divined his thought, but the ladies were strangers to me.

"Edgar is all I have, and we are quite alone," the elder woman said. "We have few friends, and you have spoken kindly to him in the bank. He is suspicious now of such friends as we have, and did not know to whom to turn. He mentioned you, and then begged me to see you."

Conners became thoughtful. He looked upward with the expression so familiar to me.

"Did he mention the fact that I had an account at the bank?" he asked.

"He did," replied the lady. "He said that the account was a large one, and he knew that your resources were large. How he knew this I cannot tell, of course. There is no harm in such knowledge, is there?"

"A bad sign," I thought, as I caught Conners's eye. "This is exactly the aid a shrewd and cunning rascal would seek. He would send his mother and lovely young sister to play upon the sympathies of

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one who might powerfully influence the bank." I knew that Conners did not lack money, but I had not before suspected that his resources were such as this indicated.

"What aid did he request?" asked my friend at last.

"He did not say," replied the lady. "I fancied, at first, you were a lawyer. We, of course, must arrange in some manner for his defence. He is innocent, Mr. Conners—I pledge you a mother's word that it is true!"

I thought a mother's word exceedingly unreliable in such a case, and pricked up my ears as the young woman now spoke.

"He was attracted by your face, Mr. Conners," she said, "having often seen you in the bank. He has spoken of you to me many times. Once he paid you some money and immediately you returned two bills through the wicket; they were old and false. He was able to trace them and save himself loss, but your quickness so interested him that he never forgot it. 'I am innocent,' he said to me this morning; 'I am innocent, and Mr. Conners can help me.'"

My friend laughed shortly.

"I recall the circumstance," he said; "a year ago, too."

Again he was thoughtful, and then his manner changed. I observed a sharp and awakened interest.

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"But there is another reason why we appeal to you, Mr. Connors," said Mrs. Parton. "We have a friend on the police force, a man whom my husband aided years ago. I fancy he could not openly assist Edgar, considering the evidence, but he mentioned your name to us both. Edgar was quick to understand him."

"Too quick," was my mental comment.

"Ah," observed Connors. "Is your friend an inspector?"

The lady made no reply, and Connors laughed again.

"I will help your son, madam," he said. "I am prepared to aid him by every means in my power."

"Oh, thank you!" exclaimed Mrs. Parton, again giving way to tears. "Forgive me, sir, but I am greatly relieved. I felt so helpless because there seemed no one to whom I could appeal. I could have died with grief, and yet I could not bear the thought of leaving my boy. There is something in your voice that gives me a strange encouragement."

I felt it also — an indefinable something which told me that her plea had touched Connors deeply, and that it excited all his powers. I waited with renewed attention, conscious now that I was to see another manifestation of the wonderful ability of which I had had ample proof.

"He is a good son," continued Mrs. Parton, with vehement emotion. "He is incapable of any crime. Ever since his father died he has been tender, solici-

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tous, and true. I know the partiality of a mother, and how often we are blinded to faults in those we love; but I cannot be mistaken here. He was ambitious and industrious, and has risen to his position in the Eagle Bank without friends or influence. He began as a minor clerk in another bank, and, by merit alone, won the post of teller in the institution he is said to have betrayed. Why should he throw away his character in the beginning of his career when he had worked so hard to attain it? It was all he had."

I saw Conners's eyes flash; he looked at me with a strange expression, and I knew that his first impression had come. When he spoke I was surprised at the emotion he displayed.

"Having the blessing of such a mother," he said, "I am sure he would yield only to some great temptation."

He looked at the younger woman from the corner of his eye, and continued:

"Tell me of him—speak freely, and tell me all you know of this. Let me know his habits, relations, and hopes. Later I will see him at the prison, but you can tell me of matters of which he may not speak."

"It is so like a horrible dream," said Mrs. Parton. "That my boy should be arrested! He was engaged to be married shortly. Miss Allen—Louise Allen here—is his betrothed. She is an orphan and lives with her brother who has a men's furnishing

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store up-town. Mr. John Gordan, a fellow-clerk of Edgar's, lives with them, and it was through John that Edgar met Louise. John is heart-broken at Edgar's misfortune, and it is no consolation to him that he succeeds to Edgar's window at the bank. I saw his face at the familiar opening as I stopped in with the hope of speaking to the president, and he was so full of grief that he could not look at me. Louise says he did not sleep at all last night, and came to the breakfast-table this morning looking as though he had lost a dear relative. We have no friend who is a lawyer, and did not wish to employ one, so certain were we that Edgar would not be long suspected. But John said this morning that we must employ counsel, and said that he would advise us to whom we must go. We saw Edgar at the prison, meantime, and he suggested that I come to you. Do you know of some one whom we may trust? It is so dreadful to be poor!"

She struggled bravely with her emotions, and Conners came to her relief.

"Let me have your address, dear madam," he said. "I will see your son and later call on you. At present I doubt if you can help me more. Does Miss Allen live near you?"

"I live in the next block," said the young lady, speaking for herself. "Perhaps I ought to say, Mr. Conners, that John was afraid to interest himself too actively in Edgar's behalf, because he worked with him in the same bank. To do so might hurt

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him without aiding Edgar; and my brother, on John's account, was sensitive also. They thought I ought to stay away from both the jail and Mrs. Parton's until matters were a little clearer, but I am really glad I came. Mrs. Parton wished me to."

"You were formerly engaged to Mr. Gordan, were you not?" asked Conners. "Oh," he said, lifting his hand as she started and then hung her pretty head, "we often have to ask questions, like a doctor or a lawyer, no matter how unpleasant. You need not answer. I know it as though you had told me, and I could name the time you broke with him. But that is sufficient now."

She did not answer, although the color heightened in her face. Conners did not look at Mrs. Parton, but took the address she gave him and went with them into the hall towards the elevator. I waited his return.

"I have a theory!" I cried, as he re-entered.

"Indeed?" he laughed. "Then you must be a part of the investigating committee and help these ladies out. Will you come with me?"

"Certainly," I answered. "Where?"

"Several places, but first to the bank. They should have additional facts by this time, and we should know them, since we are in for it now in earnest. They will not refuse me, as you can guess, in view of what you have heard of my standing there. We can forgive young Parton his loose tongue, however, if he is guilty of nothing worse."

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He made himself ready, meantime, and, going to the elevator, we descended to the first floor and entered the bank. Conners called for the president, and we were ushered into his private office. He was smooth, fat, bald, and florid; he was also benign, regretful, and prejudiced.

"I am glad some one is interested in young Parton's behalf," he said, when Conners had finished a careful statement as to his business. "If you design to procure him counsel, we will be most impartial in the matter, although the crime is something to shudder at. Think of it! Counterfeit money dealt out through the window of a national bank—it is horrible!"

He perspired heavily under the mere influence of the thought.

"There is no doubt of his guilt," he continued, when he could calm himself. "The young man was caught with the goods on him, as Flury says."

"Flury is your detective?" observed Conners.

"Yes, Jerry Flury."

"Your employés are bonded, of course, Mr. Jonas?"

"Yes, sir, and it covers this case," cried the president, with emphasis. "We don't care about the counterfeiting; but it is our loss that interests me. The counterfeiting is a government matter, but his theft is ours. I don't care what the bonding company says."

"Who succeeds Parton, Mr. Jonas? You will pardon us, but we are interested, as I have said."

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"Glad to help you," responded the president, heartily, doubtless in recollection of the account to my companion's credit. "John Gordan has his position now—a worthy and reliable young man; a friend of Parton's—but all the clerks were his friends. They will be glad to repudiate him now. Such is the punishment entailed by crime."

"Are there any further facts?" asked Conners.

"Ample to settle all doubt," replied the president. "Parton's rooms have been searched and more counterfeit money found; also a part of a broken plate and certain engraving tools—not the plate with which this work was done, but a part of a poorer attempt. Parton was once a lithographer and an engraver of rare promise. The firm with which he once worked has been found. Such things always crop out in moments of emergency. He was searched at the jail and some important memoranda found on the back of a card in his possession. Flury took a copy."

He handed Conners a paper which bore certain marks, as follows:

"J. Harding.
No. 633,722. Fld. Mch. 18th.
Allowed. At last.
Bdwy Bank \$5000. A.
Seamans Svg. \$5000 M."

Conners copied the notations in his commonplace book and returned the sheet to Mr. Jonas.

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"Counterfeiters usually work in company, and the operation is by means of a gang," he said. "Could Parton have had confederates in the bank?"

"Good Heavens, I hope not!" ejaculated the president, with a start. "And yet, we never doubted *him*."

He touched a button at his desk in nervous haste.

"Tell Flury I want him," he said to a clerk who answered.

In a moment the bank detective made his appearance, a short, thick-set man, with a large mustache and the unmistakable air of the private police. He was dressed in the square-cut coat and striped trousers of his class, his stiff checked shirt and florid tie in keeping with his countenance.

"This is Mr. Connors, Flury," said the president, ignoring me and indicating my friend. "He is a customer of the bank and is interested in the Parton case."

I saw the detective covertly watching us. He knew us both as tenants of the building and doubtless the details of our offices and habits. His demeanor suggested much.

"There won't be no trouble," he laughed. "We nipped this thing early."

"Mr. Connors suggests that counterfeiters invariably have confederates, and we know that they usually work in gangs. That is a matter for the

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authorities, but I trust that Parton has no confederates in the bank."

"There ain't a man in the bank but what is as level as this floor," said Flury, earnestly, his face flushing a deeper red. "Most all of them is in bed by ten o'clock every night, and them that ain't is simply in nice society, with dances and such. We know them all down to the breakfast-table the next mornin'."

"Who were Parton's associates?" asked Conners.

"Well, Gordan for one, and he threwed him down the minute he sees him dishonest. I gets the tip as to the engraving firm from Gordan. Of course, he's sorry, as we all are, but that don't make no difference. Gordan is broke up over the thing, and, although he gets Parton's window, he's that generous that it don't count. But I suspects," and the detective chuckled, "that he falls heir to the girl also."

"What girl?" asked the president.

"Parton is engaged to marry a young woman up-town that Gordan is sweet on. The fact is, Parton cuts him out, but Gordan is that broad-minded that it's all square with him, and he don't bear malice. It's your Christian kind that makes bank people safe, and Gordan's in that class. He stays honest, gets Parton's job, and wins back his girl. It sure proves the rule that virtue is its own reward."

"You may go, Flury," said the president.

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"Wait!" said Conners, sharply. "What were Parton's habits before this trouble?"

"Best in the world, on the face," replied the detective. "No drinkin' and no gamblin' so far as I can find out. But he had some nights that we can't account for, and we learns this mornin' that he runs an account in the name of his sweetheart in another bank, a saver on Broadway."

"Do you suspect confederates?"

"The police and federal secret people do. Of course he knows where the bills are made, and if we hadn't been so sudden we might have found the shop; but that wasn't my fault, and certainly it ain't my business." He shrugged his shoulders carelessly.

"Who searched his rooms?" asked Conners.

"The Washington secret-service people."

"Were you there?"

"Yes."

"What was found?"

"Enough to fix him. Some tools in his bureau-drawer and some bills. There were moulds in his trunk and several bottles of acid for etching. There was an old plate and a bundle of good paper."

"It looks bad," observed Conners, gloomily.

"Yes—or good!" laughed the detective.

Conners nodded his head, and, at a sign from the president, Flury withdrew.

"May I talk with Gordan?" asked Conners.

"Certainly," said the president. "I presume

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Parton's lawyer will see him in due time, but anything you may learn now will go to help the case in the end."

To my surprise, he seemed in no manner annoyed at this apparently gratuitous investigation, and my respect for my companion was necessarily increased. Evidently his account was large, since it procured for him such consideration. The president called his clerk, and gave instructions that some one relieve Gordan at his window, and in a few minutes the young man stood before us. He was a frank and good-looking fellow, but his demeanor was subdued and his countenance grave. He evidently suspected that we were officers or lawyers. Conners made no explanations, but questioned him at once.

"How long have you known Parton?" he asked.

"We have been friends from boyhood," replied the young man.

"Intimate?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you like him?"

"I loved him as a brother, sir."

"What prompted you to reveal to the officers the fact that he had been an engraver?"

Gordan flushed, looking steadily at the carpet.

"It was a circumstance with which I was familiar, and I thought it should be known. I knew that he wanted to keep the fact a secret, and I felt that he was doing himself an injustice. It was sure to

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come out, and the sooner the better for him. Candor was all that could save him now."

"And you wished him saved?"

"Yes, sir."

"Notwithstanding the fact that he had interrupted your relations with Miss Allen?"

"That is an old matter," replied the young man, with a look of surprise. "Did he speak of it?"

"No," said Conners.

"Then I shall not."

I saw a peculiar expression come into Conners's face. He half smiled, but said nothing.

"I would think Parton innocent, if I dared," continued Gordan, with a furtive glance at the president.

"The observation does you credit," said Mr. Jonas.

"Thank you, sir," said Gordan.

"That is all," said Conners.

The young man withdrew, but I caught a parting glance at my friend which I conceived to be one of dark malignity. Conners rose, and I did likewise.

"I am grateful to you, Mr. Jonas," he said.

"Not at all," replied the president, as he bowed us out.

"We will go to the jail," said Conners, as we paused in the hall. "When we have seen Parton I can report progress."

"I hope so," I laughed. "Thus far you have learned nothing with which to comfort him."

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He looked at me with his enigmatical smile; his face had the expression that it had worn in the eventful moments of my previous experiences with him, and I grew thoughtful. But I could think of no reason for any confidence on his part, unless he was satisfied as to Parton's guilt. My own theory had gone.

Upon our arrival at the prison we found that Parton had been taken into a waiting-room next to the office, where he was in company with his mother and Miss Allen; they had come to see him, and had been allowed an interview alone. But as we were ushered in, at his request, I noted some drawn curtains at a high window and felt sure that he was under surveillance. In a case of such importance no opportunity would be spared to secure evidence, and, doubtless, from behind the draperies a witness was listening to, and recording, any statement he might make which would be deemed important to the government. If Connors noted it, his countenance gave no sign.

"Ah, thank you, Mr. Connors!" cried Parton, coming forward, while the two women rose from their seats. "My mother has told me how kindly you received her."

Connors shook hands with him. We seated ourselves and I had time particularly to observe him. His face showed the effect of his trouble and a night in custody, but he did not look a criminal. There was a certain refinement in his features, and a look

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about his eyes suggesting a resemblance to his mother. I felt an instant of pity for him, although certain of his guilt.

"How long have you known that you were watched?" asked Conners.

"Known it!" exclaimed the young man, in surprise. "Why, my arrest came like a thunderbolt! I had not the faintest idea of any trouble until I was summoned to the president's office. I don't know now that I have been watched."

It was a careful answer, but his manner was disturbed and uneasy.

"You passed counterfeit bills through your window, and others were found among the moneys you had in charge; further bills, with unlawful instruments, were found in your rooms; you are an expert engraver, which fact you seem to have been reluctant to reveal, and you have large deposits in two savings-banks, one on Broadway."

I looked at him in surprise; Flury had mentioned only one. His mother looked surprised also.

"How did you know of this?" asked Parton.

"One account is to the credit of Miss Allen; the other to your mother."

"I do not understand," said Parton, wearily.

"Flury mentioned the fact of one; I surmised the other. You may remember that I bowed to you twice in the past year as you came from two different institutions. Upon each occasion you carried a bank-book."

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Parton said nothing.

"Your friend thought proper to mention your skill as an engraver. You should have anticipated him."

"My friend?"

"Gordan."

"Damn him!" exclaimed the young man, fiercely, with a glance at the girl, who shrank away. "He has my place. Flury said that, too."

"Let us not be too hard on Mr. Gordan as yet," observed Conners. "I have certain curious memoranda here, with which you are familiar. Do you care to explain them?"

Conners drew forth his book and exhibited the copy he had made from the sheet in the president's office.

"I do not care to explain now," replied Parton, firmly. "I am pledged to silence. I do not deny the fact of the money."

"You cannot deny it," returned Conners, coolly.

"Oh, Edgar!" exclaimed Mrs. Parton. "What can this mean? We have been poor, and you never mentioned having any money to me."

"It was a surprise—I could not, mother," replied the young man.

"Let the explanation wait, madam," said Conners.

"A pledge should be kept, and I do not think the worse of your son for his statement. We will speak of the counterfeit bills."

"I know nothing of them," cried Parton, passionately.

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"These bills have been passed by you for weeks."

"They have not!" he cried.

"There is no doubt of it," replied Conners. "Perhaps you did not know it."

The young man made a gesture of despair.

"The bills were remarkable in character," continued Conners, "and you might well be pardoned for not knowing it, if you are guiltless."

The young man made another gesture, looking towards the girl.

"You have no business here, Louise," he said. "This is my mother's place, perhaps, but you did not know you were engaged to marry a felon. The quicker you desert me the better. I deserve it."

The girl went white about the lips. She looked piteously at Parton, and then at us. Her suffering and embarrassment were so apparent that I turned away.

"I do not know what this means—your having money," said Mrs. Parton, "but you can explain it, I know. Louise is a true girl. She does not believe you guilty. Do you?" And she appealed to the girl.

Miss Allen said nothing, and I could see that she was on the verge of collapse.

"I think," said Conners, "that Miss Allen would prefer to speak with Mr. Parton alone. I have nothing further to learn here, madam. I think, myself, that the deposits can be explained, and Miss Allen

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owes no sort of statement to any one while we are present."

The girl looked at him with a gratitude so intense that he gave her a smile of encouragement.

"Come," he said to me. "We must hunt for evidence outside, and to-morrow I shall hope to have something to say to the authorities."

Parton did not rally under this statement, and bade us good-day with a demeanor that was almost sullen. Both women were weeping on his shoulder as we left the room.

"Well?" I said, when we were in the corridor.

"Well?" he replied, imitating my speech good-naturedly.

"How about your intuitions? You know about it now?"

"Certainly," he responded. "I know the guilty person, and we have seen and talked with him. But I am slightly puzzled over the question of proof."

"I feel sorry for the girl—yes, and the mother, too."

"Both are entitled to some sympathy," Connors observed, dryly.

"You might induce him to confess," I said. "It may lighten his sentence, providing, of course, he informs on his confederates. Otherwise I do not believe in a compromise with criminals."

"Nor I," he said, "and there will be none in this case."

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"Where do we go now?"

"Back to my rooms to wait until nightfall, and then I could take you on a trip that promises some excitement. But you are a man of responsibilities, and I should dislike to lead you into danger. Counterfeiters are dangerous people and object to being interfered with."

"Don't let that deter you," I said, eagerly. "I can take care of myself."

He laughed, but said nothing, and we were shortly back in his familiar quarters.

He lighted a cigarette and stretched himself at ease on a couch, his hands clasped behind his head.

"Let us suppose Parton isn't guilty," he said. "It is a supposition a professional officer would never indulge in from the admitted facts. But I know that he is *not* guilty, and hence my task is an easy one. It is because I know that he is not guilty that the task of finding the offender is easy, too. With a vision obscured by error or prejudice, one's perspective is limited; mine is not. If Parton is innocent, some one immediately connected with him is guilty; this must be so. The whole story is told by the fact that incriminating articles were found in his room. Grant that he is innocent, and what does that suggest? The fact of the bills being passed by him is not of itself significant. In the haste of paying them out he might well fail to note their character. I say in the haste, for, being an

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engraver and an expert teller, he would have detected them in time, anyway. Consequently, they were supplied to him daily and surreptitiously. Grant him innocent, and what does that suggest? It follows, also, that some one secreted the tools and bills in his apartment. I did not need to question his mother or Miss Allen to learn that. The latter would not know, and the former could only suspect. That I might do myself. But, since I have already determined who the criminal is, we can easily settle so trifling a matter as that."

My theory returned.

"Gordan!" I exclaimed.

"My friend," he said, looking at me solemnly, "I tremble for you. Your sagacity will fly to your head some day and the consequences may be fatal. Nay," he continued, as he saw that I was hurt, "a good man does not have to be a good detective, and a happy man has no need to occupy his mind with problems such as this. I was jesting, and if you will forgive me I will stretch my caution a point and take you with me to-night, being myself responsible to your little household for your safety."

"Good!" I exclaimed. "Where do we go?"

"I will let you know in due time, when I am quite certain myself," he replied. "Meanwhile, get word to your wife that you will be absent, and I will see a certain Mr. J. Harding, whom everybody seems to have overlooked."

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I went out to send a wire to Jennie and finish some matters in the office. The day had passed, and I had eaten a late and lonely supper at a café near by before I saw Connors again. He entered my office hurriedly.

"Come," he said. "I have been delayed. Get your overcoat, for we may be long, and the air on the water is chilly. You may take this, also," he continued, handing me a revolver. "I trust you will not need it, but precaution bars accident."

I suppressed as much as possible the excitement which bubbled through me, taking the weapon and dropping it in the side-pocket of my coat.

"A peculiar and deceitful voice; a false countenance with a pair of suspicious eyes; two calloused hands without excuse; a stain of ink on a vest and a trace of oil on a pair of trousers; large diamonds on a small salary, and the whole about a person who stands close to a good chance to be the real criminal in this case, have given me a clew which I have followed up this afternoon," said Connors, "and which we shall further follow to-night. A bare inkling of the truth is often sufficient, as I think you will find out."

I followed him from the building, and on the sidewalk we were joined by four men. Connors had evidently told them of my coming, for they observed me without comment. Answering his gesture, they proceeded down the street, boarding a

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passing car on Twenty-third Street and alighting near the ferry on the East River. It was already dark, and we threaded our way through the later crowds pressing homeward to Brooklyn, turning south to a wharf where a steam-cutter was moored. From its neat trim, and the eagle above the pilot, I recognized a revenue-boat from Governor's Island. It was evidently awaiting us, and, immediately upon our embarking, the moorings were cast loose; the boat backed into the river, pointing its prow to the north. Every moment of the time I was keenly elated, but I troubled no one with questions. What I could see was sufficient to thrill me with expectancy, while the sharp night air set my blood tingling through my veins. My tongue was silent, but a thousand speculations flashed through my mind.

Conners had left me to shift for myself, and I questioned none of his companions, whom I suspected to be secret-service officers. Neither did I molest him. He devoted himself to the man who directed the movements of the party, and they talked together in low tones. The boat pushed its way through the narrow passage between the shore and the island, and, emerging from the channel, turned its prow towards the Sound. The throb of the engines kept time to the beating of my heart. No precaution was taken with the lights, as other boats passed to and fro, and the men sat in couples with lighted cigars, conversing pleasantly together.

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I had a place near the rail at the stern, and presently Conners joined me.

"What in this wide world ever prompted you to a trip like this?" I asked, in my bewilderment. "I take no exception to anything for a purpose, but what possible information could you have gained to induce it?"

"Easily answered," he laughed. "When you suspect a man, it is a simple matter to follow him. The man I suspected sent a telegram to Glenco Bay this afternoon. It was addressed to a person named Coulter, and read: 'I will be on board at ten-thirty.' An officer went to Glenco and found that Coulter has had a house-boat moored off the shore for the past three months. He learned so many other things that we are going up to take a look. Waiting for his return caused some of the delay of which I complained to you. Do you understand?"

"I think so," I replied.

"It would not do to be there before ten-thirty," he continued. "We want our friend on the scene first."

"Who is it?" I asked, impatiently. "Gordan?" Conners smiled.

"You overlooked the president of the bank," he said.

"What?" I exclaimed, in amazement. "You are surely cra—"

Conners laughed again.

"I understand you," I said, slightly nettled. "It is Gordan, of course. In the light of what I have

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heard, it is plain enough. You have observed young Parton at the bank, and, having a good memory, recall the fact of twice seeing him coming out of saving institutions with a bank-book. The statement of the detective, Flury, and the two notations on the card found on Parton, indicate the size of the deposits he carries, suspiciously large in his case. I do not know how you discovered that Gordan had once been the lover of Miss Allen; perhaps it was a mere guess, from certain evidences which a less astute person would be slow to observe; but at all events it proved to be correct. This leads to a conclusion that is inevitable. Parton is an engraver and one of the counterfeiters; Gordan is a confederate. Gordan was taken in because he surrendered his girl without much protest, and was found to be a man easily influenced; his assumed loyalty to Parton is a part of the plot. The rascals retain a position of advantage at the bank, and are thus enabled the better to watch the authorities and aid Parton. The larger figures on the card indicate the amount of counterfeit money already issued. You suspected Gordan from the first and, having followed him, now find out his secret. Perhaps the girl and the mother are both in the gang. Counterfeiters, as you say, always work in bands, and the daily papers tell us how often women are associated with them. You see," I continued, smiling triumphantly, "being in a detective atmosphere, my faculties have become acute."

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"And the night air has freshened your imagination," laughed Conners.

We were interrupted by a call from forward, and, bidding me follow him, Conners answered it. We entered the little cabin at the bow, and under the light I recognized his companion and Inspector Paul.

"Hello!" I exclaimed, as I took his extended hand.

"I was aboard when you came," he said. "Like you, I am an invited guest."

Conners then introduced me to secret-service officer Howard.

"We are nearly there," said the detective, pointing through the door to a dark outline ahead. "When we swing about the point yonder, we are in the bay. The boat lies near there, just within the shelter of the bluff."

"What time is it?"

"Ten-forty."

"If they are prompt they should be aboard by now," said Conners.

"Shall we darken up and try to drop alongside, or launch a boat and creep up?"

"Never the last!" said Conners. "They are on the lookout for that. All they have feared, and listened for, during the time they have been here is the sound of oars grating in the locks. Large boats are common enough in this vicinity. Put the lights out and give her headway. Speed is what we want."

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We were bending eagerly over the rail as the boat rounded the point in question, with the doors closed and all lights extinguished. Ahead we saw the outlines of a long, flat-roofed craft, sitting low in the water. The windows showed red squares of light, although they were closely curtained.

We were nearing the motionless craft rapidly, and the engines stopped. Our headway brought us alongside, and the wheel came round with a quick turn as our prow swung off.

"No words or explanations," was the sharp but whispered admonition of Howard. "Move quickly, and all together. Now!"

The cutter bumped abruptly against the side of the unsuspecting stranger. There was a startled movement inside, and every officer leaped over the rail. In an instant the door flew in with a crash, and as they pressed through I followed, to look upon a scene as dramatic as though set upon a stage.

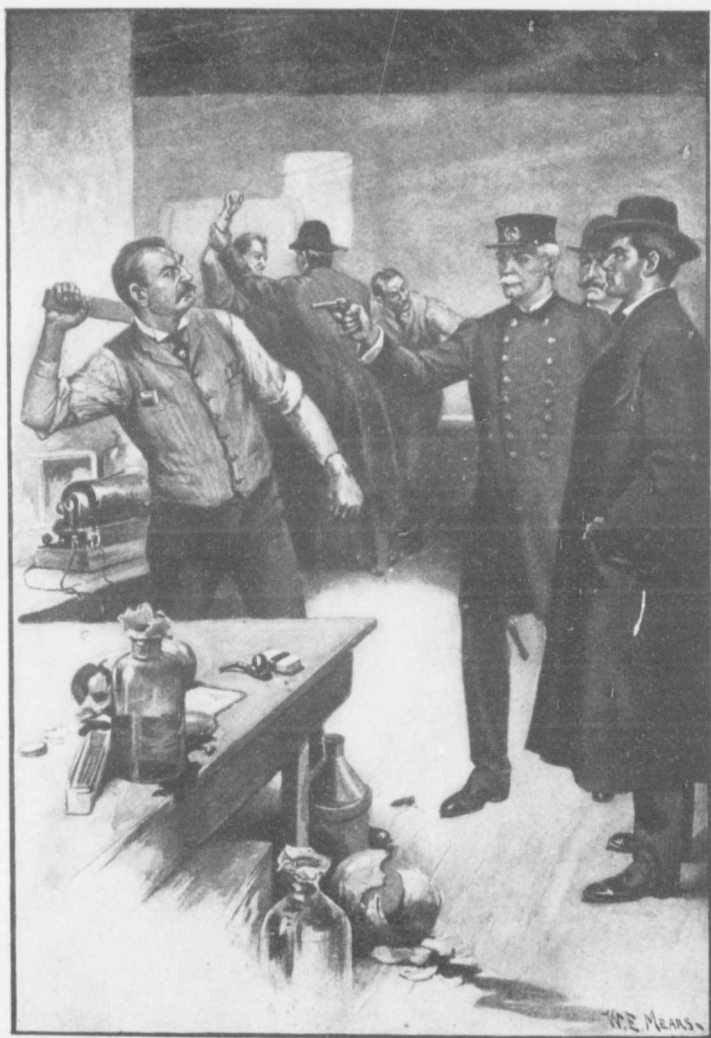
The main cabin of the house-boat was a long, low room, built above the flat deck, brilliantly lighted by shaded lamps. At one end was a stone table, near which was a bench of tools and a steel structure like a printing-press. Jugs, bottles, and all the paraphernalia of counterfeiting were scattered about. Grouped together, with faces that expressed rage and anger no less than surprise, were five men in their shirt-sleeves, three of them in aprons. The tools with which they had been working were yet in their hands, so little time had they

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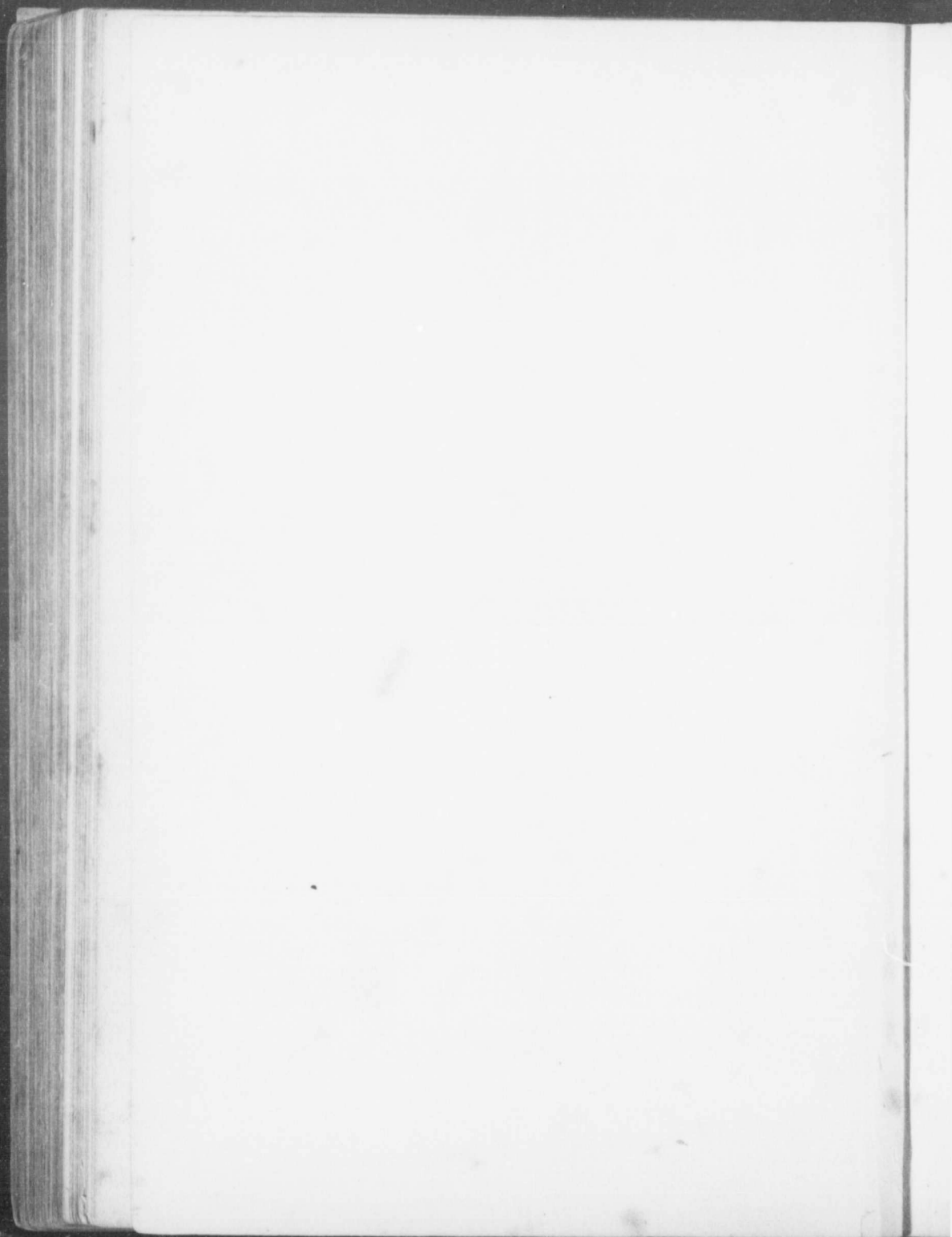
to discard them for the ready weapons which lay upon the benches immediately before them. The officers were ranged in a semicircle before me with levelled pistols on the wondering criminals, while Connors stood to the front, his hands in his overcoat pockets, regarding a stocky individual who fingered nervously an iron bar. His disposition halted between a desire to use it at all hazards, as expressed by his convulsed face, and a respect for the threatening weapon which Inspector Paul held in the line of his eye.

"Good - evening, Mr. Flury," said Connors. "I am sorry to meet you again under such unfortunate circumstances."

The scene was ended quickly, and the men were handcuffed. It was a wonderful boat, and its fittings filled the officers with admiration. An electric plant run by an engine, with sufficient power also to propel the craft, operated the tools and press. In the centre of the deck was a trap, above a well which passed entirely through the hull. An enormous box, zinc-lined and water-tight, passed up and down this well by a bolt and chain, and the criminal apparatus could be concealed therein and lowered to the bottom of the bay. Here the box rested while the great craft could drift away with no sign of its secret or any evidence of the guilty work which its owners carried on. At night it was moored above the selected spot, the implements pulled up, and the business resumed.



"A STOCKY INDIVIDUAL WHO FINGERED NERVOUSLY AN IRON BAR"



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We had the plate and its makers as well, with as dangerous a lot of bills as ever went out to disturb a tranquil business community. It was a great haul.

It was nearly morning when, tired and exultant, Connors and I reached his studio. Even then we did not go immediately to rest. I had had little time to question him.

