

The
**YELLOW
LETTER**



**WILLIAM
JOHNSTON**

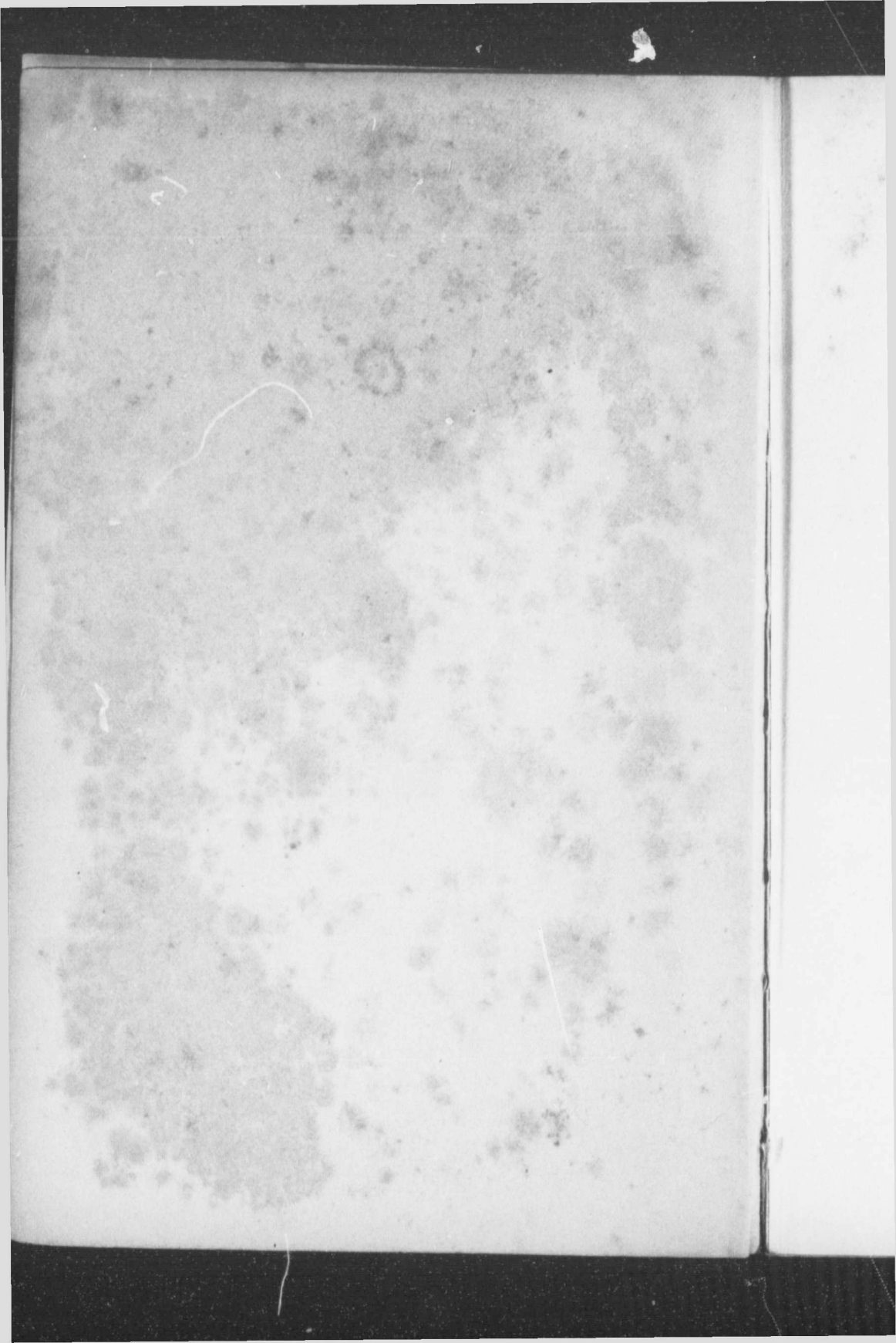
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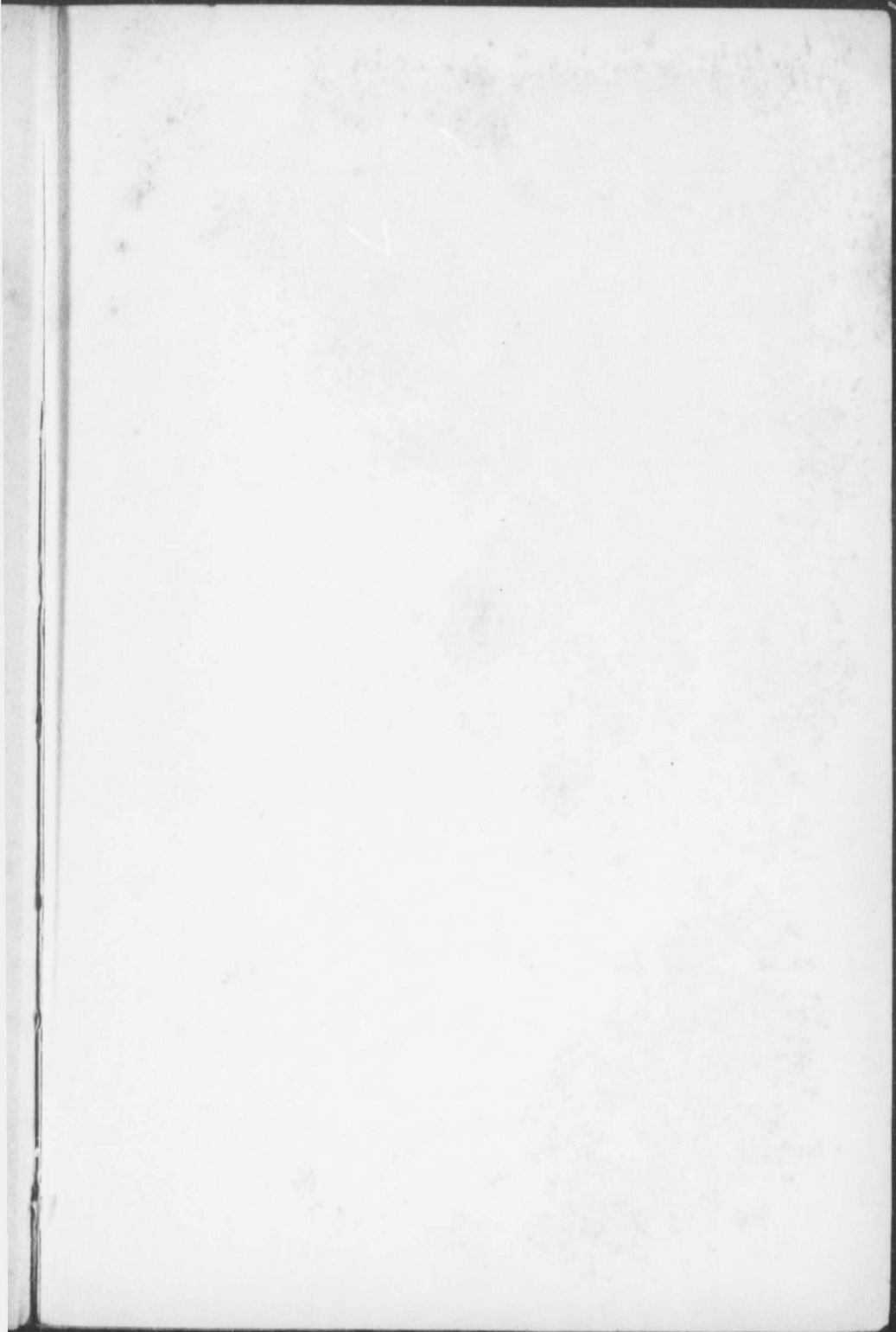
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W. C. C. S.

THE YELLOW LETTER







"Come, let's take it to Katharine at once"

MACLEOD & ALLEN, PUBLISHERS
TORONTO

ALEXANDER POPINI
WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

WILLIAM JOHNSTON
BY

THE
YELLOW LETTER



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By
WILLIAM JOHNSTON

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
ALEXANDER POPINI

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TO
MY WIFE
HATTIE BELLE JOHNSTON

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. INTO THE MAELSTROM	1
II. OUR FIRST CLUE	22
III. THE SECOND CLUE	39
IV. KATHARINE SPEAKS	60
V. TWO DISCOVERIES	75
VI. THE THIRD SUICIDE	96
VII. TWO DISAPPEARANCES	116
VIII. A NEW CLUE	137
IX. A NEW MYSTERY	158
X. WHO WAS THE THIEF?	175
XI. MORE DISCOVERIES	192
XII. THE RIDE IN THE DARK	211
XIII. THE STRANGE VIGIL	229
XIV. THE INSPECTOR EXPLAINS	247
XV. THE TORTURE	265
XVI. THE FORTY-NINTH HOUR	281
XVII. THE END OF THE MYSTERY	297

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THE YELLOW LETTER

CHAPTER I

INTO THE MAELSTROM

THEY say that coming events cast their shadows before, but certainly I had no intimation when I left my office on the afternoon of April twelfth, of the maelstrom of mystery and tragedy into which I was about to plunge. I was worried and anxious, it is true, but only as every young man is who finds himself for the first time deeply in love. There was no portent of evil, no foreshadowing of the terrible chain of events that all but destroyed my belief in my fellow-man, and left its mark so deep upon my memory that I do not believe time ever can wholly efface it.

Even now that it is all ended, and the shadow which hung so heavily over the household of my

THE YELLOW LETTER

sweetheart has been dispelled and the fiend whose devilish ingenuity brought shame and grief and wreck to so many innocent lives is paying the penalty behind prison bars—even now I shudder at the sight of anything yellow. A scrap of yellow paper vividly recalls—and I fear always will recall—the painful events of the last few weeks.

I had been waiting ever since my return from court for a telephone message that had not come—the word from Louise which I felt would decide my fate. I had written to her the night before, asking if I might go to her in the afternoon to speak on a subject of importance. I knew she would understand the object of my letter, though all that I had asked was that she would telephone me earlier than four whether she would be at home.

From my window I had watched the great hand on the Metropolitan tower clock creep slowly to twelve. As the chimes began to sing the hour of four I felt that I could bear the suspense no longer. Message or no message, I would go to her at once. Before the vibrant note of “On-n-n-e” had died away I closed my desk with a bang. As the fourth

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INTO THE MAELSTROM

stroke reverberated I stood with hat and overcoat on, my hand on the knob of my office door, hoping yet to hear my telephone ring. Impatiently I waited a minute and then dashed toward the elevator. The telephone, I learned afterward, rang almost the minute I was out of the room and Louise's voice called frantically for me, but I was not there to hear.

It was only a short walk up Madison Avenue to the home of General Farrish, the father of Louise. With the doubt that possesses every lover on such a mission as this, I walked it, now laggardly, as misgivings filled my heart, now quickening my pace as hope routed my fears. As I turned the corner into the street where the Farrish home is situated my steps were leaden. What right had I to ask Louise Farrish to be my wife? The daughter of a man worth many millions, a girl of exquisite beauty and of many accomplishments, one who could choose a husband where she willed—what right had I to hope that she would ever consent to become the wife of a struggling young lawyer such as I? To be sure, my family was of the best. With my earnings and the modest little fortune my father had left me I

THE YELLOW LETTER

would be able to provide for her. But as yet, though my prospects were bright, I amounted to nothing in my profession. It would be years before I could hope to give my wife the luxuries to which Louise Farrish had been accustomed.

On the other hand, I felt that with Louise as my wife I could do great things. I loved her with a great love. I felt that her affection and companionship would be inspiration enough for any man to conquer the world. I hoped that she loved me. I recalled the many trifles which seemed to show, at least, that she found pleasure in my society. I tried to comfort myself, too, by remembering that General Farrish was a self-made man, that when he married he was as poor as I, if not poorer. I knew that he liked me and had confidence in me. Was it then, after all, I asked myself, presuming in me to hope that Louise would listen to me and that her father would consent to her becoming my wife—yet, why had she not telephoned?

As I dragged my hesitating feet across the street I was aroused from my reverie by the rush of an automobile that all but knocked me over. With an

INTO THE MAELSTROM

angry imprecation at such reckless driving I glanced up and recognized the man who occupied it. He was standing beside his chauffeur, as if ready to leap out. It was Doctor Wilcox, a noted practitioner who attended the Farrish family, and whom I had met at their house. I plunged forward in anxious dismay as I saw the machine halt before the Farrish door and the doctor jump out and run up the steps.

My first, my only thought, was of Louise. What could have happened? She must be ill—desperately ill, as the doctor's haste suggested. Did not this explain her failure to telephone? Could it be that she was dead? What thoughts flashed through my mind I can not analyze further. I only know I reached the house but a step behind the doctor. He had hardly passed through the door when I, too, flung myself into the hall and stood there swaying, with not voice enough to ask a question of the white-faced, horror-stricken maid who had answered the doctor's ring.

"Where is she?" I heard the doctor ask as he flung his coat to the maid and started up the stairs. Before she could answer him there were hurried foot-

THE YELLOW LETTER

steps on the upper landing and Louise peered down, the anxiety in her face lessening at the welcome sight of the doctor.

I gave a little silly cry of joy and started up the stairs. Doctor Wilcox was ahead of me, three steps at a time, and, following Louise's silent direction, had disappeared in a room on the second floor, when I, with outstretched arms, approached her. I did not think to ask what had happened or who was ill or what the matter was. My only thought was one of joy that she was alive and well. What mattered if Louise was safe? And the emotion that filled me was still more intensified when she ran to me, and throwing herself into my arms, cried out:

"Oh, Harding, thank God, you've come!"

It was almost the first time she had called me by my name, certainly the first that she ever had given herself to my embrace, and I held her closely, thrilled through at the thought that it was to me she turned in time of trouble. Then, all at once, I was aroused by the opening of the door through which Doctor Wilcox had gone and the appearance of a maid, who ran along the hall.

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INTO THE MAELSTROM

"What is it? What has happened?" I asked.

"Katharine," moaned Louise, "Katharine—she has killed herself!"

For a moment I was stunned. The first thought that came to me was the impossibility of it. What place had tragedy in this happy, quiet home? Familiar enough, though I was, with deeds of violence, with self-murder as it thrust itself forward in the courts and in the lurid head-lines of the newspapers, that such a thing could intrude on the peace of this well-ordered household seemed beyond my comprehension.

"I telephoned to you, but you were not in your office," sobbed Louise, still clinging to me in the abandonment of grief.

"When did you telephone?" I asked, even under such circumstances rejoicing to learn that she had telephoned.

"Just after she did it—I don't know when it was—it seems ages ago. I couldn't—get you and—I thought—you would never come—then—then—I telephoned for the doctor and father."

Just after she did it! I had been trying to make

THE YELLOW LETTER

myself believe it must have been an accident, though from Louise's manner I feared the worst. Yet Katharine Farrish was the last person in the world of whom one would think in connection with suicide. A quiet, reserved girl of great strength of character, several years older than Louise, her dignity and her well-considered actions had led me to believe her far less emotional than her younger sister.

"It was an accident, of course," I said, though doubtfully.

"No!" gasped Louise, shuddering anew at the thought of the horror she had just witnessed. "I heard the shot and found her on the divan in her room. The revolver was still in her hand—her own revolver."

For the first time it came to me with sudden vivid force that in the elder sister's life, behind the smiling mask of reserve she always wore, was hidden some secret sorrow. I understood, now, that far-away look in her eyes. I felt there may have been—there must have been—concealed the knowledge of some mystery that impelled her to this awful deed. Yet little did I suspect whither my efforts to find

INTO THE MAELSTROM

why Louise's sister had shot herself would lead me. Little did I imagine in what a web of criminal cunning, of baffling crime, of hidden evil, I would find myself.

As I strove to soothe Louise's agitation the doctor appeared at the doorway and imperiously beckoned me. I tried to persuade Louise to wait outside, but she clung to me like a frightened child and insisted on accompanying me into the room.

"Here," said the doctor in the curt tones of authority, "I want you to help me carry her into a quieter place before I operate."

"This way," said Louise, recovering herself as soon as she saw the opportunity to be useful, "into my rooms. They are off the street and much quieter."

I saw the look with which she tried to read the doctor's face and put the question she dared not ask.

"Will she live?"

Doctor Wilcox shook his head gravely.

"She is just alive and that is all. I can not tell yet whether or not we can save her. There must be

THE YELLOW LETTER

absolute quiet. I am going to probe for the bullet and see what course it has taken. Please telephone at once for these two men. They are my hospital aides. As soon as they arrive I will operate."

As quickly as we had laid the senseless girl on Louise's bed, I telephoned for Doctor Wilcox's assistants, and was fortunate in being able to reach both immediately. Louise and the maids meanwhile were kept busy by the doctor preparing for the operation, so it fell to my lot to break the news to General Farrish when he arrived. Louise had merely told him over the telephone that Katharine had met with an accident, so he entered the house almost wholly unprepared for the shock my news gave him.

I had before seen strong men in grief, but never had I witnessed such a wave of heartrending agony as swept over the general. He came into his home erect, military, slightly perturbed, but still in manner and bearing the vigorous old soldier, fully master of his emotions. My words that told him as gently as was possible what had happened seemed to sap all his vitality. His face became ashen pale, his lips

INTO THE MAELSTROM

quivered, great tears coursed down his cheeks, his shoulders bent under the weight of his grief and he tottered as if about to fall.

While he was fond and proud of both his daughters, the elder had always been his favorite. As is often the case with fathers who have no son, Katharine had been both son and daughter to him. Since her mother's death some years ago she had been practically head of the household. It was on her that he relied for everything, and it was with her that he discussed all his business affairs. Such association between them naturally had strengthened the bonds into far more than the ordinary father-and-daughter affection.

"My poor little girl—Katharine—my little Katharine," he moaned in tones of agony that wrung my heart for him.

His first thought was to go to her, but the doctor forbade his presence in the room. I persuaded him to go to his own apartments, leaving him in the hands of his valet and promising to keep him informed as to Katharine's condition.

Deeply as I felt for him, it was of Louise I

THE YELLOW LETTER

thought most. I wanted to be with her constantly, to give her the succor of my presence. As soon as Doctor Wilcox's assistants arrived, bringing with them a nurse, Louise and I were both banished from the room. Gently I drew her into a little sitting-room, where, with the door ajar, we waited to see if our aid might be needed. Tearless sorrow now weighed heavily on her.

"Tell me everything," I said, with my arm about her. "Why did she do it?"

"I don't know," she cried out. "I can't understand it at all! There is some mystery, some terrible mystery that I can not fathom."

"When did you see your sister last?"

"We had luncheon together. She was sweet and kind, as she always was, but I could see that something was worrying her. We were to have gone shopping together this afternoon but she told me that she had an errand that would make it impossible for her to go with me. I had received your note, so I told her that it would suit me much better to put the shopping off until to-morrow. Right after luncheon she went out—where, I do not know. She

INTO THE MAELSTROM

did not use the car or call a taxi. All I know is that she was gone about two hours. When she came in I was arranging the flowers in the dining-room. I heard her enter and came out into the hall. She walked right past me without a word and went up-stairs to her own room. I ran up after her, thinking she might be ill, but just as I got to the door I heard her turn the key. I understood that she wished to be alone. About half an hour later I heard a sound like a shot and rushed up-stairs, calling to the servants. We found the door still locked and we could hear her groaning. I had the butler burst open the door and there we found her, just where she was when you saw her, still as death, with her own little revolver clutched in her hand."

"What do you suppose made her change her mind about going shopping with you?" I asked. "Did she receive any letters or telegrams to-day?"

Louise thought for a moment before answering, her slender form still shaken with silent sobbing. Gently I brushed away the tears that gathered in her eyes and drew her to me until her head was pillowed on my shoulder. I doubt that if in her

THE YELLOW LETTER

distress she noticed my action, save in the sense of comfort that it brought her. How terrible it is to see the woman that you love suffer so much and to feel powerless to do anything to help her!

"No," said Louise, "I am positive Katharine received no letter or telegram to-day except an invitation or two that we read at breakfast. We were together practically all the time until after luncheon."

"Perhaps some one telephoned to her," I suggested.

Louise did not recall any message. We summoned her sister's maid, who was crouching outside the door like a faithful animal, and put the question to her. She was in such a hysterical state that it was difficult to make her understand what we wanted, but finally she remembered that there had been a telephone call just before twelve.

"Who wanted her?" asked Louise and I together.

The girl shook her head as if bewildered.

"Think, think," I commanded. "What was the name? Who was it? If you answered the telephone, whoever it was must have given his name."

Stupidly she shook her head again.

INTO THE MAELSTROM

"Was it Mr. Crandall?" asked Louise.

Light came into Hilda's face at once.

"Now I remember," she exclaimed. "Dot was him. It was Mr. Crandall."

The name meant nothing to me and I turned to Louise for explanation. Though there were many callers at the Farrish home, I never had met a Mr. Crandall, nor had I even heard the name mentioned.

"It must have been Hugh Crandall," said Louise. "I was afraid that it was he."

Her remark puzzled me. The only Hugh Crandall I knew anything about was a prosperous young broker whom I never had met personally, though I had seen his name occasionally in connection with exchange and club affairs.

"Do you mean Hugh Crandall, the broker?" I asked.

Louise nodded, and leaning against my shoulder, told me of a chapter of the family history with which I was wholly unfamiliar. This man, it seemed, had met her sister two years before on a steamer on which they were returning from Europe. After that he had been a frequent visitor at the Far-

THE YELLOW LETTER

rish home. Katharine was very fond of him, and he had been in high favor both with the general and Louise. Though no formal announcement of an engagement had been made, Crandall was looked on by every one as Miss Farrish's most favored suitor. About three months ago, just prior to the time when I first met Louise, his visits to the house had suddenly ceased.

"I'm sure," Louise explained, "that Katharine cared for him very much. She and father had a bitter quarrel about him, though why, I never could understand, for father had always seemed to like him. There was something strange about the way his visits ended. Father came home one day at noon looking worried. He called Katharine into the library and shut the door. I could hear Katharine pleading with him and once or twice I heard both their voices raised as if in anger. When my sister came out her eyes were red as if she had been weeping. She went at once to her room and did not come down to dinner. When Mr. Crandall called that night she came down to see him, but he stayed only about ten minutes. He demanded an interview with

INTO THE MAELSTROM

father, and father refused to see him. He left the house in heat and never has been here since. For several days Katharine seemed much depressed but she volunteered no confidences and I hesitated to ask her any questions. She seemed after a while wholly to have recovered her spirits, and I was convinced that she had made up her mind to let Mr. Crandall go out of her life."

"What effect did this have on the relations between your father and sister?" I asked, seeking in vain for a motive that would have caused Katharine to attempt her life.

"None whatever that I could see. Through it all, except for that one afternoon, Katharine's attitude toward father has been most lovable. If anything, it seemed to me that she was tenderer toward him afterward than before."

"Do you suppose she has been meeting Crandall surreptitiously?"

Louise quickly and indignantly drew herself away from me.

"You don't know Katharine as I do," she said reprovingly, "or you never would have said that. She

THE YELLOW LETTER

is the soul of honor. If she was going to see Hugh she would have done so openly."

"But he telephoned her to-day," I persisted.

"That's so," admitted Louise. "And I think he must have done so day before yesterday, too. Some one called her, and she went out just as she did to-day. Generally we tell each other where we are going, and I thought it peculiar at the time that she said nothing to me."

In deep perplexity we both sat, silently pondering the mystery of Katharine's action. What could have made her do it? Was it, I wondered, because her father had learned something discreditable about her suitor and had forbidden him the house? Had Crandall been trying to persuade her to continue to see him despite her father's wishes? Was the conflict in her heart between love and duty too much for her? Louise turned to me and laid her hand gently on my arm.

"Harding," she said, "there is some deep mystery behind all this that has been creeping like a black shadow across the lives of both Katharine and my father. In some way Hugh Crandall is concerned

INTO THE MAELSTROM

in it. I know it. I feel it. It is something more than merely the refusal of my father to permit her to marry Crandall. I have watched them both and I know. I have seen this mysterious specter hovering over my father, gradually crushing the very soul out of him. I have seen Katharine's life, too, blighted by its constant presence. Whether Katharine lives or whether she dies, I must find out what it is. I must, before it kills my father, too. You'll help me, won't you?"

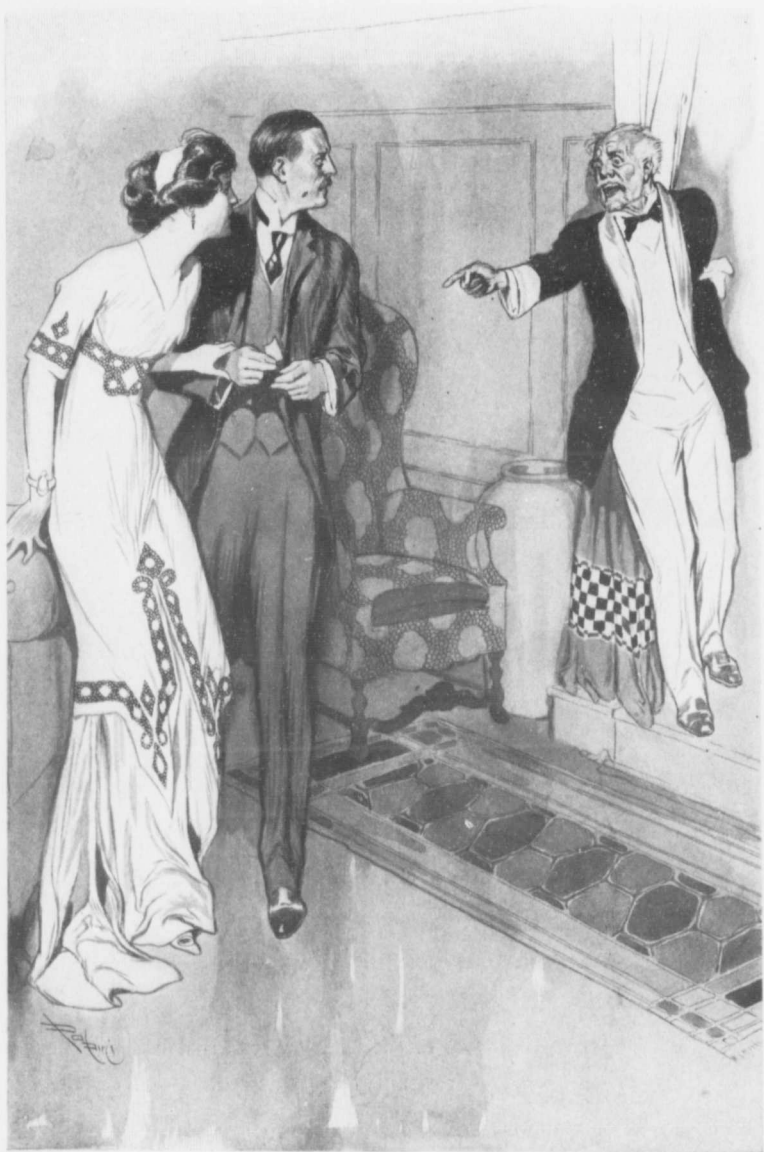
There have been strange wooings and strange betrothals in love's history, but never before has any man been brought to a fuller realization of the depth of a woman's affection for him or her confidence and trust in him than I was at this moment when Louise put this question to me. My arms went about her and my lips met hers in one long kiss that was a pledge—a pledge that henceforth my life, my heart, my mind, my powers, my everything were hers. All my abilities would be devoted to clearing this mystery that was stealing the joy from her years, when they should be the pleasantest. But this was no time for love dalliance. The mystery must

THE YELLOW LETTER

be solved. Suicides generally left letters. Perhaps—

Hand in hand, Louise and I went into Katharine's apartments, where the room's disorder still told of the tragedy so recently enacted there. In one corner stood a little open desk. Its contents bore evidence of a recent careful sorting that hinted very plainly of premeditation, but there was no note or letter there. I looked next on the mantelpiece, hoping to find among the photographs and cotillion favors that littered it some clue which might solve the mystery, but there was nothing there, either.

My eye fell to the grate below, where a fire burned cheerily. Here again was evidence of premeditation in the ashes of burned letters and the charred corner of a photograph. A blackened bit of paper that had fallen through the grate before it burned caught my glance and I stooped to pick it up. It was just a scrap of yellow, torn from a folded letter, with its edges burned to fragileness. Carefully Louise and I unfolded it, for it seemed the only thing in all the room that might yield some explanation. As we pored over the meaningless fragments of sentences,



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INTO THE MAELSTROM

an exclamation of horror came from the doorway. Looking up we saw the tall form of General Farrish tottering on the sill.

Clad in a dressing-jacket, his white hair in wild disorder, he pointed with accusing finger at the yellow scrap of paper in my hand. Never in mortal face have I seen such terror as I saw in his. His eyes, dilated, seemed bulging from their sockets. His countenance was white as chalk. His jaw had dropped in the paralysis of terror. From his throat came horrible mumblings, as he tried to speak and could not.

Louise and I sprang to his side, but with almost maniacal strength he shook us off and, with finger still pointing to the yellow scrap I had let fall to the floor, he managed to gasp:

“That yellow letter. Where did—”

Before he could finish the sentence he fell stricken to the floor, his voice choking, his eyes glazing, paralyzed by some hidden terror—we knew not what.

CHAPTER II

OUR FIRST CLUE

LOUISE and I sat at dinner together. Isn't it strange in this world of ours how the commonplace follows on the terrible, how the usual and the unusual intermingle, how the clock ticks on when the whole universe seems to be tumbling about our heads! In one of the rooms up-stairs lay Katharine, still unconscious, with a doctor and a nurse constantly at her side. The bullet had been removed, and while it had penetrated the brain some slight distance, Doctor Wilcox said there was just a chance—the barest chance—that she might recover. It might, however, be hours, he explained, before she regained consciousness—if she ever did.

In another of the rooms lay General Farrish, more dead than alive. Paralysis had deadened his limbs and tied his tongue. Only his eyes seemed alert. Most of the time since the stroke had felled him he had been slumbering heavily, not with the

OUR FIRST CLUE

sleep of health or weariness but with the coma of disease. In the moments when he was awake and seemed conscious his eyes still had the look of terror that we had seen just before he was stricken. Coupled with this look of fear was an indefinable expression of entreaty, as if there was something he would ask and could not. Anxious as Louise and I were to learn what it was that was troubling him, the doctor forbade our making any effort to do so, and made us leave the room, where he had put a second nurse in charge.

While the bustle of caring for the two stricken ones lasted there was little time for thought, and I was glad for the activity that kept Louise's mind distracted. Just at the moment when it seemed that everything had been done and there was nothing left but the anxious waiting—waiting for the worst—the butler had tiptoed in to summon us to dinner. Bravely, at first, Louise and I made pretense of eating, each trying to encourage the other, but the unforgettable events of the afternoon, the missing faces at the table and the sorrow that filled us both made food impossible. Drawing our chairs together, we

THE YELLOW LETTER

discussed in whispers the baffling mystery of Katharine's attempted suicide and her father's strange terror.

On the table before us lay the scrap of yellow paper, the sight of which had so agitated General Farish. As soon as he had been carried into his own rooms I had hastened to rescue it from the floor. I felt that, insignificant as it appeared, it must have some important connection with the events of the afternoon. Yet as Louise and I puzzled over it, there seemed nothing sinister in the fragments of sentences that the flames had left all but indecipherable.

The paper, of a peculiarly yellowish tint, was hardly more than two square inches, the torn corner of a folded letter. On it we could make out these words:

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OUR FIRST CLUE

As we studied the bit of type-writing, word by word, we tried to trace in it some hidden meaning, some sinister warning, something or anything that would connect it with poor Katharine's mental distress and her father's poignant terror. That the letter of which this was a part had been in Katharine's possession was evident from the place where I had picked up the fragment. It was equally certain that it had been her purpose to destroy it. On the other hand, General Farrish, too, must have known of the existence of this letter, else why did he show such terror at the mere sight of a scrap of it? It must have been part of some document that had made a vivid impression on his mind. More than likely, we felt, whatever the letter was, it had played some part in the quarrel between Katharine and her father the afternoon before she dismissed Hugh Crandall.

We ran over all the words we could think of that begin "b-a," trying to fit one to the phrases following—back, bar, ban, bank, bankruptcy, basin, barrel, barren, battle—there were too many of them. We gave it up and passed on to the next phrase, "used

THE YELLOW LETTER

se—" It proved equally puzzling. We could make nothing out of it, but the third line at least was definite enough for discussion.

"A sister—" said Louise. "That makes it certain that this letter did not apply in any way to father, for he never had a sister. He was an only child."

I was not so positive as she that the letter did not apply to the general. The thought came to me that perhaps even in the proud Farrish family there might have been some girl child of unblessed birth whose existence had been kept secret from Louise. Perhaps some knowledge of this sort had come to Katharine and the letter referred to it. I refrained from suggesting such a theory, for I felt it would be the height of cruelty even to hint such a thing to Louise at a time when her father was helpless to explain. Yet the following phrase, "seemed inevitable," might well fit into some theory such as this, followed as it was in the next line with the word "disgrace."

For a moment I felt that I was on the track of the solution of the mystery. Some specter from the general's past had risen to haunt his declining years,

OUR FIRST CLUE

to threaten his good name, to worry him into his grave. His elder daughter had discovered it and had been unable to carry the burden of shame. Could this have been the secret that these two shared and kept Louise in ignorance of? A word from Louise all at once upset my theory.

"I wonder," she said, "if this isn't part of a letter about Hugh Crandall."

Both she and I were convinced that in some way Crandall was involved. My theory would not account for his connection with the case and I at once abandoned it, listening intently to one Louise advanced.

"There must have been some connection between his having telephoned her and what she did this afternoon. Before she shot herself she burned this letter, or most of it. Father must have known about the letter, so I am certain that it concerned Crandall."

"Has Crandall a sister?"

"I do not know," said Louise. "I know nothing about his family. It seems strange, too, when for months and months we saw so much of him. I do

THE YELLOW LETTER

not recollect his ever having mentioned any of his relatives."

My brain recorded a victory for woman's intuition over man's logic. Her theory seemed infinitely better than mine. After all it was absurd to suspect a skeleton in the life of a man like General Farrish, who had been constantly under public scrutiny for many years. It was much more probable that the letter referred to some incident in the life of Crandall, something so discreditable that the general had been forced to forbid Katharine having anything to do with him. This theory would account for the quarrel between father and daughter, for Crandall's reticence about his family, for Katharine's distress, and naturally the sight of the letter that had caused all the trouble would upset the general. I began to see a plan for action.

"Louise, dear—" How quickly adversity strips off conventionality and puts us where our hearts would have us! "Louise, dear," I said, "it will probably be days before either your father or Katharine will be able to give us any assistance, yet the knowledge that everything has been cleared up, that the

OUR FIRST CLUE

specter has been driven away, undoubtedly would hasten the recovery of both. So I feel that we must go ahead."

"Oh, Harding," she breathed. Her hand stole out and sought mine. "What a comfort you are to me! What would I have done this afternoon without you! You're right, dear, we must solve this awful mystery at once. We must."

"The first thing for me to do," I went on, "is to find Hugh Crandall. He can probably tell us all about this letter. Even if he can't, he can say why he telephoned Katharine and where she went this afternoon. When we have learned this much we shall at least have made a good start. The next thing will be to trace the letter. If Crandall does not know about it, we will try to learn from whom it came."

"That's impossible," objected Louise. "Haven't we looked everywhere in Katharine's room for the envelope in which it came. I am positive that she burned it. Without the envelope you can never discover where it was mailed or to whom it was addressed."

"I'm not so sure about that. The post-office has

THE YELLOW LETTER

wonderful ways of tracing mail. One of the inspectors is a friend of mine and we will enlist his help. But first I must find Crandall. Probably he can tell us everything if he will. Do you know where he lives?"

"He has bachelor apartments somewhere along the Avenue, I don't know just where. I know his place of business."

"I know that, too, but it is useless to try to find him there to-night."

"Katharine used to send all her notes to one of his clubs where he received his mail—I think it was the University."

"Come into the library," said I, "we can quickly locate him."

I stopped in the hall to examine the telephone book, hoping it might give his home address, but it contained only the office of his firm. However, I had no difficulty in finding in the library the volume I sought—the club directory—and turning to his name I saw that he was a member at both the University and the Harvard.

As I was a member of the University myself I had

OUR FIRST CLUE

no difficulty in getting Crandall's address over the telephone. Loath as I was to leave Louise alone, I felt that prompt action was demanded, so I took my departure at once.

"If I find Crandall I will bring him back with me so that you may hear all he has to say. Whether or not I succeed, I will return within an hour. My friend, the post-office inspector, lives somewhere out in Jersey, but I will see him the first thing in the morning."

The grateful look Louise gave me as I left imbued me with a new and wholly delightful sense of responsibility. The ten minutes it took me to reach Crandall's rooms were filled with that incoherent bliss that comes to every man who realizes for the first time what it means to have a woman's confidence entirely his.

Crandall lived in one of those remodeled mansions so common in that part of Fifth Avenue from which the families have fled before the advance of trade. The basement and first floor were given over to shops and the upper floors to bachelor apartments. I had no difficulty in finding among the door-plates

THE YELLOW LETTER

the name I sought, but repeated ringing brought no response. Determined not to leave until I had learned his whereabouts I gave the janitor's bell a vigorous push.

"Where can I find Mr. Crandall?" I asked as soon as he appeared.

His manner made it evident that he considered my question an impertinence, but I had met Fifth Avenue janitors before.

"I am a lawyer," I persisted. "I must see Mr. Crandall to-night on an important matter."

"You won't," he replied, almost gleefully it seemed to me.

"Why not?" I demanded sharply. "What do you mean?"

My manner was not without its effect.

"He's gone away," the man explained a little more respectfully.

"Gone!" I exclaimed. Here was a new mystery, or perhaps the explanation of the first one. It may have been his departure that had depressed Katharine so.

OUR FIRST CLUE

"Where has he gone? When did he go? How long will he be away?" I volleyed.

Exasperatingly he delayed his reply. At last it seemed to occur to him that I was not making these inquiries purely for his amusement. Somewhat more politely than at first, he answered: "Only an hour or two ago—about three o'clock it was—he came rushing down into my room with his keys in his hand. 'Mike,' says he, 'I'm going away to-night. I may be gone a week and I may be gone a month. I don't know how long. Here are my keys and don't let nobody into my rooms while I'm away, on any pretext whatever.' And wid that he was into a taxicab and off before I could be saying my thanks for the bill he left in my hand."

Crandall suddenly gone, Katharine dying by her own hand, General Farrish stricken, all within two hours. I knew now there must be some connection between these events. More than ever I was anxious to find Crandall, yet I felt that the janitor had told me all he knew. I could see in the young broker's departure guilty knowledge of the shadow

THE YELLOW LETTER

descending on the Farrish home. Surely his flight was confession.

There was nothing to be gained by further questioning of the janitor. From the manner of Crandall's departure it would be useless to look for him at either of the clubs to which he belonged. I might try to trace him through the taxicab, which he had probably called from the University Club near by, but that could wait until later. Just now I felt it my duty to hasten back to Louise and tell her of this new development.