"Parton will keep his place, if he wishes, and marry his girl," said Connors. "It will bring joy to the heart of his poor mother. It also acquits Gordan of complicity, and shows him to be a true friend. There was no malice in the memory that Miss Allen was once his sweetheart—he was really attached to Parton. Doubtless he had another sweetheart somewhere; the town is big. I saw Mr. J. Harding this afternoon and learned enough to explain the whole mystery of the savings-bank deposits. Harding is a patent lawyer. Parton was once an engraver and invented a method for making a half-tone plate for illustrations. He made application for a patent through Harding, and sold it to his clients for ten thousand dollars down, with a further payment to be made on the granting of the patent. Meantime he was pledged to secrecy. Men are always cautious about such matters, and inventors abnormally sensitive. The card with its notations told me the whole story. The large number, 633,722, suggested a patent-office entry, and the date of filing proved it."

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"Once on the scent the rest was easy. Parton, when a youth, first worked in a lithographer's establishment and became an expert, but he was ambitious and wanted to be a broker. Hence, when he had saved a little money he secured a position in a bank. But he worked on his invention, perfected it, and made his application for a patent. It has taken a long time because an interference was declared, and the delay frightened his purchasers and made him apprehensive. Flury was the agent of the counterfeiters, and every morning was able to make an exchange of the bills among the moneys in Parton's box. It required but small cunning. We will get the whole matter straightened out tomorrow and you will have another interesting story to tell your family."

IV

The Maitland Case

IT was natural that I should make the studio of LeDroit Connors a lounging-place. With its decorations, its easy-chairs, and its couches, it was more attractive than my own formal office next door. I had long since discovered that the occupation of its owner as an artist was simply to gratify his tastes, for his ample means obviated the necessity of labor. He was not indolent, but he was philosophical; I had seen him exert tremendous energy when his interest was aroused. I had often wondered why he did not marry. A home, such as made up my own domestic happiness, would have taken him out of a curious lethargy into which at times he fell. He certainly admired women, and his personality, of which I have spoken before, should have made him a favorite with the gentler sex. But I came to understand finally that the reticence which marked his whole character had no less to do with his avoidance of business as a pursuit and preference for a calling at which he could work alone, than his disposition to shirk every phase of social life. As

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much as he was attached to me, I could never tempt him to my home. And yet he seemed to know the nature of women as well as men; his conduct in this respect made up in part the mystery which enveloped him. I suspected a disappointment in love—some terrible tragedy of the heart that had marked and embittered him. Hence it was a matter upon which, in our intimacy, I never ventured to question.

The day had been stormy, with high winds and rain, and I did not care to tempt the discomforts of a trip home across the bay. Moreover, Connors had begged me to spend the night with him, and I was glad of an excuse to do so. I sent a wire to Jennie, telling her of my design, and after a supper at a restaurant near by, where he was in the habit of dining, we sat together in his quarters enjoying the comfort of a delightful cigar. The studio looked well under the electric lights, its shades and colors soothing and restful.

"I especially wished your company to-night," he said, breaking a silence of some minutes. "I am to have a visitor. I did not desire to meet this person alone, and, again, I know you enjoy any matter which involves a mystery."

"I imagine most people do," was my reply. "You say, a visitor, and that means a man; if a woman, you would have said visitors; a woman would scarcely venture here after nightfall without an escort."

"If she did, the watchman would stop her at the

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foot of the stairway or refuse her an ascent in the elevator," replied Connors, dryly; "particularly at the unusual hour of midnight. That is the time my caller is to be expected."

"Certainly a man, then," I observed. "I was at first inclined to suspect a woman, thinking of no particular reason why you should wish my presence except in obedience to the proprieties—one of the several advantages of being staidly married. Who is your anticipated guest? I should infer that it is some one in fear of the police, who, having heard of your disposition to be helpful in matters touching crime, comes to you for aid. You must call off some of Inspector Paul's admiration, or his friends on the side will arrange to keep you pretty busy."

"Oh, but there is a woman involved," he said. "I received a note to-day in a very feminine hand requesting my aid in a matter of extreme importance. The writer stated that she would send a friend to visit me to-night. She apologized for the fact that he might come as late as twelve o'clock, and implored me to arrange to see him. The communication to be made to me is one affecting the honor of an old and distinguished family, and, I suspect, the honor of a woman. A matter of life and death, as my fair communicant puts it. I was not left the option of a refusal."

"How was the note signed?" I asked.

He took it from the pocket of his dressing-jacket and tossed it to me.

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"It is not signed, as you see," he said, "which in this instance is an evidence of good faith, and absolves me from anything like secrecy."

I examined the billet curiously, for dainty it was: a pink missive bearing a delicate perfume and written in a hand and manner suggesting both grace and refinement.

"Do you know anything about it?" I questioned.

"Nothing, except what I glean from the note itself. The only importance I attach to the hour named is the fact that it follows the theatre. The postmark is suburban—Larchmont. We shall find out what it means if my visitor comes. Meantime, let us discuss some questions of heredity and poisons, and make an interesting and instructive evening."

"Since there is always a reason for everything you do and say," I replied, with a laugh, "I shall doubtless be as much entertained as I am surprised."

"Surprised—at what?" he observed, quietly. "I am up on the subjects, and the note suggests both. If my studio ever palls on me, I shall fit up a laboratory."

"The note—"

"Suggests both," he repeated, unmindful of my wonder. "The handwriting is characteristic, feline, and secretive. There is so intimate a relation between the operation of the mind and its method of expressing itself by written words, that all the

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leading traits of individuality are revealed. This explains the art of the chirographist. A handwriting is characteristic. One may seek to disguise it, but the indelible something is always there. It involves heredity, too. Handwriting is indicative of families; it differs in ease and grace, but its distinctive features are the same. Firm nerves and facile fingers have not all to do with it; temperament has more. Words break in the same manner, letters are dotted at the same height and crossed at the same angle. Show me a handwriting and I will distinguish between a vagabond and a demigod. I will tell you whether he be faithful, false, or fair. A murderer unconsciously reveals himself. Study it."

I shrugged my shoulders.

"True; one has not the time," he continued. "It is a fine art, of course, and one must be acutely endowed; supersensitive and keen of sight, with a mathematical perception. That is a question of heredity, too, which prompted the suggestion of a moment since. Sometime I will tell you of a young Irishman, debonair, gallant, and brave. He was supersensitive also, and as handsome as any man who ever came out of the exuberant city of Dublin. He came out of it rather hurriedly, for some reason not stated, but I have surmised that it involved no dishonor; rather it related to an affair of gallantry which ended in a manner to disgust him with life. This is so common that it goes

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without comment. At all events, he left his native land and came to America, bringing with him a sullen aversion to women, a feeling which his face and bearing should have indicated as something strange and unusual. I have surmised as to that, too—some one played him false and left to his highly wrought temperament a choice between suicide and exile. If this was so, he chose the latter, and, leaving the cities of the East, he made his way into the region beyond the lakes, at that time known only to the Indians and the Canadian voyageurs. Here was adventure sufficient to divert any man with a wounded vanity or heart, and in the end he found a balm for either the one or the other. The Irish women are proverbially fair, while those of the Indian race can scarcely be so regarded. But that is a matter of taste, influenced, of course, by proximity and education. The subject has interested me somewhat, and I have been at pains to study it."

He looked at his array of pictures upon the walls, where Hebe and Houri, Peri and Psyche, warm in the colors of his brush, were beautiful under the lights.

I listened with an interest that was breathless. "Sometime," he had said, but he was speaking now. I was certain that he dealt with a matter affecting his own mysterious personality.

"Our exile consoled himself," he continued. "In this new region he found a band of primitive white

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men, whose life awakened his interest and curiosity. He joined them, and became one of the most adventurous and fearless agents of the Hudson Bay Company. He prospered, too. His trading-post was the capital and centre of a wide territory, and about it grew up a settlement which is now a city. Between the fur-trade and the mines, he grew rich. I could tell you the name of one mine, but you might guess its owner if I spoke of it too familiarly. The exile's heir has it now. It was a rare privilege to know this man. His frontier life transformed him; freedom and the wilderness made him as we would imagine the primitive Celt, tall, broad-shouldered, with the strength of a giant and the speed of an elk. His blond hair fell below his shoulders, and his clear, blue eyes, with the glance of an eagle, could look undazzled at the Northern sun."

I experienced a sense of disappointment. Conners's manner was reminiscent, but his words negatived any reference to himself. His own hair and eyes were the color of midnight.

"I have said that he was consoled, and you may note that I linger on the word," continued my friend. "Time and nature are tender comforters, and women love wherever you find men. Love is a condition of neither climate nor color, although it is thought to be tempered somewhat in the North; but I have seen passions among the snows as relentless as fate, slow of ignition, but, once alight, as

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deadly as the rage of the tropics. It takes your flint to kindle such a fire. There is your love of Egypt; it is not as hot as its desert; it is eruptive; it pleads, grows oratorical, and often strikes. But the passion of the North devastates; it does not deal with poniard or stiletto; it is slow, consuming, and smoulders long before explosion; then it plies club and axe, and mutilates; its fury destroys all; its rage does not laugh, Indian-like, over its victim, wrapping itself in a cloak to steal away; it is a fifth act for all, and the feet of the avenger run swift to perdition. These are characteristics for description merely.

“One day there came to the post an Indian girl. She came in a canoe with her father, who was employed by the company, and a half-breed priest who was his friend. The girl had been harbored for a time at a Catholic institution in a Canadian city where she had been taught some smattering of the knowledge of civilization. Her father was a stray remnant of the Huron tribe who had wandered among the Blackfeet, and, while he won distinction and the title of chief, his better blood had taken him at times among the French. His girl was wild enough, but his priest had tempered him somewhat, and he had grown solicitous for his daughter. She, however, remained a savage to the core and resentful of restraint, and now returned with him to the wilderness. Their stopping at the post was fateful. She looked into the gentler face

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of the Celtic giant, and then her black eyes went into his heart. He took her by sheer strength. His fame was throughout the whole country, and her savage father was glad. The girl laughed at the priest, but the wish of the master of the post was law. They were married that night. The priest certified the fact in broad letters written with a goose-quill, and the woman laughed again as she threw the paper upon the floor; but the man carefully preserved it, and it exists to-day between the leaves of a Catholic prayer-book. Through cover and certificate is driven a nail of pure gold, piercing the centre to keep unseen a record which is at once an honor and a reproach. We may see it some day, my friend, although it is a record not lightly to be inspected."

He ceased, and I followed his gaze to a picture that I had often noticed. Among the figures of his fancy it held a place of obscurity, but was neither neglected nor hidden in a sense of shame. The frame was the costliest, and its colors the richest, but it did not strike the eye of the careless observer; it was hung reverently at an angle where the light could fall upon it as Connors came from his bedroom. Through the door of his apartment he might see it at all times. It was the face of a woman, evidently an Indian, idealized by a touch of some strong emotion. Behind the fancy that had softened it there breathed a tribute so deep that it had startled me. While the countenance suggested

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all the beauty that art could give to a savage type, there spoke from it the primitive force of the woods; about the lips were the lines of a fire unquenchable. The brow was low, but the long hair fell from a shapely head shading a vision of the desert. It was wife, mother, and lover; it was vital with the evidences of a passion untutored and above control. But its blending of the panther, the savage, and the woman was touched by something that had softened it as though the soul had looked suddenly upon a blinding light and grown wistful at a realization of its womanhood.

His glance lingered upon the picture. Then he lighted a fresh cigar, and the action interrupted his recital. He offered one to me, and we smoked in silence, I waiting patiently for him to resume. But the pause was fatal. I had listened, not alone in curiosity, but with an interest intensified by my regard for him, and he had spoken, almost mechanically, as though impelled by an impulse that made talking a relief. Now he lapsed into a dreamy mood, and I, influenced by his silence, the cigar, and the luxurious ease of my surroundings, smoked on and forgot the passage of time. Then we were startled by a noise in the hall. The elevator had come aloft at that still hour, and a hand fell upon the knob of the door. It aroused me as though I had been asleep.

"Is it possible!" I exclaimed, looking at my watch. "It is near midnight."

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Connors laughed softly.

"I have observed your preoccupation," he replied. "Unfortunately my story was a soporific. Some one is at the door."

I had no time to protest. The door opened and our expected visitor entered.

He was a good-looking young fellow of probably twenty-four years of age, dressed in excellent taste, his clothes well-fitting and his whole appearance indicating an association with refined people. His countenance was frank and winning, of that complexion which inclines to red and suggests freckles. Closing the door with a deliberation which showed an easy self-possession, he came forward and removed his hat.

"Which is Mr. Connors?" he asked, politely.

My friend nodded to indicate himself.

"You were good enough to wait up for me, I see."

He glanced about the room with a manner of interest, and I saw that Connors was studying him closely. Evidently our visitor was not the kind of person he expected.

"All hours are usual with me," observed my companion, finally, bringing the young man's curious glance from the apartment to himself. "But we did expect a visitor, and I presume you are he. If so, be seated. This is my friend," he continued, indicating me; "I have not yet the honor of your name."

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"No," replied the young man, taking the proffered chair, "but my name is unimportant. It is Charles Vining. My father lives in Boston and is the principal owner of a factory at Lowell. I formerly represented it in London, and I now represent it here. I have called, Mr. Conners, at the request of Miss Hortense Maitland. She said you would understand. She indicated this hour because I had a theatre engagement made before she wrote to you. I thought to find a detective office, but I see I am mistaken."

"I do not know Miss Maitland," said Conners.

"No, I can see that, for she, too, thought you a detective, or perhaps a priest. It is to such we go when we are in trouble," and the young man smiled, his manner apologetic.

"People in trouble have sometimes found it profitable to see me, although I am neither priest nor lawyer, nor am I professionally a detective," said Conners, answering his smile. "What have you to tell me?"

"It is a long story, and so indefinite that I have wondered all evening why I am here at all," replied the young man, his face now serious. "Miss Maitland is the daughter of Dr. Henry Maitland, founder of the Maitland Sanatorium, and the manufacturer of Maitland's Pills. The family consisted of himself, his wife, a daughter, and two sons. Miss Hortense was the eldest child. She is twenty now. A Mrs. Parton was formerly a governess in the

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family. She comes to the house occasionally, and this morning Hortense told her something of our troubles. Mrs. Parton said that you had once helped her, and were very expert in obscure cases. She implored Hortense to appeal to you, and finally prevailed upon her to do so. She offered to come with Hortense to see you personally, but the poor girl is really ill. I was told not to raise the money question with you—that you were a gentleman and sensitive; that is why I suggested the priest; but, then, women don't understand matters of business, and you can't have much time to bother about the troubles of other people. The average man has quite enough of his own, so I will say that when money gets into our negotiations you can have all you need or think you are entitled to."

"That is satisfactory," returned Connors. "What is the matter?"

"The matter is this," returned our visitor: "my life is threatened. I'm not particularly given to fright, and I'm not very much scared now, but still it's not comfortable to go around with the knowledge that some one is likely to terminate your career for you at any moment."

"Who has threatened your life?"

The young man shrugged his shoulders.

"Don't laugh when I say that I have not the slightest idea," he replied; "nevertheless, I believe it to be true."

I looked at him fixedly; I could see no evidences

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of insanity. I glanced at Conners, but he was unmoved.

"I think you had better tell me your business in as connected a manner as possible, and I will listen patiently," he said. "I know Mrs. Parton, and I am glad to remember that I was once able to serve her. Tell me all about this affair."

"I do not understand our difficulty very fully myself; if I did, perhaps I should not be here," said the young man, his voice resolute; "but we are strangely involved. Dr. Maitland, after the accumulation of a very large fortune, retired from active business and lived here and at his country place at Westchester. For a short time the family travelled in Europe, and while they were in London I met them, quite by accident. I became attached to Miss Maitland, and have remained so ever since. When they returned to America, I came also. My father, at my solicitation, located me in New York. We have some means ourselves," he added, modestly, "our fortune being quite as extensive as that of the Maitlands. My attentions to Miss Hortense apparently had the sanction of the whole family; I obtained a footing in the household and was already regarded as one of its members. We were quite happy. I looked forward to the time when Hortense should become my wife, and I could regard my future as settled, when this trouble came. I first noticed a change in Hortense. I knew that my affection was returned, but now she seemed to

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fear me. Her conduct became one of moods. On some days I was welcomed; at times my presence seemed to excite terror; but always she was kind. Then her father died. It almost killed her."

"He died suddenly?" observed Connors.

"Very; I see you have heard of it. Yes, he died of a malignant throat trouble, within three days. I need not describe the grief of the family; that may be imagined. Then there was an interval of conduct on the part of Hortense not to be explained by her grief, although I first attributed it to that; then her brother died—the eldest."

"Suddenly?" inquired Connors.

"Yes, very unexpectedly. He died of diphtheria."

"Ah!" observed Connors. "A good physician was in attendance, of course?"

"Certainly. The condition of Hortense was pitiful, following this calamity. She seemed to have, mingled with her grief, a strange terror. Her only comforter appeared to be a lady living in the community named Garcia. This woman was the widow of a man named Peter Garcia, who in his lifetime conducted a small drug business, first in London, and later in New York. He died here some years ago, and the widow located in Westchester. She has a son who travels for a wholesale wine house. There was never any intimacy between the families, but Hortense used to visit Mrs. Garcia quite frequently. She is an engaging old lady, and was at one time,

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before her marriage, a clairvoyant, and hence attractive to young girls. Quite a coterie in the neighborhood used to affect her house. Her son, however, fell in love with Hortense, and that stopped things. Mrs. Garcia has come recently to the house, and Hortense and her mother always receive her politely. Hortense avoids young Garcia, of course. Conventions in that locality, however, are not what they are in the city, and the young fellow occasionally has a glimpse of her. But she never encouraged him."

"Is he good-looking?" asked Conners, dryly.

"I think he is so reputed. I have never seen him."

"The name suggests Spain or Italy—a land of handsome men."

"He is probably good-looking enough, but he is not in Miss Maitland's class; he would never think of seriously aspiring to her hand. Yet I cannot quite disconnect the occasional presence of his mother with Hortense's treatment of me. Of late Hortense has gone again to Mrs. Garcia's, but always in the absence of young Garcia, who is much from home. She returns filled with a strange terror. Her mother can do nothing for her, and Miss Wynn—"

"You have not spoken of Miss Wynn," said Conners, quickly.

"Miss Wynn is one of the nicest persons in the world," replied the young man. "The Maitlands

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got her in London. She was employed there to teach the children music, and came with them to this country. She has become almost like a sister to Hortense, and a daughter to Mrs. Maitland. Unlike Mrs. Garcia, she is really a comforter. It is to her that Hortense can go for real consolation. Following the death of Howard—”

“Howard was the son?” asked Conners.

“Yes, the youngest boy.”

“Is he dead, too?”

“Yes,” returned the young man; “his death followed that of his brother, the intervening time being brief. This final blow nearly killed Mrs. Maitland, and, of course, Hortense was inconsolable. To say the truth, the periods between each death were pretty rough on me. If I had been responsible I couldn't have had a harder time. The more I tried to comfort Hortense, the worse it was, and if it had not been for Miss Wynn I could almost believe I should have lost my mind. I have pleaded with Hortense to marry me, and let me take her and her mother to Europe. I am sure a period of travel would help them. I spoke of it last week to Hortense, but it simply was too much for her. She looked fearfully around as though she expected some one to enter the room and kill us both. Then she broke down and told me that we must part—that our love was a failure. I was deeply hurt, and said that, since my presence seemed to add to her grief, I would consent; then she renewed her tears

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and vowed that she would die, herself, if I ever suggested such a thing again. It was too much for me — quite too deep," and the young man wiped his face with his handkerchief in recollection of the scene. "Only yesterday," he continued, "she told me again that she had decided she could never be my wife; that she loved me to distraction, but there was a dark shadow between us; that I must come no more. I was not very frightened, for I have grown accustomed to her moods, which I have attributed to her grief. In fact, I pitied her. This morning she sent for me and told me of her letter to you. She begged me to come here and see you. She knew of my engagement for the evening with a business friend, and set the hour for that following the theatre. Mrs. Parton had insisted that I should see you without delay. I demurred about coming to a stranger with this story of our private troubles, but Mrs. Parton said you were accustomed to giving aid in matters of this sort. Hortense then made a singular avowal; she said that there was a reason for the death of each member of her family; that she was responsible. That now *my* life was threatened, and that I was doomed unless some one intervened. She said that she would die, too, if harm came to me, and she was ready to seek any means to save me. No," he continued, shaking his head, and looking at Connors with a glance that answered one given him, "she is not affected in her mind; she is as sane as you are."

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"Did Miss Maitland indicate the time of your danger—that is, when you were likely to die?" asked Conners.

"She said any time—that I was already in great peril."

"Did you ask her whom you had to fear?"

"Of course, and she said I would die by the hand of fate—that I would go as had the others whom she loved and whose lives were on her conscience."

"She did not indicate the person who would be the probable instrument of fate?"

"No," returned the young man, "and I am puzzled. I am convinced that she is in earnest, but I don't know what she means. I sympathize with her deeply, and that is why I consented to come to you for assistance. There is some mystery here."

"Who are the inmates of the household now?" inquired Conners.

"Hortense, her mother, and Miss Wynn. Mrs. Parton is stopping there temporarily; she is there at Hortense's request. I might add that the life of Mrs. Maitland is threatened also."

"Threatened by whom?" asked Conners.

"Same case as mine—fate," observed the young man, with defiant though grim humor.

"You are formally engaged to Miss Maitland?"

"Yes—that is, she has promised to be my wife. I had her father's consent in his lifetime, and I have her mother's."

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"You have no reason to suspect a change of sentiment upon her part?"

"Good Heavens! No, sir!"

"It is not possible that your attentions have become irksome to her?"

"I trust not, sir."

"I ask these questions because they are necessary," said Connors.

"She receives me with every manifestation of affection," said the young man. "I am sure of her devotion. Her anxiety on my account, growing out of this sudden superstitious fear, or whatever it may be called, is most acute. She has declared a hundred times that she wishes she could die—that if it were not for the sin of it, she would take her own life. Her condition is really to be pitied, Mr. Connors."

"I am filled with sympathy," said Connors. "Is this all you have to tell me?"

"I can think of nothing else. My business here was to tell you so much, and seek your help. I do not know how you can do so, being neither priest nor officer, but I have fulfilled my mission. I have always sought to obey Miss Maitland's lightest wish."

"What do you wish me to do?" asked Connors. The young man spread his hands.

"I am beyond suggestion," he replied.

"What was Miss Maitland's request?"

"Miss Maitland made none, further than that I

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should come here and talk with you. Mrs. Parton said that would be sufficient."

"I think I understand the matter, Mr. Vining," said Connors, "and I will deal with it in my own way. I can be of service, but I promise nothing before investigation. If that leads me to discover guilt, I use my own discretion as to my actions regarding it."

"You may communicate anything to the authorities you find out, Mr. Connors," said the young man, as he rose. "Nothing embraced in the word guilt can have any possible connection with myself, or any to whom I am attached."

"I shall go out to the Maitland place in the morning," said Connors.

"You may name your own hour," replied the young man; "I will join you at the train and we will drive out from the station together. Mrs. Parton felt certain you would come; hence my call on you at this late hour—that there might be no delay."

"I think I shall decline your kind offer," said Connors. "I shall look to see you upon my arrival, but I prefer to go alone."

"I shall be on hand," replied the young man, producing a card. "Hortense wrote down the hours of train service, and a carriage will be at the station. Here, sir."

Connors took the card, and, scanning the inscription, turned his eyes upon the face of the young man.

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"Who wrote this?" he asked.

"Miss Maitland."

Conners drew from his pocket the missive he had received that morning and glancing at it again, handed it to the young man.

"Who wrote that note?" he asked.

The young man took it, with some curiosity, and then returned it carelessly.

"Miss Maitland wrote it," he said. "The handwriting is the same, of course."

"Thank you," said Conners. "Good-night, Mr. Vining."

The young man paused at the door.

"You said that Garcia was a name that suggested Spain or Italy. I must confess that it suggested the Mafia, or a stealthy poniard to me. Since my life is threatened I am entitled to some suspicions. I don't believe in fate. Do you think you can help us, Mr. Conners?"

"I shall be of service to somebody," replied Conners. "You may be sure of that much."

"If it is Miss Maitland, that is enough," replied the young man. "Good-night."

We heard him as he waited restlessly for a time in the hall outside, until the elevator came up to him. Conners in the mean time lighted a cigarette.

"Your disposition to do things makes you fall heir to a lot of trouble," I observed. "Here is a nice domestic mix-up in which Mrs. Parton has involved you."

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"It might have been simpler if the young man knew anything about handwriting," returned Connors; "and he in business, too."

"If it were not for the earnestness of our visitor and the concern of Mrs. Parton, it all might be determined along very ordinary lines," I said. "I fancy I detected the same thought with you."

"Yes," replied Connors. "It is not uncommon for several members of a family to die in this manner of a contagious disease. We might think nothing of that as a matter of wonder. It might affect the mind of a surviving member, and result in any sort of hallucination. But we have something deeper here. Remember the story as we have heard it. Details are important. This family of five goes to Europe for relaxation and travel; acquires, practically, another member in a strange young lady who fascinates it, and returns to this country in its charge, to become a part of the household, and a very influential part. A young man, the lover of the daughter, in high favor with the family, also, returns to this country with them, and although eligible in all ways, he suddenly finds his suit blocked by a series of deaths which have carried off the father and two sons. His betrothed does not cling the closer in consequence, but in a remarkable manner draws aloof from him. No matter what he says, that is the conclusion. Each death seems to affect in some manner her regard for him. The girl now alleges that both her mother and lover are threat-

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ened with death, and this has some significance in the light of what has happened. She is agitated, but refuses to be more explicit, yet it is evident that she can be more explicit. She uses the word 'threatened,' for Vining repeated it here in a manner to show me conclusively that he had it from her; and yet she fears to say too much. She consents, however, to call in a stranger to assist in the capacity of a detective, at the instance of a former governess of the family whom she esteems. To detect what? The reason for the deaths that occurred under the administration of skilled doctors? or the reason for the fear she has of the other deaths which she alleges will happen, and which we may reasonably fear will occur, unless some one intervenes. All of which is quite sufficient to take me up to the Maitland place to-morrow, and to request you to accompany me."

"May I go with you?" I asked.

"Assuredly, if you will."

"I will," I said, "and with pleasure, too. But let us sleep a little first."

We went to bed, but Conners did not slumber. He was not restless, for his temperament seemed always under the control of his will, but he chose to lie awake.

"A case like this induces thought," he said. "Really, there is nothing more interesting than a study of the foibles of our fellows."

"Foibles?"

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"Call them what you please," he said. "The natural disposition we have to do things forbidden. I say natural, for crime is the most natural thing on earth. It is merely a word of civilization applied to multifarious human short-comings. There's no aristocracy in it. Men of every degree love and hate, and these two emotions are at the base of every human dereliction. Most people are criminals in disguise, and civilization merely savagery in good clothes. Good-night."

We awoke early, and went for breakfast to the familiar restaurant. The day had dawned fair, and promised well for our trip. I made the order, while Connors glanced through the morning papers, and when the waiter had departed I observed that he had laid them down and was looking thoughtfully at his plate.

"I wonder," he observed, quietly, "if we shall ever see our visitor of last night again?"

"Surely," I replied. "He promised to meet us at the Maitland place."

"I do not know," he said, slowly. "I may have been consulted too late. He left there yesterday afternoon, and many things can happen in a brief time. They have had another death."

"What!" I exclaimed, in horror. "Is Mrs. Maitland dead?"

"No," he answered, tapping the paper with his forefinger while he replied to my gaze of inquiry with a steady eye, "but Mrs. Garcia is."

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"What a series of fatalities!" I exclaimed, looking at him in bewilderment.

"When you are brought in contact with affairs of this kind you may expect anything," he observed, thoughtfully; "the penalty one pays for attempting to know too much about the subterranean conduct of people with a purpose. You have associated yourself with a detective by inclination and instinct; this is where it leads you."

"What killed her?" I asked.

"Killed, is a good word here," he replied. "Suicide, says the paper, but I have yet to learn that an ex-clairvoyant ever committed suicide. You will remember that I emphasized the word 'threatened' also. Ordinarily, suicide might be a logical consequence of this series of deaths; but not here."

I read the account in the cab as we rode to the train. It was the familiar detail of the daily paragraph. The woman, a widow who led a lonely life, had been found dead in her bed. She had shot herself through the temple, and the weapon was found upon the floor beside her. No reason was known for the rash act. The coroner would hold an inquest, and a son, who was her only relative and who was absent, had been telegraphed for.

"What do you make of it all?" I asked of Conners when we had found seats in the car.

"I think I make it out clearly enough," he replied. "I need only to interview Miss Maitland. When

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she has spoken we shall know all. She holds the key to the mystery."

"What makes you think so?" I asked.

"Your question should be: What makes you know so? Has she not intimated as much, and did she not use the word 'threaten'? The fact that her mother lives, and that Mrs. Garcia dies, is a matter of no consequence to the truth. Here is a series of victims. With the exception of the doctor we have every name involved. But even though Miss Maitland does not speak I will have the truth. Her silence, if she insists upon it, will be eloquent."

"You say victims, but we have been told that the Maitlands died of natural causes—diphtheria, the most natural of causes. Victims, of course, but not of human hands."

"Mrs. Garcia died by human hands," he replied; "but, my friend, some murders are not murders because we do not know them as such; thousands of murders are never found out; imagine me committing a murder and being found out. Arsenic is a clumsy agent, and strychnine and the acids leave traces. Given a doctor, a lack of motive, and a good chance, and detection may be laughed at. That is the supreme art of the wicked."

The train stopped at our station. At the curb we found a carriage waiting for us. Mrs. Parton was in the back seat.

"Oh, Mr. Connors!" she cried, greeting him and nodding to me, unimpressed by my presence and

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the lack of reason for it, in her excitement. "I am so glad you are here. Mrs. Maitland and poor Hortense are simply overcome. You have heard about Mrs. Garcia?"

"I saw an account of the matter in the papers," replied Conners, as we seated ourselves in the vehicle.

"She was at the house yesterday afternoon, and seemingly in the best of spirits. Shortly after supper she was found dead by her servant. The girl heard the shot and ran to learn the cause. The poor woman had complained of a headache shortly before, and gone to her room to lie down. The girl found her stretched upon the bed, the pillow bloody and the weapon upon the floor."

"Where is Mr. Vining?" asked Conners.

"He has gone ahead. He came out on the train preceding you and drove instantly to the house."

"Where is the Garcia place?"

"We pass it on the way to the Maitland house. It is a small cottage near there and formerly a portion of the grounds. An orchard lies between."

"Let us drive there first," said Conners. "I shall begin my investigations there. Such a tragedy makes a point to start from."

Mrs. Parton looked surprised, but gave the order to the coachman, and after a brief ride we drew up before the gate. The low building sat well back in a yard of green, surrounded by rose-bushes and small shrubbery. Mrs. Parton remained in the

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carriage while Conners and I alighted. A short walk took us to the house, and we entered through the open front-door. A weeping and frightened maid scarcely noticed us, and a man who was sitting at a table arose. He was evidently a village officer in charge, and awaiting the coroner.

"Where is the body?" asked Conners.

The man glanced through the door at the Maitland carriage, and, obedient to the authority in Conners's tone and bearing, led us through a passage to a bedroom in the back of the house. The dead woman lay upon the bed covered by a sheet which showed only the outlines of her form. The sight was ghastly, for a stain of red was visible at the head; but Conners approached the body without emotion.

The man was garrulous. The maid would not talk, and he had been waiting.

"The poor lady was evidently suffering," he said. "Lots of women have been known to kill themselves just out of spite. There weren't no good reason here; just a headache. She came in and complained some to the girl and then went back to lie down. She opened up this window here, for air. She didn't get no rest or relief, and she just takes out her pistol and shoots herself. The girl hears the shot and runs in to find her all bloody, with her head hanging down sideways and her arm nearly to the floor. The pistol was right under her finger-tips."

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"Was this window open?" asked Conners.

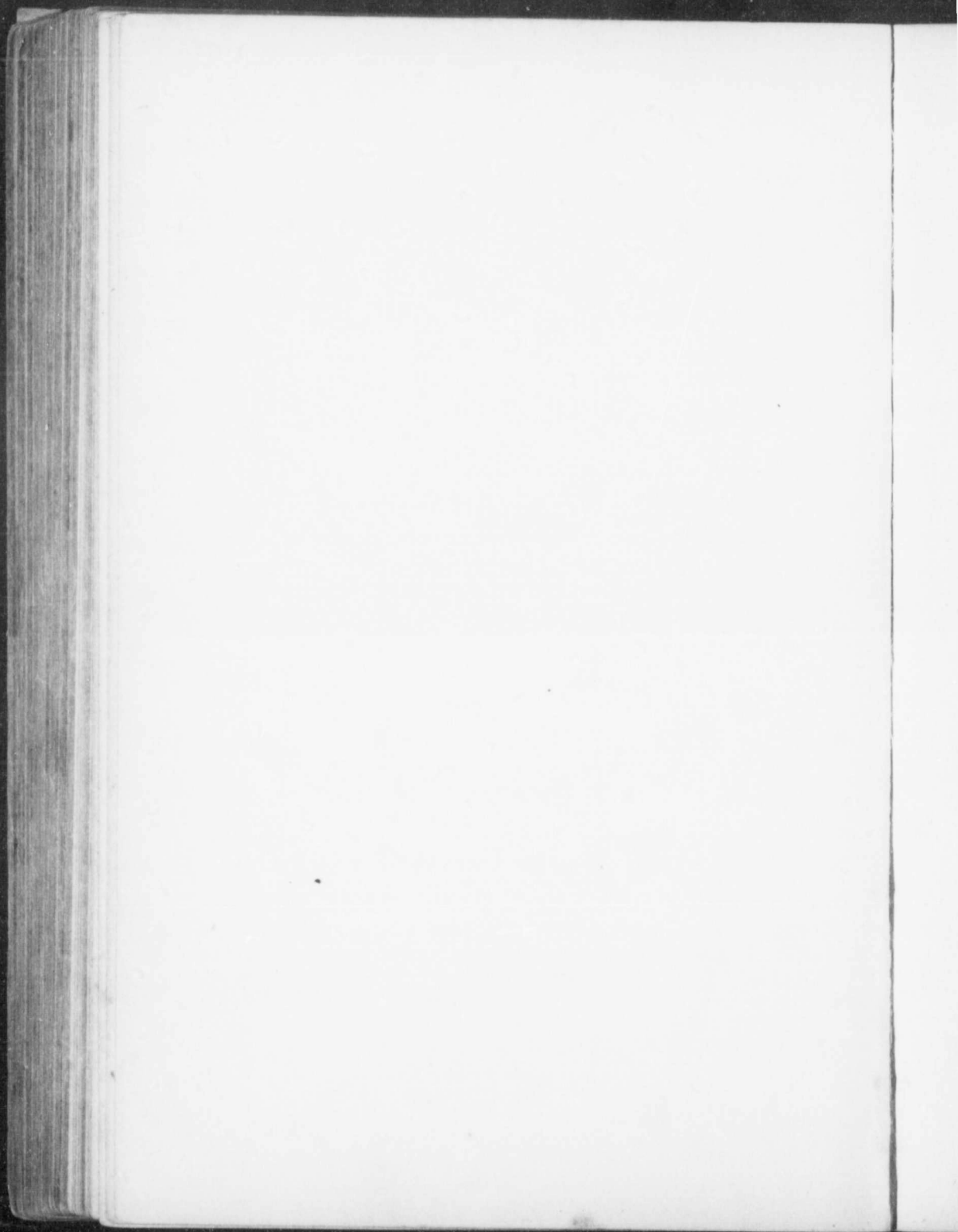
"Yes, sir."