As I turned from the door a newsboy with an armful of evening "extras" thrust one at me. Impatiently I waved him away.

"All about the suicide," he bawled as he darted off after another passer-by.

Quickly I pursued him and fairly snatched one of his papers from him. Had the reporters, after all, learned of the tragedy in the Farrish home? Doctor Wilcox and I had discussed the matter of notifying the police and the coroner. We both felt that it would be wiser not to communicate with them, for such a course would inevitably bring publicity.

OUR FIRST CLUE

There was enough agony in the Farrish home without having this sorrowful secret blazoned to a curious world in three-inch type, without having a horde of reporters and camera men constantly surrounding the house. Besides, if Katharine recovered, sooner or later she would be sure to learn what the papers had said. The knowledge that her foolish crime against herself had been thus sensationally proclaimed would be a blow from which the sensitive girl—hitherto jealously shielded—would never recover. If she should not recover—Doctor Wilcox and I were trusting to chance to find a way of explaining her death. The servants—all of them trustworthy and long in service—had been cautioned not to talk to any one about the afternoon's events. The doctor's aides and nurses, of course, had been silent. That is part of their business. How, then, had the papers obtained the news so quickly? I could think of but one possible way. More than likely some telephone girl who had heard Louise calling Doctor Wilcox had given it to the press. Even in the half-darkness of the middle of the block where I stood I could read the word "S-U-I-C-I-D-E" stretched

THE YELLOW LETTER

across the page in letters of red. I hastened to the corner where the double globes shed down a brilliant light, anxious yet dreading to read what the paper said. At the first glance I breathed a sigh of relief. The article was not about Katharine Farish. I had not thought of the possibility of there having been another suicide that day, but there it was:

MYSTERY IN SELF-MURDER OF AGED LAWYER

Ordinarily I pay little attention to stories of crime. But the afternoon had given me a new and bitter appreciation of the meaning of suicide. Standing there under the light of a Fifth Avenue corner I read the hastily written article word by word.

Andrew Elser, the article explained, had lived for many years in a West Twenty-Third Street boarding-house. Little was known about him there except that he was a lawyer. Several years ago he had given up his down-town office. Most of his income was derived from his fees as custodian of an orphan boy's estate. About four o'clock in the afternoon the landlady had heard a noise in his room like that

OUR FIRST CLUE

of a body falling. On entering she had found him lifeless on the floor. She had called a policeman, who sent for an ambulance. The ambulance doctor found that Mr. Elser had taken poison.

It struck me as a peculiar coincidence that two persons so far apart in the social scale as Katharine Farrish and Andrew Elser should have chosen the same hour of the same day to seek death. Was there something in astrology after all? Had the stars decreed that both should die? Had some conjunction of the planets, some evil aspect in the Zodiac driven both of them—the young heiress, in the bloom of joyous youth, and the aged lawyer, in his decrepit poverty—relentlessly, helplessly, to self-destruction?

So deep was the impression made on me by the coincidence that I took the paper with me and read the account of Elser's suicide to Louise. Even as I read it aloud, this inexplicable thought came to me with startling force:

Suppose that these two suicides at the same hour were more than a mere coincidence. Was it possible that the same shadow had fallen on both these lives? Had the same mystery driven them to a death-pact?

THE YELLOW LETTER

It seemed absurd. It was unlikely that Katharine Farrish had ever heard of Andrew Elser. If the family had known him Louise would have mentioned it. And yet—why had these two persons sought to die on the same hour of the same day? The question would not let me sleep that night.

CHAPTER III

THE SECOND CLUE

I CAN'T do it, Harding. You are asking an impossibility."

I was sitting in Inspector Davis' room in the post-office building. The first thing in the morning I had gone there to enlist his aid in clearing up the mystery that hung over the Farrish home. With the confidence based on a friendship that had its beginnings in boyhood association I felt sure he would do all he could to help me. I wanted, if possible, to learn through him whence had come the yellow letter.

Miller Davis, though only a year older than I, already had become one of the government's most trusted secret agents. His rise in the service had been phenomenally rapid. The robbery of the post-office where he was employed had given him his start. A little later, with the merest thread to fol-

THE YELLOW LETTER

low, he had run to earth a skilful band of stamp counterfeiters, and three of its members were now serving long terms. Only a year ago, when all the other inspectors had failed to find the flaw in the registry service that permitted a red-striped sack with two hundred thousand dollars' worth of registered mail to disappear, Davis, putting his keen, analytical mind on the case, within a week had discovered the flaw in the system and only a few days later had arrested the ex-convict who had profited by it.

With the natural interest of an old friend I had followed his career and was familiar with most of his brilliant achievements. Even though the scrap which was puzzling me had no envelope and bore no postmark, so confident was I in his far-reaching powers I would hardly have been amazed if he had told me all about it as soon as I showed it to him. Imagine, then, my disappointment at his absolute refusal to take up the matter at all.

"Don't you see how important it is?" I cried. "This little scrap is the key to the whole mystery."

He was sitting with his back to the light—a trick

THE SECOND CLUE

most business men have these days, so that they can see your face in full light, while you have difficulty in reading theirs—yet from his tone I felt that he was inwardly amused at my anxiety.

“I’m afraid you overrate my detective ability and my powers as a post-office inspector,” he said. “While I am inclined to agree with you that this bit of paper may have some bearing on the case, there is nothing to show from what post-office it came, through whose hands it passed, or by whom it was received. It may not have come through the mail at all. More than likely some messenger brought it. Before I could undertake an investigation I would have to know, first, that it had come through the mail; second, that there was some evidence that the mails were being used for an unlawful purpose; and third, I would want to be certain before I began the investigation, that I would win out. That’s the secret, old chap, of my success, of everybody’s success. Don’t tackle things you can’t do, then you never fail.”

Davis’ refusal was a greater blow to me than I cared to admit. Louise and I in our final confer-

THE YELLOW LETTER

ence the night before had decided that there were three steps that would take us far into the light.

First, I was to try at once to find Hugh Crandall. I was to ask him to explain the rupture with Katharine, the attitude of General Farrish toward him, his knowledge of the yellow letter, and why he had called Katharine on the telephone the afternoon before.

Second, failing to find Crandall, I was to make some pretext for visiting his rooms. His sudden departure and his cautioning the janitor to admit no one had a suspicious look. While neither Louise nor I had discussed what might be there to explain the mystery, I was thinking that in all probability I would find a bundle of letters from Katharine, some of which might furnish a clue.

Third, I was to ask Inspector Davis to help me trace the yellow letter.

I had anticipated little difficulty in ascertaining Crandall's whereabouts. A broker of standing does not vanish overnight without informing his business partners. Before coming to the inspector I had telephoned to Crandall's office. Great was my

THE SECOND CLUE

amazement to learn from one of his partners that they were as much puzzled as I over his sudden going away. They had merely received a telegram saying that he had been called out of town unexpectedly and did not know when he would return. The telegram had been sent from an office near his rooms the night before. There was no business affair that would take him away, so they supposed that it was some urgent personal matter.

While I chatted for a moment with Davis over our boyhood days I was thinking what step I should take next. The problems of learning Crandall's whereabouts and gaining access to his rooms did not seem so simple as they had the night before. A clerk entered with a card for Davis, and I rose to go.

"Don't go yet," he said. "It's only a man from police headquarters. His errand will probably take only a minute."

As I resumed my seat Detective Dowd was ushered into the room. He was the typical police sleuth, thick of head and foot, ready to suspect the suspicious and to see the obvious. In appearance, in speech, in manner of thought, he and the inspector

THE YELLOW LETTER

were almost exact opposites. One was a grizzled, blear-eyed man of fifty whom even the clumsiest criminal could not have mistaken for anything but what he was; the other, young-looking for even his thirty years, might have been readily mistaken for a college tutor or an alert reporter. It amused me to see with what deference the man from headquarters approached him.

"Beg your pardon for disturbing you, Inspector," he said, nervously twisting his hat, "but I've got a little matter here the chief wanted me to put up to you."

He turned toward me with a suspicious glance, but Davis hastened to assure him that he could speak freely before me.

"It's this," he explained, "the old man wants to know about."

As he spoke he drew something from his inner pocket and laid it on the inspector's desk. As my eyes followed his hand I gave a sudden start. With difficulty I restrained an expression of amazement. The object about which he had come to inquire was a torn yellow envelope.

THE SECOND CLUE

I glanced quickly at Davis. I fully expected to see in his face something of the same astonishment I had felt. I was disappointed. With a casual glance at the envelope he turned to Dowd as if waiting for him to go on.

"It's evidence in the Elser case," the detective went on, "turned in by the man on post who reported the suicide. He was that old party that was found dead in his room up on West Twenty-third Street. To my mind, it's just a plain case of suicide—an old man tired of living. The poison bottle was there on the floor beside him. I don't see nothing suspicious about it, but the chief has taken a notion that there's something behind it and wants to know where this letter came from. We searched the room, but this torn envelope was all we could find. The postmark's torn through, but he thought maybe you could trace it anyhow."

"I'll see what I can do and I'll let you know in the morning," said the inspector calmly, dismissing the detective with a nod. From his matter-of-fact tone and apparent lack of interest I would not have been surprised if he had refused this undertaking,

THE YELLOW LETTER

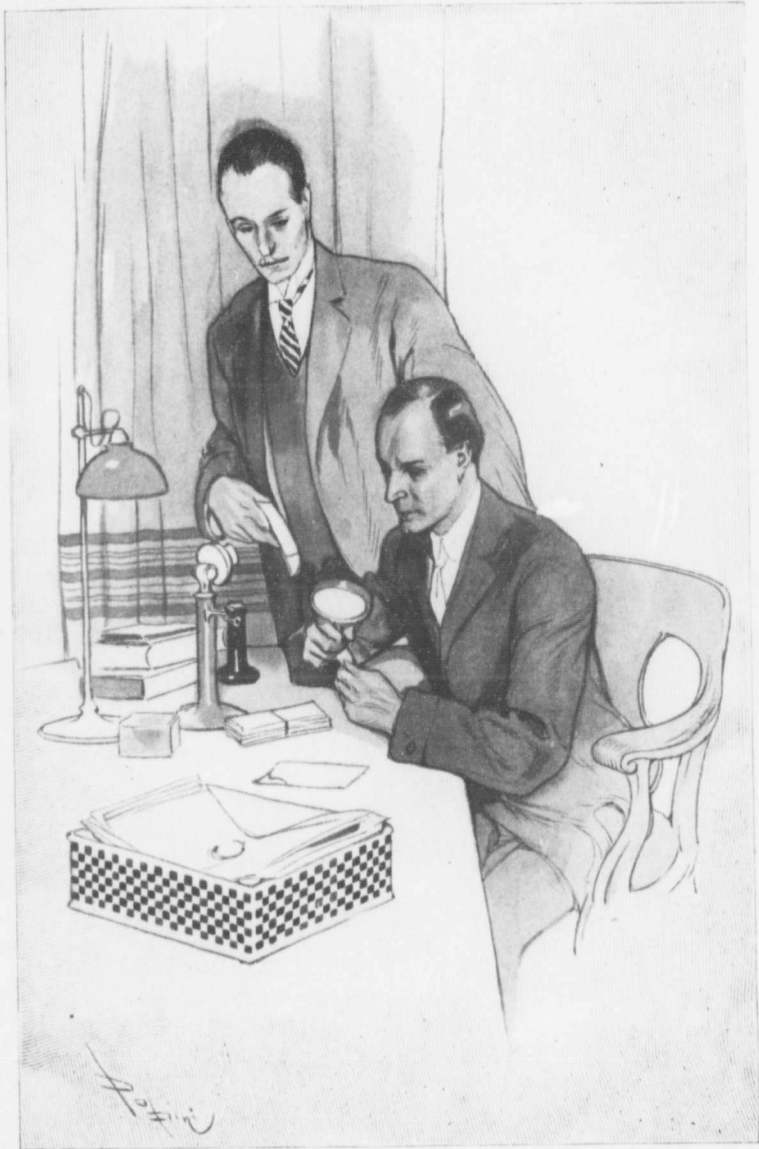
too, as he had mine, though it seemed to me that the two bits of yellow paper connected the two suicides at the same hour as something decisively more than a mere coincidence.

As soon, however, as the detective had left the room the inspector's whole manner changed. With the glitter of excitement in his alert eyes he turned to me and explosively said:

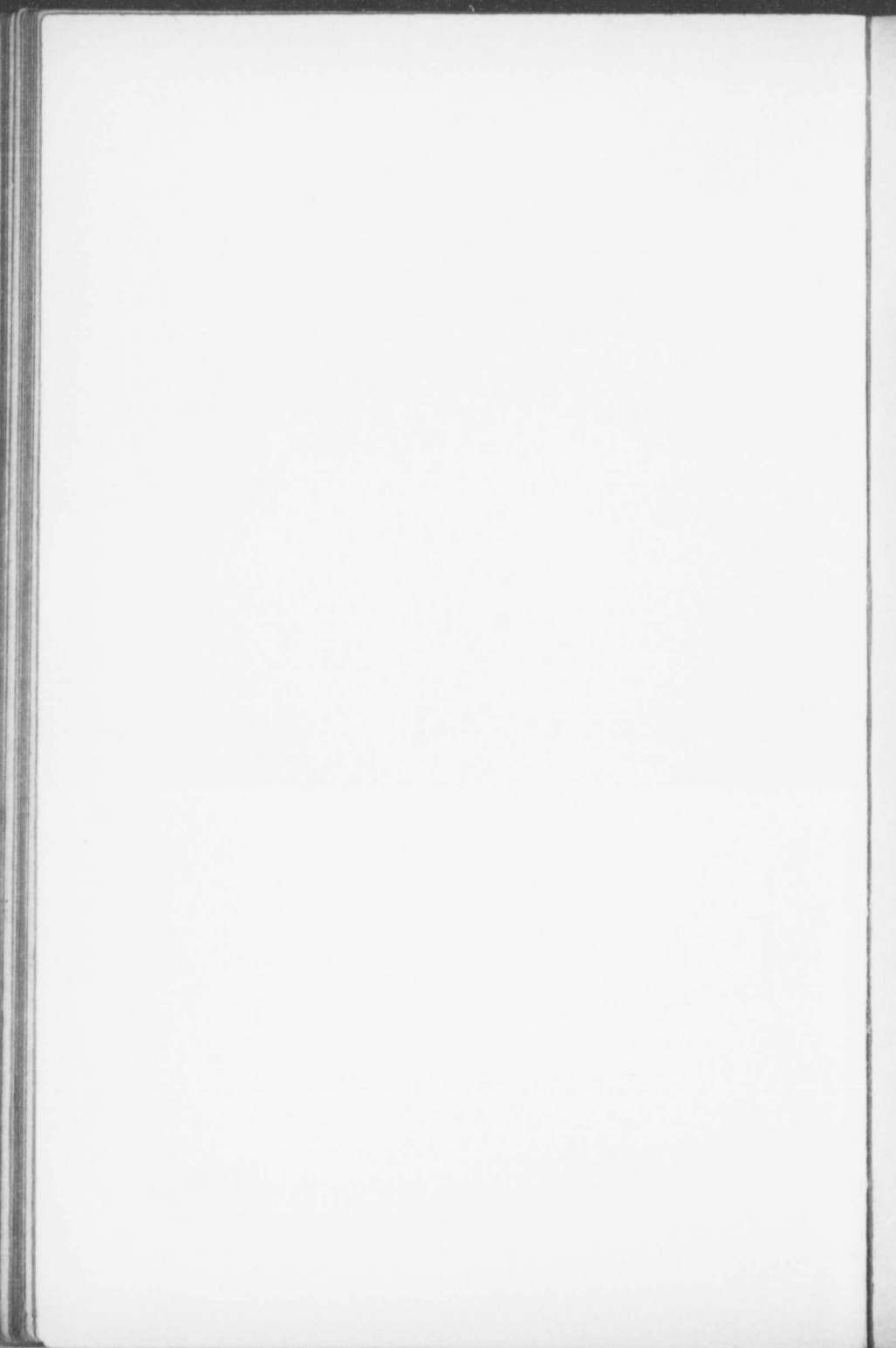
"Quick, let me see that yellow scrap."

I had replaced it carefully in my wallet after he had refused my request. As I drew it out now he almost snatched it from my hand. Putting it on his desk beside the torn envelope, he picked up a reading-glass and studied both pieces carefully. His inspection lasted for several minutes, and meanwhile, I, too, studied the torn envelope.

Both in color and texture the paper so closely resembled the scrap that I was positive that they were of the same lot. The envelope bore the address of Andrew Elser, in West Twenty-third Street. Part of the postmark—most of it, in fact—had been destroyed, as if in the careless opening of the letter with the finger. All that was decipherable was a



He picked up a reading glass and studied both pieces carefully



THE SECOND CLUE

capital "A" and part of another letter that might have been either an "N" or an "R." In the lower part of the circle was a fragment of a letter that looked as if it might have been an "N." I noticed, too, that the stamp had been stuck on rather carelessly, in a lopsided manner.

My friend, his inspection completed, turned to me apologetically.

"I beg your pardon, Harding Kent," he said, "you were entirely right. These two bits of paper are key-notes in an important mystery, one that it is well worth my while to try to solve."

"What made you change your mind so suddenly?" I asked, for though I quite agreed with him, his manner had puzzled me not a little.

He leaned back in his chair and turned it so that he faced me. He had a sharp, explosive way of speaking, biting off his words almost before he had completely enunciated them.

"Can't you see? One footprint leads nowhere. Two footprints start a path. When you brought that yellow scrap to me you were merely guessing that it might have something to do with the strange

THE YELLOW LETTER

happenings in the Farrish home. There was no way in which you could have positive knowledge, nor could I. You were only guessing."

"Indeed, I wasn't!" I exclaimed indignantly. "What drew my attention to it was General Farrish's exclamation of terror at the sight of it just before he fell, paralyzed."

Davis shook his head determinedly.

"That meant much—or nothing. It may have been mere senile hysteria superinduced by the great shock. At some time in his life he may have had some unpleasant experience which was associated in his subconscious memory with a yellow document. Wrought up as he was by the news of his daughter's attempt to kill herself, the brain cells called into action were those that had recorded other disturbing experiences, perhaps a month ago, perhaps forty years ago. No impressions in the brain records are ever lost. The sight of the yellow paper probably recalled some other yellow paper. There was then no evidence whatever that it was this particular piece of paper that so agitated him."

"But you think so now," I suggested.

THE SECOND CLUE

“The situation has entirely changed. There was nothing to show that this piece of paper had ever come through the mail. There was nothing to connect it with suicide. Dowd comes in here with a similar piece of paper that plainly has been mailed. We now have not one footprint, but two—the beginning of a path. Once started on the path, we can solve the mystery.”

“Then you think there is some connection between the two bits of paper?”

“I know there is,” said Davis. “These bits of yellow paper are of the same quality and texture—to all appearances the same paper. Two persons in whose possession they were, attempt suicide on the same day. The same person, or at least the same type-writer, wrote both the address on the envelope and the contents of the letter. This envelope came from a country post-office in either New York or New Jersey within a month—some post-office the name of which begins with ‘Ar’ or ‘An.’ There are not many rural offices that will fit in all particulars. In two days or sooner, I can tell you exactly from what office they were mailed.”

THE YELLOW LETTER

"Letters—you think there were two? Might not this be the envelope in which this paper came?"

"That presupposes an acquaintance between Elser and Miss Farrish, at least a connection of some sort. Did she know him?"