The window indicated was immediately at the head of the bed and within a few inches of the pillow. Its curtain was now drawn, but it evidently looked upon the yard. Conners let the shade run up and raised the sash. The floor within was but slightly above the yard without, and a person, standing, could readily see within the chamber. He lifted the corner of the sheet and looked at the face of the dead woman. The fatal wound showed at the temple, and the skin was discolored by the marks of powder. The muzzle of the weapon had been placed within a foot of its mark. I observed, even from the distance at which I stood, that the pistol had not been fired immediately against the temple. The discolorations extended down the cheek as though the discharge had space in which to spread.

Conners closed the window and drew down the shade. Then he looked about the chamber. It was evidently the private sleeping-room of the woman, and was furnished with a richness of which the exterior of the cottage gave no evidence. There was a dresser, an uphoistered sofa, and several easy-chairs, but Conners gave his attention to a mahogany case against the wall, its door a mirror of plate glass. Its lock was a peculiar one, but now it was unbolted and he looked within. It was filled with bottles, phials, glasses, and diminutive boxes.



"HE STOOPED TO THE GROUND AS SOME MARK APPEARED TO HIS INTEREST"



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"A medicine-case," said the man beside me.

"Obviously," said Conners, as he scanned the shelves, the contents of which he examined with care. "The good lady had evidently a more than common knowledge of a dangerous class of drugs. We might wonder why she chose so rough a means of death if we wonder about the subject at all. Here was an easier exit, through a dozen bottles immediately at hand."

After a minute examination of a bottle that called for his especial interest, he dropped it into his pocket and closed the door.

We returned to the front room and the man sat down; the chair was inviting. His curiosity had been fully satisfied and our presence had little further to offer him. Leaving him, we proceeded to the rear of the house. Stopping before the window, we looked in upon the fatal room. Conners continued his investigation. He stooped to the ground as some mark appealed to his interest, and then he walked for some distance through the grass, looking along the hedge which tended in the direction of the pretentious Maitland dwelling, visible through the trees.

"Footprints?" I questioned.

"Yes," he replied, indicating several deep indentations in the ground.

"These are holes made by a sharp stick, I should say," was my comment. "I see no footprints here."

"The grass leaves a poor trace for eyes like

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yours," he answered. "These are marks of a heel, and I could tell you the number of the shoe—a woman's, too."

"Is it possible!" I exclaimed. "I am beginning to understand. A woman approached the open window and looked suddenly in upon Mrs. Garcia, who was lying upon the bed. Her presence meant something, and through fright, rage, or perhaps remorse, for a matter which they may have understood, she killed herself. The watcher at the window saw the tragedy."

"You grow wiser daily," said Conners; "you only need a touch of Indian cunning to make you entirely sagacious. Yours is the deduction of the civilized man, knowing the methods of civilized people. There is nothing of the savage in you. It is the combination of the two that makes for something remarkable."

He led the way back to the carriage, where Mrs. Parton waited impatiently.

"The poor woman!" she exclaimed.

We drove through an open gate and under a *porte cochère*. A servant met us at the door, but Mrs. Parton led the way into the library. Near a window, standing in the shadow of the curtains, were two people, a man and a woman. I recognized Vining. The two came forward.

"Good-morning, gentlemen," was his greeting.

Conners had stopped suddenly and was looking at his companion. She was a tall young woman,

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slightly pale and inclining to sallowness. Her hair was brown and her eyes intensely black. There was a suppleness and grace about her movements that attracted my attention at once, and I observed her more closely, my interest awakened because of the demeanor of Conners. I could see that her appearance was refined and betokened strength. She was intellectual, courageous, and unquestionably handsome. She impressed, and I thought she was flattered by the intentness with which we both regarded her.

"Mr. Conners, this is Miss Wynn," said Mrs. Par-ton, presenting me at the same time.

We bowed, and Conners, standing at my right side, lifted his hand and laid it upon my shoulder. The fingers tightened in a grip so emphatic that I felt it instantly as an expression of some sudden impulse. It was a gesture of familiarity, and even grace, indicating nothing but an ease of fellowship between us, but I knew that it was a signal, and I noted that the young lady observed it also, with a strange light in her dusky eyes.

"Good-morning, gentlemen," she said.

Her voice was clear and cold, and even pleasant; but it rang with such an intonation of confidence that even a lover, or enemy, might find in it a challenge. Again the grip of Conners impressed itself upon my shoulder, and then he dropped his arm carelessly to his side.

"You have heard of the suicide of Mrs. Garcia?"

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asked Vining, with troubled eagerness. "Miss Wynn and I were discussing it. Of all the fatal communities in the world, this seems to be the worst!"

"It is very sad," observed Miss Wynn, her black eyes downcast. "I saw the dear woman but yesterday."

"Have you known her long, Miss Wynn?" asked Connors.

"I have known her well," replied the young lady, with a sigh.

"I asked if you had known her long," repeated Connors.

She looked at him with a smile.

"And I evaded the question, rather than ask that you excuse me."

"I see," observed Connors, smiling also. "But this is a small world, and I stopped by the Garcia cottage to learn that in the dead woman I recognized an old acquaintance. I remember her as a nurse in a hospital in London which some years ago I visited as a student of medicine."

"That is strange," said Vining.

Miss Wynn exhibited no interest, and Mrs. Parton spoke.

"Do Mrs. Maitland and Hortense know that Mr. Connors is here?"

"They must have heard the carriage," replied Miss Wynn. "Poor dears, they are scarcely able to see any one."

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"Will you see them?" asked Vining.

"I really do not know why the gentlemen are here," said Miss Wynn, with the manner of one in authority at the house. "Of course, Mr. Conners was expected, and Hortense feels troubled, as you know. You seemed to feel, Mrs. Parton, that Mrs. Maitland should see some one, and you will remember that the suggestion was wholly yours."

"No, mine also," said Vining. "By Jove! I want somebody to tell me what is the matter with this house."

"There is nothing the matter with it except sorrow," said the girl, sadly. "If the gentlemen can bring to us any grain of comfort, they will be welcome."

"Something is the matter with *me*," persisted Vining. "I want to know what it is."

The girl looked at him strangely.

"I will speak to Mrs. Maitland and to Hortense," she said, addressing my companion.

"One moment, Miss Wynn, if you please," said Conners, lifting his hand and checking her movement towards the door.

The girl stopped. We seated ourselves, but she remained standing.

"Mr. Vining informed us last night very fully of the bereavements which this house has suffered," said Conners, "and this morning we learned of the death of Mrs. Garcia. A most unfortunate death, in view of all the facts. It appears to be suicide,

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but I have learned to distrust appearances. I have said that we stopped at the cottage on our way here. Suicide should be the last resort of any woman in grief, especially if she be young and attractive, which Mrs. Garcia was not. So many avenues are open to them. There is Buenos Ayres, for instance, a beautiful city, and Venezuela, a charming country, where women are at a premium. I speak of them because they are remote, and places where one who has despaired might begin life anew. I have an infinite sympathy for women. However other men may feel, I could never lift my hand against the most erring. I see a pen and ink upon the table. May I ask you for a large envelope, Miss Wynn?"

I had listened to this irrelevant discourse with deep surprise, and I could see that the others shared my feelings. Miss Wynn started, as though released from a spell. She went to a secretary in the corner of the room and returned with the desired envelope. Conners took it, and, placing it before him, drew out his pocket-book. Extracting several bills, he put them in the envelope and, sealing it, laid it on the table before him.

"It is sometimes necessary to offer a reward in matters which involve the services of a detective," he said, with a smile. "I have been assured by Mr. Vining that I have *carte blanche* in the matter of money. Will you indorse this envelope, Miss Wynn? You are nearest the writing materials. I will suggest the inscription."

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He placed the package before her, and, as she took up the pen, leaned forward.

"Write the date," he said, "followed by the words 'Buenos Ayres.' Thank you. You might write 'England,' if you think it would appeal better to a poor criminal who will certainly not be pursued. He will be rich enough to find an asylum almost anywhere, if he is so fortunate as to get this money."

The girl obeyed him in silence, while we sat mute. The steady pen never faltered.

"Thank you," repeated Conners, lifting the envelope and scanning the inscription. "Mr. Vining told me that Miss Maitland was the author of the note which I received yesterday morning. I see he was mistaken."

"I wrote that note at the dictation of Hortense," said Miss Wynn, pleasantly. "Poor Hortense has been scarcely able to hold a pen for days."

"If you will place the package of money in the secretary, Miss Wynn," said Conners, "I will later instruct Mr. Vining as to my wishes regarding it. A further word concerning the death of Mrs. Garcia. We will let the theory of suicide remain, to all others but ourselves. Anything to the contrary would be difficult of proof, anyway, and only result in complication and scandal. But the poor lady was shot as she rested upon the bed, by some one who stood directly outside the window. The murderer, fully apprised of her habits, stood in the

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dusk so close to her beside the open window that the marks of the powder show in her face. The pistol was then thrown within the room, upon the floor, and the murderer fled."

"That *could* have happened!" I cried, springing to my feet.

"It did happen," said Conners.

Miss Wynn looked at him with scorn.

"It is absurd!" she said.

"Why?" asked Conners; "because others think it is a suicide?"

"Detectives are always absurd," she said, her lips curling. "They inflict us with foolish theories that perplex and frighten. You are right, sir. Let it remain suicide, for it was nothing else. Who would wish to harm this poor old lady?"

"Why should the poor old lady wish to kill herself?" asked Conners; "especially the proud mother of an aspiring son, and, perhaps, dear to her friends, too—old acquaintances, Miss Wynn? But I do not wish to augment the horror I see in the eyes of Mrs. Parton and Mr. Vining. The arm of the murderer rested upon the window-sill, and the texture of the cloth of the sleeve was plain in the dust upon it. A fragment of the cloth lingered in a splinter of the wood. I removed the traces to prevent confusion. I am ready now, Miss Wynn, to see Mrs. Maitland and her daughter."

She rose and moved towards the door as Mrs. Parton and Vining sat looking at each other with

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troubled countenances. Suddenly Connors sprang up. He moved quickly to the door, and, reaching it before Miss Wynn, opened it for her with a low bow.

"I beg your pardon," he said, with a grave smile. "I nearly ran against you in my haste. But I am unaccustomed to carpets of such depth. They take the imprint of the foot as clearly as the soft soil outside. I did not mention, did I, that the person who stood outside the window and looked in on the dead face of Mrs. Garcia had little time to think of the matter of footprints. They were there, though, in the grass, and clearly discernible to any trained eye."

She did not answer either his words or his smile. Her composure was unruffled as she passed out of the room.

"Do you really mean what your words intimate, about Mrs. Garcia?" asked Vining.

"Sometimes our conclusions are wrong," answered Connors. "In this case I must enjoin secrecy, to save gossip. I shall not permit my theory to interfere with the facts as the coroner may find them. It is best for all to say nothing."

Impressed by his manner, we waited in silence for the return of Miss Wynn. She did not come, but a servant appeared in her stead.

"Mrs. Maitland and Miss Hortense are in the parlor," said the man. "They desire the gentlemen to step in there."

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We left the library and, passing down the long hall, were ushered into a large room to the rear, the back parlor of the mansion. We found the ladies waiting, evidently with some trepidation, and Mrs. Parton presented us. Mrs. Maitland was a round, white little person, unimpressive except by her effort at composure. Her grief had not deprived her of flesh, although it was evident that she had suffered. But she was not one to despair or refuse comfort. Here was a temperament of the material.

Hortense, her daughter, was different. I found myself thinking of this, reasoning that she must resemble her father. She was of fair stature, and, when in health, must have been a girl of imposing beauty; but now her form and countenance disclosed the troubles that had torn her. Her eyes were brilliant with fever, and her complexion yellow under grief. A hectic spot glowed in each cheek. Both mother and daughter were richly dressed, and a certain dignity was added to their appearance by our knowledge of what they had so lately suffered. Following the introduction by Mrs. Parton, Connors did not hesitate, or indulge in any formality. His reluctance to deal with women, as I had come to believe, did not interfere with his duty.

"I received a note from your daughter, madam," he said, when we were seated, addressing Mrs. Maitland. "She solicited my aid, and later I received a call from Mr. Vining. I trust I may speak without embarrassment?"

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"I entreat you to do so."

It was the daughter who answered him.

Conners turned his eyes upon her deliberately. His gaze inspired confidence, for she met it calmly.

"Mr. Vining has been entirely frank with me," said Conners, "but since his visit this community has suffered another death. How long have you known Mrs. Garcia, Mrs. Maitland?"

"Ever since we have lived in this neighborhood," replied the lady. "She was here when we came."

"We may speak freely regarding her, now that she is dead," said Conners, addressing the daughter. "Mrs. Garcia was formerly a clairvoyant, and I understand that you have been a frequent visitor at her house. Did she ever attempt to tell your fortune?"

The girl let her eyes fall to the floor.

"Speak without fear," said Conners, in a voice that carried with it a suggestion of encouragement. "Perhaps I may assist you, knowing something of the methods of these people. Did she enjoin secrecy upon you?"

Miss Maitland's agitation became noticeable. After an interval of waiting she nodded her head.

"I can understand now," continued Conners. "That being the case, she must have discussed with you certain matters affecting others than yourself. She would scarcely have presumed to enjoin secrecy upon you touching your own affairs. I fancy that her death relieves you if you ever did, or do now,

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attach any significance to her words. But I think, Miss Maitland, we will speak of something more than secrecy since you were held to silence; you will pardon me if I believe she frightened you. Did she foretell the deaths which have occurred in this family? I think," he added, addressing Vining, "that it will be helpful to us if you will stand at Miss Maitland's side."

The girl was nearly overcome. She sobbed convulsively, and trembled so that it required her mother's protecting arm to sustain her in her chair. Vining stepped beside her, and Mrs. Parton went, also, to her assistance.

"I see I am right," said Conners, when the girl had in a measure recovered herself. "I regret your agitation, Miss Maitland, but it will be better in the end. We will clear away these clouds and have daylight hereafter."

Vining looked at him gratefully, and Conners proceeded.

"Did Mrs. Garcia suggest that any conduct on your part might avert these evils? Did she say that some perverseness of which you were guilty would result in the occurrence of events that afterwards did happen?"

The girl put aside the supporting hands of those near her and rose to her feet. She regarded Conners with distended eyes, that spoke something of horror.

"How could you possibly know of this?" she gasped. "Did Mrs. Garcia tell you?"

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"Mr. Vining told me," replied Conners, quietly. "That is, he told me so much that, with the added facts, I have been enabled to conclude aright. Having suffered already the loss of your father and your brothers, you were evidently fearful for your mother and Mr. Vining. You used the word 'threaten' in connection with the probable danger they were in. Did Mrs. Garcia threaten that they would die unless you did some act, or refrained from some act, which went to your conscience and was compelling?"

The girl fell back into her seat with her hands clasped to her face.

"It is true," she gasped. "I was terrified beyond words. I felt that I was responsible for the loss of those I loved; but I could not act differently. I wanted to die myself."

"I see that it is true," said Conners, "and I could find no other reason for your conduct. You are, of course, entirely blameless, and the wretched woman has gone to render an account of her conduct to the Judge upon whose mercy we must all rely. Since your mother and Mr. Vining are living, and it is Mrs. Garcia who is dead, I beseech you to speak freely and hide nothing."

"She said that I must marry her son," answered Miss Maitland, in a voice scarcely audible.

"What!" cried Conners, sharply, and I saw that he was surprised.

"I beg your pardon," he continued, after a mo-

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ment of hesitation. "This is something that I failed to surmise."

"That was it," went on the girl. "She said that it was fate; that one by one those dear to me would die if I opposed my fate. That at any moment I might stop the procession of death by yielding to a decree that was inevitable. She said it was one of those singular destinies with which fortune had occasionally to do, and unless I married her son all whom I loved would perish. I did not believe her, but I was frightened, and her words began to come true. My father died, and I was conscience-stricken. I was still obdurate, and my brother died. My heart was broken, but I was helpless. I am yet in despair."

With her face buried in her handkerchief, she put out her hand appealingly in the direction of Vining. He clasped it between both of his and dropped upon his knees beside her, kissing it vehemently, while Mrs. Maitland sobbed aloud. I looked at the honest fellow with my own emotion high. Connors was apparently unmoved.

"The infamy you have suffered is beyond words, Miss Maitland," he said. "You have, of course, nothing with which to reproach yourself. Mrs. Garcia, being a woman shrewd beyond conception, saw the premonitions of sickness as they arose within this house, and was wicked enough to give you warning only in the interest of her son. She attempted to play upon your terror to further his

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hopes and her ambition. This is obvious, and, now that you understand the matter fully, you have nothing further to fear. She is dead, and the shadow is lifted from your household. There remains only a small matter which may have power to touch you. I would spare you additional grief if I could, but it is impossible."

The girl looked at him in terror.

"Do not fear," he said, with a smile. "You are attached to Miss Wynn?"

Hortense continued to look at him doubtfully, and Mrs. Maitland spoke.

"Naturally, we are attached to her," she said.

"Not so deeply, I trust, that a revelation concerning her would too greatly distress you?"

The expression of the girl was now incredulous.

"I cannot think that she is in any manner unworthy," said Mrs. Maitland. "We have had every confidence in her, and she has deserved it."

"It has not occurred to you," said Conners, slowly, "that she was attached to Mr. Vining?"

The two women were speechless. Mrs. Maitland regarded her daughter with wondering eyes and Hortense looked at Vining. Their perplexity and embarrassment were pathetic. The young man rose to his feet. He looked awkwardly around, his countenance flushed. Then he stood manfully to the occasion.

"This is too serious to be either overlooked or denied," he said. "Of course, I have endeavored to

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protect Hortense and her feeling in the matter, but Miss Wynn was foolish. I don't know why, for I vow I have never seen myself in the light of an Adonis and that sort of thing. I have endeavored to act with good sense, but the situation annoyed me. It was something I could not resent or help or confess, and Miss Wynn knew it. You are a wizard, Mr. Conners, but it is true, and I am glad it is spoken."

Mrs. Maitland looked helplessly about, and Hortense, clasping her lover's hand, sat down.

"What is to be done?" asked Mrs. Maitland. "Are we never to be happy again?"

"I would suggest that nothing be done," said Conners. "This should not result in anything but good. It helps to clear up the mystery that has enveloped and distressed you all. I think that Miss Wynn will have the delicacy not to further embarrass any one. I take her to be a shrewd young woman, and feel quite sure that she expected something like this disclosure. I look for her to remain in retirement for an indefinite time in the future."

"She cannot remain in retirement here," said Mrs. Maitland, with more vigor than I gave her credit for. "I do not think we are so attached to her that we cannot take care of an affair like this."

"The only view to take of it, madam," said Conners. "I infer that she has been helpful to you, too, doubtless during the illness of your husband and your sons. Forgive me for a reference

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to the matter, but it is well to remember anything that may be to her credit."

Mrs. Maitland broke down, and sank weeping into her chair.

"You are right, Mr. Conners," she sobbed. "We owe her much. She was with them constantly. Hortense and I were both wearied and helpless, Hortense especially so, in view of what we now know. Miss Wynn was unfailing in strength and duty. Night and day she ministered to them, and the doctor said her assistance was invaluable."

"It is the office of a woman," said Conners, gently. "Did she administer their medicines?"

"She did—she was more than kind," said Mrs. Maitland. "It makes my present duty a hard one. I scarcely know what Hortense can say now."

"I thought of that," said Vining. "It influenced my own conduct."

"Her duties were attended with some danger, at such a time," observed Conners, and I wondered at his persistency. "A malignant throat trouble is an evil disease."

"The girl was practically the only nurse," said Vining. "She refused any assistance, and the doctor repeatedly commended her. By Jove! she had the nerve to swab out the throats with a brush, and several times she applied the caustic."

"I think she had experience as a nurse prior to her coming here," said Conners, reflectively. "In that event we might moderate our gratitude some-

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what. I mentioned that I took a course of medicine some years ago. I recall Mrs. Garcia as an attaché of a London hospital. I seldom forget a face. I think I also recall Miss Wynn's."

"You may ask her," said Mrs. Maitland. "That is easy."

"Perhaps I may, should I see her again," said Conners, slowly. "You were not aware that she and Mrs. Garcia were old acquaintances?"

Both Mrs. Maitland and Hortense looked at him.

"She never mentioned such a thing," said the girl.

"It isn't strange, in view of what has happened," observed Conners, "nor will it be profitable to follow this investigation further. I do not wish to trouble you with unpleasant things to remember."

He rose with a smile.

"There is no longer a mystery here, my dear ladies," he continued, "and my visit was unnecessary, as it now transpires. Miss Maitland would shortly have found the courage to talk freely with Mr. Vining, and all would have been made clear. I will now take my leave."

"You have helped me greatly," said Mrs. Maitland. "I trust we shall see you again, Mr. Conners?"

"I am seldom seen outside my studio," he replied, pleasantly, "but I am grateful for your invitation."

"We shall always thank Mrs. Parton," continued the lady.

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Connors took her hand, and, bidding farewell to Miss Maitland and Mrs. Parton, stepped into the hall, followed by myself and Vining. At the library door he halted, drawing on his gloves.

"I may confide to you a few things more about this matter, Mr. Vining," he said, "but it is unnecessary now. You can come to me when you have the inclination to discuss it and the ladies have passed their period of mourning. Perhaps it would be better if they never knew the facts. You can help matters some if you hurry up your wedding."

"I shall do that," said the young man, with emphasis. "I know how much we are in your debt, and I shall live to repay you. You must not forget my suggestion as to money."

"I remember that," laughed Connors.

"And I recall that Mr. Connors has a thousand dollars in an envelope in the library," I said. "You were not going to forget it?" I asked of him.

He laughed again.

"It is not my habit to forget," he replied. "Will you get it, Mr. Vining?"

Vining stepped into the library. We could see him as he searched the desk and examined the drawers. Then he returned to us.

"I thought Miss Wynn put it there," he said; "but I cannot find it. I will call her."

He turned to beckon to a servant standing near the door, but Connors stopped him.

"It is useless," he said, "for the money is gone."

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And I think you will find, also, that Miss Wynn has gone with it. I heard a vehicle leave the house while we were in the parlor. You remember my suggestion as to Buenos Ayres? It is a little sum which I shall ask you to replace, Mr. Vining, when you have quite recovered your composure. You need not mention the matter to the ladies unless you think best. I wouldn't. Good-day."

We went down the steps to the carriage that waited, leaving him standing above, with open mouth and staring eyes.

"The Maitlands were murdered, said Connors, as we rode homeward -- "the father and two sons slain, and Mrs. Maitland would have gone in due time. They were killed as definitely as was Mrs. Garcia, and by the same hand. The girl colluded with the clairvoyant, each in common interest, the mother for her son, the girl for herself. It is useless to make the matter one of charge, for this is murder that defies proof. But the woman furnished the means of infecting the father and his sons, and the girl applied it. The only possible method of discovery by legal means was confession and what the woman might tell; and when the sign of danger appeared in the appeal to me, the girl destroyed the evidence. She did not think of the traces she left behind in the perpetration of that act. It is easy to foretell the happening of events which you can yourself bring to pass. Who would dream of so sinister a design behind a

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matter so light. Perhaps that is the woman of it. Trifles to us are sometimes matters that unhinge the world for them. Mrs. Garcia was ambitious for her son; she wished him to marry the Maitland heiress. The Wynn girl loved Vining, and, with Miss Maitland the wife of young Garcia, she would have won him. The means were frightful, but these women, formerly of London, knew each other thoroughly. One is dead and the other gone. That ends the matter for us."

"But you permitted her to escape—you even helped her!" I exclaimed, in horror.

"I helped the case I was at work on," he said, "and helped the family that can bear little more. Why uselessly heap these disclosures upon their grief? And I never war on women, anyway. I should lose interest in the game if I did."

As we parted at the station I promised to see him at his studio the next morning, and, meantime, I had something to think of that night.

V

The Case of the Ambassador

I HAD occasion to be in the city of Washington one day in September for the purpose of consulting a client for whom I had negotiated some securities. Mrs. Barrister, my wife's mother, had been ill of late, and I had been absent from my office for several days. I had not seen LeDroit Conners in consequence, and from my knowledge of his habits I inferred that he was keeping his customary seclusion, loitering before his easel in his studio or spending the time with his favorite French novels. In his view, the Parisian writers had an ingenuity in fiction equalled by none, always excepting Poe.

Matters had so far righted themselves at home as to permit me to risk a run over to the capital on business much neglected, and, as I came suddenly, I found my client gone. I had the option of either coming again or awaiting his return, and I chose the latter. Washington, like London, is a city with a climate, and upon this day it rained. As dusk fell and the electric lights were reflected

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from the puddles gathered in the wet streets, I was hurrying by the Treasury building on the way to my hotel when a hand fell upon my shoulder. I turned and recognized Conners.

"Hello!" was his greeting. "I telephoned your house prior to my leaving New York and a sweet and gentle voice informed me of your presence here. So, you see, I am not surprised. I have seen so little of you lately that I feared you were ill, but the voice afore-said reassured me. Of course I am glad to see you."

"And you," I said, as much pleased as himself—"what brings you here?"

"Curiosity, adventure, and that disposition, not to be curbed, which forever induces me to meddle in matters which primarily do not concern me. I am called into an interesting case which I am assured is many grades above the work of your professional detective, and this I find to be the fact. I am temporarily in the Diplomatic Corps. Hence, you see, it is a matter of importance."

"Obviously," I replied, deeply interested, as I always was in the cases which he consented to take up. "Can you tell me about it?"

"I can do more," he said, with his enticing laugh; "I can involve you in it. I reserve all rights as to procedure and method, as you know. Otherwise, an employment is invariably declined. Let us go to my room, and, as I have an interval of time at my disposal, I can tell you what I know of the matter at this stage of my progress."

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"Your coming is delightful," I remarked, as we entered the office of the hotel and he stopped at the desk for his key. "I was lonely, and had thought of a night at the theatre."

"This will be better than a play," he laughed. "Quite as romantic, and possessing the additional merit of truth."

The room which we entered showed evidences of a hasty occupancy. Connors's satchel and dressing-case were on the bed, and his steamer trunk on the floor. The satchel was open and the dresser was strewn with brushes, combs, his pistol, and a variety of scarfs and collars.

"I had been to the barber-shop," he explained, "and went from there to the block below for some cigarettes of a special brand which I saw this afternoon. I came down this morning. How long I shall remain will depend on the time required successfully to conclude my case. A matter like this may take a man to Europe or South America, hence my luggage"—and he nodded to it with a smile.

"You surely do not expect it to involve me to that extent?" I laughed.

"I don't expect it to involve *me* to that extent," he said, "but, once in, I stay to the end of the game. I have not seen my client since I came down here, but shall go to him shortly. Generally, a client comes to *me*, but sometimes I make an exception in favor of ladies and great personages. Do you travel with a dress-suit when on business?"

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"Only when I come to Washington," I observed.

"Good! I may ask you to don it for the sake of the proprieties. I shall now assume mine. Meantime, you may read this."

He tossed me a document which I caught quickly, hesitating, as he continued:

"You will find it remarkable, after a fashion. It discloses an unrivalled knowledge of human nature. Your moralist has always wondered why the criminal wastes his energy on things disreputable. The genius that can engrave a counterfeit might make the successful president of a bank. Alas, the genius does not wish to be a bank president! The perverted taste loves villany as the sparks fly upward."

The document in question was a square envelope of heavy paper, richly embossed. I saw at once that it was of fashionable design and evidently an invitation. The contents revealed a letter, type-written upon the stationery of one of the first and most important legations, with an engraved card of imposing size and script. It was artistic, costly, and the letter read as follows:

"DEAR MADAM,—As the wife of a representative public man of your community, the Ambassador directs me to extend to you the enclosed invitation to the ball to be given at the Embassy on the 28th of this month. All the members of the Diplomatic Corps will be present, with the leading officials of the army and navy. It is designed to make this the most brilliant function of the year. The

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head of the nation will honor the occasion by his presence. Although you may be unable to attend, it is hoped that you can do so, as it is also designed to extend this request to a few representative ladies of this country. This is one of three hundred invitations. It is scarcely necessary for me to say that the enclosed card is not transferable, but I must suggest that, until after the event in question, this invitation be regarded as confidential. So many distinguished people must be neglected in this matter that our Legation is sometimes embarrassed, and they would resent the poor honor that is thus extended beyond the city.

“ I am further enabled to offer you an additional pleasure, which in this case reverts as an honor to yourself. The ladies of the Diplomatic Corps are contributing to a design in marble, with a commemorative banner, for the anniversary of the League of the Revolution, and it was thought fitting that the ladies of our Embassy should preside over the movement. While this is unusual, we have made an exception of this case, and at our meeting on Thursday it was decided to permit you to contribute. No checks or drafts are desired, as we wish no vulgar evidence of who has aided in this function, but the letters of the contributors will be bound in blue morocco and deposited with the Smithsonian Institution. A new, crisp bill of the preferred denomination of five dollars or more may be sent to the address of The Ambassador, Box A, New York City, where the details of the subscription are cared for. With due consideration from both my distinguished husband and myself, to you and to your household, I am,
“ Most respectfully,” etc.

This remarkable letter was signed by the wife of the Ambassador, with all her titles and supposed badges of distinction.

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I finished, and looked at the handsome card of enclosure, a magnificent invitation to the event in question, aristocratic, awe-inspiring, and brilliantly suggestive of the gilded assemblage that would gather under the crystal pendants of the lights at the Embassy. Then I turned my inquiring gaze on Conners.

"That ought to bring an average of five dollars in each case," I said, "but with only three hundred sent out—"

"Three hundred!—bah!" he laughed. "It was one of thirty thousand, sent to the wife of every listed politician from Maine to Texas."

"Well!" I gasped, as the audacity of the scheme dawned on me. "Of all the impudent, outrageous frauds ever perpetrated, this is the worst! The person that would send that to a wife of mine!—"

"Softly, my dear fellow, softly!" laughed Conners. "Our criminals must live, you know, and while this is shocking, there is little in it of the brutal."

"It is worse than brutal," I muttered. "It will make a scandal that will nearly kill the wife of the Ambassador, to say nothing of its effect on him. Why, the whole swindled country will rise, and you know how they do it. There will be mass-meetings called at every cross-roads, with petitions for war by each mail. Of course, the matter went immediately to the Post-office Department?"

"Of course; but don't imagine that the clever

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rascals were unprepared for any emergency. Here is another document."

He handed me a second paper, which I seized eagerly. It was also upon the legation stationery, type-written, and addressed to the postmaster at New York City. It ran:

"DEAR SIR,—My government having directed me to procure some statistics in reference to the growth of certain fruits and nuts throughout the country, the humidity, climatic requirements for the best results, etc., a series of requests have been sent throughout the states and territories, and answers will be forwarded to New York, where a bureau has been organized for the purpose of classifying this information. It has been arranged that this matter shall not burden the department, and a special box has been rented, and the mails will be collected by the clerks of this employment. To this extent you are requested to afford us proper facilities. An acknowledgment of this letter may go to the Secretary of the Statistical Bureau, 15-A, Wall Street. Very respectfully," etc.

This second letter was signed by the Ambassador. "You see," said Connors, observing me. "Now, her ladyship writes another letter, and this time it is to the Postmaster-General. Mark its tone. It is written upon the private paper of the lady herself."

I took the third letter, reading it aloud:

"SIR,—This is to inform you that certain envious persons have prepared a cruel jest in reference to the ball to be given at the Embassy on the 28th. Some foolish letters,

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with intent to annoy me, will be written and sent to you. I am shocked and grieved, but do not wish to carry the matter to my husband. Trivial as the circumstance is, I have suffered greatly under the information that has come to me, and, if such letters arrive, will you kindly suppress them? I am too embarrassed to permit you to even acknowledge this letter, although later, when my nerves are tranquil, I shall take occasion to thank you in person for any consideration you may show me. Until then, I am,
"Very truly," etc.

"That completes the series," said Conners, "and completes it perfectly. The rascals knew that time was the essence of the contract, and that the money that didn't come by return mail was not likely to come at all. They needed only a week, or ten days at the most. As they have been getting it at the rate of about a dollar a minute ever since the date of the first issue, you can see that they are in reasonably comfortable circumstances by this time."

I regarded the detective with some bewilderment.

"Has the Ambassador been apprised?" I asked.

"Has he?" observed Conners, with something of humor in his eyes—the first glimpse I had seen to the credit of his surname. "Why, he has been walking the floor for two days and nights, and her ladyship is in bed. Do not fancy, though, my dear fellow, that because you are informed it has become a public matter. On the contrary, only the most reliable officers of the police force have been

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enlightened, and every influence down here is at work to suppress anything like scandal. The cunning rascals guessed as much, and, of course, that was part of the plot. There is no longer a call for the contents of Box A at the New York post-office, and the scant mail now coming there has been seized and will be properly disposed of."

I heard him through without comment, and then laughed. The crime had been ludicrously successful.

"There is something back of the laugh," continued Connors. "Think of the poor ladies throughout the country who contributed a crisp bill, five dollars and upward preferred, through a feeling of vanity and an indirect effort to help a political husband! The thieves themselves laughed. But you suggest the gravity of the situation. If the papers get the story in its entirety it might become an issue in a campaign, and our poor Ambassador would pray for the oblivion of an obscure mission to South America."

"How did it come to you?"

"I got it first. I met the Ambassador at the Monaco chess-rooms at Monte Carlo some years ago, and, being younger, made an indiscreet boast of my powers. I gave him proof, by unravelling the mystery of a suicide at the gaming-tables, which he has never forgotten. Being an astute man and knowing the value of such a gift, as we will call it, he kept himself familiar with some of the cases of

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which you have knowledge, and, when this event happened, he sent me an urgent appeal for aid. You now understand how much he needs it. This is a question beyond his diplomacy, learned as he is in such matters."

"Can you help him?"

"I hope so, or I should not be here. You know there are few problems which I admit to be beyond me. But for once I am completely in the dark. The trick, despite its shrewdness, is one so obviously within the province of a mere thief that there are a thousand rogues, domestic and foreign, who might conceive it and carry it to consummation; or a master brain might conceive it and a daring rascal, or several daring rascals, might give it execution. It is no common crime, but in the line of common crimes, the difference being merely that of ability. The ranks of all thieves contain a possible Napoleon. This is a case in which, on first blush, the police can really help, particularly the inspectors of the Post-office Department, who know the personality of men likely to be engaged in just such a scheme."

"Have you consulted them?"

"I have consulted the chief inspector, whom I saw this afternoon. He is entirely at sea. I haven't all the information I desire, so I shall look first to the Ambassador himself, and then to her ladyship, if she is sufficiently well to see us. I say *us*, because I mean to take you with me."

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"This scheme is worthy of the upper grade, all right," I commented. "Its deal with the diplomatic service has the flavor of a knowledge beyond the ordinary. The whole play is for high stakes quickly earned."

"The point is a good one, and concurs with my own view," said Conners. "Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings cometh wisdom."

"Thank you," I observed, dryly. "What next?"

"A visit in high society, so you may don your dress suit. I will give the order for the carriage and wait for you here."

I left him to go to my room down the corridor. In a short time I had returned, immaculate in my evening clothes.

"You look charming," said Conners. "The carriage is waiting."

I regarded him quizzically.

"I trust you know where we are going?" I laughed. "I can't guess the particular game we are to run down, but, really, this is a queer garb for hunters. The situation is grave enough for serious business, but here we are, decked out for all the world like a couple of fops going to attend the function of the 28th."

Conners laughed, too.

"I am in search of information, primarily, and I do not know just yet where we shall find our thieves. We are going to the Ambassador's, and I always attire myself to fit the company I mean to keep.

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Our presence will not, in consequence, excite remark, and I do not wish it to."

We left the hotel, and a short drive brought us to the ministerial dwelling. In spite of its imposing size and appearance, I could almost believe that its front betrayed a sheepish appreciation of the dilemma in which the cunning rogues had thrown its occupants. The lights shone dimly through the great plate-glass windows, and the heavy darkness shrouded the portals as though the columns of the entrance were draped in mourning. The lights burned here, also, but they seemed feeble and ineffective.

We gave our cards to the solemn-looking personage who received us. After a period of waiting amid the heavy furniture of the reception-chamber, he announced our arrival, and returned to conduct us through the wide hall, and up the stairway at the back to a room where the Ambassador received us.

And disturbed he was. His gaze of inquiry upon me was almost meaningless, and he gave me a flabby hand following Conners's introduction; but the latter he welcomed effusively:

"My dear Mr. Conners! I am delighted to see you—but, dear me, what a state you find me in! I have had something in the way of a premonition that some time I should be compelled to call upon you. I never thought, however, that it would be in a matter like this. If you can give us any aid

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at all—if you can save us—I shall never be able to reward you sufficiently.”

He really meant it. His flushed features and weary eyes, his dishevelled hair and general air of unrest, betrayed his agitation. He was a portly man, representative of his class and station and aristocratic to his finger-tips, but now, in his vexation and humiliation, the humblest of the people of this democratic country might have elbowed him without embarrassment. In the face of this unexpected and indescribable situation he was plebeian.

We seated ourselves, while he remained standing. Worn as he evidently was, he could not remain quiet, and he paced the floor restlessly as he spoke. Conners looked at me curiously, evidently guessing the trend of my reflections.

“I think I realize your position,” he said, quietly.

“Not wholly, I fear,” groaned the Ambassador. “This is a peculiarly sensitive country, resentful, after a fashion, of my office and position. The relationship of your states to your general government embarrasses us in a thousand ways, and your governors and congressmen have large powers to make us trouble. There is no one to whom I can directly appeal or explain. This matter will even embarrass your government, and that is its most perplexing feature. It is a matter which I cannot handle myself, and it is a matter which your government can scarcely handle for me. Think of my

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helplessness! I could make restitution, and I mean to do so. But that is an admission that confesses to something like complicity, and the difficulty is that I cannot disconnect my office from myself. I cannot recognize the offence as in anywise affecting me officially—and yet what am I to do?"

"Of course I shall not consider the question of restitution," said Conners. "My business is to find some method of aiding you."

"Precisely, my dear friend, but how?"

"I confess it is puzzling," rejoined Conners. "But I must first know the facts, and when we have found out the criminals we shall have a basis upon which to take some definite action. Until then, of course, the case is confusing."

"Alas!" exclaimed the Ambassador, "that is the most embarrassing fact of all. I know the offender."

"That is something, indeed," said Conners, betraying no evidence of surprise. "Your agents have worked intelligently and rapidly, it seems. I learned nothing of this from the inspector."

"No; he has been both considerate and wise," replied the Ambassador. "I have reason to be grateful to him."

"He has made no arrest?"

"No, and will not, in the absence of a complaint, and we shall take care that none is made. We can probably control that. It is only the odious publicity to which we object."

"The first point of contact with the thieves," said

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Conners, "would be the man, or men, who took the mail matter from the post-office. It is scarcely probable that the rascals let themselves come in contact with any of the employés unless by collusion, and that should be run down. The inspector probably has done this, since you know the criminals, but I mentioned it to him, and he was reticent. That must necessarily have been one of the clews followed."

"It was," replied the Ambassador. "The mail was invariably called for by a young man who came in a carriage. There seems to have been little concealment there."

"That is strange," observed Conners, and I saw a change in his manner. "The rascals should have known that the weak point in their scheme was here. I should have thought they would have taken every possible precaution to guard it."

"Doubtless," murmured the Ambassador, "if the crime had been an ordinary one, and the criminals ordinary persons, they might have done so; but this was not the case."

"I am interested," said Conners. "Please proceed."

"The mail was secured by a young man of definite appearance. He wore a uniform suggesting an employé of the legation, but the officers now know that he was disguised. He wore a gray wig and whiskers; but he also wore glasses of unusual brilliancy, and one of the clerks observed a peculiar

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cast in his right eye. The back of his hand carried a blue scar."

"It would have been so easy to wear a glove," muttered Conners.

"True," and the Ambassador's voice was now strained; "but he could not glove a lisp in his speech. The clerk swears to all this."

"A very striking person this, whom they selected to go for the mail," said Conners. "I think I shall see the inspector again."

"It is useless on that account," said the Ambassador. "The young man was traced to this city. He is my son."

His reserve gave way and he covered his face with his hands.

"What do you tell me, sir?" exclaimed Conners, in a peculiar voice.

The Ambassador started quickly, his eyes lighting and the flush deepening on his cheeks. Then his demeanor changed to his previous attitude of distress.

"Your tone and manner are comforting, my dear friend," he said, "but I am assured by the inspector that there is no doubt about the matter. It was first taken to the secretary of my legation, and then the news was broken to me."

"Has the young man confessed?"

"I have not had the courage to tax him with my knowledge, as yet."

"I trust her ladyship has not been informed of this?"

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Something in the manner of Conners again impressed the Ambassador. He roused himself.

"Not as yet. The first trouble was sufficiently depressing without the odium of this revelation. It will kill her, I fear, as it has nearly killed me."

"I would not be too sure about the young man's guilt prior to confession," said Conners. "I am exceedingly glad, now, to be in the case. I have not the honor of the young man's acquaintance, but an Ambassador's son is not likely to be involved in such a transaction for any reason that I can now conceive. Even had he hoped to escape detection, he would know the confusion such an act would entail upon you."

"I have thought of all that," said the unhappy man. "But he has gamed unwisely and unluckily. I have learned to distrust him."

"A bad handicap for him," murmured Conners.

"Oh, I would not credit this thing," cried the Ambassador, "but for the evidence disclosed to me by the inspector! It leaves me no hope."

"What has been the conduct of your son to you regarding this affair?"

"In the light of what I know, that of a master hypocrite. He has been indignant, sympathetic, and subsequently much depressed. I have prayed that it might be remorse and some appreciation of what he has brought upon us all. There is another point, Mr. Conners, scarcely worth mentioning, however, in view of the other testimony: although

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my allowance to him has been most liberal, he has recently made expenditures of large sums of money. I can conceive of no method by which he could have become possessed of it along usual lines. The officers told me this, but I had learned it already from another source and intended to question my son regarding it."

"Is your son an officer?"

"Not in the army. I have him employed at the legation, but he has no tendency towards the military, like his brothers. He is reserved and studious, and of an inventive mind. He has the temperament and ability for this very offence. The inspector cited it as an instance of clever villany and declared that it displayed a high order of ingenuity."

"The inspector seems to have thought of everything," observed Connors. "I should be glad to talk with your son about the matter."

"That is easy. Perhaps it might be well for me to have it over. Do not think, Mr. Connors," he continued, with dignified emphasis, "that I have been unduly hasty in coming to this conclusion regarding my own son. I have seen too much of the world to be foolishly credulous, and in the presence of the facts I know that some man's son is guilty. The glasses, unmistakable and made in Paris; the lisp, the scar, together with the fact that he was followed to Washington, and is in possession of a large sum of money for which I cannot account, are evidences which he cannot overcome. The inspector

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has made careful investigation, and his statement, made with due sympathy and delicacy, has distracted me. I can only believe."

"Let me suggest," said Conners, "that the statement was made to you at a time when you were embarrassed by the matter of the fact itself. You would have been distressed sufficiently if your son's name had not been connected with it. I urge upon you that you send for the young man and let me talk with him."

The Ambassador pushed a button and, when answered, gave directions to the messenger.

"I shall not wait," he said, when the clerk had departed. "Discuss the matter with my son as freely as you please. I am going to my wife, and shall return in half an hour."

"If you do not find us on your return, you will hear from us to-morrow," said Conners. "Meantime, I trust that you will suggest nothing of your suspicions to her ladyship."

"You are kind," replied the Ambassador, with a faint smile. "I find your words gratifying. I shall say nothing until concealment is no longer possible."

He inclined his head slightly and passed into the hall.

Conners shrugged his shoulders and looked after him.

"This bids fair to be worse than you thought," I said.

"Much worse."

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"And proves that high life is not without its limitations. He would be a very wretched man who would change places with the Ambassador to-night."

"Or the Ambassador's son; and the most aspiring housemaid would hesitate about accepting the grief and the position of the Ambassador's wife. You are getting to be truly a philosopher, which is one of the essentials of a really skilled detective."

"I did not know that philosophy was a requisite in such a case. I have fancied that a knowledge of criminals, their habits, haunts, and physiognomies were the chief essentials. Of course, I have seen you do some wonderful things."

"And without your essentials," he laughed. "You have ascribed them to luck, chance, and the peculiar developments of each particular case."

"No," I replied, reproachfully. "You must not misunderstand me."

"I do not, my dear fellow. The detection of crime does not differ greatly from the detection of any other fact. A crime is an act committed, and must be discovered by the methods we employ to learn of any other act that is sought to be concealed. To a detective no knowledge is useless."

A young man entered the room. He was pale, of good form and carriage, with a pleasant face. It was slightly marked by a peculiar cast of the right eye, easily seen through a pair of brilliant glasses. Involuntarily, I looked at his hands; upon the back of one was a blue scar, plainly discernible.

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"Good-evening, gentlemen," he said.

His voice had a perceptible lisp.

For reply Connors introduced himself and me, and then continued, "We are here to confer with your father about the difficulty with which you are doubtless familiar."

"Certainly," replied the young man. "I have heard of you, Mr. Connors. My father has often spoken of you, and mentioned your skill as a detective. I am told that you only engage in such matters because of a peculiar ability which you possess, and the fact that they afford you adventure. I can understand that it may provide a greater excitement than the hunting of wild beasts in Africa. It is also advantageous to society. If you are able to be of service to us now we shall be very deeply in your debt."

His manner was collected, admirable, and engaging. It expressed concern, but evidently the position of his father had inspired him with confidence. He had the air of one who was above the ordinary assaults of fortune.

"I hope to be of assistance," replied Connors. "I met your father some years ago, when I was probably younger than yourself. I am in his debt for a consideration paid me then, which I have not forgotten. This matter is likely to be serious, I fear."

"I quite understand that," replied the young man. "More serious to me, I fancy, than I might care at present to admit."

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"How so?" asked Conners, carelessly.

The face of the young man underwent a change. He lost his easy appearance.

"I am terribly troubled, Mr. Conners. I presume that to you I should be as frank as to a lawyer or a physician. In aiding my father you will incidentally aid me. I am sure of your discretion—and your friend is an officer?"

He looked at me inquiringly.

"You may speak without reserve," said Conners. "My friend is as reliable as myself."

"I understand my father's position fully," said the young man. "This affair is likely to lose him his credit with his government. To me it is a matter of life and death."

Conners looked at him fixedly.

"I am deeply interested," he said. "If I am to be of the smallest service in this matter, I beseech you to speak frankly. Conceal nothing, for even the most insignificant details are sometimes matters of importance."

The young man hesitated for an instant, and then drew off his glasses which he wiped nervously with his handkerchief. The defect in his eye became more apparent, but it did not wholly mar his features or detract from his pleasing and attractive expression.

"I am devotedly attached to a young lady," he said, "and to lose her would tempt me to suicide. I am unwilling to consider such a thing, especially

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as we have been engaged. I have never doubted her affection for me, but I am this afternoon in receipt of a letter breaking off our engagement. I am a deliberate man. My first impulse, I confess, was to rush to her house and beg the meaning of her words, but my better judgment prevailed. Yet I cannot understand the cause of her action."

Connors nodded and the young man proceeded:

"She loves me—I am sure of that—but she is much sought after, and her people are ambitious. I am a younger son, and although she is rich in her own right, the question of position will count with her parents, whose influence with her is, of course, very great. If my family should be disgraced and my prospects ruined she might never relent. She is a daughter of Mr. Jerome Olmer."

"To what do you ascribe the young lady's conduct?" Connors asked.

"I have not the slightest idea, other than that she may have learned of this cruel business."

"Does she assign no reason in her letter?"

"Her letter was a brief note of two lines: 'Our engagement is at an end. My decision is irrevocable.'"

"The last sentence is suggestive," said Connors. "She did not look for you to submit without a protest."

"Certainly not."

"You think that in some manner she has become informed of the probability of scandal growing out of this matter?" said Connors.

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"Exactly, Mr. Connors. Some agent of the authorities has been false. Her regard for me was absolute. I would have staked my life upon it, but I am in a measure helpless at this time, because I cannot discuss the matter with her without calling up the question of this scandal."

"Even though the worst should happen, and your father's embarrassment should be as great as he may fear, still, if she loved you as you believe, she should remain faithful. Some women do."

"She would," returned the young man, quickly, "uninfluenced."

"You still hope to win her?"

"Hope! I *must* win her!" cried the young man, passionately. "If I do not I shall die."

"The malady is not really fatal," observed Connors, with a trace of something in his voice which, in another, I should have thought bitterness. "Could you have a rival?"

"I have not," replied the young man. "I know that she has been eagerly sought, but she has chosen me. Colonel Adrian Vanotti has been a devoted admirer, but he is now wooing her sister."

"Who is he?"

"He is attached to one of the legations. He is one of the most popular men in Washington."

"Was he ever in favor?"

"He thought so," replied the young man, moodily, "but I know he was not."

"You have recently come into possession of an

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unusual sum of money," said Conners, abruptly. "I beg your pardon, but I should like very much if you would tell me of it."

The young man looked surprised. He flushed slightly and then hesitated.

"The detail is significant, and I trust you will treat it properly," persisted Conners. "It has a bearing upon the very matter we are discussing."

"I do not know why it should," replied the young man, his manner growing suddenly reserved. "The question relates to me only, and is essentially my own business. How you should know of it, or why you should speak of it to me at all, I am at a loss to understand."

"Your father told me of it," said Conners. "All things are important at such a time, and there should be no half-confidences."

The young man frowned.

"If the matter is important I have only to confess it," he said. "I received an additional sum of money to-day."

He placed his hand in the inner pocket of his evening-coat and produced a package of bills.

Conners made a motion, apparently half-involuntary, and the young man, surprised, gave him the package. The sum was an important one, and Conners ran through the package rapidly.

"Six hundred dollars," he murmured, as he returned it, "new, crisp, and of the preferred denomination of five dollars and upward."

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The young man gasped.

"What do you mean?" he stammered.

"I think you should tell me where you got this money," said Conners. "I will state beforehand that I promise to believe you."

The young man recovered himself slowly and his manner grew reflective.

"I am accustomed to having my word credited," he said. "It is also my habit to keep it. I promised to say nothing of the matter, and this promise involved the whole sum of money I have recently received. That accounts for my indignation at the fact of its discussion."

"I knew that something accounted for it," said Conners; "but since this very money may have been procured by means of the swindle which has been perpetrated in the name of your father, I think your promise is one to be broken."

"You would not have me betray a confidence, Mr. Conners?"

"I would like to insist upon one question, at all events. From whom did you get this money? I shall be content with the answer, and require no further details from you."

"From Colonel Adrian Vanotti."

Conners drew a long breath. "If you will pardon me, my friends," he said, "I will write a note."

He stepped to a desk, and, seizing a pencil and paper, scribbled a few lines, while I waited with the young man.

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I had observed him closely, and my good impression was confirmed by an inspection of him in repose. He was kindly, gentle, and polite.

Conners finished his note and came forward, slipping the paper in an envelope which he handed to the young man.

"Will you kindly see that your father gets this without delay?" he said. "I shall hope to meet you again to-morrow."

The young man went with us to the lower floor, and we parted at the door.

"The hour is early," said Conners, as we seated ourselves in the waiting carriage. "We make another call to-night."

"A bold one," I replied, as I sat gasping for breath. "I heard you instruct the coachman to drive to Mr. Olmer's."

Jerome Olmer was one of the great financiers of the country, who had lately retired from business and made Washington his place of residence during the winter months. His wife knew the value of money in diplomatic circles, and made acquaintances here which were of social service to the family in many trips abroad. I trembled to think of where our adventure was leading us, but I had every confidence in my companion.

"Do you expect to see Miss Olmer?" I asked.

"I scarcely know. She is probably ill, if the Ambassador's son speaks with authority. But women of her class have pride, and she may be

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sustained by the emotions incident to her breach with him."

The carriage halted at the door of a residence scarcely less imposing than that of the Ambassador. It was blazing with lights. There was no gloom here. We ascended the marble steps and presented our cards to the footman.

"Mr. Olmer," said Conners.

Our appearance was orderly and excited nothing in the man's mind. There was the sound of music in the parlor to the right, and several guests had assembled. We were conducted to a small reception-room in front, through the open doors of which we had a glimpse of a brilliant scene across the hall.

"You said Mr. Olmer!" I remarked, as we waited.

"Miss Olmer may come later," replied Conners.

A small, brisk gentleman entered the room. He was in evening dress and wore side whiskers. He was bald, severe, and had the positive demeanor of a successful man of business. He was to make short work of two intruders whose names were unfamiliar to him. He held our cards in his hand, and regarded us with a look of inquiry. We were standing, and Conners greeted him.

"We are agents of the Ambassador," he said, mentioning the name of his client. "If you will kindly permit us to be seated I can state our business in a moment. The Ambassador will shortly follow us."

I heard his statement with surprise, and then

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remembered the note. Mr. Olmer waved us to a sofa, his countenance still one of inquiry, as he took a chair near us.

Conners took from his pocket the papers he had shown me, relating in his short, distinct manner the story with which I had been made familiar. Mr. Olmer heard him with the wonder that such a recital was calculated to excite.

"You are a man of business, Mr. Olmer," said Conners, in conclusion, his voice taking on its impressive emphasis. "I see you fully comprehend the importance of what I have told you. You will learn its relation to yourself in the questions I must ask you, and you will pardon them also. You are aware of the engagement of your daughter to the Ambassador's son?"

The financier nodded; he was speechless.

"Did you know that she had broken it to-day?"

"Bless me, no!" he replied. "This is a serious matter, gentlemen. Of all the impudent schemes—!"

"So serious that I am sure you will afford us every assistance in your power," said Conners. "In order that you may know its import, and that the Ambassador may know how much you are in a position to serve him, I have requested him to be present at this interview. I think I hear his carriage at the door."

Almost instantly a servant entered with a card. Mr. Olmer looked at Conners and nodded.

"Show him in," he said to the servant.

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The man disappeared, and in a moment the Ambassador entered.

He had summoned his official demeanor to his aid. He was dignified and self-possessed.

Mr. Olmer greeted him.

"This is an almost inconceivable outrage!" sputtered Olmer.

"I have stated to Mr. Olmer the nature of the case we have under consideration," said Conners. "Believe me, it was necessary. I have had a conversation with your son, and I deemed it imperative that we speak with Miss Olmer, who is his betrothed. We desired your presence to give authority to my request. I trust that Mr. Olmer now understands it."

"It is a delicate matter to discuss with Lucile," said the financier, thoughtfully, "particularly in this public manner. Yet unless the scandal is suppressed it is likely to involve us all. It is shameful!"

"It is almost a matter of state," said Conners, "and I have dealt with it as such. I have taken the only means by which it may be detected and hushed up."

"It should be hushed up, surely," said the financier. "I presume my wife should be here?"

"By all means," said Conners.

"Thank you, sir—excuse me." And the little man almost fled from the room.

We waited impatiently through a period in which

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the Ambassador restlessly paced the floor. Then we turned to greet Mrs. Olmer, who entered the room with her husband. They were accompanied by their daughter, to whom the Ambassador's son was, or had been, engaged.

They welcomed the Ambassador, and the financier presented us.

The girl was beautiful, and I could see that she was brave, possessing that dignity and self-possession which wealth and refinement give to a woman. I gazed upon Conners with a feeling of admiration at the way in which he bore himself. His manner was easy and graceful and expressed a perfect confidence.

"Have you been informed, Miss Olmer, of the scandal likely to involve us?" he asked.

"I have been informed by my father of the fact that you wish to see me," she replied. "I do not know how any scandal can involve us, although I have heard something of the matter before."

Conners smiled, and his eyes lighted.

"Under the seal of secrecy?"

"Yes," she replied.

"I had little doubt of it," said Conners. "You will be surprised to learn that some of the money obtained by this swindle has come into the hands of the Ambassador's son through the very person who was your informant."

"You cannot know this without knowing who informed me, sir."

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"We know that only the gentleman who is in possession of this money could have told you, or the person of whom he procured it. Only the authorities should have knowledge of the matter, outside the participants. Your informant made the mistake of speaking too early, urged by an undoubted desire to prejudice. You were so induced to break your engagement of marriage. Am I not right?"

"If the statements made to me were true, my action was a proper one."

"We will not doubt it," replied Conners. "But it is safe to assure you that nothing said to you which reflected upon your betrothed was true."

"Upon what authority do you say that?" asked the Ambassador, in a deep voice.

Conners looked at him with a smile.

"I will be responsible for all I say," he replied. "I only ask that Miss Olmer will induce herself to be entirely frank with me."

"I beseech her in Heaven's name to do so!" cried the Ambassador, wiping the sweat from his brow.

His stately bearing was gone and he was now the trembling father, unnerved by the strain and the suggestion of hope in the words which had so moved him.

The girl looked at him and then at Conners.

"I will be frank, and for my own sake," said the girl, softly. "If I have been unjust I shall never forgive myself. But I was deeply shocked."

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"Of course, my dear child!" exclaimed her father.

"Colonel Vanotti was your informant?" said Conners.

"Yes," she replied. "I would not have listened to him, but I had heard too much before its import came to me. I would have stopped him, but it was then too late. He told me the whole frightful story, and said that he knew the Ambassador's son was guilty. Colonel Vanotti had been a familiar friend, and we all regarded him as the soul of honor."

"My son had some claims," said the Ambassador.

"I had proofs," she replied, addressing him. "Colonel Vanotti showed them to me. He had a letter to the inspector from you, sir, in which you besought him to come to no conclusion regarding your son until you had seen him and yourself finally passed upon the evidence submitted."

"We have all been at fault by reason of this ingenious matter," said Conners, quickly. "How could Colonel Vanotti possibly have obtained such a letter?"

"An inspector's clerk was in his pay, and abstracted the letter from the files long enough to have it exhibited to me. Colonel Vanotti excused the act on the ground of his friendship for our family. I was terribly grieved, but I had no alternative except to believe such evidence."

"While we may have some reason for gratitude towards the clerk in question," said Conners, "I think, in the public interest, that he should be

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found other and distant employment. A young man of such tendencies is easily dealt with: unfortunate, but necessary, in matters of diplomacy. I think," he continued, addressing the Ambassador, "that we can interview Colonel Vanotti to-morrow."

"He is here," said Mr. Olmer, "in the parlor."

"Why did you say that?" gasped his wife, in horror. "Would you subject us to a scene?"

"I do not object to a scene," said her daughter.

Conners looked at her with his eyes gleaming. I had seen the glance before, turned upon the beautiful figures that lined the walls of his studio.

"In that event," said Conners, drawing a deep breath and standing erect, "let us beg that he be sent for."

Mrs. Olmer looked about her. The majestic person of the Ambassador, with the confident bearing of Conners, reassured her. There were enough men present.

Mr. Olmer stepped to the door and called a servant. He gave a whispered order, and after a moment of waiting, in which I was consumed by excitement and curiosity, the gentleman in question entered the room.

He certainly looked a dangerous rival for any man—tall and dark, with a person and bearing that was worthy of Conners himself. His keen glance flashed about the room, and a look that crept into his eyes gave instant warning of the fact that he was aroused. Our presence meant something, and

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the figure of the Ambassador was a declaration. His glance at the girl was almost reproachful.

We said nothing, and as he paused and bowed, Conners, without introduction, addressed him.

"Colonel Vanotti," he said, "you had occasion to relate to Miss Olmer a certain story which has reference to the Ambassador and his family. She has not betrayed you. She learned the facts from her father, who had them from myself and my companion as agents of the Ambassador. In the common interest of those here involved, you have no possible objection to a word with us relating to the matter, I trust?"

Colonel Vanotti surveyed him coolly. He was calm and confident.

"Certainly not, as you have stated it," he replied. "I do not know you, but in the presence of these friends any statement you may make will have due weight with me. I have told Miss Olmer how much I regret the matter. I desire to say as much to the Ambassador himself."

"All of which we appreciate," said Conners, "since I am authorized to speak. You are undoubtedly in a position to aid us greatly, as you may understand, when I tell you that the Ambassador's son has confessed his guilt."

The demeanor of Colonel Vanotti changed. He staggered slightly and then glanced quickly about.

"Confessed!" he gasped. "The fact that he—that he had won large sums of money from me lately?"

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Vanotti paused, now hesitating and uncertain.

"Never, sir!" cried Conners, in a ringing voice. "This is valuable as a part of his story, and by me only suspected; but he has confessed to the commission of the crime."

The effect of his words was electrical. Every listener started as though stung, but the appearance of two was marked. The Ambassador sank back in his chair, his face white and his eyes staring, while Vanotti, pale also, and then red, looked at him in amazement; then he turned his gaze on Conners.

There was no mistaking his emotion. His features were convulsed with a sudden passion, and he drew himself erect as though he would spring bodily upon the man who confronted him.

Conners laughed.

"Why should you exhibit anger at such a statement, Colonel Vanotti?" he observed, quietly. "Why excite yourself over words which should call for sympathy instead of rage? What have I said to offend you?"

Vanotti did not reply. He struggled desperately to control himself.

Conners again gave vent to his provoking laugh.

"Permit me to aid you in explanation," he continued. "You see in my statement an accusation, and so answer it. It is *you* that have confessed, if confession were needed—for to-morrow would have given us all the proof which the most exacting court

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would require. But we will not speak further in the presence of these ladies. I think they wish to withdraw. You would do well to sit down, sir."

Vanotti made no reply. With another look about him, he dropped into a seat. The ladies rose instantly, the Ambassador and Mr. Olmer going with them to the door. The girl paused for an instant upon the threshold for a parting glance at Conners. Her eyes fell under his bow, and she vanished with her mother.

When they were gone, the Ambassador seated himself, striving to maintain his composure. He left the situation entirely to Conners, who had, with such success, precipitated it.

"Colonel Vanotti," said my friend, deliberately, "I will assume the task of protecting you in this matter, for reasons which may be obvious, if you think you can afford to be frank. It is needless for me to say to a man of your intelligence that no influence can intervene to save you from a sacrifice either of your life by way of the pistol, or the best years of it to the cell of a prison. A man of your sensibilities must shudder at the thought of a striped suit, a jeering turnkey, and ceaseless labor—I shall not speak of prison fare. Now, you may keep your freedom, whatever character you may carry to some attractive foreign country, and every dollar that you have made out of this scheme, if you will tell us in writing the absolute truth regarding it. Do you accept?"

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Vanotti thought quickly.

"What assurance can I have of this?" he asked.

"The word of the Ambassador, to be given to you now."

The Ambassador looked towards Conners and nodded.

"I agree," said the Ambassador.

"And I," said Vanotti.

"Very good," said Conners. "Had you confederates?"

"No."

"*You* impersonated the Ambassador's son. You painted the scar upon your hand and the mark at the eye—not a very difficult task, I fancy, to a man of your accomplishments. You also procured glasses such as you knew he was wearing, did you not?"

"And the lithp wath eathy," said Vanotti, looking malevolently at the Ambassador.

"We are not yet on ground safe enough to permit us to indulge in humor," said Conners. "We will devote to-morrow morning to the details of the story. You have lost large sums of money recently to the Ambassador's son; I can understand your further disposition to involve him in this matter. Did you make him a payment to-day?"

"Yes."

"With the new, crisp bills of the denomination of five dollars and upward preferred?"

"The humor is yours," growled Vanotti.

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"Pardon me. May we now say good-night?"

Vanotti rose and bowed.

"My respects, gentlemen," he said, as he left the room.

"Conners!" exclaimed the Ambassador, grasping his hand. "I cannot find words to-night. Will you call to-morrow, that my wife may thank you?"

"But, see what you have to pay!" laughed Conners.

"I would pay any sum!" cried the Ambassador. "You understand that. This is an absolute escape for me."

Conners smiled as he waved his hand towards me.

"Forgive me, sir," said the Ambassador, coming towards me. "You have my thanks also."

"Don't mention it," said I.

"Can we keep the scandal from the papers?" asked Mr. Olmer.

"Since we can have the postal authorities take charge of the refunding of the money, we can restrict it to a paragraph of little importance," said Conners. "That is not a difficult task, now that Vanotti must be silent. There is no other source of positive information, and, in such matters, the papers insist on accuracy. It is practically over."

"Thank Heaven!" breathed the Ambassador, fervently.

"We will call to-morrow as you request," said Conners, as he took my arm. "Good-night."

VI

The Abduction of Mary Ellis

"IT is not your good-fortune to be a father, my friend," said LeDroit Connors to me one morning when, having inspected my mail and duly instructed my clerk, I entered his studio, as was my habit.

I looked at him reproachfully.

"Never mind," he continued, good-naturedly. "I am not the author of any particular being myself, more's the pity, although I am not, as are you, a married man. But just at this moment I feel that I should like to join the community of parents; it would afford me a better excuse for being thoroughly indignant."

"What is it?" I asked.

Connors had laid aside his brush, and, lighting a cigar, leaned back in his chair.

"The stealing of children," he said, reflectively, "is probably the most unpopular crime that can be committed in this country. It is not indigenous to the soil. It is an exotic—an imported offence, one that has best thriven in communities where the

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poor are oppressed by the rich and where the element of revenge is combined with the instinct of greed. Do my words suggest anything?"

"Yes," I replied, eagerly. "Is it the Ellis case?"

"Exactly," he answered.

"Jennie was speaking of it only this morning," I said. "I have heard her discussing it with Mrs. Barrister on several occasions."

"Their sympathies would naturally be aroused," he observed, gravely. "Of all others, such a crime would have a special terror for women. It is not difficult to imagine something of the feelings of a mother whose child, a daughter, and one of tender years, has suddenly disappeared from the household. It is bad enough in the case of a boy—but a little girl, one over whose every moment a sensitive and doting woman has watched since its first hour of infancy—makes the situation all the more terrible. Stolen by ruffians with hearts callous enough to trade upon the anxiety of a mother! The fact itself is an intimation of how the child may fare. We need not consider its tender necessities—we may fear for its very life. To most parents it is a terror that touches insanity. It forbids food, sleep, rest."

"It is frightful," I muttered. "I'm glad your interest is excited."

"My interest is not only excited, but I have been appealed to. I was at the house last night, and Mr. Ellis has just left here."

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I dropped into a chair, regarding him intently.

"I do not know how familiar you are with the case," he went on. "I have followed it from the beginning, although I may not have mentioned it."

I knew he had not. Such was his habit, and he spoke of these matters only when he had reached a solution or had resolved to be active in the case.

"The published accounts are voluminous," I ventured, during his pause.

"Yes, but inaccurate as to the facts. I can give you the version of the police, with their conclusions to date. Eight days ago Mary Ellis, a child of seven years, was stolen from her home on Riverside Drive. She disappeared in broad daylight from the custody of her nurse, a young woman long a servant in the family, and of a character that makes her complicity in the deed a thing of great improbability. The girl's name is Caroline Wells, and her connections are most respectable. She is not to be charged with great negligence, either. She had taken the child into the park opposite the house, the width of the street and but a short distance beyond. There was a leisurely policeman near at hand to whom she spoke as she went by. She left the child for a moment upon a park walk, in an open space not fifty yards from the house, and went for a ball that had rolled down an abrupt slope. The incline led into some bushes, and the ball was lost. Detained for some moments in her search, she heard no sound to alarm her, and when she re-

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turned the child was gone. The scene was unusually quiet at this hour, and in the girl's mind there was apparently no thought of harm. As you know, the neighborhood is of the best. Before fright almost deprived her of reason, she noticed an ice wagon, near at hand, while an automobile was disappearing rapidly along the drive beyond a hill."