"I don't think so. Her sister and I were talking of the Elser suicide last night after we saw the evening papers. Louise surely would have known it if her sister was acquainted with him."

"Perhaps," said Davis doubtfully. "There isn't a human being over ten that has not a secret that they keep from some one. It looks to me, though, as if in all probability there were two distinct letters. That is what makes me suspect a plot. It convinces me that the mails are being used for an improper and more than likely a criminal purpose. This brings the case or both cases properly in my domain as a post-office inspector."

"And I can count on your assistance, after all," I said joyfully. "When can you begin work?"

"I have begun," he said tersely, pushing over for my inspection something he had hastily scrawled on a pad lying on his desk. It was an order addressed

THE SECOND CLUE

to the superintendent of the railway mails, which read:

"Have all railway mail clerks on New York and New Jersey routes report from what rural office within the last month they have received large quantities of letters in yellow envelopes. If letters have been discontinued, when?"

"DAVIS."

"Large quantities!" I gasped. "Were there more than two?"

"Of course," he snapped, in a way that showed me he did not wish to be questioned further. Then he reached for his hat and coat, and with an abrupt "Come along!" led the way to the elevator.

"Where are we going?" I asked as he rushed me hurriedly through Park Place to the Sixth Avenue Elevated.

"To Twenty-third Street," he replied, "to find out what the police have not."

In the "L" train I told him in low tones of Crandall's apparent connection with the case and of his sudden disappearance. He sat silent, his whole bearing indicating such abstraction that I doubted if he had heard a word I was saying, but suddenly,

THE YELLOW LETTER

just before we left the train, he startled me by asking:

"Do you know Crandall? What color are his eyes?"

I regretted that I had to say no to the first question, and that I did not, to the latter, which query amazed me greatly. What connection the color of a man's eyes could possibly have with two attempts at suicide and a lot of mysterious yellow letters from a rural post-office was entirely beyond me. Curious as I was, I hesitated to question him on the subject, for experience had taught me that he was better at asking than answering.

Instead of going directly to the boarding-house where Elser had killed himself, he took the other side of the street and turned abruptly into a house, beside the door of which was a doctor's plate.

"Is Doctor Berner in?" he asked of the maid, and on being shown into the physician's office, introduced himself as "Inspector Davis" and began questioning the doctor about the Elser suicide.

Though the papers had made no mention of Doctor Berner, the statement being that a policeman

THE SECOND CLUE

had called an ambulance from Bellevue Hospital, it now appeared that the landlady had summoned him as soon as the suicide was discovered. Elser was dead, so he had withdrawn as soon as the policeman arrived.

"Did you ever have Elser as a patient?" asked the inspector.

The doctor reflected.

"Only once—about two years ago. I gave him something for insomnia. He called here at the office and I wrote him a prescription. He was to return in a few days for further treatment, but he did not do so. Another time—"

The doctor hesitated.

"There was another time I had almost forgotten, a year or two before that. He met me in the street one day and asked what my office hours were on Saturday. He explained that he was the guardian of a boy who was in a boarding-school. The child had some slight throat trouble and he wished me to make an examination. On the following Saturday he brought the boy here, a bright little chap about ten."

THE YELLOW LETTER

"Do you know the boy's name? What school did he attend?" The inspector fired his questions rapidly, but it was quickly apparent that the doctor had nothing more to tell, so we left.

"What a wonderful man you are!" I exclaimed as the doctor's door closed behind us. "How did you learn that Doctor Berner had been called in after Elser killed himself?"

"There is nothing wonderful about my knowledge," answered Davis with a laugh. "What is the first thing that people do when anything happens? They run for the nearest doctor. Doctor Berner is the nearest doctor. Could anything be simpler?"

The simplicity of his logic amazed me. It was like a conjuror's trick after it has been explained, or like one of those puzzle pictures with hidden faces. You work hours trying to find them, and after you have found them you wonder how you ever happened not to see them.

We now arrived at Mrs. Trask's boarding-house—one of those dingy ex-residences that proclaimed its retrogression by a white slip of paper on the door frame. I had supposed that here, too, my friend

THE SECOND CLUE

would introduce himself as "Inspector Davis" on account of the prestige it would give him in searching the rooms, but to the slattern maid who came to the door wiping her hands he merely said:

"Tell your mistress a couple of gentlemen are inquiring about room and board."

Mrs. Trask was the old-school boarding-house mistress fast disappearing before the inroads of the family apartment hotel. "Better days" was written all over her, though somewhat obscured by years in boarding-house grease. Eying us sharply through her spectacles, she inquired how much we were willing to pay, meanwhile debating with herself whether it was necessary to ask for references.

Davis' "not more than twelve dollars a week each" apparently convinced her that references were unnecessary, for she at once led the way to what she described as the second floor front, the room in which Elser had killed himself only the day before. Probably she had no intention of telling us this, but garrulity overcame her caution. She had been expatiating on the advantages of the room—Heaven knows it needed an eloquent advocate!—when sud-

THE YELLOW LETTER

denly she lowered her voice to a mysterious whisper.

"One gentleman has occupied this room for fourteen years—ever since I've had the house, and a fine old gentleman he was, too. I wouldn't have the room vacant but what happened to him yesterday." She let her voice sink still lower. "If it was a couple of ladies looking at the room, I wouldn't be telling it, but I know you gentlemen won't mind. It was in this room yesterday Mr. Elser killed himself, not on the bed, but right here on the floor. It was poison he took—cyanide of mercury, the doctor said."

"You don't say!" exclaimed the inspector, as if he had heard the news for the first time. "Why did he do it?"

"It's more than I can say," said Mrs. Trask, evidently well pleased to talk about the tragedy. "I did everything I could to keep him comfortable and happy. He spent all his time here since he gave up his office down-town. He read the papers every morning in the parlor. Every afternoon he took a walk. He was always on time to his meals and there never was a complaint out of him. On Satur-

THE SECOND CLUE

days he used to go up to Westchester to see a boy that he was guardian for. Every Saturday night regular he paid his board, that is, up to last week—that's still owing."

"Did he have any visitors?"

"No, I don't recollect that there was ever any one here to see him, though occasionally he used to bring the boy down here to lunch on Saturday or Sunday. He hasn't had him here, though, for the last three years."

"Did he receive any mail?"

"Ain't it queer, now, that you speak of that! The first letter he had in months came only last week. The police found part of the envelope on the floor beside him. Them and me both looked through all his things, but never a trace of the letter could we find. I can't for the life of me think what he could have done with it. I know the letter must have had some sort of good news for him, for after he received it, for several days he was as bright and chipper as could be, more like himself than he had been for years. Then yesterday somebody telephoned to him—I don't know who it was, for I was

THE YELLOW LETTER

out marketing—and he never had had any 'phone calls before that I know of. Right after lunch he went out and was gone until after three. Soon after he came in he killed himself in this very room.”

To my mind things were beginning to look blacker and blacker for Crandall. The parallel between the cases of Katharine and Elser was entirely too strong for it to have been mere coincidence. We knew it was Crandall who had telephoned Katharine. It must have been he who had called Elser. There was much to be explained. What it was that had driven them both to seek death was still a mystery to me. My mind reverted to my original theory that there was a child, whose existence had been kept from the world, that was in some way connected with the Farrish family. Old Elser was the guardian of a boy. Suppose this boy was the child. It would establish a possible connection between the two suicides. It would explain why Katharine might have known old Elser yet never have mentioned the man to Louise.

I took it for granted that Davis would ask the landlady further about the child. Of course, he

THE SECOND CLUE

would want to know the boy's name and the name of the school where Elser kept him, but he made no further inquiries. Telling the landlady he would let her know in a day or two about the room, he turned to me with:

"Come on, Kent, it is time we had some luncheon."

"We must find Crandall," I said as we left the house.

"We must find who wrote the yellow letters," Davis responded.

"It must have been Crandall," I asserted with conviction.

"It may have been Crandall," the inspector replied. "Was Crandall left-handed?"

CHAPTER IV

KATHARINE SPEAKS

IF I had been alone I would have gone directly to the Farrish home. I was anxious about Louise. I had not seen her since the night before, though I had telephoned her early in the morning—I greatly regretted having to leave her so much by herself in such distressful circumstances. I thought it wiser now to prepare her beforehand for the inspector's coming. I wanted him to see the Farrish home. I felt that if he met Louise and realized the luxury and comfort in which the family lived he would better appreciate the mystery and my determination to solve it.

I suggested luncheon at Martin's and Davis assented. As soon as we had obtained a table I excused myself and hastened to the telephone. Louise told me that the condition of both her father and Katharine was practically unchanged. I briefly

KATHARINE SPEAKS

summarized my morning's work and asked if I might bring the inspector after luncheon.

"By all means," said Louise, "bring him right over. I want to meet him and there may be some things I can tell him which will aid him."

When I returned to the café on the Broadway side, where I had left the inspector, I found him abstractedly rolling little pellets of bread and placing them in various positions on the cloth. So absorbed was he in his occupation that he hardly seemed to note my return. His flying fingers would hastily mold three or four pellets in as many seconds. Placing them in a row, he would eye them intently. Occasionally he would swoop down on some unoffending pellet and sweep it to the floor. Two or three times I tried to interrupt him to learn what he wished to eat, but each time he waved me impatiently away. Finally, not desiring to delay too long over luncheon, I gave the waiter the order without consulting him. Mechanically he ate what was put before him, all the while keeping up his game with bread balls.

Knowing him as well as I did, after studying

THE YELLOW LETTER

closely his eccentric movements, I felt sure that the array of pellets was closely allied with the mental process by which he was seeking to solve the Far-rish mystery. The larger pellets, I decided, must be the various theories about the yellow letter or letters and their origin. The smaller pellets were the different persons connected with the case. One by one he pushed the larger pellets from the table until a single pellet remained. The smaller ones he kept arranging and rearranging until at last he seemed satisfied. The single surviving large pellet stood directly on a crease in the cloth. On one side equally distant from the crease, but close to each other, he had placed two of the smaller pellets. The rest were in three groups on the other side of the line. For perhaps five minutes he carefully studied their position without shifting them, and then with a quick motion of his hand swept them all to the floor.

“There was some purpose distinctly criminal connected with the yellow letters,” he said, as if for the first time aware of my presence, and becoming as loquacious as he had before been silent. “When

KATHARINE SPEAKS

we have run this mystery to earth we will find that there are two of the criminals—only two guilty.”

“Guilty of what?” I asked in amazement.

“I haven’t the slightest idea as yet,” he replied with such apparent frankness that I suspected he was not telling me all his thought. “Evil ideas are of three kinds—the solitary, the pair, the group. Crimes are merely the physical expression of evil ideas and bear the same classification. The solitary evil idea manifests itself in a variety of crimes. In this class belong defalcations, poisonings, crimes against women and generally the assassination of private individuals. These are the hardest crimes to discover and punish. The evil idea is not communicated. This sort of criminal seldom has confidants. Often, in fact almost always, he masks his villainy behind the cloak of respectability. Most of these offenses are due to mania, to blood-lust, to a desire for revenge for real or imaginary wrongs.

“Evil ideas of the pair are generally attributable to money-lust. In such crimes as burglary, highway robbery, blackmail, you will find two persons equally guilty, always the pair. Sometimes it is the

THE YELLOW LETTER

man and the woman, sometimes the strong man and the weak man, sometimes two women, though seldom, for women have little of the inventive or creative faculty, even in crime. Notorious women criminals, just like all other feminine celebrities in literature or art, have much of the masculine in their make-up.

“The third kind of evil idea, that of the group, is responsible for the strike, the mob, the conspiracy. It is the contagion of crime. The Black Hand is a typical example. The members of this notorious organization, while they profit financially by their misdeeds, care little about that end of it. Their greatest pleasure is in the torture of their victims, in the agony they suffer from the time the nameless dread of the Black Hand first seizes them until finally they are put to death for refusing the society’s exactions. It is this evil spirit that kills kings, burns witches, destroys property and lynches negroes. The Farrish mystery, however, is of the second class—the crime of the pair. I am certain of it.”

“The important thing then for us to do,” said I,

KATHARINE SPEAKS

trying to bring him from the abstract to the concrete, "is to find Hugh Crandall and also to discover who was his closest associate—man or woman."

"Do you think so?" he asked enigmatically, adding a second later, "Can't you take me to see Miss Farrish?"

Hardly another word passed between us as the taxicab whirled us up Madison Avenue to the general's home. I was thinking about Davis' strange theories of crime and his opinion that this was a crime of the pair. I felt sure that he, as well as I, must be convinced of Crandall's connection with the matter and surely his flight did not argue innocence. But if this was a crime of the pair, who was the other guilty person? Whom did Davis suspect? He had said that it might be either two men or a man and a woman. A woman? Could it be that he suspected Katharine Farrish of sharing Crandall's guilt?

No, no, it was too impossible, too absurd. Yet certainly the yellow letter seemed a link between her and Elser. It was she who for a long time had been Crandall's closest associate. That association

THE YELLOW LETTER

apparently had been recently renewed in secret. Was it possible that back of the mystery there was some crime and that Katharine was guilty?

For a moment I was tempted to order the chauffeur to stop. It seemed almost desecration to take this heartless analyzer of crime into the home where death stalked so close. Suppose Katharine was— No, I had pledged my word to Louise that I would solve the mystery and I would keep my promise, no matter where it led me. After all, the important thing was my beloved one's peace of mind. As long as the shadow hung over her father and sister, her happiness must be marred. Better the knowledge of evil than the terror of mystery.

Davis wasted little time in ceremony. As soon as I had introduced him to Louise, he said abruptly:

"I'd like to see the room where it happened—alone."

As Louise called one of the servants to escort him up-stairs I was rejoicing at the opportunity to be alone with her. The cold formality of her greeting would have troubled me had I not attributed it to the inspector's presence. As soon as he had left us,

KATHARINE SPEAKS

with the memories of the evening before glowing in my mind, I turned to embrace her.

"Don't, please don't!" she said coldly.

"Why, dearest!" I stammered in amazement.

She offered no explanation but said in the most matter-of-fact tones—too matter-of-fact to be natural, I thought—"Tell me, Mr. Kent, what you learned at the place where Mr. Elser lived."

I was dumfounded. What had come over her? What could have happened to make this sudden change in her attitude toward me? Could this cool, distant young woman be the same girl who only a few hours before had clung so desperately to me and had wept out her sorrows in my arms? Had she overnight forgotten the kiss with which we pledged our joint efforts to solve the mystery?

"Tell me, Mr. Kent," she persisted quietly, "is there a yellow letter in that case, too? Do you believe there can be any connection between Mr. Elser and—and what Katharine did?"

Greatly perturbed, yet trying to convince myself that her attitude was only a girl's natural reaction as she recollected the events of the evening before,

THE YELLOW LETTER

I was just beginning to rehearse what little we had learned in the boarding-house when Davis came running down the stairs.

"Tell me," he said abruptly to Louise, "what color are Mr. Crandall's eyes?"

"Blue," said Louise, "gray-blue."

"Humph!"

I could see she was as much puzzled at his question as I had been, but he offered no explanation and made no comment.

"Was Crandall left-handed?" he snapped.

"I don't think so," said Louise after a minute's thought. "I never noticed that he was."

"Humph!" he repeated, his eyes roving about the room. "Take me in to see General Farrish."

The young doctor whom Doctor Wilcox had left in charge happened to be passing through the hall, and stopped as he heard the request.

"It can do no harm," he said, in reply to Louise's look of inquiry.

The four of us—the doctor, Davis, Louise and myself, in the order named, tiptoed into the general's room. I was prepared for a great change in him,

KATHARINE SPEAKS

but his appearance was really terrifying. Perceptibly thinner, aged as by many years, all shriveled and shrunken, he lay chained to his bed by his affliction, unable to lift leg or arm, his lips fallen nervelessly apart, his tongue lolling uncontrollably—dead, dead, dead, save his eyes.

As Louise and I approached the bedside it appeared to me that he recognized us both and I could detect the same pleading look I had noted the night before. He seemed to be struggling with his deadened senses to ask us something. While I did not know whether or not his hearing had been impaired I thought he might be worrying about Katharine's condition, and carefully and slowly I began to enunciate something about her, hoping that I had guessed what it was he wished to ask. But even as I spoke I saw that his eyes had left my face. Into them returned the same acute terror he had exhibited at the sight of the yellow letter. If those eyes could have spoken, their shrieks would have filled the room. I followed the direction of their glance. He was staring in terror at the one strange face in the room—the inspector's.

THE YELLOW LETTER

Seeing how much his presence disturbed the invalid, Davis turned quickly and left the room. Louise and I followed, leaving only the doctor and nurse.

"I wonder what made him look so?" breathed Louise.

"He's afraid of something—for some one?" I said, hurrying to overtake Davis, hoping to learn from him his opinion as to what caused the patient's fears.

"I was right. It's just as I thought," I heard him mutter as he hastened to the hall and reached for his hat and coat. I saw that he was making preparation for instant departure and I was in a quandary what to do. I felt it my duty to accompany my friend, for from his manner I was convinced that he was on the track of the mystery. Yet I did not wish to leave Louise until I had gained some explanation of the barrier that she seemed to have raised between us. I was conscious of no way in which I could have offended her, yet there was a marked difference in her attitude toward me overnight. While I was still debating the question and

KATHARINE SPEAKS

Davis had all but reached the door, seemingly indifferent to whether or not I accompanied him, a nurse came running to Louise.

"Miss Farrish," she said, "I think your sister is recovering consciousness. I thought you would like to know it and to be at her side in case she speaks."

Though Davis was some distance away his acute ear must have caught her words. He turned and was up the stairs in a flash. Louise convulsively caught my hand. The barrier between us was swept away. I knew then it was only fear that she had been forward in showing her affection. Hand in hand we raced up the stairs after the inspector, and ranged ourselves on the other side of the bed from him.

Between us, her long hair in braids, only the white bandage around her forehead to suggest her wound, lay the silent figure of Katharine Farrish. The pallor of her face seemed only to enhance her beauty, and though her eyes were closed, her long dark lashes still gave expression. As we watched, she began stirring restlessly and her hands twitched nervously. Suddenly her eyes opened wide, not

THE YELLOW LETTER

with the light of intelligence, but with the brilliancy of hysteria or the excitement of fever. She made an ineffectual attempt to rise in bed, but she was too weak. Sinking back on the pillow she shrieked: "Promise me, Hugh, promise me, you'll do it at once."

After that one sentence she relapsed into unconsciousness. I feared for a moment that she was dead. The doctor hastened to her side and began to feel her pulse and listen to her heart. It seemed many minutes before he turned to us with a reassuring whisper:

"It is nothing serious—a relapse to be expected after that outburst. Her heart is stronger than I expected. She will not likely regain consciousness for many hours, but there is no immediate danger."

His manner, rather than his words, invited us to go, so Louise and I followed Davis from the room.

The inspector seemed to have forgotten his haste to depart. He sat down abruptly on a divan in the upper hall, with his face resting in his hands, and gave himself up to intent thought.

Louise and I stood a little apart, discussing in



Only the white bandage around her forehead to suggest her wound



KATHARINE SPEAKS

whispers Katharine's strange outcry. What could she have meant?

"She meant Crandall, of course," said Louise. "She mentioned Hugh—did you hear it?"

I nodded assent.

"Probably she was repeating a conversation she had with him just before she shot herself," I suggested. "What do you suppose she wanted him to promise her?"

Louise shook her head. I racked my brain in vain for some theory to fit her words to her own desperate act, to Crandall's flight, to her father's terror. I judged from Davis' abstracted manner that he, too, was similarly engaged.