"This has been looked to?" I asked.

Connors smiled.

"The driver knows as little as the near-by policeman, and the automobile is the property of a celebrated physician whose wife and chauffeur accompanied him at the time."

I made a gesture of regret that I had uselessly interrupted him.

"Mr. Ellis is a banker of wealth, with offices in the financial district, a member of our leading clubs, and a gentleman entitled to the sympathy of all good people. His wife belongs to a family of such distinction that it would almost seem as if the entire city might rise in indignation and revolt. But the very prominence of the family seems to have hushed public expression, and the community is apparently of the opinion that the police are capable of dealing with the mystery. That is the strange feature of a crime like this. It is an offence that strikes deepest at the heart of society, and yet it is one that excites little comment. It is a thing heard about, and not seen — something devoid of dramatic or spectacular effect. It is difficult for the public to

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look into the household and see its consternation and despair. If a bomb had fallen there, scattering the magnificent house to the winds, it could not have created greater havoc. One must come in contact with the inside of such an event to see how appallingly tragic it is. At any moment since she realized that her child was gone, death would have been a mercy to the mother. Even I was scarcely ready to know what the interval had done to Mr. Ellis; but he, of course, understands that he must keep his head to comfort and sustain his wife and deal with the question of the child's recovery."

Again, deeply moved by his words, I looked at him. The note in his voice, so unusual, suggested that for once the responsibility of his task might have unnerved him.

"Is it too late for you to be of assistance?" I asked.

His answer disclosed the thought that he had given to the subject and the depth of the feeling it had aroused.

"Of all the problems ever submitted to me heretofore, of all the investigations to which I have ever committed myself," he said, "this is the most difficult and trying. The very nature of the crime makes it so. If it is an abduction, pure and simple, for money, as would appear, the perpetrators may be strangers to the family. This is the police theory. There are thousands capable of the crime, if they could foresee success, so no particular haunt can

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be suspected and searched. In the time that has elapsed any community, near or far, may hold the little victim. In the absence of a clew direct, the child has simply fallen into an abyss. Doubtless you recall the most notable case which the public has known, that of Charley Ross; and in all these years his fate is yet a mystery, whatever rumor we may have heard to the contrary. I repeat, my friend, that of all crimes against society this is the most infamous. Murder may be a virtue by comparison."

My interest was increased by a momentary surprise. His dark face was flushed.

"You have asked if I think it too late for me to be of assistance in the matter," he continued, slowly. "Perhaps. But of one thing I can assure you. Heretofore I have been an apologist for all whom I have followed. In each case I could find in my soul some drop of patience. Always I have made allowance for ignorance and poverty, of which crime is the natural offspring. But since I have seen Mrs. Ellis as I saw her last night, I have seen how this crime outrages even the primal instinct. I have realized that it has no place in even the nature of a tiger, and I promise you that, if I do not recover the child, I shall avenge her. In this instance I shall be pitiless. And here speaks a certain strain in me that is as immutable, as relentless, as the basic foundations of the earth."

Connors had been always to me a man of enigmas.

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I thought his language peculiar. I knew it was unusual. Sometimes he was as plain and definite as a mechanic, often dry and abrupt. Again, he would grow rhetorical, and affect a certain stateliness of speech and manner that indicated to me his love for the romantic; but he was seldom impassioned. All this I attributed to his strange nature and the mystery in which he enveloped himself. He was not voluble. He talked to me freely and seemed glad to do so, but his disposition, when I fancied I knew him best, was either taciturn or, when on a case, suggestive of confidence and good-humor.

I broke the silence which followed his earnest recital with the most natural of questions:

“What have the police done?”

“Everything within reason. I have no criticism there. What could they do but inspect the surroundings, hunt for the persons who were in the neighborhood, and verify the facts as to the wagon and the automobile? It is not a case of hatred growing out of family dissension, jealousy, or revenge. Of this they have assured themselves, and in their judgment I concur. The child was stolen for the purpose of extorting money. The cunning of the criminals is to be deduced from the fact that as yet there has been no communication to the family.”

“Is that strange?” I asked, puzzled to discover his meaning.

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"Certainly it is strange," he replied. "Ordinarily there is a communication at once. The kidnapers are anxious to realize on what they have done. They show an impatience that leads to their detection. But here is the cunning to which I have alluded. The villains are waiting until hope deferred shall make the heart sick. They have remained silent until the horrible suspense shall break the back of any effort. And they are wise, too. Every dollar that the parents possess is now at the disposition of these wretches, if they can suggest a method of exchange. They can win more than a million. Their cruel sagacity conquers in simply playing with time and the dark."

"Do you say there is no clew?"

"I have said the police have none, and I have intimated that I, too, am in the dark. But I am not hopeless. For the first time in my life, my dear fellow, I lack pity for one erring woman. In the devilish ingenuity of this feature of delay I recognize, on my soul, the touch of an intelligence that is feminine and instinctive—that knows in its depths the nature of the crime committed."

"You are certain of the maid?"

"I am certain of the report as to her character. The household consists of Mr. and Mrs. Ellis, a butler, the cook and laundry-maids, Caroline Wells, and a footman. There is a coachman, with two boys, in the stable. Also a Miss Grace Maurice, formerly a school-teacher, and employed as gov-

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erness for the child. As to this governess, I am not sufficiently informed. She is the daughter of a Dr. Charles Maurice, a dissolute physician of such bad repute as to call for some suspicion. Dr. Maurice has also a son, who, with the courage of his sister, left his house when his habits so developed as to make his home disgraceful. This evidence of character speaks well for them both. The young man was last heard of as an employé of a bicycle-shop, and later as a chauffeur, but, inasmuch as there has been no recent connection between him and his father, and no known association between himself and his sister, the fact of his existence has dropped out of sight. All the people of the household have been investigated thoroughly, with nothing found upon which to hang a doubt."

"What are the doctor's present relations with his daughter?" I asked.

"He has none, nor has he had for some years. The girl is as greatly esteemed in the family as the unfortunate maid. She has displayed less grief than Caroline Wells, who is overwhelmed, but Mr. Ellis maintains that her interest is sincere and touching. The contact of so many persons with the child, of course, complicates the case, and the first suspicion naturally goes to some member of the household; but, as I said before, we may thus be led to stray from the fact that the kidnappers may be total strangers."

I could offer no further suggestion in the face of

The Long Arm

such a statement, and shook my head despondently.

"This is practically the case," continued Conners. "Immediately upon the disappearance of Mary, Caroline Wells made inquiry of the policeman, and it was only when the loss of the child was certain that she became violent and incoherent. At this juncture there appeared upon the scene a possible factor. A young man named Raphael Henges has frequented the servants' quarters of the neighborhood for the past two years, and while a favorite with all the girls of her class in the various households of this locality, he was, of late, the avowed lover of Caroline Wells. He is a sailor when employed, lithe, well-knit, and of a personality to particularly appeal to a girl of the domestic class. At the moment of the girl's outcry he came running from an adjacent street, questioned the policeman excitedly, and besought the girl to tell him the cause of her distress. When told, he assisted the girl to the house, and, after aiding her to explain the loss of the child, hurried away with the butler and the policeman to search the vicinity. Naturally, he knew Mary, and she had always been with him a petted favorite when permitted to visit the quarters below stairs. He is, of course, under surveillance. There is little significance in the manner of the child's disappearance, particularly if there was collusion on the part of the nurse. It is her place of concealment and the question

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of her recovery with which we have first to deal."

"Are the police expecting a communication?"

"Yes."

"And waiting for it?"

"Certainly; and I am waiting. We can do nothing else. But the time should be close at hand. The cunning behind the crime will not wait too long. It will know unerringly when capitulation is ripe. All that a man has he will give for his life. In the case of a mother the rule especially applies to a child."

"Do you mean to tell me that you will permit this outrage to succeed?" I questioned, aghast. "Will you pay?"

He looked at me with a strange light in his dark eyes.

"Perhaps; pay—and discover and punish. There's no morality in this for us, is there? One may be a hero and die for any cause but economy. How far may we experiment with the fate of a child? What would you give to save your Jennie for yourself? This is probably the only crime that may justify a compromise with the perpetrators. However, I'm not in the case for that purpose, although both Mr. and Mrs. Ellis have looked for just such help from me."

"I trust you are right," I observed. "That is, as to the speedy coming of some sort of communication. I can understand what the suspense may mean to the parents."

The Long Arm

"Yes. I ask only to come in touch with some point of advantage, be it never so light; some thing or person to offer the faintest suggestion for intelligent work. You know my resourcefulness. But there will be no written communication."

"No!" I exclaimed, in surprise.

"Assuredly, and see if I go astray."

The telephone bell rang sharply. It always rang sharply in Connors's studio, and now it brought me to my feet, my tense nerves on edge.

In an instant Connors had the receiver to his ear, waiting during an impatient moment.

"At last!" he muttered, as though in relief, dropping the instrument into its fork and springing for his coat. "Come, my dear fellow."

I knew I was to accompany him. Following him to the elevator, we were soon in the carriage behind the familiar driver, who understood the simple nod of the man beside me.

"It's in the *Telegram*," he said—"the woman's organ. We'll call the first boy."

"It's too early, unless there's a special," I remarked.

"There is a special," he replied. "That was a part of the message."

"Are you working with the police?"

"I'm working alone, but they've given me all the facts. Harper Dean's wife sent Ellis to me, or, rather, she begged Mrs. Ellis to solicit my aid. Norma and she are bosom friends, and you can now understand my added interest."

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He stopped the carriage to buy a paper from a scurrying boy, searching it eagerly.

"Here!" he cried, and I read an advertisement above his slender finger:

"The child is pining for its accustomed surroundings. If fifty thousand dollars can be made available, we can point the way. Answer 'yes,' next issue."

Connors laughed softly.

"We are going to the office where I left word," he said. "That advertisement is in some sort of script, and came out of the abyss. We have a thread at last."

"But the answer?"

He scanned the advertisement again.

"*We—*" he muttered. "'The next issue.' Now being the eventful time, they exact haste."

"But the answer?" I repeated. "If it is 'yes,' you are committed and your good faith is charged. Even with criminals one must be honest. You have no authority, and— isn't there such a thing as compounding a felony?"

He laughed again; he was jovial.

"Didn't I say there was no morality in this. Norma Dean tells me that the child is a tender flower, lovely beyond words. I'd write the answer on the sky."

"This shows the draught made on society by such a crime," I observed. "It's time for public thought on the question."

The Long Arm

"And some special legislation, eh? It is time. We are growing, my dear fellow. The responsibility of citizenship shows in you."

"Thank you," I responded, shortly. "I trust this little communication justifies your spirits."

"Did I say a thread?" he laughed. "Well, a cable, my dear boy—a chain, with a pair of handcuffs dangling on the end."

"I don't see it," I responded.

"Your limitation and my figure of speech. We'll let the authorities use the handcuffs, as I only 'point the way,' in the language of this indiscreet writer. I am only a little brother to the police. That is my authority."

The carriage grated against the curb, and I followed him into the building of the great newspaper. A boy was waiting in the hall to show us instantly to the office of the city editor. Upon Conners preparation waited. To his power was added the friendship of the great Bartholomew Dean. He greeted the expectant journalist cordially. Here, as elsewhere, he was known. The man took from his desk a slip of paper and handed it to him.

"As I stated in my message," he said.

Conners took the slip, inspected it for a moment, and then passed it on to me. It was the text of the advertisement, written upon a sheet of brown wrapping-paper in sprawling capitals.

"They are careful," said the city editor.

"They think so," answered Conners, as I returned

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the paper to him. "The experts tell us that there are no two handwritings alike. The kidnapers might have thought of this when they remembered that there are several hundred thousand scribes in this vicinity. I may keep it, I suppose?"

"Certainly," responded the city editor. "All our facilities are at your disposal."

"Thank you," said Conners.

He inspected the slip through a small glass which he took from his pocket.

"We won't answer 'yes' immediately," he said, placing both in the case from which he had taken the glass. "We are entitled to a little delay on our own account. Think of the language used: 'Pining—accustomed surroundings—available.' What ruffianly kidnapper wrote these lines?"

"By Jove!" exclaimed the city editor.

Conners laughed.

A clerk entered and, stooping, whispered in the ear of his chief.

The journalist dismissed him with a nod, and then looked at Conners, who laughed again.

"Two officers from Mulberry Street."

Conners took the paper from the case and handed it to him.

"Give it to them," he said, "but don't mention that I've been here. I remember every word, and the form of every letter. I'm off now."

"Let me have anything in the way of news," said the city editor.

The Long Arm

Conners nodded and left the room, going out by a rear entrance to avoid the officers below.

"What next?" I asked, as we entered the carriage.

His response was a direction to the driver, who whipped up his horses and sped away.

"To the Ellis residence," he said.

"Am I to see Mrs. Ellis?" I asked, in alarm, with a vision of the suffering woman in my mind's eye.

"Calm yourself," he replied. "That is a detail which you will not be able to report to your household. But you will see Mr. Ellis, whose anxiety should be sufficient to satisfy the most morbid curiosity. And perhaps, in the shadows lurking somewhere about the vicinity, we may be able to catch a glimpse of the criminal himself."

"Herself. That's what you intimated."

"Your spirits are rising, too," he replied. "Well, I am going to question some of the household a little further. Mrs. Ellis could afford me nothing; she could only sob and beseech. Mr. Ellis is equally helpless, and I gained nothing by contact with the servants. A mere inspection is generally sufficient because of a certain instinct which I possess, but to-day I am going to see Caroline Wells."

"And this father of the governess? Miss—"

"Miss Maurice?"

"Yes. Has he been looked after?"

"After, over, and all about. The police have not lost sight of him for an instant. He is drunk and

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disorderly, and practically incapable of serving any criminal purpose at this time; this was his condition for days prior to the abduction."

"He's a doctor, therefore of some education; and I was thinking of the language of the advertisement."

Connors shook his head, and we drew up before the house. It was a handsome stone residence overlooking one of the most attractive portions of the Drive, but now its chaste exterior seemed to bear some impress of the grief within. The curtains were drawn at every window, and a few leaves, blown about by the wind, had been permitted to gather in the basement area.

As we alighted a woman came through the front door and, seeing us, paused for an instant on the steps. Then she came forward to meet us.

"I beg pardon, but I am sure I recognize you, Mr. Connors," she said. "I am Miss Maurice, and I have just left the bedside of Mrs. Ellis. She is worse to-day. Oh, sir, have you any news?"

Connors lifted his hat respectfully, and I stepped to one side.

"No," he answered. "I have nothing as yet."

"Oh!" she exclaimed, in a tone of disappointment. "This is a case where no news is bad news. We were so hopeful that you would bring something. I have nearly reached the limit of endurance on my own account. If there were some way to punish that wretched girl!"

The Long Arm

"You mean Caroline?"

"Certainly. She had our little darling in charge. She need not have left her for a moment. It is her fault. Why the police do not put her in prison I cannot tell."

"It certainly might not have happened if she had remained with the child," said Conners, regarding her intently, as her eyes snapped with anger and she compressed her thin lips. "Or if Henges had come upon the scene a little earlier. She was going to meet him, I think."

Miss Maurice made a quick gesture.

"That's it! You are right, Mr. Conners. She is cunning in her stupidity, and Mr. Ellis is good enough to pity her. If she had given the attention to her duties that she gave to Raphael—" She paused, and her vehemence left her. "Poor lad! He loved Mary, too. He ought to whip this stupid thing."

"I shall see the girl," said Conners, making a motion towards the steps.

"Will you need me?" she asked. "I was going out for a bit of air. I'm nearly down myself. But if I can be of service—"

"No," he said. "Go for your walk, Miss Maurice. If you are needed we can come again."

"I shall be gone but an instant," she answered, eagerly, and then, as Conners proceeded up the steps, she drew down her veil and walked away.

"A handsome woman," I observed, looking after her.

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"I noticed that," he said, "and also the manner in which she emphasized a good word for Caroline."

The footman who had let Miss Maurice pass out stood with the door ajar for us. Following him through the lower hall, he conducted us to the drawing-room, where we were shortly joined by Mr. Ellis. His greeting was subdued, and his features disclosed the stress under which he labored. He was worn, haggard, and his eyes were bloodshot from lack of sleep.

"Twice fifty thousand—any sum," he said, huskily, when Conners had exhibited the paper containing the advertisement. "I ask only that they may be speedy. I fear for my wife's reason if not her life. Since we have heard from them, Mr. Conners, I do not wish the police to interfere. I will pay this money and promise anything. Only let us have our child."

"We have some comfort in this notice," said Conners, soothingly. "We may infer that the child is fairly well. Impress that upon your wife. We fear nothing now but delay."

"It's the delay that is killing us," said Mr. Ellis.

"That will count for nothing when your child is restored to you," answered Conners. "I have seen all the members of your household with the exception of Caroline, the nurse. You will remember that I said to you that I would want to question her when I should have more time."

"And Miss Maurice?" said Mr. Ellis.

The Long Arm

"We met Miss Maurice at the door as we came in," said Conners.

"She's a treasure, at such a moment, to my wife," said Mr. Ellis. "She loved the child devotedly, but keeps up her courage. She's a woman of great strength of character."

"And great warmth of feeling," said Conners.

"Oh, intensely. She has felt this scarcely less than my wife, because of her intimacy with Mary; but she maintains a better control of herself. She's vindictive towards poor Caroline, but we pity the girl. She worshipped Mary in her soul."

"She was also somewhat devoted to this young man Henges," said Conners.

"It seems that most of the kitchen was devoted to him, from what we now learn," answered Mr. Ellis. "Is your companion a reporter?" This was the first intimation that Mr. Ellis was conscious of my presence.

"No, he is a broker and an intimate friend who has an office adjacent to my studio," said Conners, presenting me. "In these matters his counsel is invaluable, and much of the good-will which affairs of this kind has brought to me is due to his shrewdness and foresight."

I looked at him from under my eyebrows, but said nothing.

"May we see Caroline?" he continued.

Mr. Ellis touched a bell.

"Send Caroline here," he said to the servant who

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responded, and the man, to whom that direction had of late been frequent, bowed silently as he withdrew.

I waited expectantly the coming of the girl, marking her closely as she entered and stood before us. She was comely, after the order of the better grade of housemaids, but a trifle heavy and inclined to stoutness. Conners, I thought, should have small trouble with her. She was undeniably stupid. She might be an accessory, but never a principal in such a crime as the abduction of a child committed to her care. Her eyes, which had been swollen with much weeping, were now dark and sunken. Her features, naturally red, were chalklike. For an instant she regarded us with a look of inquiry.

"Sit down, Caroline," said Conners.

His voice was kindly, and the girl was not embarrassed.

"Are you a preacher, sir, or a priest?" she asked, as she obeyed him.

"No," answered Conners, and I saw that the question interested him.

"You are different from the others," she said, with a gesture of despair. "They only worried me. I was hoping you were a priest, for it's one I need. Miss Mary is dead."

I felt my own interest growing. Here was something masked under an assumption of despondency. It might mean much.

"Why do you say that?" asked Conners. "I have been told that you insist that Mary is dead."

The Long Arm

"She was not stolen, sir. It is a mistake. The police will have it so, but I was not careless. When I left her, it was for an instant only, and she was at the walk as I went down the hill. There was not a living soul near, except the policeman. She stood in the open where I could see on either side of her, and I did."

"Could you have seen any one who approached her?"

"I could, unless they approached from the house, sir, and in that case the policeman could have seen them. When I found the ball I ran up the slope, but she was gone. She's dead, sir."

She spoke in a monotone, as though repeating a speech which she had made often. She was listless and hopeless.

"Why, we have heard—" I started, and Connors lifted a warning hand. I was venturing some of the shrewdness and foresight of which he had spoken and for which I now blushed. Only in the interest which I felt did I excuse myself.

"How soon did Raphael Henges arrive upon the scene?"

The girl's demeanor changed instantly.

"How could the child have disappeared?" she asked. "Raphael was there almost soon enough to have seen her. It was he that told the police of the doctor in the automobile. He knew the chauffeur. The ice-man was at the corner of the street north, and to the south was another automobile on

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the side street that nearly knocked Raphael down as he came on the Drive. They would have seen Miss Mary."

"We haven't heard of this automobile before," said Conners.

"He will tell you of it, sir. It wasn't on the Drive, and didn't leave until after the trouble. The man who had it came to the policeman with the crowd when I cried out. Raphael said he could have had nothing to do with it. Why wasn't little Miss Mary seen, sir?"

"None of these people may have been looking, Caroline," said Conners, in a voice calculated to give her confidence. "A child is no unusual object. But you have not answered my question, directly."

"Raphael had nothing to do with it, sir," she replied, her manner now sullen and defiant; "although there's people in this house as talk too much about him. It's maybe that it's overlooked because of the grief, but I don't think it."

"He seems to be much thought of here?"

"What's the use of mixing him in it at all, sir? I'm tired of talking about Raphael. He feels this as much as any one."

"Did Mary own a wax doll with light hair, which was recently bought?" asked Conners, and the girl's demeanor changed again. She returned to her former apathy.

"Yes, sir. It was bought on the day before she died. We took it with us that morning."

The Long Arm

"Then it must have disappeared with her?" said Conners.

"Certainly. Is that the case, Caroline?" interjected Mr. Ellis.

"Yes, sir," said the girl. "We haven't seen it since."

"The spirits took that, too," said Conners. "Who bought it?"

"Miss Maurice," replied Mr. Ellis. "She purchased nearly everything that the child required."

"It is a great pity that Miss Maurice did not care for the child altogether," said Conners, sternly, and with a marked change of manner. "She would scarcely have been thinking more of an appointment with Henges than of the little girl she had in charge."

The sunken eyes of the girl flashed. She looked at him with an anger and resentment so obvious that I feared for an instant she would make a scene. Ordinarily she was of the station and temperament that weep at so direct a speech, but, instead, her emotion was one of deepest passion. I saw that Mr. Ellis was surprised. He looked at Conners inquiringly, but remained silent.

"I think I shall look after this Henges," said Conners to him.

"He has been about here most of the time since Mary's disappearance," answered Mr. Ellis. "Is he below, Caroline?"

The girl did not appear to hear him. She glared at Conners vindictively.

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"You may go, Caroline," said Conners. "If Henges is about, have a servant direct him up here."

"She's nearly demented, as are most of us," said Mr. Ellis, as the girl went out.

As he spoke, the door leading from the drawing-room to the hall opened to admit Miss Maurice. She entered silently and swiftly, her pale face flushed, evidently by her walk. She had not removed her hat or street wrap, and now stood regarding us as though surprised to find that we had remained so long.

"I am glad you have returned, Miss Maurice," said Conners, turning to greet her. "This is most opportune. I wish to ask you if you recall purchasing a doll for Mary the day before she disappeared?"

"Why, yes," she replied. "Of course I would remember that. We were driving. I wanted a toy for the child, so I stopped and bought it."

"Where?"

She mentioned the place.

"Shall I get it?" she continued.

"You cannot," said Conners. "It disappeared with her."

"Oh!" she exclaimed, looking about with an air of indecision, and at that moment Caroline returned to the drawing-room. Her eyes flashed as they fell upon Miss Maurice.

"Raphael is not here, sir," she said, speaking to Mr. Ellis. "But Mr. Jackson's Edmund, the foot-

The Long Arm

man next door, says that Miss Maurice can tell you about him."

"Oh—yes—Henges," said Miss Maurice. "Edmund saw us down the street. I met him coming this way. He stopped at a telephone booth on the corner. Do you wish to see him?"

"Have him sent for," said Mr. Ellis, and Caroline again left the room.

"I must go now," said Miss Maurice. "Mrs. Ellis will need me. She has been too long alone."

Mr. Ellis started.

"The nurse is with her," he said, "but I forgot that Miss Maurice was away. Excuse me, gentlemen; I will return shortly," he added, as he hurried away.

"We scarcely dare to leave her for an instant alone," murmured Miss Maurice. "Poor dear!"

She took off her hat and wraps slowly, lingering about the farther end of the long apartment, and as the door opened at the back she came forward quickly and seated herself upon a sofa. Raphael Henges entered.

He was a picturesque fellow, after the fashion that Conners had described, darker even than Conners himself. He sported a mustache above well-cut lips. A set of white teeth flashed beneath. He was graceful, muscular, and well dressed. As he came forward, Conners stood up and he stopped before us.

"What's your age, Henges?" asked Conners, abruptly.

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"Twenty-seven, sir."

He answered without hesitation, knowing that the inquiry related to the matter that had stirred the house, having already been twice interrogated by the police.

"A sailor?"

"Yes, sir."

"Why haven't you married Caroline Wells?"

The young man flushed, looked disconcerted, and as he shrugged his shoulders I saw that Conners was watching Miss Maurice. A glance at her showed a scarcely perceptible movement of the features, and Henges looked at the carpet. Then I wondered at the presence of the governess in the room.

"Well, sir," he answered, finally, "that's a personal matter. I don't see how it interests you."

"You need not answer the question unless you like," said Conners. "It is not meant unkindly. Your association with Caroline is a part of the gossip of this house, and she was responsible for the safety of little Mary. The child is gone, and every connection that Caroline had is a proper matter of inquiry."

"Assuredly," broke in Miss Maurice.

Henges glanced at her in a startled manner, and again looked at the floor.

"I'll answer, sir," he said. "I want to conceal nothing that can help you. I have only a little money saved, and when I first spoke to Caroline I—that is—I—" He stopped suddenly.

The Long Arm

"Take your time," said Conners.

Henges coughed.

"I don't need time, sir. Caroline is poor, sir, and I am pop'lar."

"What?"

"Pop'lar with the girls, sir. We kind of fell away, and then I heard that Caroline's aunt was going to leave her a lot of money. She's the widow of a truckman, and well fixed. So Caroline and I come together again and made up. I'm a young man and can afford to wait, so I told her we needn't hurry. I'm quite pop'lar, sir."

"So you think it is your duty to do the best you can for yourself, when it comes to marriage?"

"Yes, sir; that's it. Although I don't see what that has to do with this business."

"No? Well, it seems that you are honest as well as popular. We merely wanted to make your acquaintance, Henges, as we may call on you later. You may go now."

"Thank you. Anything I can do I will. I was one of the first to look about, and if I had met the man who stole little Miss Mary it wouldn't have been well with him."

"Yes? Well, we may see you again."

With a look of evident relief, Henges left the room, glad to escape from so singular an inquisition, and at the moment of his departure Miss Maurice rose.

"Excuse me," said Conners, turning to her and

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speaking in his smoothest voice. "May I ask you some questions, also, Miss Maurice?"

"As many as you like," she answered, in a softly modulated voice.

"Thank you. It is necessary for us to know everything about this house that may relate to the matter of Mary's loss. You can see some of the difficulties under which we labor. Mr. and Mrs. Ellis cannot help us, the servants are frightened, having already been made nervous by the detective officers, and they are full of useless gossip which a circumstance like this has occasioned among them. You understand?"

"Certainly."

"Now you can help us. We are as yet wholly in the dark, but I have some impressions regarding the criminal. I want to talk with you earnestly and at length. May I?"

"Certainly, sir."

"Can you come to my studio this afternoon? There we can be uninterrupted and free from—from—the wretched and depressing influence which weighs us down here."

His countenance contracted, and he lifted his shoulders with a perceptible shudder.

"Ah, yes, indeed!" she responded, quickly. "I understand you, Mr. Connors. At what hour shall I come?"

"At three o'clock, if you will. I should like you to bring some one with you, although my friend will

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be there. Make it the footman, the butler, or any one disengaged here."

"I will come gladly," she said. "It is strange that there are no overtures yet. This suspense is awful."

"Forgive me—you have not been informed," said Conners. "An advertisement in the paper, undoubtedly from the abductors of Mary, notifies us that they are ready to treat for money."

"At last!" she cried, eagerly. "Why, that settles everything. Mr. Ellis is ready to pay."

"Yes."

"You will not advise him against it, Mr. Conners; you will not delay the recovery of our darling," she said, and her voice contained a note of menace.

"Oh no," answered Conners, earnestly. "But think of what we have to do. We must be certain that Mary is safe and will be well treated during the negotiations. We will pay, and pay heavily, for the guarantee that the child has not been injured or maltreated."

"Of course," she interrupted, with growing excitement.

"We shall not permit the police to interfere," continued Conners, "but we must be cautious in that, and these wretches must know that we are cautious. Therefore, I will need all the facts."

"I will help you," she said. "I will be there. Only, for the sake of Mrs. Ellis—for all our sakes—be speedy."

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"Trust me as to that," he responded, gravely. "We are going now, and I shall expect you."

"I will call Mr. Ellis," she said. "Oh, Mr. Conners—gentlemen"—and here she turned her eyes upon me, and I saw that they were large and expressive—"if you knew how grateful we shall be for your wisdom! You are not to let a question of money stand between our cherished darling and our breaking hearts."

"We shall let nothing stand in our way," said Conners. "You know my address?"

"Why—" and she hesitated. "I—I had forgotten—"

"I have not a card," he said. "Will you get me a blank?"

Miss Maurice brought a card from a silver receptacle on the table, and Conners handed her a pencil.

"Make a note of it," he said, giving her the number and watching her as she wrote. "Thank you."

I followed the movement of her nimble fingers. Her handwriting was bold, and large in lines.

"Shall I call Mr. Ellis now?" she asked, as she returned the pencil.

Conners nodded carelessly, as though he was preoccupied and scarcely heard her. With an inclination of her head to me Miss Maurice left the room.

"Well," he said, after an interval of silence following her departure, "do you know where you are?"

The Long Arm

"Yes," I answered, grimly. "I'm nowhere."

"Things have happened rapidly," he said, "if you had only observed them. In the first place, the doll did not disappear with Mary. I found it lying in a corner of the lower hallway when I was here last night. It had rested undisturbed under a pair of overshoes for eight long days. The servants are practically having a holiday here. They are enjoying both the excitement and the leisure of a funeral, and, in spite of her grief, Caroline is something of a heroine. That's the irony of these events."

"Have you made any progress?"

"Why, I know the thief."

"You do!"

"Absolutely. But that does not reveal the hiding-place of the child, and to know the thief without that information is to make a position of greater peril. This thief would not speak if tied to the stake with the fagots lighted. Red-hot pincers would not pull out the information needed."

"You were wrong," I cried, eagerly; "it is not a woman, then. Is it that Spanish sailor? I doubt if he has the fortitude you have indicated."

"Wait until you see more, my dear fellow; and remember, when Miss Maurice comes to the studio this afternoon—Mr. Henges will accompany her."

"Oh!" I exclaimed. "I recall what he said so frankly about marriage. He needs the money. Was that significant?"

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"So much so that I did not question him further, as you saw."

"It is a case of collusion, then?"

"Surely. Most abduction cases are; but I know with certainty about this one."

"And Henges proves to be a factor, as you guessed at first?"

"Rather."

His emphasis was significant.

"He's a Spaniard," I mused.

"He's no Spaniard," said Connors. "I can come closer to him than that, for a reason all my own. He is a white man, Mexican born, with just enough of Indian in him to make doubtful his mixed blood."

"I see," I said, remembering the stoicism with which that race was said to endure torture. "Your task is just beginning. In view of the advertisement, and your present knowledge, you must be doubly careful."

"Certainly. We have not asked them to 'point the way' as yet. It is dangerous to do so, as the police have seen the advertisement and will look after it. An answer may come from the office in Mulberry Street, for all the villains know. I say villains, for there are, of course, more than one. Of necessity, the negotiations would be guarded, lengthy, and doubtful. These people would run them over days, perhaps weeks, in order to protect themselves. This is what I wish to avoid by some proper action."

The Long Arm

We did not wait for the coming of Mr. Ellis, but left the house at once, and as we went down the steps Conners pointed to the park, indicating the spot from which the child had disappeared.

"Shall we go over?" I asked.

"No," he answered. "I have been there, and the scene is as Caroline Wells described it. You can see as much from here."

"I presume it does not matter how the child was stolen, since she is gone; and, as you say, it is where she is at present that interests us."

He nodded, as was his habit when thinking, and we stepped into the waiting carriage. Half an hour sufficed to land us on the sidewalk in front of the building above Twenty-third Street. We did not go immediately to the studio; we were hungry, and it was well beyond the luncheon-hour.

Going to the restaurant near by, which we frequented, Conners stopped to buy a paper.

"It will help to an appetite, I trust," he said.

When we were seated at the table, he opened its pages and, running down its columns, burst into a laugh.

"Here's the answer," he said, pointing it out to me. "In black letters and double-leaded—the word 'Yes.'"

"The police?"

"Why, of course," and he laughed again. "The abductors would first verify this, so you can see how long we might have to wait if we pursued

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regular methods. Meantime, Mrs. Ellis might die of anxiety, and her dear friend, Mrs. Dean, take to a sick-bed in consequence."

"Is Henges so shrewd as all that?"

"I don't think him very shrewd," answered Conners, dryly. "You continually misunderstand me. Henges is nearly as innocent as you are."

I laid down my knife and fork.

"You are hard to understand," I said.

"Here's a cigar to help out your digestion," he chuckled, tossing one across the table. "We have an arduous time ahead of us."

Knowing him, I said nothing, and we smoked in silence, he thoughtful, and watching through the windows the crowd hurrying by, while my own meditations mingled with the smoke-wreaths above my head. He was resting, I was patient, and it was a quarter to three o'clock when we rose and paid our bill. Then we sauntered across the street, and, entering our office building, took the elevator to the top floor.

I did not stop at my own office, but went with Conners directly to his apartments.

Even though expecting his visitors, Conners did not change his accustomed habits. He threw off his coat and donned his artist's sack and cap; but he put his easel to one side and laid his brushes carefully away.

"You are clearing the deck for action; what action?" I asked, with a laugh.

The Long Arm

"We shall need room," he said, seriously.

"What do you hope for in the meagre possibilities of this visit?"

"Information," and he turned his dark eyes on me. "Information — information — information — that's the requirement here. Light, and a knowledge of where this poor child is concealed; and whether we can restore her unharmed to her parents. A mistake might cost us the little one's life. There may be those in this who would sacrifice it at the slightest risk of their detection or capture by the authorities."

"This looks to be one of your star cases," I said, feeling better, under the influence of a good luncheon.