"Everything," I said to Louise, "every single thing we have learned points to Crandall's connection with the mystery that has hung over your father and Katharine. When we have found him we shall learn what it was. I am more and more convinced that he is guilty of some crime, something terrible, something that your father and sister knew."

The inspector laughed aloud.

We turned toward him, I in indignation, Louise

THE YELLOW LETTER

in astonishment, to find him looking at us with an amused smile.

“Don’t be too sure,” he said quizzically. “Crandall doesn’t seem to have been left-handed.”

CHAPTER V

TWO DISCOVERIES

“**W**HERE are we going now?” I asked sarcastically.

I was thoroughly indignant at the levity with which the inspector had received my theory of Crandall's guilt. Firmly convinced of my sound logic, the thought of Davis laughing at me before Louise rankled. As I began to expound, as forcefully as I could, the reasons for my belief, he cut me short.

“Come along, Harding,” he said in authoritative tones, “we've no time to lose.”

Almost before I knew it I found myself by his side in the taxicab he had hailed. In my indignation I had failed to hear the direction he gave the chauffeur.

“According to your theory, Mr. Detective Kent,” he said with assumed gravity, for he was still in a chaffing mood, “where would be the best place for us to go next?”

THE YELLOW LETTER

"To Hugh Crandall's apartments," I cried, determined to convince him of my view of the case.

"That is exactly where we are bound," he replied to my amazement.

"But," I stammered, "I thought from your manner that you disagreed with me as to Crandall's guilt."

"I do. I doubt every man's guilt until it is definitely proved. I admit there is plenty of evidence of Crandall's connection with the case. I do not admit that any of the evidence yet shows it to be a guilty connection."

Again I started to explain my reasons for thinking Crandall guilty, but again he refused to listen.

"My dear fellow," he said, "in my years of investigating crimes I have thoroughly learned one lesson, and that is the unwisdom of jumping at conclusions. There is only one rule that never fails. Collect all the evidence possible first and then see to whom it points. Most detectives, both professional and amateur, make the fatal mistake of deciding on a theory and then setting out to prove it. That is the reason so many innocent men are convicted and

TWO DISCOVERIES

so many guilty ones escape. You can prove almost anything about anybody if you work hard enough. Starting out with the theory that no such man as Napoleon ever lived, I could gather many convincing proofs—”

He stopped the taxicab at the corner long enough to gather in an armful of afternoon papers from a newsboy, and began scanning their first pages and throwing them aside. From the disappointment in his face I judged he had not found what he was looking for.

“What did you expect to find?” I asked wonderingly.

“Other suicides,” he said tersely, keeping on with his hasty reading.

Though I have known Miller Davis for years I must confess that I constantly find myself almost dazed by the seeming rapidity of his mental processes and their apparently erratic course. Here he was rejecting my theory of Crandall’s guilt, yet jumping wildly to the conclusion that there would be other suicides, possibly connected with Katharine Farrish’s act and Andrew Esler’s death. It was

THE YELLOW LETTER

entirely beyond my comprehension, and the next tack of his mind seemed even more puzzling.

"Do you know anything about art?" he asked as calmly as if we were having an after-dinner chat at the club.

"A little, not much."

"If any one asked you to define technique I doubt if you could do it. I do not believe there is a painter or an art critic who could give a satisfactory definition. Yet any one who knows even a little about paintings knows something of technique. We know that every painter has his own technique. Show me paintings by Henri, Lawson and Glackens and you do not have to label them for me to tell them apart. I recognize the work of each man by his technique. Even if Lawson painted a portrait and Henri a landscape, the individuality of the artist would make his work recognizable, though masked by a subject unusual for him. Crime is like art in one respect at least—technique. Every criminal brain has its own technique. Any one who has investigated crime, who has studied evil-doers under all conditions, who has matched his wits against theirs,

TWO DISCOVERIES

inevitably comes to recognize types of crimes: Given any particular crime to trace, from the very nature of it he is able to say at once, 'This is the work of So-and-so.' Now in the Farrish case I am confident that a crime of some kind has been committed or is even now being committed. I may not know what particular thing it was that drove both Katharine Farrish and old Elser to seek death—in fact I do not know as yet—but that makes no difference. I know the type of crime. I recognize in the case certain indefinable things which convince me that behind it all is a cunning criminal brain that has planned some far-reaching plot. If it was devilishly ingenious enough to drive two people to suicide, in all probability it will have the same effect on others. There may be no other suicides, but I believe there will be. I shall watch every report of a suicide for the next few days with particular interest. Who the criminal is, and who his associate is—for I am convinced it is a crime of the pair—I have no idea. Investigation of mail thefts and stamp counterfeiting never has brought me in touch with this particular sort of crime, so that as yet I

THE YELLOW LETTER

am entirely at sea as regards the identity of the criminals."

"All you have said," I told him, "only convinces me that I am right about Hugh Crandall. An intelligent, educated man gone wrong, a respectable broker with a secret propensity for crime, would fit your theory, wouldn't he?"

"You saw Crandall's janitor last night, didn't you?" was all the response he chose to make to my question. "What kind of a chap is he?"

"If you can get him to admit you to Crandall's rooms you are a wonder," I replied, repeating word for word my interview with the janitor the night before.

"I generally go prepared for such fellows," he answered, smilingly drawing from his pocket a blank legal document on which the word "attachment" was printed boldly across the back. Taking out a fountain pen he rapidly filled in Hugh Crandall's name, on the outside only.

Of course I saw through his ruse. He would represent himself as an officer come to attach Crandall's furniture and thus gain access to the rooms.

TWO DISCOVERIES

"But suppose the janitor insists on reading the document and sees that it is blank inside?"

"No one ever reads legal documents unless necessary. Besides, a man of the janitor type generally has considerable respect for the arm of the law. He probably is more or less familiar with its workings in dispossessions and such things, and realizes how futile opposition would be, supposing that we really were sheriff's deputies, as he will undoubtedly take us to be."

We reached the place, and, dismissing the taxicab half a block away, marched boldly up the steps and rang the bell. As the janitor answered, Davis, carelessly flipping back his coat to show a badge of some sort, demanded admittance to Crandall's apartments.

"I've got an attachment, see?" he said, flashing the back of the document before the janitor's eyes.

"Oh, that's it, is it?" said the janitor. "That's why he beat it so quick yesterday and told me not to let any one into his rooms?"

"So he has gone," exclaimed Davis in mock surprise. "I don't wonder at that. Has he paid you the rent?"

THE YELLOW LETTER

"Come to think of it, he is a month behind," said the janitor, "though often it's been that way and he always made good."

Even as he was talking he began to lead the way up-stairs. Respect for the law, coupled with the insidious doubt of his tenant that Davis' remark had implanted, removed all obstacles to our purpose.

As he flung open the door to Crandall's apartment after unlocking it with his pass key, Davis turned, and handing him a coin, said:

"Can you get me a hammer and a couple of tacks till I put up a notice?"

"Sure," said the janitor as he tucked the coin in his pocket. "I'll go down-stairs and get one right away."

The apartment into which he had admitted us was a two-room-and-bath suite, with furnishings indicating that its occupant was a man of comfortable means and good taste. There were some well-chosen pictures on the wall and a fine lot of books. There was none of the display of stage favorites and sporting pictures found in bachelor dens; but two framed photographs of Katharine Farrish, one with

TWO DISCOVERIES

an inscription, smiled down from the walls, almost the only touch of femininity about the place.

As soon as the janitor disappeared Davis made a bee-line for a desk that stood open and began a hasty search of the papers. I stepped into the bedroom and glanced about. Something on the dresser caught my eye and I crossed and picked it up. I started as I realized what it was. The small object in my hand was to me more and more convincing proof of Crandall's guilt.

"Come on, Kent," called Davis from the adjoining room; "I've got what I came for."

Still clutching the object I had picked up I returned to the sitting-room to find Davis impatiently waiting for me at the head of the stairs.

"Quick," he said, "let's get out before the janitor returns. There is no use waiting to make explanations, as long as we have all we need."

As we reached the front door we heard the janitor shuffling up the stairs, but we were around the corner and safely seated in a hotel café almost before he could have discovered our absence from the rooms.

THE YELLOW LETTER

"See what I found," I exclaimed in triumph, drawing a silver hypodermic syringe from my pocket and laying it on the table. "Crandall's a morphine fiend."

"It does look like it," said Davis unconcernedly. "See what I found!"

Tearing off a corner of a menu card he wrote something on it and then tore it up quickly after showing it to me.

"Lock Box No. 17, Ardway, N. J.," I repeated after reading the words. "What does that mean?"

"That," said Davis positively, "is where the yellow letter came from—or the yellow letters."

"How do you know?" I asked in astonishment. I had supposed that the one thing of importance we would be likely to find in Crandall's apartments would be a bundle of Katharine Farrish's letters. In fact I took it for granted that they were what Davis had been searching for in the desk. It seemed to me such an obvious thing I had not suggested it to him, yet here we were after our visit to the rooms with only two things—the hypodermic syringe and a post-office address. Surely there must have been

TWO DISCOVERIES

in those rooms something more definite, something more damaging to Crandall than the things we had obtained, and of the two I believed that my discovery was the more significant. How could Davis possibly know that this was the address from which the yellow letters emanated?

"It is a simple problem in addition and subtraction," said Davis. "The yellow letter connects the Farrish and Elser cases. Many things connect Crandall with the Farrish case. A criminal using the mails for illegal purposes naturally locates, if possible, in another state from the scene of his operations, foreseeing the better chance of legal delays and possible escape. A criminal working in New York naturally seeks New Jersey as headquarters. If Crandall was cognizant of the yellow letters, whether his connection was innocent or guilty, he naturally would have known or would have tried to find out whence they came. I went into his rooms with one question in my mind and I soon found the answer. 'In Crandall's address book will there not be some address in New Jersey that may give a clue?' Almost the first thing I turned to was this

THE YELLOW LETTER

one of Lock Box 17. Now in the postal business one of the first things we learn is that the criminal always tries to get a post-office box. For that reason two references are always required. In spite of that precaution, many of the boxes are constantly being used for fraudulent purposes. When we find out who rented Lock Box 17 at Ardway, we shall be close on the trail of the yellow letter."

"Were there any letters of Katharine Farrish's in the desk?" I asked.

"I guess so," said Davis unconcernedly. "I saw a bundle of letters in a woman's handwriting, but I didn't even look to see whose they were."

I was disappointed thus far with the inspector's handling of the case. His disregard of what appeared to me to be vital evidence and the decision he had made about this address being that of the sender of the yellow letters seemed to me wholly illogical.

"You'll grant, of course, that Crandall is a morphine user," I ventured.

"A pair of swords in a man's room don't make him a fencer. Excuse me for a minute while I telephone my office."

TWO DISCOVERIES

While he was telephoning I reviewed the case in my mind. I was strongly tempted to break with him and continue the investigation my own way, and yet what had I to gain by it? After all, we had learned very little except that Crandall was connected with the mystery. Where were we likely to find Crandall? Davis had had much more experience in tracing men. He was resourceful, as the method in which he had effected entrance into Crandall's apartments showed. Just as I made up my mind that I would be wise to continue to follow his lead, lacking one of my own, Davis returned, an expression of annoyance on his face.

"Kent," he said abruptly, "you've got to start at once for Ardway. I had planned to go out there, but as I have to appear in court to-morrow there is no use in my going to-night."

"I'll go the first thing in the morning," said I, determined to see Louise again and have a talk with her.

"There's a train out there at four o'clock this afternoon," he said, looking up from a schedule he had picked up in the lobby. "It takes nearly three

THE YELLOW LETTER

hours to get there. Never let a trail get cold if you can help it."

"But—" I protested.

"You can telephone her," he said. "It is for her sake that you will be going, and she will appreciate your energy in the matter more than anything else."

I had not looked at it in that light, yet I felt that he was right. There could not be a moment of happiness for the girl I loved until the black shadow that menaced her home and those she loved had been dispelled. Yes, Davis was right. I would go to Ardway that evening. I stopped only long enough to telephone Louise of my intention and to go to my rooms for a bag.

"If you have a revolver you'd better take it with you," said Davis.

"I never owned one in my life," I replied.

He drew out his own and handed it to me. It was of the hammerless variety, flat and almost square.

"Be careful how you use it," he warned me. "It's a magazine gun and goes off with a very light touch."

"What do you expect me to find out in Ardway?"

TWO DISCOVERIES

I asked him as a taxicab hurried us to the Hudson tunnel.

"There are two things. First: find out if Hugh Crandall is there, when he arrived and what he has been doing. Probably if he is at the hotel he will be registered under an assumed name. Second: find out who has Lock Box No. 17. There is a list of box-owners kept in every office, with the names of the two references. Find out all you can without arousing suspicion. I'll be out and join you there to-morrow evening. I'll come out on this same train. I'll leave it to you to find a plausible pretext for questioning the postmaster."

Tedious as the trip to Ardway would ordinarily have been, so absorbed was I in puzzling over the mystery I hardly noted the passage of time and was startled to hear the brakeman calling my station. I had learned from the conductor that it was a village of less than two thousand inhabitants and that there was only one hotel, about a block from the station. It proved to be a country hotel of the better sort, doing a thriving business in feeding motor-car folk who passed through and in taking care of traveling-

THE YELLOW LETTER

men and farmers' supply agents who visited the neighborhood.

As I signed the register I scanned the names, hoping to see that of Crandall, but it did not appear. Yet registered the night before was a name "Henry Cook" that caught my eye. Something about the writing made it as distinctively that of a city man as his clothes would have distinguished him from the country boy behind the desk.

"Where will I find the post-office?" I asked the clerk. "I want to get a special delivery letter off to-night."

"It's a couple of blocks up Main Street," he told me, "but you'd better go in and get supper. The dining-room closes at half-past seven and the post-office stays open until eight."

I took his advice and, after an excellent meal, lighted my cigar and walked in the direction he had indicated. The streets were lighted after a manner by oil lamps at the corners. There was no moon and the villagers for the most part seemed to live in the rear part of their homes. Few of the straggling stores had their windows lighted, so it was with

TWO DISCOVERIES

difficulty I read the signs on the buildings I passed, yet I had little trouble in finding the post-office. It was a one-story building that stood on a vacant lot in the middle of the block. It evidently had been built by some local politician for the purpose, as it was not quartered in the corner of a cigar or grocery store, as most country offices are. Peering into the darkness I read the sign "*Post-Office,*" and noted with some surprise that the windows were without lights. I drew out my watch and striking a match looked at the time. It was only half-past seven. For lack of something better to do I walked around the building. To my amazement when I reached the end away from the street I found the rear door standing wide open. Thinking perhaps that the postmaster might merely have gone to supper, relying on the honesty of his neighbors to leave things undisturbed, I loitered in the vicinity for a full half-hour. At last, growing impatient, I entered the rear door and striking another match looked about me. As far as the uncertain light permitted me to see, the place looked as if the postmaster had been unexpectedly called away in the midst of his work.

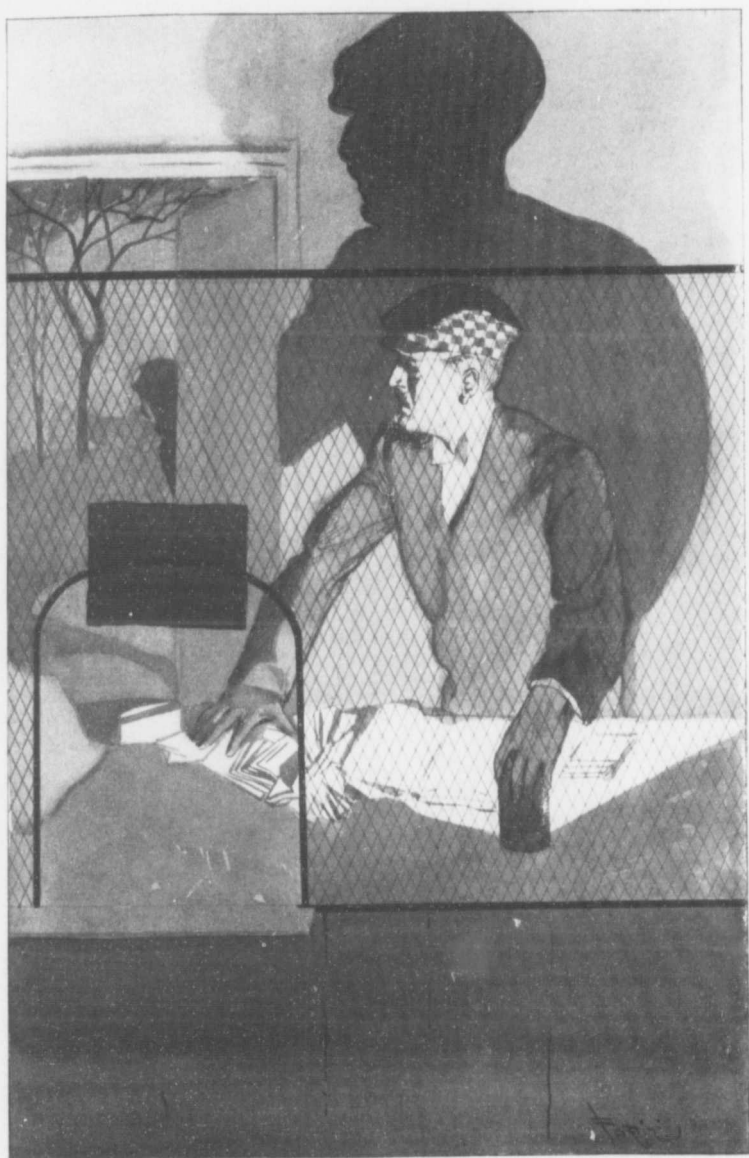
THE YELLOW LETTER

I recalled that in my bag at the hotel was one of those storage battery lights, which happened to be there because I often found it useful in the cabin where I went to shoot ducks. I decided to get this and investigate further. It had begun to rain and there were few people on the street. I returned with my light in a very few minutes and began to explore. I did not greatly fear interruption, for the mail-boxes on the street side served as a screen to shut off the shaft of light by which I worked.

My second inspection convinced me that the postmaster had left in considerable hurry. A pile of mail half-sorted, a stamp drawer left wide open and the books standing in an open safe seemed to bear out this theory. Even the cash-drawer stood open, revealing a few bills and some change.

"If the cash-drawer had been rifled," I said to myself, "I might suspect that the postmaster had been murdered and robbed."

I pushed the cash-drawer shut and heard the automatic lock click on it, and then began a search for the list of box-owners. At the back of each box a slip was pasted with the owner's name. To my great



Even the cash-drawer stood open

TWO DISCOVERIES

* disappointment box No. 17 was blank. I turned next to the safe and at last found the book in which the accounts of box-rent were kept. In this were neatly entered the name of each box-holder and the two references given, for every box except No. 17.

As I stood poring over this book, perplexed by my failure to discover the owner, I became conscious that I was watched. A sixth sense convinced me that some one else was near. Quickly I pressed the button that extinguished my electric lantern. Noiselessly I turned toward the rear door by which I had entered. I caught just a fleeting glimpse of a man's face being hastily withdrawn. Undoubtedly it was the postmaster who had returned and caught me there. Of course he must take me for a burglar. It had been too dark for me to recognize the features of the man and I was certain he could not identify me. I stood motionless for a minute or two, listening intently, but I could not hear even a footstep—nothing but the patter of the rain.

Yet undoubtedly whoever had discovered me had gone to summon assistance. It would never do for me to be caught there. While I felt I was perfectly

THE YELLOW LETTER

justified in my mission, it would be hard to make satisfactory explanation. If I was captured there it certainly would mean an unpleasant night in a vermin-filled shack, perhaps in irons. It might take several days to establish my innocence. I decided to attempt an escape. The sense of having a revolver in my pocket comforted me, though I realized its possession would be most damaging if I should be caught. I moved swiftly to the door and peered out. There was no one in sight.

Thrusting my lantern in my pocket and turning up my collar I made a dash around the corner of the building and looked up and down the street. It was entirely deserted. The thought struck me that the man who had been watching me might still be in hiding on the other side of the building, but I did not stop to investigate. With the best air of unconcern I could assume, I walked, not over-hastily, back to the hotel. There was no one in the office but the clerk behind the desk and I stood there for a moment beside the big old-fashioned stove drying my clothes. The door opened and a tall smooth-shaven chap came in and approached the desk to get his key. As

TWO DISCOVERIES

he saw me standing there he gave me a keen glance of scrutiny. I had noticed that he had come from the direction of the post-office and he must have seen that my clothing was rain-soaked. He half-halted as if about to speak to me, but changed his mind. I heard the clerk say:

“Good night, Mr. Cook,” as he vanished up-stairs.

If this was the man who had seen me in the post-office, plainly he was not the postmaster. If not, who was he? What was he doing there?

It was long after midnight before my mystified brain would let me sleep. Every step I had taken seemed only to be leading me deeper and deeper into darkness.

CHAPTER VI

THE THIRD SUICIDE

SOMETHING had happened.

I awoke the next morning with a start and sat up in bed listening to the strange confusion in the hotel. Instinctively I recognized that the sensation of the unusual that so affected me was something more than the feeling every one experiences on suddenly awaking for the first time in a strange place.

I sprang from the bed and, opening my door, looked out into the hall. I could see nothing, for a turn of the corridor shut me off from the main hall. From the floor below came the confused murmur of many voices and the sound of men moving about—many men. My first thought was of fire, but there were no cries and there was no smell of smoke. The memory of my experience in the post-office recurred to me. I vaguely wondered if I had been tracked and discovered.

THE THIRD SUICIDE

I hastened to dress. If they suspected me of robbing the post-office, the sooner I found out the sooner I could plan some method of action. As I put on my collar I heard footsteps in the corridor, and, coatless as I was, I flung open my door. A chambermaid was passing.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"Haven't you heard about it?" she asked in wonder.

"Heard about what?"

"The suicide in the hotel—in the room right under yours. They discovered it hours ago. The coroner's just come and is getting ready to hold the inquest."

"Who was he?" I asked. I was thinking it might be Hugh Crandall, dead in some suicide pact with Katharine. A sense of disappointment began to take hold of me. I felt that if it were Crandall my efforts to clear the mystery would be still more futile, but the woman's answer quickly dispelled the thought.

"It wasn't a 'he.' It's a woman."

She hurried on down the corridor and I hastened to finish my dressing, recalling as I did so Davis'

THE YELLOW LETTER

belief that there would be other suicides. It seemed absurd that there could be any connection between the suicide of a woman in a country hotel in an obscure New Jersey village and the two suicides the day before in New York, and yet there was at least one link between them. It was Crandall who had telephoned Katharine. Some one had telephoned Elser, too. It was in Crandall's rooms that we had found the address of this place where the third suicide in the series had taken place.

With the triumphant feeling that my friend the inspector finally would have to accept my theory of Crandall's guilt, I hurried down-stairs and forced my way into the room where the coroner had already begun his inquest.

On the bed, covered with a sheet, except for the face, lay the lifeless body of a woman perhaps fifty, the face still distorted from the death agony. A bit of rope attached to a rod among the rafters of the room showed that she had hung herself. The woman's outer clothing lay neatly piled on a chair near the bed. This much I had time to notice before the coroner finished selecting his jury. Near the

THE THIRD SUICIDE

coroner, too, I observed the man whom the clerk had called Cook. I thought he gave a quick glance in my direction, but I could not be sure. The first witness was called, Mahlon Williams, the proprietor of the hotel.

"Mr. Williams," said the coroner, "do you know this woman?"

"I can't say as I do."

"What was her name?"

"She was registered here in the hotel. The name's on the book. You can see it for yourself. I don't know if it 'twas her real name or not."

"Mary Jane Teiler, Bridgeport, Conn.," was the entry in the hotel register which was produced and submitted for the jurors' inspection.

"Tell us, Mr. Williams, what you know about the deceased."

"Mighty little; nothing at all, in fact. She come here night before last. Got in on the seven-two train from New York, I calculate, from the time of her arrival. She had no baggage, only that little black bag yonder, and she asked for a room for the night—a cheap room. She seemed so feeble I gave her this

THE YELLOW LETTER

room on the ground floor, No. 4, and only charged her seventy-five cents for it, though it's a dollar room, or a dollar and a half for bridal couples. She paid for it for one night and right after supper she went into it and stayed there. Yesterday morning after breakfast she went out somewhere and was gone maybe an hour or an hour and a half. I didn't see her when she come in but I heard—"

"Mahlon Williams," said the coroner severely, "you ought to know enough about the law to understand that what you heard ain't evidence. Tell only them things you know of your own knowledge."

"All I know," said Williams, perceptibly miffed, "is that she come out along about three in the afternoon and paid another seventy-five cents, saying she wanted the room another night. That's all I seen of her."

"Can I ask a question?" said one of the jurors, all of whom were townsmen of the class usually to be found around the hotel bar-room.

"If it is a proper question," said the coroner judiciously.

"Where did she go when she went out?"

THE THIRD SUICIDE

"The question is a proper one, if the witness can answer it of his own knowledge," the coroner ruled.

"If I knowed I'd a told already," said the hotel keeper.

One or two of the other jurors asked questions, prompted plainly more by curiosity than by intelligent effort to ascertain the facts; but it was plain that Mr. Williams had revealed all that he knew, and he was dismissed.

Doctor Allen, who had been sent for as soon as the suicide was discovered, gave it as his opinion that the woman had hung herself early the evening before, as nearly as he could judge about five o'clock.

"Who was it found the body?" the coroner asked.

"Mary Evans, the chambermaid," the constable volunteered. "Here she is, right here."

The coroner proceeded to examine her.

Much embarrassed by the prominence into which she found herself thrust, but manifestly enjoying the unusual situation, the girl told how, early in the morning, as soon as she began her work, she had gone to the room.

"I didn't know there was any one in No. 4," she

THE YELLOW LETTER

explained. "I knew the woman had taken it for just one night and I hadn't bothered making it up the day before. None of the other roomers was up yet and I thought I might just as well get No. 4 off my mind. I knocked like I always do and getting no answer I opened the door right wide all of a sudden. Such a shock as it gave me I never expect to have again to my dying day. There was the poor creature a-hanging there. I let a yell out of me that must have waked the dead, and then I ran and called Mr. Williams."

"Had you seen the deceased on the day previous?"

"Yes, but she wasn't deceased when I saw her."

"Did you have any conversation with her?"

"No more than to pass the time of day with her you might say."

I was thoroughly disgusted with the drivelling way in which the proceedings were being carried on. I could see little hope of any discovery that would establish connection with the similar events in New York. I turned from listening to the witness to studying the face of the man Cook. Could it be possible he was Hugh Crandall? I saw that he was

THE THIRD SUICIDE

watching the testimony with eager interest. Against my will I had to confess that his face was one that attracted rather than repelled me. While there was a shrewdness about the eyes, the chin was square and firm and the skull well-balanced. I tried to read in the shape of the mouth or the curve of the ears some sign of the criminal, such as I expected to find written on the countenance of Crandall, but it was not there.

“She was sitting there crying.”

A sentence of the maid's testimony suddenly thrust itself forward from my subconsciousness as if demanding my attention and I listened intently to what she was saying.

“That was the way it happened that I didn't make up the room the day before. When I went in to do it she was sitting there crying and tearing a letter to bits.”

A letter! It came on me in a flash that here was the clue, that this was the connecting link with the other two cases.

I pushed my way forward into the room, determined to learn all there was about this new phase of

THE YELLOW LETTER

the case. The proceedings stopped abruptly at the bustle my movement made, and everybody, coroner, jurors and spectators, gaped at me.

"I am a lawyer," I said. "May I ask the witness one or two questions?"

Still the coroner gaped and I waited no longer for his permission.

"Was it a yellow letter?" I asked.

"Now that you speak of it I kind of remember that it was."

"Has the letter been found?"

"She was tearing it in pieces."

"Where are the pieces?"

The eyes of everybody present began roving about the room, as if in answer to my question. The constable instituted a hasty search, in which I myself, the coroner and the jurors joined. I felt that if we could only find those pieces, the mystery might be solved. While the room was being ransacked I kept my eye on Cook. As I asked the question about the letter's color I noticed that he looked startled. I was amazed now to see him edging toward the door. I was tempted to demand that he be restrained and

THE THIRD SUICIDE

searched. I felt almost sure that if the pieces of the yellow letter were to be found anywhere it would be in his pocket. Yet second thought advised against such rash action. I had no positive proof that Cook was Crandall. Until I had, surely it would be unwise to accuse him. I remembered that there was no train by which he could leave the town until late in the afternoon, so there was little prospect that he could escape me.

"How did you know it was a yellow letter?" the coroner asked me suspiciously, pausing suddenly in his search.

It was an awkward question. I realized that my impetuosity had placed me in a predicament. I was by no means ready to tell him the whole story, and yet the fact that I knew or suspected the color of the letter that she was tearing up certainly indicated that I knew something about the woman.

"I didn't know it."

"Well, what'd you ask the question about it for?" he repeated, his suspicion of me rapidly increasing.

I was thinking quickly what I could say that would divert his thoughts. I noticed with annoyance

THE YELLOW LETTER

that the eyes of every one in the room were on me and that they were curiously awaiting an answer. I assumed an air of mystery and drew the coroner to one side.

"I am perfectly willing to tell you everything," I said. "I am out here on another matter that is something of a mystery in which a yellow letter figures. The letter has disappeared. I never saw or heard of this old woman before, but when the witness mentioned that she was tearing up a letter a sudden notion came to me that it might be the one of which I was in search. A detective who is working on the case will be out here this evening and then I can tell you more about it."

I spoke the last sentence in a whisper so low that it reached only the coroner's ear. He pondered over my statement and then abruptly announced that the inquest was adjourned until nine o'clock the next day. I would have escaped him if I could, but I saw that he was determined to worm out everything I knew or suspected. I decided that activity would be the best remedy for his curiosity. Accordingly I invited the coroner and the constable to come up to my

THE THIRD SUICIDE

rooms where, without waiting for them to question me, I began firing questions hot-shot at them, suggesting things for them to do, simple things that would have been the first thought of the police of New York or any other large city, but which they had not thought of. Had they telephoned a description of the woman to the Bridgeport police with her name to see if she could be identified as any one who was missing from that city? Had they examined her clothing to see if there was any mark on it that might identify her? Had they studied her writing on the register to see if it gave any indication of being assumed or disguised? Had they examined her pocketbook to see if it contained any clue to a motive? Had they considered whom she might have come to this town to see?

"That idea of calling up the Bridgeport police ain't such a bad one," said the coroner. "Suppose you do it now," he said, turning to the constable.

"I'd like to know who's going to pay for it if I do," the constable objected. "There ain't enough fees in this office for me to be spending my money that way."

THE YELLOW LETTER

"You go ahead and do it and I'll see that you get the money back."

"If you're going to pay it out of your own pocket I'll do it, but if you expect me to wait till you put it through as a lawful expense I ain't taking no chances."

Their petty wrangling over such a trifling amount exasperated me not a little.

"Here," said I, pulling a five-dollar bill from my pocket, "take this and pay for it and tell them to telephone you as soon as they can what they have found out. This ought to cover both the message and the answer and if there is anything left get yourself some cigars with it."

The constable needed no second bidding. As soon as he had disappeared I turned to the coroner:

"Did you notice that man Cook at the inquest? Who is he?"

"I don't know who you mean," he replied. "The only Cook I know here in the town is Bob Cook, and he's laid up with a broken leg."

"Didn't you notice a tall, smooth-shaven fellow who stood right close beside where you were sitting?"

THE THIRD SUICIDE

He listened closely to the testimony and the minute we began looking for the scraps of the letter, didn't you see him slip out of the room?"

"Come to think of it," said the coroner, "I believe I did notice him, but I can't say as I seen him going out. Maybe 'twas one of the guests of the hotel."

"I think he is, and I'm pretty sure he's registered in the hotel as Mr. Cook, too, but I'd like to know more about him."

"Let's go down and ask Mahlon. If there's anybody staying in his hotel he don't know about it's something unusual."

We found Mahlon Williams in the little boxed-off corner behind the hotel desk that was labeled "Private Office." The curious crowd was still gaping at the door of the room where the suicide had taken place, at least such of them as had not adjourned to the bar to talk it over, so that we were alone in the office.

"Mr. Williams," I said, "what do you know about this man Cook, who is stopping here in the hotel?"

THE YELLOW LETTER

"No more than I know about you," said he, "and not as much, in fact, for he didn't ask no peculiar questions at the inquest. Speaking about that letter—"

"How long has this man Cook been in the house?" I interrupted, determined not to let either him or the coroner annoy me with questions.

The hotel-keeper, plainly provoked at my attitude, stared thoughtfully at me for a minute and finally decided to answer my question as the only hope of getting me to answer his.

"He came just the night before you did—got in on the seven-two train."

His answer settled everything in my mind. Cook was Crandall. The arrival of Cook in the village coincided with the departure of Crandall from New York. The haste in which he had departed was explicable by the arrival of the old woman on that train. Evidently he wanted for some reason to arrive in the village at the same time that she did. What had been his motive was still a mystery to me. It flashed across my mind that perhaps, after all, her death might not have been suicide. A clever

THE THIRD SUICIDE

criminal might easily arrange things to look as though she had hung herself. I determined to make an investigation to see if there was any evidence to prove this, but I said nothing of my suspicions as yet. I already regretted my precipitancy in asking about the yellow letter. The questions of the landlord and the coroner might be deferred for a while, but sooner or later I would have to make some explanation, and I had none to give.

"What is Cook's business?" I asked the landlord hastily, anticipating a question I saw forming on his lips.

"I don't know. He kind of looked to me like a traveling-man—or a lawyer. What was—"

The return of the constable from telephoning saved my answering the question he was about to ask.

"There ain't no woman missing from Bridgeport that the police know anything about," he said sententiously.

"Did ye tell them her name?" asked the coroner.

"Yep. They say there's only three families of Teilers in the telephone book and only four in the

THE YELLOW LETTER

directory, and they are going to look them up and telephone inside of an hour."

"Maybe her name wasn't Teiler," suggested the hotel-keeper. "I recollect seeing her kind of hesitate as she went to write in the register."

"That's just what I was thinking," I cried, glad to divert his attention once more. "Let us go and look at the register and then examine her clothing. Maybe there are some marks on it."

"That's a good idea," said the coroner. "Wonder we didn't think of that before."

The hotel register showed us little save the name "Mary Jane Teiler" in the tremulous old-fashioned hand little used to handling the pen. There was perhaps a little more space between the last two names than after the first—as if she hesitated a moment while deciding what name to use or perhaps with an honest woman's natural aversion to assuming any other name than her own.

"Let's look at the clothing," I suggested, eager for an opportunity to see whether there were any indications that would point to anything other than suicide.

THE THIRD SUICIDE

The four of us hastened to the room again. To my annoyance I noted that the rope had been removed from the rafters, though the woman's outer clothing still lay piled on the chair. There seemed to be nothing about the inexpensive black suit to identify the owner, no mark of any kind except the label of the concern in New York from which it had been purchased.

"Where's the black bag she carried?" asked the coroner.

"There was some money in it," Mr. Williams replied. "I put it in the safe."

As we left the room to return to the hotel office I gave a hasty glance at the corpse. From the condition of the face and throat it was all too plain that death had been by strangulation, still, I reasoned, a powerful man might have strangled the woman first and hanged her afterward to conceal his crime. I determined to put the theory up to Davis as soon as he arrived.

Twirling the knob of the ancient safe that stood in the corner, the hotel-keeper reached in and drew out a well-worn hand-bag of black leather and up-

THE YELLOW LETTER

set the contents on the desk. There were three one-dollar bills, neatly folded, three dimes and eight pennies—a meager amount that suggested the hoarding of pennies for this trip, whatever its purpose. There was a half-ticket, the return stub of a ticket from Bridgeport and another one from New York to Ardway, and that was all, save two neatly folded black-bordered handkerchiefs.

“Looks like she came from Bridgeport, after all,” the constable volunteered.

“Maybe she did,” said the landlord, unfolding one of the handkerchiefs and holding it up to our gaze. “Maybe she did come from Bridgeport, but her name wasn’t Teiler—not Mary Jane Teiler by a long shot.”

In the corner of each handkerchief was a neatly embroidered “S.”

It gave me quite a shock as I looked at that mute evidence of her assumed name, of her effort to mask her identity.

Could her name have been Elser?

Was this the way in which she was connected with the two suicides in New York? But even so,

THE THIRD SUICIDE

suppose she was the sister or relative, or even the unrecognized wife of old Andrew Elser, what possible connection could these two humble people have with Katharine Farrish?

The mystery was growing deeper. How I wished that Inspector Davis would come.

CHAPTER VII

TWO DISAPPEARANCES

I LOOKED at my watch and saw that it was nearly noon. I remembered that I had not yet called up Louise as I had intended to do the very first thing that morning. What a laggard lover she must think me! How heartless it must seem to her for me to leave her alone so long in the mansion where her father and sister lay dying, perhaps dead, with the black shadowy mystery still hanging over her and them! What must she think of me? Filled with self-reproach I sprang up without a word of apology or explanation to the others and hastened to the telephone booth I had observed in the hall.

"Give me O141 Madison," I demanded of central.

"What's the matter?" she repeated, with surprise in her tone, which struck me peculiarly until I considered that long-distance calls from Ardway must be such a rarity as to surprise even the operator.

TWO DISAPPEARANCES

"I want long-distance—New York," I explained, enunciating distinctly, "0141 Madison."

"Again," central replied, flippantly, it appeared to me.

I repeated the number, more than annoyed by her response. "Oh, I've got your number all right by this time."

It was a good thing for her that she tried no more jocularities with me, or the rules of the company against profanity would have been shattered. There was a wait of several minutes, filled with the usual false alarms of long-distance telephoning, during which I stood and fumed. At last I heard my dear Louise's voice and hastened eagerly to ask after her welfare. Her voice seemed strong and cheerful, though she admitted that she had slept little the night before. I apologized for not having called up before. She told me that while her father's condition was unchanged, the doctor thought he was in no immediate danger, and that Katharine was much improved. The doctor believed now that she could live. She was conscious, but very weak, and Louise had been forbidden to speak to her and was allowed

THE YELLOW LETTER

in the room only for a minute at a time. I hastily sketched for her the events of the morning.

"Oh, Mr. Kent," said Louise's voice—how I wished she would call me by my first name—"who do you suppose called up?"

"Who?"

"Hugh Crandall."

"What's that?" I exclaimed, hardly believing my ears.

"Hugh Crandall," she repeated a little louder and more distinctly. "He asked for Katharine, and the maid called me to the telephone. I told him my sister was ill and could not come to the telephone. He seemed greatly agitated and insisted on knowing what the matter was. He was so agitated and persistent I finally told him she had met with an accident. He was silent for so long I thought he had left the telephone, but all of a sudden he asked, 'Did she shoot herself?' and before I thought I answered 'Yes.' Then he cried out, 'Oh, my God!' or something like that and asked if she was fatally injured. I told him that she was alive but unconscious, and then, Harding, he asked if I had seen anything of

TWO DISAPPEARANCES

a yellow letter. I thought I had better tell him nothing about that, so I answered 'No,' and then he rang off."