"It is," he replied, more seriously. "How can I discover where this little girl is concealed and get her unharmed out of the hands that hold her?"

"Pay the price, as you have intimated," I suggested.

"You see the difficulties in that direction," he returned. "I have pointed them out to you."

"Well," I said, "you can meet Miss Maurice here this afternoon, get what she can tell you, and then we can see if the abductors 'point the way.' If it takes weeks of negotiation, and the police intervene to stop you, why, by that time your wonderful faculty for dealing with these questions may point your own way, may enable you to recover the child, capture the criminals, and all without the payment of the money. You *have* done such things. But

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I understood that you were going to pay the price?"

A neighboring clock struck three, and, following a knock upon the door, it opened to admit Miss Maurice. I endeavored to catch the eye of Conners as we rose to welcome her, but his gaze was fixed upon his visitors. Raphael Henges came with her.

"You are punctual," said Conners, smiling.

"I did not dare be otherwise, after your suggestion that I could help you," replied Miss Maurice.

"I brought Mr. Henges along. He is interested, and you told me to bring any convenient person."

Mr. Henges was already interested in the interior of the studio, for he stood staring with evident delight at its elaborate appointments.

"Sit down," said Conners.

He placed a chair for Miss Maurice near the entrance to his inner apartment, and motioned Henges to a seat upon a couch with a canopy and draperies, the top of which was ornamented with fancy weapons, the centre being an Indian bow, a shield, and a quiver full of arrows.

I knew my companion so well that I was filled with curiosity. His demeanor was unusual, and, though always polite, he was almost mechanical in his dignity and suavity. Both Miss Maurice and Henges now watched him expectantly.

"Before beginning the series of questions which I want to ask you, Miss Maurice," he said, de-

The Long Arm

liberately, after they were seated to his satisfaction, his voice deep with the feeling he could disclose when he willed, "I have to show you how greatly we are embarrassed. Have you read the advertisement in the paper, of which I spoke?"

"Yes," she answered, looking at him with wide eyes.

"Did you observe that it is couched in unusual language and bears evidence of both intelligence and education? This shows that we are dealing with no ordinary criminals. I now find that the advertisement has been answered by the police."

He presented to her the paper, pointing out the word "Yes" in black letters.

She looked at it almost mechanically, and let the sheet sink into her lap.

"This is not your answer?" she said.

"No. You now see something of the difficulty we experience. We are willing to pay any reasonable sum of money—any unreasonable sum, I may say—but in the effort to do so our steps will be dogged by the officers. Every person connected with these negotiations will be watched by a score of eyes and trailed by persons both shrewd and skilful."

"But you have not permitted these people to advise you of their method," she said.

"I doubt if they will answer at all," replied Conners. "They suspect this, will detect this, and be cautious."

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"Yes," she urged; "but they are evidently, as you say, unusually intelligent people, and they may have a plan which has taken this into consideration."

"Your answer is a good one," he observed, half musingly; "but, still, I am quite sure they will be silent."

"You can at least try, Mr. Conners," she said, earnestly.

"Surely," he returned. "We *shall* try; but what possible method can they adopt that will avoid the difficulties I have named? Can you suggest one?"

"Why, how can I answer a question like that?" she said, starting as though to rise. "Of what can you be thinking, Mr. Conners?"

"Forgive me," he answered, slowly. "I am deeply perplexed, as you can see. This impresses upon us the gravity of the offence, Miss Maurice. It shows us how easy it is to conceive such a crime and how hard it is to bring it to fruition. The theft of the little one was not difficult; her return for money is covered with danger, because it makes all participants violators of the law."

"You ain't going to stand on that?" cried Henges, breaking in. "Ain't we to get this child home? Somebody ought to be killed."

"Somebody may be," said Conners, regarding him significantly. "I am not always a patient man."

"The case does not admit of much patience," said Miss Maurice. "The task is yours, Mr. Conners. Mrs. Ellis is, in a measure, my benefactor."

The Long Arm

She is dying of anxiety and grief, and the persons who have stolen little Mary court a proposition in money. You have no right to delay another instant in responding, since Mr. Ellis expects you to do so. He is ready to pay."

"That's right!" cried Henges, half rising.

"What's this?" said Conners, swinging suddenly about.

I was startled at the change in him, his voice pitched high and his features suffused with a quick and uncontrollable passion.

"Do *you* break in upon my helplessness and embarrassment?" he cried, his hands clinched, and restraining himself with difficulty. "Do *you* dare taunt me with my inability when it was *you* who instigated this crime which your girl, the wretched Caroline, carried out?—when you tempted her to betray the most sacred of trusts in order to extort money with which to marry you! You were there, you wretch, upon the very scene, at the moment when this blow struck home to that household! Where is Mary Ellis?"

Both Miss Maurice and Henges sprang suddenly erect.

"You fool!" cried the governess, through set teeth.

The man said nothing. Surprise and anger showed in his face, and as he lifted his hand Conners grasped his wrist and forced him backward. I started forward, and Miss Maurice now shrank away, her face white.



"THE STRUGGLE WAS SHORT"



The Abduction of Mary Ellis

"Stand off!" said Conners to me, in a suppressed voice.

I knew his strength and his ability to deal with such a moment, and, though dazed by the suddenness with which this event had been precipitated, I obeyed.

The struggle was short. The men, with set muscles, stood as statues beneath the canopy, and then, with a crash, it came down. It was as though Conners had torn it away in order that he might confuse his antagonist in its folds. The crossed swords, with the shield, rattled upon the floor; the strung bow bounded away, and the quiver of arrows clashed after it. The men fell apart, and Conners stood erect. Henges lay panting heavily upon the couch, his face a picture of rage and astonishment.

Then I observed that Conners held an arrow in his hand which he regarded closely.

"I am sorry," he said, huskily. "Here, my friend, help me."

I sprang to his side as he cast the arrow to the floor.

"What is it?" I cried.

"Get the red flask with the glass from the next room, and be quick," he said, hurriedly. "There's no time to lose."

I ran to obey him, returning with the bottle as he threw off his coat and rolled up the sleeve of his shirt. Then I noticed that the blood trickled from a wound in his arm.

The Long Arm

"Break off that electric-light bracket and pull out the wire," he said.

I paid no heed to our bewildered visitors. When Connors spoke, I acted quickly. I wrenched the light from its fastening, dashed the glass to the floor, and drew out the wires coiled about the end of the pipe.

Meantime, his manner had grown more deliberate. He took a drink from the flask, which he placed upon a table, and turned to a stand upon which rested a small dynamo which I had seen him use in experiments about his studio. In a moment he had connected it with the current from the wires and set the armature in motion. Its scarcely perceptible humming made a strange sound in the now deathlike silence of the room.

"I scratched myself with the arrow," he said, calmly. "Its point is poisoned. The effect is certain and deadly, unless I am prompt."

Taking no note of my horror, he twisted the wires together, and as the sparks flashed from their red points he applied the white-hot metal to his wound. Under its caustic touch the blood ceased to flow. The red drops bubbled for an instant and the scarlet patch went livid. His courage was adamant, and his face betrayed no sign. The edges of the wound shrivelled and a blister arose as his frightful remedy progressed. It seemed that the awful moment would never end, and the words of protest which rose to my lips were checked in the knowl-

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edge of the frightful dilemma which made necessary this cruel and heart-rending scene. The flesh burned with a sickening noise, and the wretched odor, sharp and pungent, made me faint.

"There!" he exclaimed, after a stifling moment, throwing down the wires with a smile. "I have done what I could. We must wait."

"Merciful Heavens!"

I looked at Miss Maurice, who stood white and trembling. She was as a graven image, the picture of terror.

"Not a pleasant scene for a lady," said Conners, quietly.

"Merciful Heavens!" she gasped again.

"Look here," said Henges, rising suddenly and throwing off his coat. "You have cut me, too."

He bared his arm, and along the smooth surface the blood trickled from a wound near the elbow.

Even my tense feelings, wrought to the highest pitch by the sickening ordeal to which Conners had subjected himself, yielded to surprise at the startling change which occurred in Miss Maurice. She had expressed the horror to which his act had moved her. Her exclamation evidenced its frightful effect upon nerves feminine and highly strung. But now she shrieked aloud. Her breath came brokenly, and she leaned against the wall, overcome with emotion.

"Where's that stuff you drank?" asked Henges, hoarsely.

The Long Arm

"You!" cried Conners, again giving way to passion. "Child-thief!—wretch! I said that there might be some killing, and now Heaven takes vengeance. Stand back, sir."

Henges sank upon the couch in terror and consternation. He had felt the force of Conners's strong arm.

Miss Maurice sprang forward like a tigress. In an instant she had seized the flask.

"It is useless," said Conners, intercepting her and grasping the bottle in her hands. "This man may have a chance for his life—but I'll not give it."

"He is innocent!" she gasped.

"I would stand before an angel from heaven," said Conners. "I shall stay here to see him die."

She swayed backward and then pushed his hands away. She leaned against the sill of the window to keep from falling.

"I am guilty!" she said.

"Bah!" exclaimed Conners, fiercely. "I see it now. You love him and are in league with him—you!"

"No!" she cried, her clasped hands to her mouth. "Quick—save him! He is innocent! I took the child! I called her back from the park, when Caroline had gone away. She ran to me—the policeman wasn't looking. I took her through the house to an automobile waiting on the side street. My brother was in charge—I had promised him money. I did love Henges, and it was I who

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sought the money with which to marry him. Before God, it is true!"

"Where is she?" asked Conners, sternly. "No lies, if you would save this man."

"On Staten Island—near Richmond."

"What gets her?"

"An order from me—be quick!"

"To any bearer?"

"Yes. She is with my brother's wife. In Heaven's name, be quick!"

"Fix the wires," said Conners, turning to me. "Fix them, and stand ready."

He hurried to the inner room and came forth with pen, ink, and paper.

"Here," he said to Miss Maurice. "Write."

In spite of the stress under which she labored, her fingers flew over the paper with the rapidity of light.

"Well done," said Conners, with a quiet smile, taking the sheet and folding it slowly. "Remain by the dynamo, my friend, until my return. We shall have time to save this unfortunate man, I trust."

"Make haste!" came through the pale lips of Miss Maurice as she sank back into her chair. "We are in your hands."

Conners left the room hurriedly, and I, nearly as helpless as the two people with me, leaned against the iron frame of the dynamo, sickened and faint. Henges lay quietly upon the couch, looking fixedly at the limp form crouched in the chair before him.

The Long Arm

Following the vivid moments we had just experienced, I could take no note of time. I know that it seemed ages until the hand of Connors fell upon the knob outside the door and he again entered the studio.

"I feel better, my friend," he said to me, cheerfully. "Is the dynamo ready?"

"Ah!" said Miss Maurice, with a deep-drawn breath, her hand to her eyes. "Must we endure that horrible thing again?"

And now, following the swift sequence of events that had shaken me as I had never been before, occurred a surprise greater than any I had known. It was an incident which Connors was himself to remember all his days, and to which he many times referred.

Henges arose from the couch, and, with his hand clasped over his wound, confronted us steadily.

"Mr. Connors," he said, "I think I shall now turn the tables on you. How much have I left of life?"

Connors regarded him curiously.

"I think I failed to promise you anything," he replied. "However, if you are in luck we'll say two hours."

"Will I suffer greatly?"

Connors shrugged his shoulders.

"Very good, sir. I'll let you witness it, that you may have the satisfaction of having killed an innocent man. I am innocent. I'll swear to it upon a stack of Bibles as high as this building.

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I'm the last man in New York to steal a child, and, if I wasn't, little Miss Mary is the last child I'd steal. I'm no saint, but I'm no coward, and there's some things I wouldn't do. You've killed me, and I'm innocent. Take that fact with you to your grave."

"You may not lack courage, but you are a fool," said Conners, regarding him with a peculiar look.

"Oh no, I'm not. You did this, not I. You've committed a murder, and a useless murder."

"You are going to make me unpopular!" said Conners.

"Yes, sir—with yourself. If there's a woman on earth who thinks as much of me as you have heard, I can afford to stand for her. And I will stand for her now, and I will stand responsible for her hereafter, if you will promise that she goes free. Say the word, and you can put that fire to my arm."

Conners looked at him in silence, his inaction wearing on my nerves until my pulses leaped. The man made a strong figure as he stood with flushed face and determined bearing, his eyes answering those of Conners in the protracted interval. Then Conners spoke quickly.

"Give Mr. Henges a drink," he said to me. "And it might be well for you to take one yourself."

As Henges came towards me, Conners stooped and lifted the now prostrate form of Miss Maurice to the sofa.

"Does it go?" asked Henges, the glass in his hand.

"It does," said Conners. "Take a drink."

The Long Arm

Henges tossed off the liquid hurriedly.

"Why, that tastes like whiskey," he said.

"A very excellent quality," replied Conners; "and you may hand me the flask."

He knelt beside Miss Maurice and forced a portion between her lips.

"And now," he said, rising, "we shall not be under the necessity of burning your arm at all, Mr. Henges. You may take my word for it. The arrow was not poisoned."

"No!" exclaimed Henges, falling back bewildered, while I struggled with my senses to know what he meant.

"No," repeated Conners. "These measures, a little heroic perhaps as regards myself, were necessary to overcome a very strong will which I recognized in the lady who loves you. I knew her to be guilty all the time. I never mistake a handwriting, disguised though it be, and the text of the advertisement was written upon a piece of brown paper that bore upon its reverse side the stamp of a toy-store. It had been wrapped about a doll, and to it adhered this evidence in wax and a strand or two of floss that served for hair. A magnifying-glass told me this very readily. The doll, which must have accompanied the child when she disappeared, told the rest. I had proof positive that Mary returned to the house after Caroline had lost her. And, again, Miss Maurice was good enough to inscribe an address in my presence."

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Henges swore under his breath.

"And you burned yourself for nothing?" he said.

"Scarcely," returned Conners, looking now at Miss Maurice, who had opened her eyes and was watching him intently. "I secured thereby an order for the child, which I could probably have obtained in no other manner. Such, at least, was my estimate of your—your future wife."

"That's it," said Henges.

"That order is now in the hands of an efficient officer who frequently waits upon me below. When the telephone informs me that Mary is recovered, this episode will have ended."

Miss Maurice made an effort to rise. Henges hastened to her side and drew her erect.

"The order will be honored," she said, faintly. "Must we wait?"

Conners looked at his watch and stood a moment in reflection.

"I would come very nearly trusting my life to the word of a man who has displayed the peculiar characteristics of Mr. Henges," he said. "Since he stands for you, and you leave in his company, you may go if you like."

"She'll need some time to get out of the Ellis house," said Henges. "She's got some things there, I suppose."

"Yes," answered Conners. "And it would be well for her to save embarrassment for all and go quickly. Make your arrangements accordingly. If you

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need money, Mr. Henges, to help your new prospects to a better career, I have some at your disposal. You are entitled to something for the shock I gave you and your share in the recovery of the child."

"Come, Grace," said Henges to Miss Maurice. "Let's get out before the trouble comes."

At the door he hesitated.

"I can respect a man who could burn himself like you did, Mr. Conners," he said. "I therefore ask a favor. The people at the Ellis house have been very good to me. It will be a shock to them to know that Grace did this. Can't you suppress that in some way, too?"

"How about Caroline?" asked Conners.

"It's over with us, anyway," said Henges. "She knew I liked Grace. She told me so."

"But she didn't tell you how Miss Maurice felt?"

"No, sir; but I knew that myself."

"I'll think over your proposition," said Conners. "Let us see how we get along. We can easily credit the police with the recovery of the child, and there's something in what you say as to the Ellis household. Good-day."

"Thank you, sir," said Henges.

Conners watched them depart in silence, and, overcome with the varied emotions which I had experienced, I burst into a laugh of derision.

"What was it," I cried, "that you said about a cable with handcuffs at the end? What was that

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strain in you that was to avenge all this, and was as immutable as the earth? I forget the rest of your big words."

"Hush, my friend," he said, his hand upon my shoulder. "I am not as presumptuous as I sometimes pretend. There are other sentiments within me to which these incidents have made a strange appeal. I have been compelled to be stern, relentless, and cruel to a woman — a guilty woman, as you know, but still a woman. I have a religion, and I have violated its chief canon. I must make confession. Good-day to you, and give my love to Mrs. Barrister and Jennie. I will see you to-morrow morning."

He went to a picture that hung near his bedroom door—the picture that always held for me a singular fascination. It differed from the others which adorned the walls of his studio in that it was a portrait and not beautiful. It was framed with pure gold, and the curtains that draped it were priceless. He drew them aside and stood with folded arms regarding it, and as I watched him, and saw traces of tears upon his lashes, I went out silently, closing the door softly behind me.

VII

Signor Tommaso

CONNERS released the speed lever, and, taking his foot from the brake, we slipped swiftly into the spring morning. The green prospect wavered about us, and the white highway of Van Cortlandt Park was an uncertain ribbon fluttering in fantastic lines ahead, blown about by the rush of air that enveloped us. The early morning was glorious, and to a perfect day and a perfect sky was the added panorama of the distance—the scattered foliage of the northern city suburb silvered by the haze which crept from the moist earth. To the east the heavens were full of vapor banked high against the blue, reflecting in the sunlight that made them vast pillars of white something of the beauty of the Long Island waters beneath.

It was not often my privilege to accompany Connors upon these excursions. I was not so free to roam wheresoever I pleased, and, again, I fancied that his hours with his automobile or on his yacht were periods of meditation, when he preferred to be alone. Occasionally, however, I could find an ex-

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cuse to join him and experience, as at the present, the rare delight of his company in his moments of recreation.

We rode without comment or speech during this burst of speed; we were racing to the city, where Conners must again apply the brake. We rounded a bend where the white road was enveloped for a space in a cluster of trees and bushes.

"Whoa! Wait! Hey!"

Conners shut off the motor and brought the nose of the car against a patch of tattered hedge by the roadside, the sole remnant of some good burgher's estate of long ago.

"Here, you! Can't you stop that infernal noise until I get these beasts quiet?"

Two uneasy horses attached to a disordered surrey were rapidly inciting each other to frenzy. An elderly man on the front seat, with taut reins and a fearless whip, was helping them to this conclusion. As they danced, nearly erect upon their hind-legs, he swore rhythmically and consigned all motor-cars to the regions below, citing our car and Conners with great particularity.

Noting that the swaying vehicle contained a lady, with two children, in the rear seat, Conners cramped his wheel about and leaped from the car. I followed suit, although fearful that the man on the seat might try his whip on us, but after a minute we had the surrey under control. Each hanging to a bridle-rein, with all sorts of soft apologies for the

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speech of the man on the seat, we brought the horses about and led them mincingly by the red monster in the roadway.

The lady was grateful, but the elderly man was unappeased. His opinion of motorists came back to us upon the wind.

Climbing again into the car, we resumed our journey, and, with a sense of discomfort because of the incident, I said, ill-naturedly:

"Who are those people who boast of the intelligence of animals? I've never been able to find any reason in them. A brute is a brute."

Conners laughed.

"That man was a brute," he said. "Unfit to be trusted with a pair of good horses and a pair of children at the same time."

"An automobile doesn't scare," I said. "Yet that fellow, who thinks he owns the road with a couple of crazy animals, wants to legislate us off the highway. His right to drive a vicious horse is better than yours to drive a vehicle which you can positively control at all times. Are we to blame for the temper of his brutes? He is one of those persons, I presume, who believes religiously in the intelligence of animals."

"He didn't act like it," suggested Conners.

"He was swearing at us," I replied. "His wild whip was simply a display of temper. He didn't find any fault with his horses. Yet they go about with their ears cocked at all the world. They are

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frightened at anything that is new and strange. Horses deal out injury or death to more people annually than all the railroads of the country."

"Don't be ill-tempered; the day is too fine," said Conners. "Men, as well, are frightened at anything that is new or strange. Have you forgotten what Victor Hugo said—that it is the unknown only that is terrible? An automobile is the unknown to a horse, and a blue umbrella the equivalent of a den of lions. Yet I have seen a pair of thorough-breds stand placidly in the escaping steam of a sixty-ton locomotive. I am one of those persons who believe in the intelligence of animals. I could cite instances. I have known some otherwise stupid animals that understood the Lord's Prayer, and one or two fairly well qualified to vote."

"All right," I responded. "Cite your instances."

"Well," he said, yawning under the influence of the morning and settling on the slow speed. "I think you capable of understanding the Lord's Prayer, and I know I am permitted to vote. Which means that you must not take me too literally when I wish to justify those people with whom you are out of temper. Yes, I have seen the horse, which I regard as somewhat down in the scale, display qualities which would dignify a man, and at one time I knew a dog with both calculating and reasoning powers. This was in connection with a case that failed, one of the few of that kind with

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which I have had to do. But I was young then, with more of life on my hands, and hence, less interested in such matters."

"Considering your present advanced years, which have taken you somewhat beyond a quarter of a century, you must have been young," I laughed. "But I know the value of your present mood. Tell me."

"It was an opportunity I had to judge between man and beast, or, at least, to compare them," he said, laughing also, his humor stirred by his memory. "This dog, and the series of incidents in which he figured, had to do with a very characteristic person, a Mr. Finn Williams; so characteristic that he was, in some respects, a creature apart from all others of the human family. Mr. Williams was one of nature's errors, or, better, an evidence of its inscrutability. I believe I told you that I had a Western experience."

I felt, likewise, the influence of the spring morning and the luxury of motion.

"A religious experience?" I asked. "Of the kind they tell about at the camp-meetings out at Chautauqua?"

"An irreligious experience, perhaps," he answered, and then he eyed me quizzically. "There's a great deal of country west of Chautauqua, my dear fellow, although some people who live on Staten Island don't know about it. I see you are going to hear me incredulously, but I shall tax you before I have

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done. A line from an English writer comes to me: 'He who has learned belief, has learned something.'"

"It's the doubter who is deified in these days," I responded.

"Not with the Christian Scientists," he laughed, "and they are some millions strong. Well, a part of this experience was at a mining-camp which my father owned at the time. Its locality doesn't matter, but it's a good way from here, and the time was some years back. Longer, perhaps, in seeming than in fact. Life was unconventional out there, and this Mr. Williams, of whom I speak, didn't suit it. It was a place of about two thousand people, mostly men, and Mr. Williams drifted in from somewhere, and, upon his part, seemed to like it. Even in such a spot, a kind of refuge for society's malcontents, the gentleman was marked. Nature having emphasized him, he sought to live up to the distinction. He took himself seriously, a sad mistake, and at times he took himself jubilantly. This disposition is ill-omened, and in his case it was fraught with dire possibilities. He was heavy, muscular, and in some respects imposing, being tall and sporting a great black mustache of the circus variety, through which was at times exposed a set of large and brilliant teeth. His hair was black, also, and inclined to curl, and his eyes were magnetic and piercing. To all of this was added the sinister limitation that he 'had a way with women,' and the man with this way with women carries around a

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doubtful destiny with every sort of possibility in his future.

"I have said that life at the place in question was unconventional; I mean that it was in no way restricted. People were privileged to do pretty nearly as they pleased, provided they did not interfere with any one else. This, I believe, is the principle at the base of all order, anyway, and if Mr. Williams had observed it things would have been different. But the emphasis of his character, in connection with the destiny to which I have alluded, forbade. My father, who looked him over shortly after his arrival, estimated him correctly. 'The stage brought him in,' he said, 'but the hearse will take him out.'

"The industry with which Mr. Williams connected himself was the whiskey business—he opened a saloon. He more intimately made himself a part of the local social system when he took to himself a wife. Nearly all of the dozen or more indiscriminate ladies of the place fought for the distinction of his notice; but he finally selected one of the least pronounced and unattractive of the lot, and settled down into such domesticity as the environments permitted. Things might have been better but for the fact that the remaining ladies refused to acquiesce in this arrangement, and Mr. Williams himself regarded his marriage state with more or less levity. Numerous citizens began thereupon to exhibit signs of discontent, which foreshadowed some

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sort of crisis. Mr. Williams continued his way serenely. He was a man of courage because he was a man of vanity.

“And now things began to happen in the community: the local stage was held up, and the express people put on an extra guard. Horses began to disappear from neighboring ranches. Mr. Williams was absent from his saloon at critical times; men began to watch the shanty that sheltered his domestic peace and found him missing. Then, one night, a woman was found dead. She was one of the ladies who had refused to be reconciled to Mr. Williams's marriage, and of whom the woman of his choice had just reasons for jealousy. She was murdered savagely and in a manner that revolted even the hardened disposition of a mining-camp. Her body was found upon the floor of the small house where she lived with her husband, still twitching with the agony of her parting from life. Her throat was cut from ear to ear. The citizens got together and took Mr. Williams in custody. They proposed to stand on little ceremony, and made speedy preparation to equip him for the hearse.

“He was unquestionably guilty. His wife contributed voluntarily and eagerly to the testimony. It is one of the ironies that a man so popular with ladies has a method of destroying shortly all illusions in the creatures so fortunate as to attain him. He was absent from home at the time of the murder; he was in its vicinity at the time of its hap-

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pening. While stoutly asserting his innocence, to both of these facts he made confession. And then it was that the husband of the victim came forward with a story that settled all questions as to the popular prejudice. He declared that, jealous of his wife, he had kept Mr. Williams under surveillance for some days; that one afternoon, in the hills, he had seen him stand up the stage; and upon another occasion, in the night-time, he had seen him abstract a horse from the stable of a ranch some miles north of the camp. The date corresponded with the indignation of the bereaved owner, who was present. If Mr. Williams had possessed a father and brothers in that community, they would have suffered with him. The local sensibilities could stand no greater shock.

“As I have said, my father was a man of influence with these people, and as his son I possessed some on my own account. I had looked into the matter, and, although I was not possessed of any good opinion of Mr. Williams, I regarded the situation with some doubt. I found something at fault with the testimony, and the wife of Mr. Williams’s bosom was too eager. The stricken husband, while allowed something in the way of indignation, disclosed more venom against Mr. Williams than grief at his own loss. He was too ready and vehement. Had I been given the time, I might have maintained this view, but the situation seemed hardly worth it. And circumstances which had to do with the peculiar in-

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telligence of an animal intervened, which gives the especial point to this recital.

"In addition to his way with women, Mr. Williams had a way with animals. That tendency of the feminine mind to incline to him was duplicated in a most singular manner in all the dumb brutes with which he came in contact. He was master of the horse, which knowledge now cried trumpet-tongued against him. Birds responded to his whistle, and the prairie wolves, the pest of the adjacent country, held his hen-roosts in singular and reverent respect. I don't essay a reason; I simply know it to be a fact. This strange influence which he exerted over the animal kingdom was the wonder of the camp. He kept a prairie rattlesnake in a box behind his bar, full-fanged and as deadly as when it lay in the prairie sands. Often he permitted it to coil about his neck as he served drinks to his customers, and, as they stood off in terror, he would whirl it about his head like a lasso."

"And do you tell me that women were attracted by such a man?" I asked, in wonder.

"I said some women; and I may add, all women of his class with whom he came in contact. You know I never sit in judgment on the sex. You are a married man, not I."

"I have never known any one who has a greater reverence for women than you," I said, indiscreetly.

His brow lowered, and for an instant I feared for my story.

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"This recital does not greatly concern me," he said. "Besides, I have no way with animals, and snakes I abhor. Well, at the time of the coming of Mr. Finn Williams into the community of which I speak, there existed as its most general denizen a large fox-terrier of mixed shepherd breed, on bad terms with every household in the place. He was the friend of the children, the enemy of the indiscriminate ladies, the terror of cats and vermin, and the companion of every loose and drunken character that visited the camp. The legal title to him rested in a miner who was the foreman of the hoisting machinery at the principal shaft, and who happened to be also the husband of the woman who was subsequently murdered.

"When Mr. Williams established his place of business in the town, this dog, contrary to all precedent, transferred his allegiance from the shanty of the foreman and set up his residence in the Williams saloon. From a guerilla and an outlaw, he became the tamest and most abject of servitors. From an object of passing notice, he obtained a place in the public eye. He became an individual and a character. At Mr. Williams's behest he would stand erect like a man, walk on two feet, throw somersaults from the bar counter, and do strange things with cards at the poker-tables. He even affected an indifference to the rattlesnake, and the deadly warning from its tail, which was usually sufficient to scare all dumb creation into fits, ceased to dis-

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turb him. I frequently saw him sleeping placidly upon the top of its box. His confidence in his new master was supreme.

"This dog knew the ways of the camp from a puppy. He had attended every public function as a sneaking and delighted auditor, and he knew the significance of a hanging as well as the man who drew the rope.

"Upon the evening when it was decided to dismiss Mr. Williams the dog was present. His interest in the proceedings attracted me. It was not the policy of my father to interfere with the laws which these men had made for themselves. He left the democracy of the camp with its majority. But he was present, as was I, at Mr. Williams's arraignment and arbitrary trial. The accused had been allowed little speech. To hell with him was the verdict, and the gathering had silenced his protestations with the muzzle of a pistol. The general issue was enough for it, and, after the wife's contribution and Mr. Williams's admission as to his presence near the scene of the killing, the case was considered proven.

"It was now that my father spoke.

"'It is strange,' he suggested, 'that in so bloody a deed this man came away clean. He was caught, red-handed, just outside the cabin. The woman was still struggling in the death-throes, and her blood spattered the interior. Yet this man shows not a drop.'

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"The dog parted the crowd with a rush. He fastened upon the foreman, stripping his flannel shirt to the waist. The white undergarment was marked with red. Before the men could interfere he had pulled his prisoner down, and within the torn garment was a rag, drenched and bloody. This dropped upon the floor before us.

"'Put up your gun,' said my father, as the man rose white and furious to his feet.

"'I reached the poor girl first,' gasped the husband. 'Naturally, as I lifted her my hands got bloody. I wiped them on that handkerchief.'

"'Did you find the weapon with which the deed was done?' asked my father of those about. The woman was slain with a knife.

"The men drew that of Williams from its belt. It lay upon the bar in its scabbard, where it was thrown when he had been disarmed. It was clean and bright.

"The dog again went wild. Legs, tail, and ears all spoke in unison. He mingled protestation with entreaty. Certain of attention, he shot from the room. Two men followed him as he darted up the long street and disappeared in the tall weeds which surrounded the house of the victim. They were far behind when he returned, bearing in his jaws a blade red to the haft. It belonged to the foreman of the hoist.

"'I left it in the house this morning when I went on duty,' said the man. 'He found it there, and killed her with it.'

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“‘And you don’t hold up no stages, nor practise stealing hosses hereabouts,’ said a friend from the crowd, with a scowl at Mr. Williams.

“‘He desired to put a proper word in a doubtful place. The situation was becoming complex.

“‘The foreman fingered his pistol nervously, and his friend eyed the animal with looks of anger.

“‘Stop!’ commanded my father. ‘This dog can talk.’

“‘He can lie,’ muttered the foreman.

“‘Softly,’ said my father. ‘We were speaking of the stage.’

“‘Lingering now in the doorway, the dog barked loudly. His tail beat a tattoo upon the floor.

“‘Go!’ said my father, and the dog darted away. He sped like an arrow to the house of the tragedy. We were alert and curious, and more men followed him. We waited impatiently until they returned, bearing a split mail-bag not yet rifled of its letters. The dog crept after them, panting and triumphant.

“‘He drew it from under the bed,’ explained the men. ‘It was hid under a pile of ore sacks.’

“‘He was jealous of me,’ said Mr. Williams, pointing to the foreman and now permitted to speak. ‘I told you that in the beginning. He killed her.’

“‘Events had followed too rapidly to permit that assembly to fully appreciate their significance. Such testimony needed digestion. But prejudiced though they were, they saw the necessity for a

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change of base. This is where the case failed, for there followed another interruption. A cry of fire came from the street outside. Some women stood together, interested in the proceedings taking place in the saloon, and one of them shrieked that the powder-house was burning. The powder-house was a building in which was stored the blasting cartridges for use in the mines.

"The men stood not upon the order of their going. A hanging was an event in the nature of a social recreation, expressing in its best tendency the culture and refinement of the camp. But a burning powder-house awakened a sense of public duty. They departed in a body, paying small attention to Mr. Williams, and the aggrieved husband remained on guard. He was not to be diverted from his position as both judge and avenger. The blaze was easily suppressed. The structure was erected with a view to protect its contents, and the logs burned poorly.

"But, singular fact! This same incident had happened some months before. The powder-house had caught fire during a pending execution, and the resulting excitement had served to delay the hanging. What is the significance? Why, the woman who had alarmed us now testified that the dog was the incendiary. When the lynching-party had first assembled, she had seen him with a lighted fagot in his teeth scurrying up the street. It was a brand stolen from beneath a neighboring kettle."

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"I retract," I muttered, as Conners paused.

"Thank you," he laughed. "I am glad of your credence. You see, the dog knew the history of the camp. He adopted an expedient which, because of its uselessness, would never have suggested itself to a man. The powder-house was a vital spot, and an accident there would arrest public attention. This had been proven before."

"Mr. Williams was released?" I ventured, as he paused again. "The foreman took his place, and the dog was rewarded?"

"As dogs are usually rewarded," he answered, dryly. "Mr. Williams was not released. We returned to the saloon and a fitting sequel to the tragedy of the evening. The curtain had fallen upon the fifth act. Mr. Williams was gone, the dog was dead, and the foreman likewise a corpse. My father's horse had been hitched to an adjacent rack, and Mr. Williams had availed himself of this waiting opportunity to sever his connection with the camp. The body of the foreman lay under a table near the bar, and at the threshold of the door, to which he had dragged himself in his effort to follow his master, was the dog. The throat of the man was torn out by savage teeth, but otherwise he bore no wound. Two chambers of his revolver, still clinched in his hand, were empty, and one bullet had gone through the dog. The horse, which we found next day wandering about near the railroad station some ten miles distant, carried blood on

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the saddle; so we inferred that the second bullet was retained by Mr. Williams—how effectively we never learned. The premises were easy. Left alone with his prisoner, the foreman sought to kill him. Mr. Williams defended himself, and, being large and powerful, probably struck him down. The dog did the rest, receiving his death-wound in the struggle.”

“There must have been something good in the man, to inspire such an affection in dumb brutes,” I said.

“I never discovered any good in Mr. Williams,” laughed Conners. “I don’t think the quality necessarily a moral one. The rattlesnake died of grief when Mr. Williams came no more, but his abandoned wife survived the shock. She married early and cheerfully on the hopeful theory that the second bullet had made her a widow. Hello!”