"That was right," I said. "Where did he call up from?"

"I have no idea."

"When was it? How long ago?"

"Not very long—within the hour."

Hastily I explained to Louise that a man that I believed was Crandall was here in the hotel with me and that I would find him at once and make him explain the mystery. Before I left the booth I got the Ardway central again and from her learned—what I had begun to suspect—that "0141 Madison" had been called from the very booth in which I stood, not over an hour before. There was no longer any doubt about it in my mind—Cook was Crandall. He evidently had gone straight to the telephone booth after slipping out of the room as I had asked the question about the yellow letter. From the questions he put to Louise, he must have been suspecting that Katharine would try suicide. Why else had he asked if she had shot herself? He

THE YELLOW LETTER

must have known her motive. He surely could explain the dark mystery that burdened her father and herself.

I resolved to seek him at once and, even if I had to have him arrested on some pretext, or if I had to use physical force, to make him disgorge all he knew. I felt in my pocket to make sure that the revolver Davis had given me was there, and hurried back to the office.

"Have you seen anything of Cook?" I asked, trying to mask the eagerness with which I sought him.

"Not since early this morning," the landlord volunteered. "I guess you saw him after I did. The coroner told me you saw him leaving the room during the inquest."

"I seen him," volunteered the clerk.

"Where? When?" I asked excitedly.

"About an hour ago, driving past here lickety-split with the black mare from Jones' livery stable."

"Which direction did he go?" I cried, all excitement at the thought that Crandall was escaping just at the very moment when I, for the first time, had made sure of his identity.

TWO DISAPPEARANCES

"He must be followed and found at once," I said, turning to the landlord. "Don't his actions look to you like those of a guilty man? The minute he hears me ask about a yellow letter he disappears from the hotel. There is no train by which he can escape. So desperate is he that he hires a horse and tries to get away cross country."

I had hoped by my eagerness to stir in the landlord something of my own feeling in regard to Crandall's guilt, but these country yokels are hard to move.

"What do you suspect him of?" he inquired calmly. "Why should he want to escape from you? Have you got a warrant for him?"

I was not yet ready to divulge my reason for wanting Crandall captured. Even if we had him, what definite crime was there of which I could accuse him? I was morally certain that the yellow letter or letters emanated from him, yet how could I prove it? A new thought came to me.

"Where is his baggage?" I asked.

"He only had a hand-satchel with him," said Mr. Williams, "and I guess that is up in his room."

THE YELLOW LETTER

"Suppose we go look for it," I suggested.

"You don't do no such thing as that in my hotel," said the landlord decisively, "not unless you've got a warrant. He's paid for his room for a week in advance, and there ain't no law to prevent his going and coming as he pleases, so long as there ain't no warrant out for him. If he wants to get out of town behind the fastest horses in Jones' stable I ain't a-going to try to stop him, and what's more, if he has left his grip in his room it is going to stay there. Maybe or maybe not there are things in it, but there ain't no prying stranger going to know what's there unless he can show me due warrant of law."

"You may be defeating the ends of justice," I warned him sternly, indignantly resenting his remark, yet seeing no way in which I could successfully dodge his appellation of "prying stranger" without revealing my whole hand, and this I was determined not to do until Davis arrived and I had had an opportunity to consult with him.

"I may be blocking your plans," said the landlord gruffly, "but you'll get no more help out of me un-

TWO DISAPPEARANCES

less I know what it is you are after. The right kind of a mystery doesn't hurt the hotel business, but there's things that do, and if you want any help from me, young man, I've got to know what's going on."

"I wish I knew myself," I said mentally, adding aloud: "When I am ready to speak you will hear many things that will astound you. Meanwhile, I tell you that I have every reason to believe that that man who fled from here is a great criminal and that if you do not aid in his apprehension you will be doing a serious wrong to the community. I'll tell you this much, I am convinced that he was responsible for this woman's death and for other deaths."

"Maybe he is and maybe he ain't," said the landlord. "I saw the lady myself, and nobody can persuade me it was anything but a suicide. Why, I cut her down!"

"I am not denying that she committed suicide," I replied with some asperity, "but I am morally certain that if she killed herself she was driven to it by the man who has just fled. I insist on being allowed to examine his baggage."

THE YELLOW LETTER

"Look here, young man," said Mr. Williams, "I have told you once and for all that the baggage of no guest in this house is going to be examined without due process of law. And I want to say right here that it's evident that you yourself know a lot more about this case than you are telling. If you are an officer and can show me a warrant I am ready to give you all the aid and assistance I can, but until you do, I'd advise you to keep your nose out of things that ain't your business and to stay out of places you ain't got a right to be in."

The suspicion crossed my mind that it might be he who had discovered me in the post-office the night before. I decided quickly that it could not have been, for he was in the hotel when I arrived. I felt sure it must have been either Crandall or the postmaster. Plainly, though, there was nothing further to be gained by argument with the obtuse Mr. Williams. After all, there ought not to be much difficulty in tracing Crandall by the vehicle in which he had driven away. That could wait until Davis arrived. Meanwhile I pondered on what I could do to throw light on the case. I had it. I would

TWO DISAPPEARANCES

visit the post-office again and see what I could learn about the holder of the lock box from which Davis believed the yellow letters came.

Abruptly leaving the landlord, I strolled out into the street, determined to go boldly to the post-office and make inquiries. As I approached the building I saw a little group of villagers gathered in front of it, the faces of some of whom I had noted at the inquest. They seemed to be excitedly discussing some happening. It was not without some trepidation that I came closer. If my visit to the post-office had been discovered and there was any one in the crowd who could identify me, an awkward situation might develop. I put on a bold front, however, and approached closer.

"What's the matter?" I asked, trying to make my inquiry seem casual.

"The postmaster's disappeared," some one explained.

"Where?"

"Don't know," said my informant. "He didn't come to the office at all to-day. When the people come for their mail after the New York train got

THE YELLOW LETTER

in he wasn't here. Hank Rollins always brings it up on the stage, and as he's passing, throws it off on the board walk and the postmaster comes out and gets it. Nobody ever goes for their mail for a few minutes after that, to give him a chance to get it sorted. The first persons who got here to-day found the mail-sack lying just where the driver had flung it."

"Yes, sir," broke in an old man whom I heard them call "Dad" Hutchinson. "Yes, sir, I was the first to notice it. I was going to the office to see if maybe there was a letter for me from my daughter Mary, who lives up Boston way, and I noticed the sack lying right over there. I went into the office to tell the postmaster about it and kind of have a little fun with him, and bless my soul if there was hide or hair of him to be seen anywhere. Looking through the boxes, I could see that the back door was standing wide open, and I went around there and looked, and I couldn't see anything of him, either. It didn't seem right for the mail to be lying out there on the sidewalk, 'twas like taking undue liberty with government property, so I dragged the

TWO DISAPPEARANCES

sack around and flung it in the door and went looking for the constable. Then I heard about the suicide and the inquest down to the hotel, so I went down there to fetch him, and all the crowd that had been down to the inquest come trailing along."

"I noticed when I come along here last night that the post-office was dark," volunteered another of the crowd. "I don't know just what time it was, but it was just before it began to rain. I remember, now, thinking it kind of funny the office was shut up so early, but I didn't stop to investigate. I'll bet he wasn't here last night, either."

"It's burglars, that's what it is," said an excited youngster. "I saw them at work. I come along here last night and there was a flash, like from a dark lantern. Right in there behind the boxes, it was. They must a been at work then. I'll bet they killed him and hid his body and made away with all the money and stamps."

"How many of them were there?"

"Did you see them?"

"What time was it?"

Questions poured thick and fast on the youngster,

THE YELLOW LETTER

who evidently had told all he knew and a little more. I took advantage of the furor his story had created to slip around to the rear of the building, where I found a self-appointed committee of citizens and the constable guarding the door.

"Has anything been stolen?" I asked.

"Not as far as we can discover," said the constable. "There ain't no disorder about the place and the safe hasn't been busted, as far as I can see. I ain't made any regular investigation, being as this is government property."

"Has no one any idea where the postmaster is?" I asked.

"That's just what we've been trying to find out. Jim, here, as soon as we found Rouser wasn't here, went up to the Widow Smith's, where he boards. Thought maybe he'd just overslept or something like that, or maybe was sick. But Mrs. Smith went up and looked in his room and come down and said he hadn't been home all night."

"Yes," interrupted Jim, "and what's more, she said it was nothing unusual for him not to come home. There was lots and lots of nights recently

TWO DISAPPEARANCES

when he didn't show up. She had no idea where he spent his nights. She's a woman that minds her own business and don't interfere none with her boarders' goings and comings as long as they pay their money regular."

"What are you going to do about keeping the office open?" I asked, much puzzled over this new mystery. How I wished for Davis! Mystery seemed to be piling on mystery with every step I took. Beyond the one conviction I had that Hugh Crandall was in some way to blame for it all, I saw nothing that would help me in my undertaking.

"We've arranged about that. We've sent for Jennie Cox to come over and take charge. She always takes hold when Charlie Rouser wants to take a day or a half-day off. She knows the combination of the safe and the money-drawer, and has been sworn in as special assistant. She'll know what to do and who to notify."

"It may interest you to know that Post-Office Inspector Davis will be out here to-night," I told them. "I left him in New York last night, and he promised to join me here."

THE YELLOW LETTER

Suspicion flashed into the faces of all my auditors.

"Maybe that's why Rouser has disappeared," suggested the constable. "He's been spending a lot of money lately, Rouser has. Maybe he knew the inspector was coming and was short in his accounts."

"He couldn't have known it," I protested. "The inspector himself didn't know he was coming here until late yesterday afternoon, and there isn't any way possible that the postmaster could have been advised of his coming."

The arrival of the substitute official diverted the conversation. Miss Cox, an unimaginative, unattractive woman of thirty, in a most matter-of-fact way entered the building and took charge.

"The first thing," she said as she calmly hung up her hat and coat, "is for all you men to get out of here so that I can sort the mail."

Even the constable moved toward the door, impelled by the authority in her tone and his own respect for government property. I determined not to be routed so easily. It seemed to me that the occasion afforded me an excellent opportunity, not to

TWO DISAPPEARANCES

solve the mystery of the missing postmaster, but to work out one of my own puzzles—who it was that had rented Lock Box 17.

“Miss Cox,” I said, “as a personal friend of Post-Office Inspector Davis, who is to join me here in a few hours in connection with an important matter, and for your own sake as well, I would suggest that you should keep at least two of us here as witnesses. This is government property. The postmaster has disappeared and some of the government’s property may be missing. If your inspection is made in the presence of two witnesses there can be no question about your statement of the condition in which you found things. I really think it is a necessary precaution. I would suggest that two of us, say the constable and myself, be permitted to remain as witnesses.”

“By ginger, he’s right,” said the constable, whose attitude toward me at once became one of decided friendliness.

“Maybe I had,” said Miss Cox. “You two may stay, but the rest get out.”

With a narrow sense of duty she insisted on sort-

THE YELLOW LETTER

ing the morning's mail before she made any investigation. Meanwhile the constable and I discussed the case. From him I learned that Rouser, the postmaster, was a likable young fellow of twenty-five or six, who had held the office for two or three years.

"The way he come to be postmaster was this: His father had represented this district in Congress for twenty years or so before he died. The old man was an able citizen, but never had accumulated much money, though he gave the boy a good education. Charlie, however, wasn't much good. He was bright and smart enough, but he seemed to lack the git-up and git-to-do for himself. After his father died he lived on the little money left him till it was all gone and then just drifted around, getting a meal where he could and his clothes growing shabbier and shabbier. The women-folks all liked him and was always trying to find something for him to do. He'd work if he had it, but he wasn't the kind of a fellow to be teaming or gardening or trucking, and it was the hardest sort of a job to find something that would suit him. The old postmaster died and the politicians was about equally divided as to

TWO DISAPPEARANCES

who was entitled to the place. They didn't seem able to agree on no one. Then somebody suggested Charlie Rouser, some of the women-folks I guess it was, and first thing you know he had it.

"It don't pay much, only six hundred a year, but Charlie don't drink and don't gamble, so he's been able to get along on that well enough, and he ain't made a bad postmaster. He's a weak youngster and easily led, and if he'd ever got into bad company I can see his finish. Lately I've noticed he seemed to be spending a lot of money, though where it came from, if the books is all straight, is more than I can imagine."

"What's he been spending it for?"

"Well, I noticed him the other day wearing a big diamond in his necktie and he bought himself a gold repeater watch and he's always hiring horses at the livery stable and going off for drives in the evening. One night I seen him buy a round of drinks that cost a dollar and ten cents. That's what I call spending."

"Maybe he met with an accident on his drive."

"Maybe he did, but I don't believe it likely. A

THE YELLOW LETTER

fellow that can get along with women can get along with horses, and while Charlie wasn't athletic or anything like that, I never seen the horses yet he couldn't drive."

By this time Miss Cox had her mail sorted and turned to us with: "If you two gentlemen want to see what's in the safe, now is your chance. I'm going to open it."

Everything inside the safe was in the neatest order. She removed the ledgers and put them on the desk, inspected the cash-drawer of the safe and made a tab of the amount. She also carefully counted the reserve supply of stamps, postal-cards and stamped envelopes, and added them to her tally.

"Now for the daily cash-drawer," suggested the constable. "Let's see if he's taken any of the cash."

"That's just like a man," snapped Miss Cox. "How are you going to tell till I go over these books and see how much there ought to be? We'll open the cash-drawer after I'm through looking."

There was nothing to do but wait, and it was perhaps half an hour before she completed her calculations, being often interrupted by callers for mail.

TWO DISAPPEARANCES

"If that cash-drawer hasn't been robbed," she said, "we'll find exactly sixteen dollars and forty-eight cents in it."

In the presence of both of us she opened the drawer and carefully counted out its contents. One five-dollar bill, two two's, four ones and three dollars and forty-eight cents in silver and pennies were in the drawer.

"Right to a 't,'" she exclaimed triumphantly. "I believe you two are disappointed at not finding a shortage. Charlie Rouser may have his faults, but he's honest."

"What's that there at the back of the drawer?" asked the constable, paying no attention to her remark.

The drawer, one of those heavy wooden affairs with a circular pocket for silver, had been pulled out almost to its utmost length. Where the money compartments fitted into the back of the drawer a little space was left, barely visible under the overhang of the desk. It was at this particular space that the constable was pointing.

Following the line of his finger, I caught a glint

THE YELLOW LETTER

of yellow, just as the energetic Miss Cox gave the drawer a hard jerk that brought it out to its full length. She reached into the slit and brought out a neat package of one-hundred-dollar bills—fifty of them.

The three of us gazed at each other in blank amazement.

What was a poor country postmaster on six hundred dollars a year doing with five thousand dollars carelessly concealed thus?

Where did he get it?

Where was he?

CHAPTER VIII

A NEW CLUE

“SO, Davis,” I concluded, “you see that every new clue points to Hugh Crandall.”

The post-office inspector sniffed.

“What have they done with the dead woman’s clothes?” he asked. “I want to see them at once.”

I had been anxiously awaiting Davis’ arrival, not without some little feeling of triumph, to tell to him the startling developments in the mystery since I had left him hardly more than twenty-four hours before at the ferry. I was at the station awaiting him, and led him at once to the little hotel. The noise of his coming had been bruited about by the village gossips, and as his fame had penetrated even to the obscure Jersey village, there was a curious crowd gathered at the station. Some of them even followed us as far as the hotel lobby, pressing so close that private conversation was impossible. To

THE YELLOW LETTER

avoid interruption, I took him at once to my room and ordered our supper served there.

While we waited for it I summarized as briefly as I could the new features of the case, beginning with my finding the post-office deserted, the name missing from Lock Box 17, the suicide of the woman, the calling up of the Bridgeport police, the testimony of the maid that the woman had been crying over a yellow letter, the discovery of the five thousand dollars in new hundred-dollar bills in the cash-drawer, the coincidence in the initials of Cook and Crandall that had first attracted my attention to the missing guest in the hotel, his peculiar conduct the minute I mentioned the yellow letter and his flight from the town behind the fastest horse obtainable.

While I was only an amateur in criminal investigation, I prided myself that I had followed everything as far as Davis himself could have done. I doubted if even he, with all his shrewdness, could learn the identity of the dead woman or could explain what the postmaster was doing with such an unusually large sum, left so carelessly hid in the

A NEW CLUE

cash-drawer. My private opinion was that the money was probably counterfeit and that when we had solved the mystery we would find that Hugh Crandall was at the head of a band of skilful rogues who were defrauding the government. More than likely they had headquarters somewhere in the vicinity. Probably with the connivance of the postmaster they conducted some sort of green-goods or other swindling game through Lock Box 17. It seemed to me more than possible that Crandall, taking advantage of Katharine Farrish's love for him, had snared her father into some nefarious scheme. Such a theory would explain her sudden break with him and might even account for her father's terror at the sight of the yellow letter that had revealed to her his error. The knowledge of her father's plight, too, might have driven her to try suicide. Old Elser possibly was one of the gang's dupes or agents who saw exposure coming, through Katharine's activity, and feared to face it. The one flaw in my theory, it seemed to me, was that it in no way accounted for the second woman's suicide, and in spite of Davis' prophecy that there would be more suicides, I was

THE YELLOW LETTER

inclined to believe that perhaps, after all, it was only a coincidence. Learning her identity, I did not regard as half so important as to locate Crandall. I almost wished that I had gone in pursuit of him alone. I would have felt an unholy joy in rounding him up single-handed, while Davis followed other minor clues. I felt considerably annoyed that Davis apparently was more interested in learning who the dead woman was than in discovering Crandall's whereabouts.

"I have no idea what they have done with the clothes," I said almost crossly. "I suppose they are still in the room. The inquest was adjourned until to-morrow morning. Maybe they have been taken to the undertaker's. He came this afternoon and took the body away. I forgot to tell you that Crandall called up the Farrish house this very morning and asked for Katharine—right from this very hotel."

"What did he say?" he asked apathetically.

I repeated the conversation with Louise word for word as she had told it to me.

"That," said I, "is definite evidence that Cran-

A NEW CLUE

dall, the man whom we suspect, was here in the place where you sent me—here under an assumed name. What greater proof of guilt can you have, unless it is actual confession?"

"The man you suspect," he corrected with some asperity, turning abruptly to the waiter, who had entered with our supper.

"Tell the proprietor to come up here at once," he said, "and tell him to bring with him the garments worn by the woman who killed herself."

If I had sent Mahlon Williams such an order I am positive he would have paid no attention to it, but Davis' was obeyed. So quickly that it almost seemed as if Williams had been listening outside the door the landlord appeared carrying the black coat and skirt the woman had worn. Perhaps it was something in Davis' authoritative manner, perhaps it was due to respect for his position, but at any rate Williams brought the clothes at once.

"There's no use in your looking those over," I said. "They were carefully examined to-day, and there is not a mark on them. The only clue is the letter 'S' on two black-bordered handkerchiefs

THE YELLOW LETTER

and a return ticket to Bridgeport. She signed her name as Mary Jane Teiler, but there is none of the Bridgeport Teilers who answer her description, nor are any of them missing. I found out all that long ago."

Davis was paying little attention to my conversation. I doubted if he was even aware that I had spoken. With a small pocket tape measure he was taking the various dimensions of the coat and skirt. He turned up the hem of the latter and inspected it as carefully as if he expected to find a name written there. He did the same thing first with one sleeve and then with the other.

"You say that she registered as Teiler and that her handkerchiefs were marked with an 'S'?" he suddenly asked me, showing that he had heard all I said.

Both the landlord and I answered him affirmatively.