He brought the steering-gear down and the car swerved sharply. We were in the streets of New York.

“You wouldn’t run over a dog to-day,” I said, as a large Newfoundland lumbered out of the way.

“Scarcely more than I would a child,” answered Conners, “and you know what emphasis that contains. Don’t doubt the intelligence of animals any more, and when you are driving a car be considerate of the horses. Remember what Hugo says about the unknown.”

We left the vehicle at the garage, and, turning

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into Broadway, walked down the street together. When we reached the building which contained our quarters, a large, bluff man was waiting at the revolving door.

"Why don't you have some one in your apartments when you go away, Mr. Connors?" he asked. "I can't drop money through the mail-slot."

"Why not?" said Connors.

"Well, I like a receipt."

"Come up," said Connors, "and I'll give you one."

I did not wait, but passed into the building ahead, and they followed. I had observed this person some months before in Connors's studio, but nothing about him had especially appealed to my attention. I left them together in the lower hall and took the elevator for my office.

It was yet early in the day. I had come over from my home the night before, in order that we might start for our ride at dawn, and we had taken breakfast at a road-house near Yonkers. I merely glanced at the letters on my desk, and, seeing that they were of some importance, I left them for another word with Connors before giving them more serious attention. Stepping down the hall, I entered his studio. The man was still with him, and I started to withdraw.

"Come in," he called. "Mr. Henderson is just going."

"You might bring your friend," said Mr. Henderson.

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"Thank you," said Conners, as he mentioned my name, and I shook hands with his visitor. "I may go over this afternoon."

"Very good," said Mr. Henderson, as he departed. "I'm there all the time."

"That is the proprietor," said Conners, when the door had closed, "of Henderson's hundred horse-power, four-cylindereed, five-speed circus and menagerie. He operates one of the few remaining wagon shows of the country, and seems to be holding his own against railroad competition. I am the owner of a warehouse in Long Island City, which for a time was like one of Henderson's elephants on my hands. Last fall I let him have it to winter his outfit in, and this beautiful day, of which we have had a sample, is evidence to him that he must soon be on the road. He has cleaned up his cages, gathered his people for rehearsal, and is preparing for his season. He came in to-day to pay his bill. Incidentally he invites us over to inspect his aggregation prior to taking flight."

"Let's go," I said.

"Surely. It will be an interesting sight. We catch the circus in repose and see it at our leisure."

My thoughts went back to those blissful days when the road show typified to me much that was of heaven; when my breast was the seat of conflicting emotions, and I wavered with a future that made me either clown in a conical hat or a daring bareback rider who leaped through paper balloons.

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"By Jove!" I exclaimed. "Let's go to-day."

"This afternoon, if you like," he replied. "You heard what Henderson said. Let us get the dust out of our systems; you look after your office and then we'll have lunch. Meantime I'll run that Long Island sky in behind this group of nymphs."

He got his palette and brushes, seating himself before his easel, and I left the studio.

The mail which I had left kept my attention until noon, at which time I returned to his apartments. He was ready and waiting, so we went out for lunch, and then took a cab for the ferry. Landing beyond the river, we boarded a car and soon reached the great brick structure which housed the Henderson show. Inquiry at the guarded door brought the proprietor to meet us. He was hospitable and hearty.

"Come right in, gentlemen," he said. "This is just the right moment. You've caught us in the act."

"What act?" asked Connors.

"A dress rehearsal, you might call it," said Mr. Henderson. "The actors feel better in their professional clothes, and I like to see the looks of the show before actually going on the road. To get the 'toot angsonble,' as I used to say when I managed a theatre. It gives me a better idea of the general effect of the first performance. I require this on the last few days prior to my departure."

We entered, and our attention was at once riveted

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on a busy scene. Ranged about the walls were the wheeled cages, while the centre, strewn with sawdust after the manner of a circus-ring, was filled with moving figures in kaleidoscopic costumes. These were active and in motion, engaged in the various exercises which were to thrill the rural heart. Iron stakes were set in front of the cages, and a rope separated a passageway between them and the centre of the building all around. This enabled the attendants to wait on the animals unmolested by the performers of the ring.

Mr. Henderson swept his hand over the scene with a show of pride.

"A double tent this year," he said, "with one for the beasts nearly as big, and side attractions enough to pay fixed charges. I ought to make some money."

"I hope so," replied Conners. "The building seems to have taken care of you."

"It's all right," said the proprietor. "I've quartered a good many of my people in the north wing, while some of the performers have found accommodations in the near-by hotels. What is it, Lizzie?" he continued, as a woman approached him. "Be careful," and his voice sank to a tone of admonition. "You see, I've some gentlemen with me."

"I don't care who is with you," she answered, excitedly. "You've got to speak to my man. Things have got so that I don't consider him worth a damn, but for the sake of peace you'd better use

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your influence. I may have to live with him, after all."

She was a stout, well-featured woman of the circus type, her bleached hair in sharp contrast with eyebrows of jet. She was showily dressed in the costume of the street, evidently not taking part with the performers now at work.

"There, there!" he said, in an accent of conciliation. "I'll do it."

"And if that hussy stays with the show," she continued, "you'll have to find her quarters away from ours. We don't stop at the same hotels."

"I'll see to it," said the proprietor. "I'll speak to Tommy to-day."

"Speak to the Demorist girl, too—the cat!" said the woman, shaking her head threateningly. "She won't be fit for the ring if you don't. I'll spoil her looks."

Mr. Henderson swore softly as she moved away.

"Lots of trouble, Mr. Conners," he said, wearily. "I'm used to it, though, and it's a part of the business. Where you get a lot of various people mixed up together, the quarrels and jealousies is awful. It ain't all confined to grand oprey."

"It's easier to manage the beasts," suggested Conners, looking along the line of cages.

We sauntered down the line of rope.

"Why, the beasts is as gentle as doves in comparison," he replied. "I'd sooner manage a herd of elephants than a woman. This lady's jealous.

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It ain't only Miss Demorist that I mentioned. Every woman in the show is making eyes at her husband, and we ain't started yet. I'd let him go now, but I can't fill his place."

"He must be an Adonis if he rivals those fellows yonder," said Conners.

He looked to where a group of nimble acrobats tossed themselves about a spread carpet. They were in costume, and their tights disclosed their trained muscles and graceful proportions.

"I don't know what it is," said Mr. Henderson. "The man's just impudent with women. He's nothing for looks. He's loggy."

"Loggy?" inquired Conners.

"Loggy as compared with those fellows yonder. They don't admit that he's in their class. He's not a ring man nor a rider. He's the Animal King. Here's his beasts."

He stopped before a cage containing three ponderous lions. They were sleeping heavily upon the floor.

"They are magnificent," I said, examining them admiringly. "Does he own them?"

"Bless you, no, sir. I own the whole show," he added, proudly; "but he trains them. I've two cages more, which you'll see presently. We've a large circular cage for the ring, and we let them all in together. He handles them like they were kittens."

He put his cane through the bars and prodded

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them gently. They rose clumsily with deep coughs, growling sullenly at us, with their bloodshot eyes aglow.

"Can you handle them, too?" I asked, politely.

Mr. Henderson laughed.

"I can feed them," he replied. "But I wouldn't go in that cage to save the show. No, nor is there another man I know who would. But Signor Tommaso puts his head in that big mouth yonder twice at each performance. He lays the whip on them until they jump a tight rope. No, sir. I handle them from the box-office."

We moved away from the cage, and for a time watched the active figures on the carpet. Then we became engrossed in two performers who balanced themselves on a flying rope. The horses were brought out. A girl in a short skirt covered with spangles danced by. She flourished a riding-whip at a pony that came through an opening, evidently from a dressing-room.

Mr. Henderson left us to speak to her. They conversed together in low tones, and I could see by his gestures that he was entreating her. She laughed foolishly and flourished her whip again, looking away from him. Her curls, also colored, were shaken coquettishly. She giggled as she made response.

I left Connors at the rope waiting for the return of Henderson. Passing down the line, I surveyed the various dens. There were bears, hyenas, and

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wolves in profusion. Then I halted in front of one massive cage where a great tawny tiger walked nervously back and forth. As I stood watching him, fascinated by an interest for which I could not account, he stopped. His eyes, a combination of green and yellow, emitted gleams of light. My presence disturbed him, and the color of the iris changed. He placed his great paws together and sank his head upon them, glaring now in fury and biting fiercely at the space between the iron rods. A succession of deep growls became a roar of passion, and as it rang through the building it was answered by the heavier notes of the lions until the ears were hurt.

Mr. Henderson and Connors ran towards me.

"Did you touch him?" asked Connors.

"No," I answered.

"Touch him!" cried Mr. Henderson. "A man that gets close enough to touch *her*, sees his finish. Them gaudy paws have reached out after every man about the cages. I'll rope the circle back further, during performances."

I shrank away in momentary alarm. The savage beast was a picture of insensate hate. It had thrown itself to the floor, and with paws protruding through the bars was clawing frantically at space.

"It's nothing," said Mr. Henderson. "The wickedest beast on earth, that's all. And the finest, too. Caught in India, full-grown and just as untamable as possible."

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"He's a beauty," said Conners.

"*She's* a beauty," answered Mr. Henderson. "It's a female. We have to watch her every minute of the day. She ripped the clothes off a man yesterday at feeding-time."

"Signor Tommaso does not go in with *her*," said Conners.

Mr. Henderson laughed shortly.

"The man don't breathe that could live a minute in her company. If there was such a man, the salary Tommy gets a week he'd get a day. A man in that cage would draw five hundred extra at each performance. How many men did you ever see in a tiger's cage?"

"I don't recall any," replied Conners.

"No, sir," continued Mr. Henderson. "We can scarcely get near enough to clean the wagon."

The tigress was crouching now upon her white belly, eying us balefully.

Conners stood in an attitude of reflection.

"What dreams of the jungles of her freedom!" he said — "the tragedy of the chase and the glory of slaughter; the upper Ganges; the base of the Himalayas; the shrines and temples of the dead ages, with the desert sands and fierce Indian sunlight. Caught full-grown to look henceforth through bars at a curious crowd. No wonder her thoughts are hideous."

The tigress rose again slowly, arching her back like a cat. There was something in the low tone

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that brought her ears to rigid points and set each muscle like a band of steel. Then she leaped against the bars with a fury that set the cage rocking upon its springs, roaring again until the place re-echoed.

"Come," said Conners, while the attendants rushed to the various cages to quiet the disturbed animals. "Let us leave her majesty in peace. For some reason our presence angers her."

We went to where a group of elephants were tossing hay upon their leathery sides, and a nimble man was swinging between a pair of tusks. The girl in the spangled dress galloped by, casting a glance at Conners. Then she leaped from the saddle.

"Hello!" she said, as she joined us.

"You ride well," said Conners.

"You should see me nights," she answered.

"You are not to exhibit here?" he said.

"Well, come round to -morrow. I rehearse a special act and you can see me then. We open in Stamford, too, and that ain't so far."

"If Mr. Conners could teach you a little sense," said Mr. Henderson, severely, "I'd beg him to come every day. Didn't I say enough awhile ago?"

She tossed her head.

"Your wife ain't jealous," she said.

Mr. Henderson laughed hoarsely.

"If she was I'd quit this business," he replied.

"You girls—"

He stopped as his gaze fell along the length of

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the interior. He lifted himself upon his feet, as though for a better view, his eyes staring.

Marking him, the girl looked also, and then he swore deeply, his tone and manner expressive of his profound amazement.

A man, tall and dark, had come down the line of rope from the cage of lions. He was in tights and wore trunks and a beaded sash. His fleshings were cut low to expose his thick neck, and were armless, to show his great muscles. A silken turban topped a shock of black curls, and he carried in his hand a gilt wand. At the cage which held the tigress he had stopped, and, leaning negligently against the bars, was surveying us calmly.

We followed Mr. Henderson across the intervening space. Impressed by his manner, which had attracted them, the performers near by came also. The proprietor halted in front of the silent man, his astonishment still upon him.

"You fool!" cried a voice beside me. "You'll get in the wrong place sometime."

I saw that it was the woman who had first spoken to the proprietor. She was evidently the man's wife.

The man laughed.

"Come here, Lizzie," he cried, "and I'll put you through the bars."

"Look at that!" exclaimed Mr. Henderson, turning to us with his face alight. "That's Tommaso, the Animal King."

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The paw of the tigress slipped between the bars. It came out silently and languorously, the talons like pointed knives sheathing and unsheathing themselves in the fur. It caught the man at the waist, drawing him against the bars.

I struggled to repress the cry that rose to my lips, and the man dropped his wand. Half turning, with his left hand he seized the limb at the hock, and, passing his right its length through the bars, he scratched the yellow flank gently.

"What, ho! my lady!" he cried, chuckling coarsely. "Are we friendly? I'll come and see you to-morrow, old girl."

Both arms now went through the bars, and his hands were buried in the folds of skin about the neck. Then he pulled the beast forward.

"Good-bye," he said, patting the scalloped head. "I won't forget you, old woman."

"Tommy," said Henderson, in an awed voice, "have you ever done that before?"

"No, sir," replied the man. "I've looked her over a time or two, but I ain't paid her no special attention."

He leaned upon the rope with both arms, swinging his gilt wand gently. His brother nomads looked their admiration, and he smiled in gratified vanity.

"I ain't afraid of no beasts," he continued. "You know that, Mr. Henderson. I'll go in the cage with her to-morrow."

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"What! With the Indian Empress? You darsn't," cried Miss Demorist.

Impressed as were the others, she voiced her surprise.

The man chuckled gleefully.

"What, my beauty! Weren't you looking?" he said. "Wait till to-morrow. I'd do it now but my turn's over and I'm expected outside. Do I get a kiss, eh?"

He caught her chin in his great hand, drawing her forward and laughing at the blows from her whip.

"You—!" cried a voice, sharp with anger.

The words were drowned in a roar from the cage. The tigress was crouching with arched back and eyes of fire.

"There, now!" exclaimed Signor Tommaso, angrily, releasing the girl and backing to the cage. "See what your sweet voice has done. Demmy knows I'm only in fun, and your face would turn the lions sour. Get away!" he continued, waving his wand in the direction of his wife, "or I'll make *you* jump the rope. You'll get the Empruss sad."

He turned with a sweep of his arms at the bars and brought the yellow beast to a state of quiet. Then he stooped under the ropes and, crossing the sawdust space, disappeared in the dressing-room.

"Will you permit him to go into that cage?" asked Conners of Henderson as we made our way to the door.

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"Will I!" replied the proprietor, delightedly. "Didn't you see him?"

Connors made no reply.

"Come over again to-morrow," continued Mr. Henderson. "Maybe he'll change his mind, but you can at least see him with the lions. He knows his business, though, and I ain't afraid of his taking chances. Why, he'll make a kitten out of that cat before we've been out a week. And I'll tell him what it means for his salary to-night."

We bade him good-bye at the door and walked in silence to the car. My companion spoke of other matters until we reached our building, and there I paused at the curb.

"It's late, and I must be getting home," I said. "Remember, I was out last night."

"Yes," he replied. "Come in to-morrow, sure."

"Are we going over again?" I asked.

"Yes; but don't offer to bring your wife. She'll want to come if you tell her."

"You are interested in the Empress," I laughed.

"Yes, or Signor Tommaso. Didn't you hear what his wife called him."

"I was watching the beast," I answered.

"Where were your ears? Didn't I tell you something this morning? She called him Finn."

"What?"

"Yes, sir. That is Mr. Williams, of my mining-camp. So we'll surely go again to-morrow."

He disappeared through the doorway, and I

Signor Tommaso

boarded a passing car. I remembered very clearly as I rode away.

The events of the day remained with me that night. I pondered over the singular chance that had brought Mr. Finn Williams again upon the scene of LeDroit Connors's experience, and wondered what it portended. All circumstances with which he had to do seemed portentous. Jennie found me silent and non-communicative, while Mrs. Barrister voted me dull. When I sought my bed my slumber was disturbed, and I dreamed of a large man with massive shoulders and black, curly hair cast into a den of lions. They sought to devour him, but he talked to them and they understood him. He begged for his life and they answered him.

"Why are you cruel to women?" they asked of him.

The man, though frightened, grinned foolishly.

"Why, you eat them easily enough," he replied. "What are they for?"

The lions reflected.

"In this man's estimation, what are they for?" they mused.

They spoke again.

"While throughout nature there is a war of species, yet everywhere there is a comity of kind. We do not eat each other."

"I do not know," replied the man. "I only feel,

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and, feeling, I speak and do. When I am hungry I eat. Why should I speak kindly to a woman who offends me?"

"We are hungry," said the lions, and they fell upon him.

I awoke depressed, and with a feeling of foreboding.

The trip across the bay lightened my spirits, and when I reached my office the impression of the night had worn away. The incidents of the day before reappeared in brighter colors, and I remembered with pleasure the strange and motley collection of performers and animals that I had met so familiarly and intimately.

I joined Conners at lunch, and immediately following we set out for his warehouse in Long Island City. He was in his best mood, and laughed when I told him of my dream.

"Do you credit it to a disordered digestion?" he asked. "That is the modern diagnosis. But here was a vision, and it needs no Joseph come from the pages of Holy Writ to interpret it."

"Why?" I asked.

"Why?" he echoed. "It is merely cause and effect. The natural reaction of what you saw yesterday upon an intelligent mind in repose."

"Do you believe in dreams?"

"Bah!" and he laughed again. "Do I believe in water or sunlight, mathematics or chemistry? Do I believe in electricity or magnetism? Read Flam-

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marion's *Unknown*. Some day I'll tell you of a dream that came true."

"Will you tell me of its significance also?"

"Certainly," and his tone was still one of banter. "But if you mean that I am to venture upon the theory, I must hesitate. No one since the beginning has found the truth. But we may guess at it; that is, if we are men with the unaccountable instinct of Mr. Williams. I have instinct, too. That is why we have come to-day."

Mr. Henderson met us at the door, and we entered again upon the animated scene which had so appealed to me upon the preceding afternoon. In costume, and more seriously engaged, the actors were tumbling about the sawdust-strewn interior.

"We are to have a regular rehearsal," said Mr. Henderson. "I am glad you came."

We went down the row of cages. The animals were sluggish, having just been fed. The huge lions were slumbering in their grated dens, but a cluster of monkeys were chattering noisily on their perches.

"The Empress is quiet," said Conners, looking towards the cage where the striped body was seen prostrate and with outstretched limbs upon the floor.

"Wasn't it wonderful!" cried Mr. Henderson, in triumphant allusion to the feat of the day before. "Tommy is sure the greatest thing with a show. Think of a man handling a tiger, and she a female

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born out of captivity! The people won't believe it!"

"If she displays the temper we saw yesterday, they may," said Conners. "I trust Signor Tommaso will reconsider his determination to be familiar."

"You saw," replied the proprietor, confidently. "That man's a hypnotist."

"He should try his powers on his wife," laughed Conners. "She seems to have escaped the spell."

Mr. Henderson shrugged his shoulders.

"He tries his rod on her—same as on the beasts. There she is now," and he pointed across the wide building to where the woman stood. She was with a group clustered about the stand where the musicians were tuning their instruments. "Tommy 'll be along after a while, and exercise the lions. It's best to have them well in hand before we take the road."

We wandered down the line, watching the acrobats. They leaped from spring-boards, turning somersaults on a mattress, and finally two men performed on a trapeze above a net. Miss Demorist, in fetching tights and the spangled dress of yesterday, rode her pony about the ring. She threw us a kiss, tossing her curls and winking boldly. Mr. Henderson frowned his disapproval, but she was undismayed.

"There's the trouble," he growled. "It's one of the things a circus man has to contend with. You

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get a lot of miscellaneous people together, the women mixed up with the men, and they grow too damned free. She'll keep Tommy's wife on edge until he knocks 'em both out, and then I'll get another lady rider. We can't spare Tommy after yesterday. Animal Kings are rare."

"Here he is," said Conners, and Signor Tommaso came from the dressing-room.

He was in trunks and tights, and carried his gilt wand. His heavy face was flushed, and as he stopped to greet his wife, near the musicians, I noticed that he staggered slightly.

"He drinks," said Conners. "A bad habit in an Animal King."

Mr. Henderson laughed.

"A bad habit in any man about a show, but too many has it. But his act don't require steady muscles, and liquor helps the nerves."

I was not so sure of that, and watched Signor Tommaso attentively as he crossed the space between the ropes and approached us.

"Good-afternoon, gents," he said, and his eyes, bright in spite of his indulgence, betrayed no recognition of Conners antedating the meeting of the preceding afternoon. "You have come to see me conquer the Empruss?"

"You are going in?" asked Mr. Henderson, his tone expressing his admiration, and adroitly seductive.

"Am I? You just wait! But first I'll look after the lions."

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He bent under the ropes and approached the cage. Regarding them an instant, he passed to the rear, and, letting the door ajar, sprang in with a lightness which surprised me. An attendant with an iron bar closed the opening quickly.

Stepping amid the heavy brutes, he prodded them with his wand. They rose lazily with a succession of sonorous coughs.

"Hand me a whip," he commanded, and one was passed to him through the bars.

Laying about him, he set them in motion, laughing as their heavy bodies tumbled one above the other. He set them upon their haunches in the corners and stood off in triumph.

"How's that?" he asked.

The attendants and actors now gathered idly about. The scene was interesting, and I watched it eagerly. I had never before seen such an assembly out of order and in relaxation.

Satisfied with his work, Signor Tommaso pushed open the door and leaped to the ground, coming again in front.

He walked down the roped space, followed by the admiring throng, and halted at the cage of the tigress. She rose as we approached, standing poised upon her great fore-limbs. Her yellow eyes, with a tint of green, gleamed upon the spectators. The black stripes expanded under her heavy breathing, and the tuft at her tail's end twitched nervously. She was silent.

Signor Tommaso

Signor Tommaso thrust his arm through the bars and pushed away the savage head, and then turned to the ropes.

His attitude was admonitory and authoritative. Conners stood near him, and his dark face was serious with interest. He was quiet and alert.

"You see, friends," said the Animal King, in cumbrous dignity, "I ain't actually tried the Empruss. But she knows me. Every day in passing I give her a good word, and yesterday ain't the first time I knowed I could hold her. The old girl has smiled at me every time I have come under this roof, and I tipped her the wink last afternoon before I ventured on liberties. And she a wild thing, too, and never out of the woods until they netted her full grown somewheres in Asia. They say she clawed a man nearly up on shipboard, which shows how he lacked the know. I'm the only man living that's got it."

He looked about to see that his words had made due impression.

"You'd better not go in, Finn," said his wife.

Signor Tommaso scowled.

"I don't want any lip from you," he growled. "Where's Demmy?"

Miss Demorist, whip in hand, brought her spangled person into view.

The Animal King greeted her appearance with a grin of satisfaction.

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"You must see this," he said, "Don't crowd," he admonished, as the throng drew together.

He dodged quickly behind the wagon and laid his hand on the gate.

"Hold on!" shouted Henderson. "Get back there, you fellows, and mind the door."

Signor Tommaso laughed as two men followed him. Then he released the bolt.

The tigress turned about slowly, facing him as he sprang through the opening. I looked fearfully to see her strike him at once, but the door shut quickly behind him and he stood within.

The great beast was motionless. A sharp sound escaped from the auditors as the suspense ended in a sigh of relief.

The man moved slowly. He laid his whip and wand upon the floor of the cage and bent forward. He passed his hand over the huge head, and let his fingers rest upon the white fur of the throat, fondling it gently. The tigress arched her back, emitting a succession of low whines. Then she purred like a great cat. He pushed her backward, kneeling beside her and kneading the skin above the ribs. Her furry tongue came forth, licking his knees, and he lifted her head, scratching it sharply. The scene was horrible.

"Ho, ho, old girl!" he said, lying down and resting his head in the flank of the great forearm. "We're lonely, eh? They feed you all right, but they ain't friendly. They give you the end of the

Signor Tommaso

bar when you are restive. Shall we sleep? No? Then we'll play a bit and have our nap afterwards."

He leaped erect, and, seizing the yellow body in his arms, sought to draw the beast up. Great as was his strength, he could not move her. She lashed him with her tail, and, rolling over, beat him off with her paws. The talons were drawn in, and she struck with the pad of her foot.

"Get up!" he said, releasing the folds of skin and grasping her ears.

She sprang away and leaped the length of the cage. He dodged from side to side, striking her with his hand. Wild in the novelty of this new companionship, her eyes blazed. She threw herself upon her back, rolling against his legs and fighting gleefully. He tossed her over again, and she sprang about, now crouching with her head between her expanded paws. Her body was swollen, and its colors grew brighter. Again he struck her, and she danced away. She was wanton in her gambols and mad with play. She was a puppy, eager with delight.

Signor Tommaso drew off, and, panting with his exertions, leaned against the bars. The perspiration stood in beads upon his heavy face. He grinned at the cheer which burst from the throng.

"What's that?" he said, turning. "You are growling, old girl! None of that, or I'll try the whip!"

The tigress rolled over, doubling like a ball at

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his feet. The furred tongue came forth again, and its rough surface stripped the heavy silk from his thighs.

"Down!" he cried, angrily, pulling the rent together. "Lie down!"

He scowled as he struck at her, and she shrank back. Under his eyes she sneaked away, crawling to a corner. He stood above her for an instant, spurning her with his foot, and came again to the bars. She lay quiet and subdued behind him.

He looked at us in triumph, his chest heaving and his face pressed against the grating.

"You see?" he said, as he gripped the iron with his hands. "Where's Demmy? Come up, lass. I'll see that the beast keeps away."

Miss Demorist danced forward fearlessly. The power of the Animal King was supreme.

"What did I tell you?" he said, looking down on her. "Oughtn't the wife to be proud of me? And she jealous, too. Come closer lass, and I'll take you in with me."

"He can do it," said Henderson.

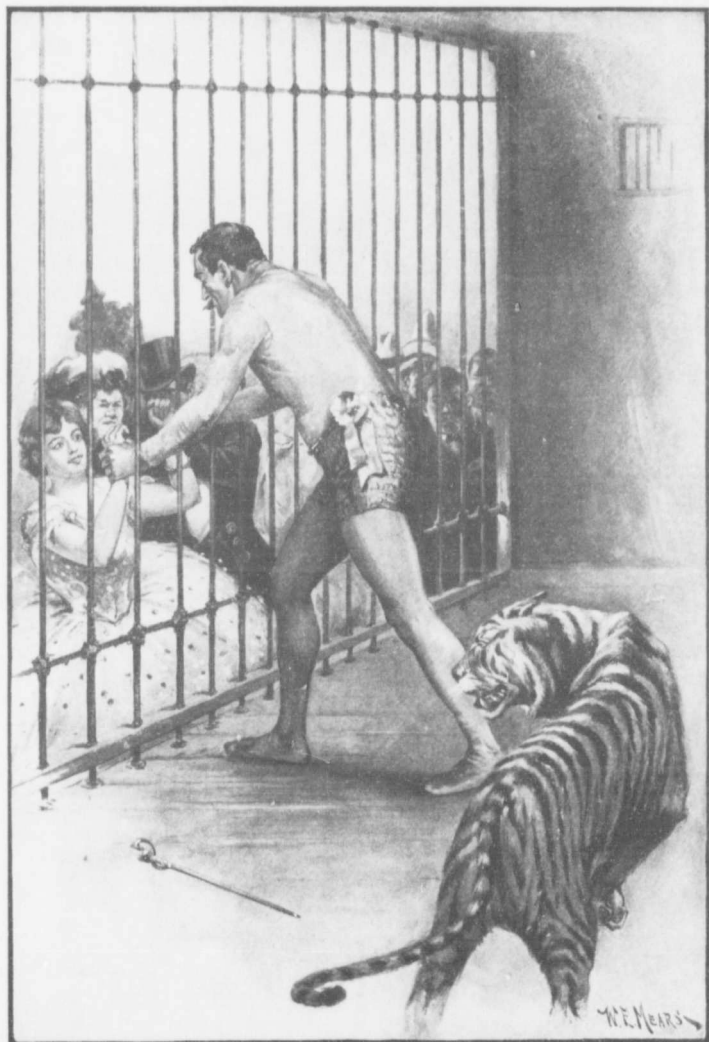
"No, he won't," laughed the girl.

Connors swung about with the speed of light.

"Quick!" he said, so sharply that Henderson, at his side, was startled. "Is there a pistol here?"

I was speechless before the scene that followed, rigid like a statue and incapable of motion.

Signor Tommaso had seized the hand of the girl



"AS HER WHITE ARM SLIPPED IN BEFORE HIM HE STOOPED
OVER IT"



Signor Tommaso

in his huge fingers and drew it through the bars. As her white arm slipped in before him he stooped over it. Drunken with excitement and the exertions through which he had passed, he fastened upon it with his lips.

The cage rocked under the bolt that struck it. With a roar of fury the tigress leaped forward, and the Animal King collapsed as the yellow mass overwhelmed him. The long fangs sank into his bull neck, and I heard the bones crack in those terrible jaws. The girl fell back, and the place echoed with the roars which answered the scream of the tigress.

I could not shut my eyes. The man became a mass of quivering flesh rapidly and miserably torn apart. Teeth, limbs, and claws that worked incessantly were merciless.

Circus people are a ready people, and, though the women fled, the men fought madly. Bar after bar was pushed through the grating, and Henderson emptied his pistol through the bars. The Empress was beaten to the floor. The remnants of Mr. Finn Williams, who had a way with women, were severally rescued.

Scarcely able now to stand, and sick with the spectacle, I leaned against the entrance of the warehouse as we made ready to depart.

Mrs. Williams passed slowly to her quarters, following the procession that had gone ahead.

"You needn't sympathize none with me," she

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said to a man who offered a frightened word of consolation. "I knew he would go up against the wrong lady sometime. He ain't pretty now, and the Demorist girl can have him."

VIII

The Corpus Delicti

IT was early in December. The snow lay white upon the house-tops and the weather was calm but threatening. The busy street-cleaning brigade had cleared Broadway of its mottled covering, and traffic was active in the narrow thoroughfares; but in the studio of LeDroit Conners the electric lights burned early, for the heavens were full of clouds. These were days of idleness with him and with me, and we sat together that afternoon, smoking numberless cigars in the apathy that enveloped us.

He had done nothing since the case of the Ambassador; nor had he again alluded in any way to the story which he had seen fit to tell me of the Hudson Bay agent and his Indian wife, which had taken such a hold upon my interest. In some manner the subject matter related to the mysterious picture upon the wall—the Indian face, amid the collection of fair women in their rich frames; of this I was certain. I had not failed to note his frequent allusions to the Indian characteristic, which he cited with a mixture of pride and gloom. His dark face was a

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continual study, and his rare faculty for calculation and deduction still kept alive my wonder. The name Connors was Irish, and yet I had discovered but little humor in his moods, and only a buoyancy and lightness of philosophy suggested his right to such a parentage. Our intimacy continued close, but his confidence had stopped at any allusion to his past. His temperament was not morose, but sad, rather, and regretful. He was so much a detective that I came to fancy that his interest in crime had a closer connection with his personality than I dared to think. I put the impression aside as unworthy of me and ungenerous to him, yet the idea would force itself upon me. His meditative disposition, his enduring soberness, his reticence, and his avoidance of women, though so fitted to attract them, puzzled me. I recalled his ease of manner when in their company, and knew that he was unembarrassed and that he could even charm; but the mention of my wife or the suggestion of a visit to my home set his eyes in vacancy and changed the topic of our conversation. I knew him incapable of any guilt, so that I found myself wondering whether he had been falsely accused of some crime in the past and had extricated himself by those matchless powers which enabled him to detect the guilt of others. Here, I fancied, might be the key to his character and a beginning of that inclination which incited him so much to an interest in the sinister characteristics of others.

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He sat in an easy-chair, his legs crossed after his familiar fashion, smoking quietly. My position was near the window upon one of his luxurious sofas. I could look out at the white prospect of the house-tops below as they stretched away towards the river.

"What have you there?" he asked, as I let a book fall from my listless hand to the floor.

I stooped to recover it.

"One of your novels, which I found lying beside me. I glanced through the opening chapter, which deals with the perversity of women. French, and deceptive, which I always resent in a book. Woman is a creature of devotion in my creed. You, however, seem to have so little desire for association with the sex that I have quite despaired of you. Both my wife and her mother bear me a grudge for my failure to entice you to my house."

"They are very good to think of me," he replied, slowly. "If they continue in that mind, I may find the courage to visit you sometime. What a sky we have!" And he turned his glance towards the window. "A Hudson Bay day, dull and lowering."

"Paris, Persia, Africa, and the Far East to choose from," I said, "and you have mentioned the Canadian North! Have you travelled entirely throughout the world?"

"Yes," was his laconic answer.

"Did you pick up your education en route? You

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are a young man yet, and there must have been some days of school."

"Oh, one can travel far and fast in this age," he replied, "and a little time suffices for all accessible spots. One need only be restless, as I was, and have the means. You see, I had to suppress a young manhood of very strong emotion, and much change and discipline were necessary before I was subjugated. Philosophy and a good father helped."

It was his first reference to any kinship or family tie.

"He is dead," continued Conners, "and since that event I have been a changed man. *He* was my education, almost wholly. The foundation was laid at an Indian school out West. I finished a college course in Germany under protest."

I looked at him with eyes that spoke my astonishment.

"An *Indian* school?"

"An Indian school," he repeated, slowly. "My youth demanded congenial associations. But my father was white enough, my dear fellow, and my mother put color to shame if color be a question of virtue. The thought of all men that it is has made me a rebel and an outlaw to the society of men and women."

I did not reply; I only listened.

"You have spoken of the devotion of women," he went on. "Let me speak of it, too. I once told you of a man who was an agent of the Hudson

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Bay Company in the far Northwest—the one who was married by a priest to an Indian woman who came to his post one day during the trading season. You recall it, of course? The man was a fugitive from something, not dishonorable, and the woman was the child of an Indian of the better class. The man was of striking person, refined and of gentle birth; the woman was a savage, except for a brief period in a convent school at Montreal. It was not a question of love in a conventional sense. They came together like two atoms under the laws of magnetism. Isolated, remote, they were moved by the primal impulse. She saw the great stature and fair face of the Celt with the eyes of a woman untutored, and he noted the fierce passion he had awakened. It was a meeting of two lonely and unfettered natures in the wilds; each felt the sincerity of gratitude. The priest went on his way to perform his work of hardship and self-denial amid the voyageurs and trappers about the lakes, and the Indian father, contented with the disposition of his daughter, joined a band of hunters that journeyed northward. The season of trading over, the nomadic gathering about the post dispersed and left it to its interval of solitude and inaction. The woman remained with her husband and the few half-breed attendants who made up his retinue at the company's quarters. Time had few duties and allowed the trader leisure to become acquainted with his wife. That uncouth honeymoon is some-

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thing to think about, in the light of what took place thereafter; it is a study in the philosophy of the heart for those who knew the man when it was over. The days and nights are long in that country. They sat by the great fires of the quarters, they wandered over the wide expanse of snow-plain lighted by the phenomena of the Northern heavens. The woman was not one to be shielded or protected—she had known the elements from childhood. It was probable that a sense of majesty entered her awakened soul amid the plains, mountains, and waters of that country at such a time; it is probable that the man thought little of his past, and found nothing to regret in his association with a woman who loved him as a panther loves her young. His very presence brought her joy. His heavy foot-fall upon the rough boards of the company hall thrilled her as a strain of music to refined ears. The months passed. Life was daring in such a country. The winter alone is ominous.

“One afternoon the man went to visit a bear-trap on a stream which flowed into the lake some miles from the post. It was a trivial errand of each day. Often the woman went with him, but to-day she remained at home. He went alone, as the attendants at the post had their various duties elsewhere; but as the day waned, not in change but hours, the woman stifled the first faint pangs of illness she had ever known and went in search of him. She was not uneasy, but his prolonged absence was unusual, and

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she thought he had perhaps secured a prize and needed help. She told the Indian women who were her servants that when the trappers returned they were to follow, if she and her master still remained away. She left the post; the men returned in due time and gathered about the fires. They were hungry, and the absence of the master and his wife was not noticeably marked as they busied themselves with their evening meal. But the dogs in the hall grew restless and howled, and then the servants recalled the words of their mistress. They spoke of her command, and the men, seizing their guns, set forth upon the trail. It led them over a snowy expanse, and through a winding gorge, declining to where the ice had gathered in great masses in the stream where it entered the wide lake. At this point the banks were fringed with trees that set back towards the forest. As they neared the place where they knew the master had set his trap, sinister sounds, which each recognized, made them turn grave faces one to the other; they quickened their steps, each bending forward now under a strange sense of excitement. They heard the howling of wolves and could see their lank forms gliding about the underbrush with unusual movement. Dashing upon the scene, they fired volley after volley to scatter the hungry creatures that seemed half mad with an eager rage. Then they gathered about the great trap of logs.

“It had been empty when the master reached it,

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and, badly set, had fallen by some action of the wind. He had crawled under it, his massive shoulder supporting the trigger, to lift the framework again into position. A false movement in the snow brought it down, and it had pinioned his leg fast between the logs. He had struggled until, weak and exhausted, he had little strength left, and now the wolves gathered. They have an instinct that teaches them of such a time, and they knew the man was helpless. He fought them off, but their numbers were augmented; they were no longer frightened by his shoutings; hunger overcame fear. The corner of the trap was lifted by a log that had fallen under it, and through this aperture they had access to him; within the great frame of logs he had been safe, otherwise. It was at this moment his wife reached him. He himself said little of it afterwards, but they knew what had happened. With a rage as great as theirs she had fought them off alone. Afraid to leave him an instant to go for help, even though she might have done so, yet powerless to continue a struggle that would be futile, she had crawled into the orifice of the trap, blocking with her body the only entrance to him. She paid no heed to his frenzied words of protest. She told him merely that help would come, and, clasping with her free hand his numb fingers as they both lay in the snow, she fought away the ravenous beasts with the other. They found her dead, her arm devoured to the shoulder.

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He was bleeding and unconscious, and only the child showed signs of life."

"The child!" I exclaimed, starting up from under the monotone of his voice.

"Yes," he replied; "the child—that is how I was born."

"But your father lived, you said?" I observed, finally.

"Yes, he lived until I had grown to manhood. I will tell you of him sometime, and also of the affection and care he lavished on me. At present, I fancy, you have had enough."

I sat thinking. Here was an answer to many conjectures. It was little wonder that he believed in the laws of heredity and the potency of instinct. He remained silent, and, though I longed to question him, I dared not. My glance wandered about the room to fall upon his nymphs in colors, and it lingered upon the mysterious picture of the Indian face near his study door. I fancied that I understood it now, but I did not speak. Then I looked at the bust of Poe, above which swung the raven, and at the studies of the Chevalier Dupin, the idol of his fancy, wherein his deft brush had pictured the cold, calm features of a man who existed only to reason.

He had resumed his cigar, but now he took it from his lips and regarded me with a smile. He had thrown off his mood.

"How is your time?" he asked.

I put my hand to my watch.

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"No," he laughed. "I mean for the next few days. Could you prevail upon your family to spare you for so long? I have arranged a little journey to Virginia."

"Nothing would suit me better than a trip just now," I answered. "There is nothing doing in a business way until after the holidays. Where do we go?"

"To Norfolk, with perhaps a day of rest and reflection at Old Point Comfort. I have really been busy for the past two weeks, although I have been reticent. You remember Vining?"

"Of course. The young man who married Miss Maitland, up in Westchester."

"The same. Well, he has an uncle to whom he seems attached, and who is in trouble. He wrote me a letter of entreaty in which he begged for my assistance, and, really, I find that there is need of it. I got from Vining all he knew, and then sent to Norfolk for the papers—a statement from a lawyer, copies of certain testimony, and, indeed, all available information. I have been collating the facts into a form which permits me to study them.

"The uncle in question, Mr. Joseph Byrne, is a widower of about sixty years of age, who lives with his daughter Millicent and a housekeeper, on his place near Norfolk. His estate is extensive, that portion upon which is situated his residence having a frontage on the bay. He is a man in good circumstances, but by no means rich. His daughter

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is an attractive girl, and she has been quite a favorite with the young officers at Fortress Monroe, as well as with the young men of the best class of Norfolk and vicinity. She had two suitors whom she seemed especially to favor, one a Lieutenant Randall of the fort, and the other a young real-estate agent of Norfolk by the name of Edgar Holden. Holden is a nephew of a banker of that city, Jasper Holden. This uncle is a man of great wealth, a projector of trolley railways, and a person of wide influence throughout his community. He is grasping, avaricious, and a hard creditor. I do not know, as yet, why I emphasize the fact of this uncle, but his name in connection with this affair has impressed me. The father of Miss Byrne is a man greatly beloved, deeply devoted to his daughter, but possessed of a violent temper. Although this disposition has at times involved him in disputes with his neighbors, it has not sufficed to overcome the general good-will which is felt for him. For some reason he conceived a strong opposition to the attention paid his daughter by young Holden, and circumstances tended to develop this into an intense hatred. The girl exhibited some spirit, the young man persisted in his attentions, and Mr. Byrne warned him publicly to appear at his house no more; this warning was coupled with a threat to kill him if he disobeyed. Young Holden met the threat with a laugh, and that same afternoon moored his sail-boat at the Byrne dock, and, during the absence

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of Mr. Byrne, visited the house. The next day he ventured there again, and was murdered in cold blood."

"By Mr. Byrne?"

"So says the testimony. Mr. Byrne was promptly arrested, had his preliminary examination, and is now confined in the county jail under indictment for trial. Public feeling is running high, and Miss Byrne is in despair. Vining and his wife have gone down there to comfort the daughter and extend such aid as may tend to help their relative."

"I fail to see what he can do," I said, with some indignation. "The murderer seems to deserve little. What can he hope by an appeal to you?"

"I did not know, myself, until I studied the case. Jasper Holden, the uncle of young Edgar Holden, has sought a right of way over the farm of Mr. Byrne for a trolley line, and, failing to get it, resorted to condemnation proceedings. His men went upon the premises and remained an unusual time, as Mr. Byrne asserted, tearing up a valuable woodland and demolishing a racing-barn and speed-track. Then the right of way was abandoned and the line tended elsewhere, but Holden still endeavored to hold that portion of the farm along which the line was projected. He caused the records to be searched and bought an adverse title; then he threatened ejectment proceedings. These things are the worst that can happen for making

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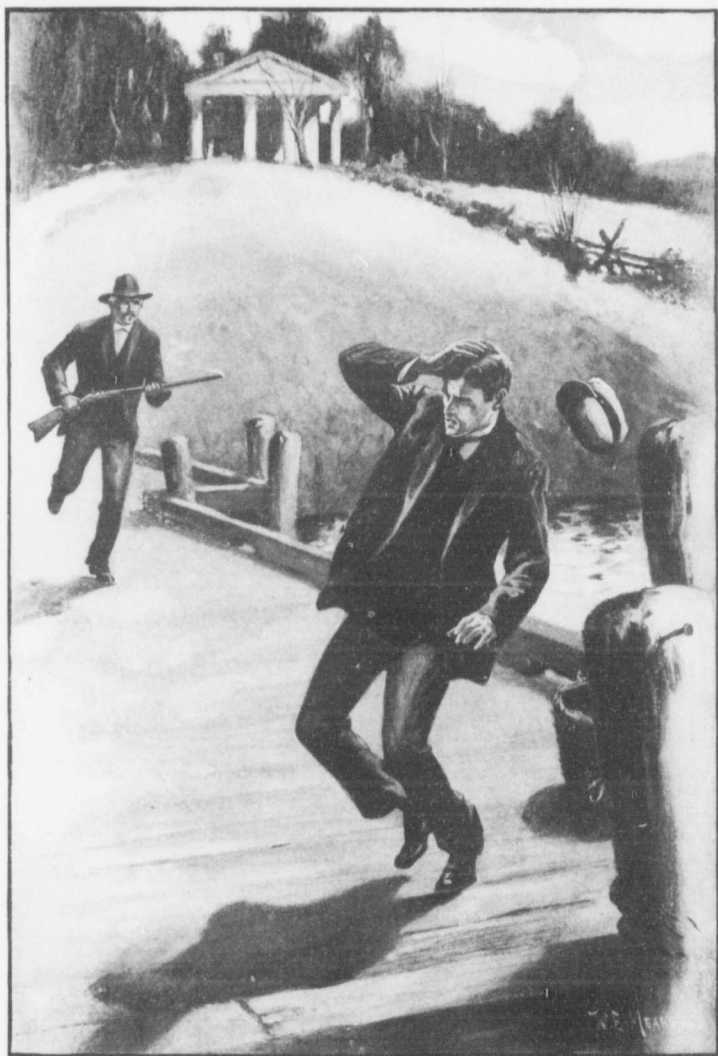
bad blood in a country community, and Mr. Byrne was wild with rage."

"They scarcely justified the murder of the young man," I said.

"Certainly not, but the difficulty lies in the fact that the old man denies the killing. He asserts his innocence with every show of grief, particularly so since a witness against him is his daughter. Two other equally disinterested people claim to have seen the murder. One is Lieutenant Randall, and the other is a boy of good character who was hunting squirrels near the lake. Upon the afternoon in question Mr. Byrne left his house, and, taking his gun, went into the woods. He stated that his mission was to seek a hawk that had been hovering over his hen-roost. Shortly after his departure young Holden was seen approaching the house. He came up the walk from the bay, moving leisurely until he observed Lieutenant Randall in company with Miss Byrne in the front yard, at which he turned and retraced his steps. The young people recognized him. Miss Byrne had just learned of the quarrel and her father's threat from her companion. She desired to express her regret to Mr. Holden, and begged him to heed her father's injunction. She said as much to Lieutenant Randall, and they followed Mr. Holden down the walk. They saw him pause at the dock to speak to the boy who is the other witness. This greeting lasted for an instant only. The boy proceeded on his way,

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and Mr. Holden turned towards his boat. As he stooped over a rope which was wound about a mooring-post, a gun was discharged, and Mr. Byrne emerged from a cluster of bushes near the path and ran towards the dock. Young Holden had thrown up his hands with a cry and fallen upon his face. The murderer rushed upon him, and apparently, overmastered by passion, discharged a second barrel into his body. Miss Byrne fainted at the sight, and as Lieutenant Randall, overcome with horror, bore her to the house, he looked back to see the murderer drag his victim to the boat and cast loose the fastening; the boy testified to this also. Three hours later the boat was found, with drooping sails, drifting down the bay; the anchor was gone and the thwarts bloody. Meantime a telephone had summoned a doctor for Miss Byrne, and several excited neighbors had gathered at the place. An officer followed shortly, and, when Mr. Byrne appeared, promptly arrested him. He was flushed, wearied, and his clothing showed traces of blood. He appeared astonished, asserted his innocence, and declared that his walk had been long; that having shot the hawk of which he went in quest, its fluttering had scattered the telltale drops upon his clothing. Men went to the spot where the bird was alleged to have been killed, but found no trace of its body nor any feathers to give color to the old man's tale. Miss Byrne has been ill since, Lieutenant Randall despondent, and the boy witness frightened,



"THE MURDERER RUSHED UPON HIM"



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but resolute and assertive. The case is regarded as complete."

"Why, surely," I said. "Was the body of young Holden found?"

"No," replied Conners, with a smile. "The authorities say that it is resting at the bottom of the bay, safely weighted down by the missing anchor."

"Have they dragged for it?"

"Impossible. The area and depth make such a task hopeless."

"Scarcely necessary," I observed. "What remains?"

"What the lawyers call the corpus delicti," said Conners, reflectively. "It seems that in a case of murder the body of the victim with life extinct must be absolutely viewed by competent witnesses."

"I understand perfectly," I remarked, sarcastically. "I once served on a jury. After the murderer had dragged his victim on the boat, the young man revived, climbed the mast, and, with the wings of the hawk Byrne claims to have shot, flew away to some health-restoring spot where he is now recovering from the effect of his wounds. A fine thing, the law! Its question of a reasonable doubt ought to acquit the old rascal. That is where your usefulness comes in."

"Scarcely," said Conners, with a smile. "But the death must be proven. The law seeks to exclude every possibility of error in that respect."

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But the redeeming feature of this affair is the denial of Mr. Byrne in the face of the almost established fact. Again, his character has been that of absolute truth."

"Men who do that sort of thing in rage do not generally confess. They become frightened and plead either innocence or self-defence."

"Sometimes," replied Conners. "But one incident that has excited indignation in others has made me thoughtful. It was the brutality of the second shot."

"Are these all the details?"

"Yes."

"Then his neighbors know best," I said. "He is guilty."

"It looks so," returned Conners, "but, like the law, I want the corpus delicti proven. I have picked out the only points in the case which look to serve Mr. Byrne, and have acted on them. We can now go and see him."

"What have you done?"

"I have sent a skilled engineer down to examine the detail of the right of way over his farm, and put an advertisement in the Norfolk paper. I have put the advertisement where Mr. Jasper Holden will be sure to see it. If I am mistaken here, Mr. Byrne's case is hopeless."

The hour was late, and I arose from my seat.

"I shall count upon your company," said Conners.

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"Surely," I replied. "We should enjoy the trip whether you are successful or not."

"You mean whether Vining's relative is guilty or not," he observed, with a laugh. "We must learn the truth, at all events."

I laughed also, but he saw the doubt in my mirth and made no further comment. This was a case that differed from all the others with which I had seen him deal. The commonplace and vulgar brutality of the murder was revolting. The crime was crude, bare, and devoid of any feature of sympathy. But the skill of Conners might find the body where others had failed, with, perhaps, an unknown provocation to mitigate the offence. I fancied that he even admitted my conclusions to be just, and that only his desire to befriend young Vining was responsible for his zeal and labor in the matter.

On the next afternoon we took passage on a Dominion steamer, and the day following reached Norfolk.

"Wait here," said Conners when we had engaged rooms at the hotel and made due deposit there of our light luggage. "I have a conveyance to hire for a trip to the Byrne place, and an errand of no importance of which I will tell you upon my return. You might look about the town for half an hour; the place is quaint and interesting."

I went with him to the street, and we parted at the entrance to the hotel. I wandered down the

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old-fashioned walks and enjoyed the weather, which was delightful after the snows which we had so lately left. But an hour passed before Connors rejoined me. I had returned to our rooms, and he entered quickly, with a nervous eagerness unusual to him.

"A spirited team will be here presently," he said, "and we are promised a drive over an enchanting Southern road."

"The advertisement of which you spoke?" I asked, indicating some newspapers which protruded from the pocket of his overcoat.

"Two advertisements," he replied, with a laugh. "I will show them to you later; but at present I will not tax your good opinion of me by risking a mistake."

A negro messenger from the office knocked upon the door to announce that our carriage was waiting, and, following his lead, we passed down the stairs.

Our carriage was the open type, and the drive was charming. The Southern air was exhilarating at this season, and I breathed it with a sense of joy. Connors felt something of my mood, and his face bore an expression of easy confidence. Evidently the matter of his task rested lightly upon his mind.

"This region ought to be conducive to health and an open mind," I observed, as the carriage sped along. "Why is it that your brutal crimes are invariably enacted in the country?"

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"Are they?" he asked.

"I am surprised that an authority like you should question it," I replied. "What do the papers tell us? The farm-hand revolts and butchers a whole family, father and babe alike. Your rural criminal has a mania for that sort of thing; he seems to prefer an axe. The country assassin conceals himself by the roadside with a shotgun loaded with buck-shot. There are your Tennessee and Arkansas feuds that involve generations. What is there in this contact with the soil?"

"Something worth a thought," he replied. "I will discourse on it sometime at length. Contact with the soil seems to give emphasis to human nature—it may make great criminals as it makes strong men; but isolation has more to do with the question of brutal crime. It is the same with murders at sea. Persistent thought develops, but persistent thought in solitude tends to insanity. I have a theory which we have not the leisure to discuss now. But your word, brutality, is a term. A criminal is as wicked who murders a family by poison as he who slays them with a cleaver. There is no refinement in crime."

"I was thinking of the case you have in hand," I said.

"Do not let that worry you," he laughed. "I see you are prejudiced."

"I sympathize with Vining," I said, "but I confess to a prejudice against a man who could fire

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that second shot of which you spoke. The term brutality was yours in that connection."

"True," he said. "And I repeat that it was significant."

"I have one satisfaction," I retorted. "You will be able to do the criminal little good."

"Why?"

"You have nothing to work upon; the facts are all known, and admit of but one construction. Every reasonable theory shows murder plain and simple."

"It is a hard case," he observed, "but the truth can be found out if we can lay our hands on the key. There are some crimes, however, impossible of detection."

"That is a surprising admission from you," I said. "What are they?"

"Crimes that are scarcely worth detection—crimes that are made so by law; those which involve but little moral turpitude, although they may involve great interests. Smuggling, for instance. Diamonds come into this country by the quart. One man of my acquaintance manufactured a wax olive, the pit of which was a precious stone. Properly bottled, with one to the dozen, they were consigned in Italy, and the officers might have destroyed a hundred cases in vain. No ingenuity suffices here; it takes exact knowledge. I will tell you of this also, some day."

A brace of rabbits in the road ahead diverted

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his attention, and the conversation changed. The question of human dereliction was dismissed from our minds until we drew up before the gate of a low, rambling dwelling which sat back in a yard of green. A stone walk between a row of dwarf cedars led to the entrance, which was shaded by a front veranda.

The noise of our arrival brought Vining to the door, and he came down the walk to meet us.

"It was good of you to come," he said to Conners, "and you, also," he continued, addressing me.

"I do not think I could work without him," said Conners, with a laugh, laying his hand familiarly upon my shoulder. "He is an inspiration to proper thought; at least, he is good company. How is Mrs. Vining?"

"She is well, but much distressed. We are really uneasy about poor Millicent. There was a scene when Uncle Byrne came home."

"Is he here?" asked Conners.

"Yes, he was released this afternoon. The judge accepted my bond, and there was but little danger that he would run away. Even Mr. Holden did not oppose it."

"Mr. Jasper Holden?"

"Yes, he told the state's attorney that he felt no personal animosity towards Mr. Byrne, although he had loved his nephew dearly; but he claims to be a Christian man, and he stated his belief that Mr. Byrne would be present to face the terrible

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charge, no matter what the result might be to him. He even expressed his intention of coming out here to-night."

"What for?"

"Well, he says that he feels that he is in a measure to blame, himself. It was his controversy with Mr. Byrne that inflamed him, and brought about the state of mind that resulted in the murder. It really seems to be a noble act. I did not oppose it, as it is likely to affect the community well and operate in favor of my uncle; that is what our lawyer said, anyway. He told us to receive him politely and with consideration."

Connors smiled, but said nothing, and a moment later we entered the house.

Vining conducted us into a large apartment on the ground-floor, a family sitting-room after the fashion of Southern country-houses. An old man sat before a fire of logs that burned on the wide hearth, for, although the air outside was bracing, it was chilly within doors. He rose, and two ladies who were with him, as we entered. One was Mrs. Vining, whom we knew already, and following her greeting I had time to observe the daughter. She was a slender young woman of attractive appearance, but her beauty was marred by evidences of much weeping. The demeanor of her father was sullen and despairing.

"How are you, gentlemen?" he said, in response to our formal words. "Mr. Vining insisted that

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you could be of some service to me, but I don't see how. When my own daughter is a witness against me, I've little to say. I presume she means to tell the truth, but I don't understand it."

"We will understand it for you, Mr. Byrne," said Conners. "Let us have the whole story."

The old man responded at once. He talked rapidly, giving emphasis to each petty detail of his actions during the day of the difficulty; it had been constantly upon his mind. One circumstance grieved him, and he repeated it over many times, hurt, apparently, that his word was doubted; his neighbors did not find the hawk he had flung away; but a prowling fox could have captured the body and the wind blown away all traces of the feathers. In spite of this, his statement only corroborated the facts as we had heard them. He could tell us nothing new.

Conners questioned his daughter. The girl was tearful once more, but she told the story as he had told it to me. She had seen her father shoot young Holden down, and then she remembered nothing more; she had fainted. When she recovered consciousness the neighbors had arrived, and her father had been arrested. Lieutenant Randall had told her of the crime. She was agitated, but positive; like her father, she could not understand it, but she had spoken the truth. He had never taught her to do otherwise.

Conners could elicit nothing more. Supper was

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served shortly after the examination was concluded, and eaten in gloomy silence. Then we went into the yard for our cigars. Connors walked through the orchard alone, while Vining and I talked together. He joined us, however, when the noise of an arrival proclaimed a visitor, and we entered the house together. Mr. Holden had arrived.

He was already in the family-room and had spoken to Mr. Byrne and the ladies. Mrs. Vining had met him at the court-house, and Vining introduced us as his friends. Our presence meant nothing to him. A country dwelling might shelter many visitors.

"I thought it my duty to call, Mr. Byrne," he said, speaking with business precision, but in a voice that was singularly hard and unsympathetic. "We have both lived in this county so long that I felt I owed something to you. I have only the evidence that is known to all the community, and personally I do not wish to urge it against you. It is sufficient for the state to do that. I am grieved for my poor nephew, but I am not the less sorry for you."

I observed him closely, and I saw that Connors did likewise. The banker was tall and spare, with an iron face and gray hair. His eyes were piercing, and suggestive of no pity. As I looked at him I wondered the more at his presence.

"I never killed Edgar Holden," said Mr. Byrne.

"I have always thought you incapable of such a

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crime," said the banker—"any crime, I might add. I have come out to tell you so. You were wrong to threaten him, but I can understand how you might be goaded to that. I have felt for you, and for Miss Millicent also."

The girl sat looking into the fire and said nothing. A strange and ludicrous thought entered my head, and I fancied I had fathomed the reason for his presence. I could have laughed aloud as the idea shaped itself in my brain. This old rascal was unmarried, either a bachelor or a widower. He wanted the girl himself, and saw an opportunity to win her. His nephew was dead, Lieutenant Randall must be in the old man's disfavor, and by playing the friend in need he might win a place of gratitude and the pretty Millicent's hand. It was a business man's chance, and he was looking to it. I longed for an opportunity to whisper my suspicions to Conners, but his attention was centred upon the banker.

"Would you mind stating, Mr. Byrne," he said, "whether or not when you made the threat against the life of young Holden you were in earnest?"

"I generally mean what I say," replied the old man, stoutly, "and I was very angry. I know now that I should never have made my word good. But I wanted the young man to keep away, and if he had persisted in coming to the house I should have assaulted him, but not with a gun."

"Go on," urged Conners, as the old man paused.

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"I like the construction of your sentences; they ring right."

"I am glad Holden is willing to overlook our quarrel, in view of the trouble I am in," continued the old man, "but he was wrong to persecute me."

"I did not mean to do that, Mr. Byrne," said the banker, suavely. "I meant really to pay you a fair price for the place. In fact," and he coughed slightly, "my visit now is in part to say as much to you. Legal trials are expensive; you will need money. Mr. Vining has been generous and helpful, I know, but you are not the man to rely too much upon the charity of a relative. Let me offer you ten thousand dollars for the place?"

Mr. Byrne made no reply. He looked helplessly at Vining, who in turn looked at the banker. Resentment glowed in his face, but he caught a sign from Connors, and by an effort kept silent.

The banker's manner grew eager.

"Think of what such an offer means, Mr. Byrne," he continued. "I do not insist that you accept it now; but you might consider it. The place is not worth half so much, as you know, and I am only induced to offer it because I feel that my—perhaps my attitude brought about this terrible affair. I sympathize with your daughter, too; and I could not do you an injustice through my poor lost nephew without some effort at reparation. My conscience would be easier if I knew you had ample money for your defence."

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I saw that Conners's eyes were glittering.

"I guess that is provided for, Mr. Holden," he said, quietly. "My purpose down here was to buy the farm. I am a friend of Mr. Vining, and he wrote me to come. They needed the money for the very reasons you state, and I had some to spare. It's a nice place, here."

The banker started. His face flushed, and he looked at Conners with an expression of uncontrollable anger.

"It is beyond your power to serve Mr. Byrne in that respect, as you see," continued Conners, "but I am a business-man, and that ten-thousand-dollar offer is attractive. Would it go with me?"

The banker paused. His features resumed their wonted look of hard serenity.

"No, sir," he replied, coolly. "My purpose was, as I have said, to be of service to Mr. Byrne. What price did you pay, may I ask?"

"Seven thousand dollars," answered Conners.

I could see that Mr. Byrne was listening to this conversation with growing wonder, a feeling which the others shared. But the attention of Mr. Holden was riveted upon Conners, and the silence of Vining, together with the known purpose of our presence, prevented interruption.

"The sum you name was ample," replied the banker; "but I will pay you eight, and give two thousand dollars to Miss Millicent if she will prevail upon you to accept it."

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Connors looked at him for an instant with a glance of admiration; then his countenance underwent a change.

"That is a tempting offer," he said, slowly; "it gives me a profit and serves the purpose you have in view. It is stated, too, with the delicacy to be expected from a man of business. But, after all, the money may be squandered in the expenses of this trial. It looks, anyway, as though Mr. Byrne would be convicted."

"That is not assured," observed the banker, after a moment. "My consideration in the matter is worth a good deal to him. I loved my nephew, but he is dead, and our duty is to the living. Mr. Byrne is a good man, after all. We might prevail upon him to plead guilty to manslaughter and save the county great expense. That would be popular with the people. If I favor it, the State will consent, and we might get a pardon from the Governor. I would undertake to guarantee it. This would save expense to Mr. Byrne also. The trouble over, and the farm sold, he could seek a new community—Texas, for instance—where he might make a new experience among people of our own kind. Away from all connection with the scandal of this affair, he might have a chance for happiness. If you are his friend, you will advise it. Again, I understand Lieutenant Randall is shortly to be ordered to Texas."

As absorbed as I was in this strange conversation, I found an instant in which to laugh at my theory

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of a moment since. This man was not a lover of anything but money. He was following his purpose relentlessly; he had coveted the farm, and he would not surrender his desire. He was seeking it over the corpse of his relative, who was his heir, and into the time of trial and perplexity of this afflicted household. Manner, movement, and intonation had the ring of the dollar. He was the stuff of which money kings were made.

"You plead well, Mr. Holden," said Conners, quietly, "but your offer is too small. I will sell to you for eight thousand dollars, if you will give to Miss Byrne a hundred thousand to prevail upon me to accept it."

The banker started to his feet with a quick exclamation.

Then he resumed his seat, his face again convulsed with rage.

"The truth is," said Conners, "that I talked with an engineer at Norfolk this afternoon who has examined the right of way over which you have been having trouble. He was looking for oil, but he found coal instead, and a rich and promising vein. Coal so close to tide-water is rare, and, as you seem to know it, I think you will accept the somewhat impressive figure I have named."

The face of the banker was a study. I saw that Vining was fairly trembling with excitement.

"It would be ill - advised on Mr. Byrne's part to plead guilty to any offence at this early period,"

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Connors went on, finally, after a pause in which he had given the banker time to reflect. "I think you will agree with me when you hear my construction of an advertisement which you inserted in a Norfolk paper yesterday. Let me read it."

He drew the papers from his pocket and bent to the light upon the table. Mr. Holden was silent, and kept his gaze fastened upon him, as though fascinated. Connors read slowly, and with emphasis:

"Do not communicate by letter. Go on Saturday evening next to Parlor A, Raleigh Hotel, Washington.

"J. H."

"I beg your pardon," he continued, looking up, as he laid the paper down and unfolded a second one. "That is an advertisement inserted by me. If I used your initials, Mr. Holden, it was not entirely by accident. The advertisement which you inserted reads as follows:

"Keep away. Advertisement of yesterday bogus. Don't know what it means, but be careful. J. H."

"The fact is," continued Connors, as he laid down the paper and, drawing back, fixed his steady eyes on the banker, "I was suspicious from the first, and inserted the advertisement upon a theory. Your nephew is *not* dead, and he would have appeared in Washington at the time indicated, to meet me,

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or an agent whom I should have had there. You saw the advertisement and feared something. You did not understand what it meant, so you corrected it with one of your own. The man who fired the blank cartridge at your precious relative came with him in the boat; he was concealed in the wood near the dock at his instigation; enacted the comedy of murder as a result of your conspiracy to buy this coal vein, and was a person in your employment, directed as to every detail. Mr. Byrne's stature is a common one, and his dress and carriage easily counterfeited. The scene of rage was easily enacted, but you should have explained that Mr. Byrne, although a man of passion, was not a man of crime, and your tool should have been content with a single shot."

Mr. Holden arose to his feet white and trembling, while Mr. Byrne confronted him with an anger that took Vining to his side. Mrs. Vining went to the aid of Millicent Byrne, who had fallen back in her chair, while Conners stood before the baffled banker, smiling and triumphant.

"It is unnecessary to explain to you how I know these facts," said Conners, "or how much I know. A mind like yours must instantly suspect your accomplice; but you can call your nephew back to Norfolk without fear. Meanwhile, we will consider the matter of suppressing a charge for a conspiracy so criminal. With all your wealth you could not stand against it for an instant. I sug-

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gest that your nephew take upon himself the opprobrium of declaring it a practical joke, to get even with Mr. Byrne for the threat against his life; this, however, is only on condition that you accept my last offer. Let us hear from you to-morrow, and remember that the coal vein is as valuable as you think it; also, that your nephew's sense of humor has involved the authorities. I see that Mr. Byrne is very angry, but this time he will doubtless control himself. It will be wise, however, for you to say good-night."

The banker surveyed Conners with a look that expressed his rage and hatred.

"You are a detective officer?" he said.

"Above suspicion," replied Conners, with a smile.

Mr. Holden, without a word, turned and left the room.

I stepped to Conners's side and shook his hand. Millicent Byrne had recovered, and was hanging about her father's neck, while Vining and his wife pressed to a place beside me.

"It was not difficult, my dear fellow, in spite of your opinion," said Conners to me, when feeling had been in a measure quieted. "Mr. Byrne's assertion of innocence was utterly futile in the face of his daughter's testimony, unless his daughter was mistaken. If she and the two remaining witnesses were not mistaken, the murder was evident; but if they were wrong, there was a reason for Mr. Byrne's plea. If innocent, the murderer must have been

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another; it was a case of mistaken identity, a thing quite common. But the circumstances made it uncommon. The resemblance of the murderer to Mr. Byrne, the killing at the time and place and in accordance with the threat, the brutal and insensate rage which prompted the mutilation of the body, made the act either genuine or one of simulation. The statements as to the character of Mr. Byrne, as I had them, were not to be controverted; he was not a man of brutality, and since the murderer was not Mr. Byrne, why should it not be perpetrated by a man who much resembled him, upon Mr. Byrne's premises, and in accordance with Mr. Byrne's threat? This inquiry suggested the comedy, and, once conceived, the circumstances grouped to it; I had the key. The fact that the body was dragged to the boat was a rational effort to conceal the crime; but why conceal a crime so openly committed? Mr. Byrne might, in the heat of passion, fire the gun, but he would not do that. And yet it was to his interest to dispose of the body, and one prompted to enact such a scene would so reason. Hence, the boat was found floating down the bay with the anchor gone. If I had known of only the first proposition, I should have guessed the second. If the killing was a comedy, it was pre-arranged, and Mr. Byrne's movements were watched. The details clearly showed that the man who fired the gun, not being Mr. Byrne, must have come to the spot in the boat, properly attired and instructed as to

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his part. It was a small part, easily carried out by the most ordinary intelligence, and I saw the motive in either avarice or revenge—revenge on the part of young Holden because of his thwarted attentions to Miss Byrne, or greed in the man who was for some reason contesting for the possession of this property. From here I could follow the matter with closed eyes. I adopted the simplest method. I sent an engineer to look for signs of oil upon the property, and put an advertisement in the paper, which I felt sure would attract the attention of Mr. Holden. It did, with the result which we have seen. Jasper Holden does not know how certain I am of his guilt, but, knowing it himself, promptly confesses. He dare not do otherwise. Edgar Holden will not probably return at once, but he will make his continued existence in the flesh known to the authorities, and Mr. Jasper Holden will hasten to accept the proposition I made to him. I advise you to consider it, Mr. Byrne. The price is a good one, and you are entitled to a measure of damages. His suggestion as to Texas has its merits. It is not only a great State," and here he looked at Miss Millicent and smiled, "but Lieutenant Randall is ordered there."

He was right. Three days later, when the Vinings returned to New York, they had to tell us that Jasper Holden had accepted the proposition for the farm, and the authorities had heard from his

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nephew. They were confused as to the facts, and the banker was not inclined to enlighten them, but a motion had already been filed in court to quash the indictment, and Mr. Byrne was going to Texas.

THE END