"Where is the telephone?" he asked, "I want to call long distance."

There was a note of excitement in his voice that indicated to me that he believed himself on the verge

A NEW CLUE

of some discovery, though what it was I could not imagine. If there were any clues that had been revealed in those rusty garments his methods were too much for me.

He dashed away to the telephone, the landlord following. I ate my supper alone and waited. Just as I was finishing he came back into the room, and, seating himself, began to eat, apparently indifferent to the fact that everything had grown cold in the half-hour he was absent.

"Well," I said inquiringly, "did you learn anything?"

He nodded and calmly finished drinking his cold coffee, seemingly with a relish.

Expectantly I sat there, waiting for him to go on. He seemed not to notice my impatience, though it must have been apparent, and waited until he had pushed back his chair and lighted his cigarette. He always rolled his own, and never before had I realized what an irritating operation rolling a cigarette can be made. It seemed to me that he was taking entirely unnecessary pains to have the ends twisted just so. Finally I could brook no further delay,

THE YELLOW LETTER

and burst out with: "Well, what have you discovered, Mr. Inspector?"

I supposed that he might have obtained a clue to where the woman's garments had been manufactured, some tiny thread by which he hoped to run her identity to earth. Little was I prepared for the startling discoveries he volleyed at me, so tersely, so concretely put that I could not doubt the accuracy of his information.

"The woman was Sarah Sackett, spinster. She lived on a little farm just outside Bridgeport with her brother Robert, who is somewhat older than she. They inherited the farm from their parents and have lived there all their lives. The brother is employed as cashier in a little country bank about ten miles away. Every morning he drives into Bridgeport and takes the train. When his sister left, two days ago, he came with her to the station. He evidently is not aware of her death, though he seems greatly worried over her absence. He presumably expected her to return last night, for he waited over several trains. This morning he was asking the station agent if he had seen her."

A NEW CLUE

The dry, matter-of-fact way in which he recited the facts he had learned added to the value of his narrative. More and more I marveled at the man's detective ability. I was overwhelmed with a sense of my own incapacity. All day long the coroner, the constable and I had been trying to ferret out the mystery of the unfortunate woman's identity with practically no result. With the same clues to work on, with identically the same properties to draw deductions from, the inspector in a very few minutes had not only learned her identity, but many other important facts about her. Nor did it occur to me to doubt the truth of his information. The assurance with which he spoke was in itself a sufficient guarantee.

"How on earth did you learn all this so quickly?" I asked in amazement.

He smiled with that grim tantalizing smile of his that I had seen before. His cigarette had burned itself to a stub as he spoke. He turned it carefully in his fingers, inspecting it as if to see whether he could extract another puff before throwing it away. He finally decided that he could not, and

THE YELLOW LETTER

drew forth his cigarette papers and tobacco, preparatory to rolling a new one. Meanwhile I awaited his answer in suspense.

"Go on," I commanded. "Tell me about it. I must know how you did it."

"The principal part of a magician's art," he said as he lighted his new cigarette, "lies in what is called 'misdirection.' With a glance from his eyes, with a sudden movement of his hand he attracts your attention to his right side. Meanwhile his left is doing the trick. Now, misdirection, in my business, has just the opposite effect. Amateurs, in investigating crime, examine the evidence and see clues pointing in some direction. They follow those clues and find themselves floundering. They have the right clues, but they go in the wrong direction. You read the evidence aright as to Miss Sackett coming from Bridgeport, but all your efforts to locate her as Mary Jane Teiler were simply a waste of time. In the clothes she left behind her was her real name."

"Look here," I said, "you can't string me in that fashion. I myself examined those garments closely.

A NEW CLUE

There was no name in them and there were no marks by which she could be identified."

"Is that so?" There was deep sarcasm in his tone.

"And not only that, even if I had overlooked any marks that might have been there, the landlord, the coroner, the constable and half a dozen others examined them closely. If there were any marks, some one of us surely would have discovered them."

For answer he got up leisurely and walked across to a chair where the garments were still lying. He picked up the skirt and held it by the lower hem.

"Look closely at it," he commanded. "Do you see nothing there?"

I scanned the dusty cloth intently and shook my head. He picked up the coat and offered it gravely for my inspection, even turning it inside out, sleeves and all.

"Well, what of it?" I exclaimed impatiently. "I can't see anything there either."

"Can't you?" he asked over-pleasantly. "That's where I found the woman's name."

Again I took up both garments and studied them,

THE YELLOW LETTER

but I was positive that there was no name of any sort or anything to indicate a name. I felt that he must be simply jesting with me.

"You can't fool me," I exclaimed. "I would wager you a thousand dollars to five hundred that coat and skirt do not differ any in the slightest from hundreds of other coats and skirts worn by hundreds of other women."

"You lose," he responded tersely. With one finger he began to trace an almost invisible line on the goods where there had once been a seam. "Do you see that mark?"

"Yes," I replied. "I noticed that long ago. It simply means that the skirt has been lengthened or shortened, but what of it?"

"It means more than that," he answered almost severely, as if reproaching me for my lack of observation. "It means that a thirty-eight skirt has been lengthened an inch and a half. Look at this coat. The sleeves have been lengthened two inches. It is a thirty-eight coat. Can't you see how simple the problem has become?"

"I confess I can't see it at all."

A NEW CLUE

"Let me state it for you: A woman from somewhere in Connecticut buys a black suit of a rather peculiar texture from a cloak and suit house that receives a great many mail orders. She requires a thirty-eight coat with the sleeves lengthened two inches and a thirty-eight skirt let down an inch and a half. That's enough to identify any person."

"I must confess I still don't see how that knowledge will help you."

"In these days of system every house that sells women's garments has elaborate card indexes. The greatest expense they have is in alterations. They figure that a roll of cloth that costs so much will make so many suits of a certain pattern which they will sell for so much in a certain length of time. They figure on making so much profit on the suits. If the cloth is all right, the pattern popular and the price reasonable, they can figure to a certainty on their profits, except for one factor—alterations. Alterations require the time of skilled work-people and also correspondence and frequently extra express charges. The aim of the manager of every such establishment is to reduce alterations to a minimum.

THE YELLOW LETTER

For that reason he keeps a record of every alteration made. This particular dress happened to come from a store where I know the manager well. It is their busy season just now, and I took a chance on finding him in his office. I described the goods in the suit, gave him the size and the sort of alterations that had been made on it and asked him to have his card index looked up. I told him in all probability the woman I wanted to know about came from Bridgeport, Conn., or near there. It happened that only three of the eight suits they had made from this piece of goods—at least the only ones entered on the alteration cards—had gone to Connecticut. Of the three, two were thirty-six coats, so they could be eliminated at once. The third one had had the sleeves lengthened and also the skirt. The sizes corresponded, so there was very little doubt that it had been this woman who had bought it, Miss Sarah Sackett, the woman who committed suicide here.”

“But even so,” I protested, still marveling at his revelations, “how did you get the rest of your information about her so quickly?”

A NEW CLUE

"The address she had given was 'in care of the express agent' at Bridgeport. Such an address in a large city would mean nothing, but in a place the size of Bridgeport the inference was plain that the agent was probably an acquaintance. If she lived in Bridgeport, she would have given street and number. I concluded at once that she lived in the suburbs near Bridgeport. I called up the express agent, and he gave me the rest of my facts."

"Did he tell you why she committed suicide?"

"He doesn't dream that she has," the inspector replied. "I put my questions in a guarded way and he happened to be a garrulous fellow, who readily followed my leads. All I asked him was where a letter would reach Miss Sarah Sackett, saying I had forgotten which rural free delivery route it was that she lived on. He told me that she and her brother were still living on the old Sackett place, Route No. 1. I explained that I wanted to make sure of an important letter reaching her at once. He told me she was away, explaining that he had seen her come down to the station with her brother, and suggested that it might be a good idea to send

THE YELLOW LETTER

the letter in her brother's care, and told me the address of the bank where her brother could be reached. So you see it is all quite simple when you know how."

"I don't see, though," I objected, "how anything that you have learned in any way connects this woman with the Farrish mystery."

"I told you there would be other suicides, didn't I?"

"It looks to me like a mere coincidence."

"How about the yellow letter she was reading?"

I started. For a moment I had forgotten the strange, tinted link that seemed to bind the Farrish tragedy, the Elser case and the Sarah Sackett suicide together in the terrible chain of mystery.

"We've got to find Hugh Crandall!" I exclaimed. "I will not be content until we do. There is no doubt in my mind that he is the author of those letters. We've got to find him, Davis, and make him explain. I promised the girl I love I would not rest until I had cleared away the mystery, until I had lifted the cloud that is hanging so heavily over her father and her sister. Nothing, nothing shall stand

A NEW CLUE

in the way! Think what it means to me! The one I love, the one who is dearer to me than anything else in the world, is living in constant dread of an unknown terror. I feel that Crandall is responsible. I am positive that he is guilty. Help me find him, Davis! We must find him."

As I spoke Davis sat regarding me with unmoved countenance. He puffed leisurely at his cigarette two or three times, and then, with cutting asperity, without the slightest indication of sympathy for my anxiety, said slowly:

"Harding, I told you that one of the reasons for my success was that I never undertake anything that I can not accomplish. I came out here to find the man who has been using the mails illegally to terrorize people to such an extent that they are driven to suicide. I am confident that we will quickly locate him and his accomplice in crime. Rest assured that you can safely leave the plan of action to me."

"But—but," I stammered, "what is your plan of action? What are you going to do now?"

"I'm going to bed," he replied, yawning as he

THE YELLOW LETTER

rose from his chair. "There's nothing more that can be done to-night."

Impatient as I was, and anxious though I was to alleviate Louise's fears at the earliest moment possible, I could not but feel that he was right. There was nothing that could be done that night. I showed him where the room was that I had engaged for him—next to mine—and, feeling much depressed and perplexed, was preparing to turn in when I was startled by a sharp rap on my door.

"Come in," I called, thinking, of course, it was Davis with some new theory to suggest.

Instead it was the clerk from the office below.

"You're wanted on the telephone," he said.

I had already taken off my coat and waistcoat and I did not wait to put them on. Just as I was I sped through the hall to the telephone booth. Who could it be that was calling me at this hour? It must be long after ten. I could think of only two persons who knew of my being in this hotel, Louise and Hugh Crandall. I felt that it must be Louise. Why should Crandall call me up? True, he could have learned my name from the hotel register, and from

A NEW CLUE

my question about the yellow letter he must know that I was on his trail, but having escaped from the village, why should he communicate with me? No, it could not be he. It must be Louise. She would not call me at this time unless something had happened. That was it. Something terrible had happened! Katharine was dead, or perhaps her father. Perhaps both of them. Or maybe Katharine had spoken again. Perhaps she had given some information that Louise felt would aid me in the investigation that meant so much for both of us.

Isn't it strange how fast we can think? It could not have taken me more than thirty seconds to race from my room to the telephone booth in the hall below, yet in that brief period all these thoughts and a hundred other queries and fears pursued each other in mad tumult through my brain.

Breathlessly I rushed into the booth and grabbed the receiver. It was the voice of Louise that I heard. Faint though it was, I recognized it at once, and was overjoyed to note that there was nothing in it of the sadness there would have been if the worst had come to her father or Katharine.

THE YELLOW LETTER

"Is that you, Mr. Kent?" she asked.

"Yes, yes," I cried. "What is it?"

"This is Louise Farrish speaking. I want you to promise me that you will drop your investigation at once and return to the city."

"What's that?" I cried, not believing my ears.

"If you love me"—she was speaking slowly and enunciating with labored distinctness that there might be no mistake—"you will drop all investigation at once without any questions. Do you hear me? Repeat what I have said so I can be sure you understand."

Word for word I repeated her message, amazed beyond thought at its import. As I finished repeating it, I cried, "Why, tell me why—" but I heard the thud of the broken connection.

Frantically I called central. I pleaded, urged, demanded that she get the person at the other end of the wire again. It was no use. I called for the Farrishs' number. Central reported, "Don't answer." I said that I had been called just now from there. After weary, impatient minutes of waiting and wrangling, she told me the call had come from

A NEW CLUE

another number, from a pay station. I demanded that number at once and finally she got it for me. It was a drug-store near the Farrish home. The druggist's clerk said that the young lady who had been telephoning had left the store. I tried to get him to send a messenger around to the Farrishs' to ask Miss Louise Farrish to come to the telephone. He refused. It was useless. I was forced to give it up.

I emerged from the telephone booth perspiring, frantic, puzzled beyond measure at the sudden and startling turn in affairs.

What could have induced Louise to send me such a message? What could have happened?

CHAPTER IX

A NEW MYSTERY

I WAS up with the dawn the next morning and down-stairs to find a train schedule. The only thought in my mind was that I must go to Louise at once. I could not understand her sudden amazing change of front. Why, after pledging me to solve the mystery, should she all at once be as insistent that I should immediately stop all inquiry? I had lain awake the whole night, pondering the situation and seeking a solution. What reason could she have? Who could have influenced her to such action?

The first train, I found, left two minutes before six. I ordered breakfast, though in no mood for eating, and went to Davis' room. I felt that I needed his advice. I found him awake, smoking a cigarette in bed. Briefly I related to him the amazing telephone conversation I had had with Louise the night before.

A NEW MYSTERY

"What possible reason could have influenced her to make such a strange request?" I concluded.

"A woman doesn't have to have a reason," he answered—flippantly, it seemed to me.

"You don't understand!" I cried. "Louise is not the ordinary flighty girl. She has the finest, best-balanced mind of any woman I ever knew. She never acts on impulse."

Davis looked at me with that exasperating smile of his.

"Kent," he replied, "when you have been married as long as I have, when you know women as well as I do, you will realize the folly of trying to find reasons for the things women do. Their minds are not governed by reason, but by impulse. Every sane woman knew that the hobble skirt was an absurdity, yet when Fashion decided in favor of the hobble skirt it was worn. I doubt very much if Miss Farish herself could tell you why she asked you to discontinue your investigation. Probably she acted on impulse. By this time she undoubtedly is just as eager as she ever was for you to go on."

"What would you advise?"

THE YELLOW LETTER

"I'd go on," said Davis laconically, as he lighted another cigarette.

For a moment I was almost shaken in my determination to do nothing more until I had seen Louise. It seemed as if Davis might be right. Perhaps she had acted only on impulse. Perhaps her love for me had made her feel that the investigation might lead me into danger. But I reconsidered. She had given me her love and trust and confidence. She surely was entitled to full confidence from me. I could not honorably continue the investigation without first seeing her.

"I am going to town on the first train," I said decisively. "I shall do nothing more until I have seen her."

"And I shall go on with the investigation," said Davis with that exasperating smile of his.

Impatiently I turned and left him. I choked down a cup of coffee and hurried to the station. The journey seemed miles and miles long, though the train made few stops. As soon as the ferry landed me in New York I sprang into a taxi and ordered the driver to take me at once to the Farrish house. Not

A NEW MYSTERY

until we had turned into their street did I realize that it was still too early for me to try to see Louise, even on such an urgent mission as mine. A few doors away from the house I stopped the chauffeur and bade him drive up the avenue to the entrance of Central Park.

I dismissed him there and strolled aimlessly into the park. I would wait until ten o'clock before I tried to see Louise. Still pondering the situation, I strolled along one of the park walks and flung myself on a bench by the little lake where the swan boats are. There was no one about at that early hour and I was glad of it. I wanted to be alone and think.

How long I sat there I do not know. I was so deep in thought that there was neither sight in my eyes nor hearing in my ears. Yet the eyes will not be denied their rights. A feeling came over me that some part of my brain was trying to tell me something. It came more and more forcefully. My eyes were seeing something which they were trying to compel me to notice.

What was it?

THE YELLOW LETTER

I pulled myself together with a start and looked about me.

With an exclamation of horror I sprang from the bench and gazed into the lake just in front of me. Floating on the surface, not fifty feet from where I had been sitting, was the body of a woman.

"Other suicides, other suicides"—Davis' remark of two days before kept jiggling through my brain. Other suicides! Katharine, Elser, the woman at Ardway—his prophecy had been right—and was this another in the terrible chain?

I ran like a madman toward the park entrance, where I remembered I had passed a policeman. It was with relief that I found him still there.

"There's a woman—drowned—in the lake!" I gasped, pointing over my shoulder.

He ran back to the lake with me and together we waded out into the shallow water where the body lay. In my horror at the unexpected sight I had not stopped to note her appearance, nor could I have told whether she was young or old, dark or fair.

I looked at her now with more than interest—with a feeling of sorrow, of understanding. The deed

A NEW MYSTERY

of Katharine Farrish had brought me to a closer sympathy with unfortunate persons influenced to seek death. As I saw that this poor girl was young and fair I sadly wondered what tragedy had driven her to drowning.

Never shall I forget the impression the picture of this suicide made on me! She lay on her back, with long blonde tresses of well-kept hair floating out on either side of her shapely head. Her eyes were closed, but her shapely brows and long dark lashes made her face comely even in death. Her clothing, I observed, was well-made, and though wet and soiled as it was by the water, it still gave the impression of neatness.

We grasped the body gently by the arms and drew it in to the bank, where we lifted it to the park bench on which I had been sitting.

"I wonder if there is anything about her to identify her by?" said the policeman, and together we looked.

Apparently there was nothing. There were no rings on her hands, though the fingers were those of a woman of refinement. The officer turned back the

THE YELLOW LETTER

collar of her coat, but the name of the maker had been cut away.

"She didn't want nobody to know who she was, I guess," he said after a hasty examination. "They generally try to hide their names."

"Yes, I suppose they do," I said apathetically.

"I've got to go over to the arsenal and report this and send for the wagon. Will you wait till I come back? I won't be long."

"I'll wait," I said.

He disappeared up the path and I was left alone with the body. As I sat there, meditating on the mystery that had caused so many other tragedies, I became conscious of the fact that one of this girl's hands was closed, as if, even in death, she was striving to conceal something.

Stooping over, I gently pressed back the stiffening fingers.

An exclamation of horror came to my lips as I saw what had been concealed there.

It was a little scrap of yellow paper.

I could hardly believe my eyes. It must be that this poor girl here was another of the victims in the

A NEW MYSTERY

baffling chain of crime I was seeking to unravel. I held the water-soaked fragment up to the light, but there was nothing on it—not a word. Yet there was no mistaking the color and texture of the paper. It was undoubtedly the same that Louise and I had found in Katharine's room after she had tried to kill herself. It was the same that the police had discovered in old Andrew Elser's room. There was no question in my mind but that it was the same that the woman in Ardway had torn up before she hanged herself in the little hotel. But what was the tie between them? What could be the mysterious import of this yellow letter that drove its recipients to death?

Here was one fragment. Perhaps I could find other scraps—perhaps the whole letter. I ran down to the bank of the lake and began a systematic search of the water along shore. Foot by foot I studied it carefully. For ten minutes I searched unavailingly and then I caught a glimpse of something yellow half hidden by an overhanging tree. Carefully I parted the branches. Sure enough, submerged in six inches of water, were more of the yellow scraps.

THE YELLOW LETTER

I waded in and, scooping them up carefully in my hands, laid them on the grass to dry, for they were all but falling apart and I hardly dared handle them. Meanwhile I continued my search for other yellow scraps—this time without avail. If she had carried a torn-up letter with her as she sprang to death, the other pieces had floated away.

At last, convinced that there was no possibility of recovering more of them, I gave up my search and returned to where I had spread the recovered scraps on the grass. One by one I studied them. They were evidently a part of a type-written letter, but the ink had run so that it was impossible to read a single word on them. From their shape, too, it appeared that they were not consecutive, so there was little hope of learning anything from them.

Just two of the inky smears seemed to have a possible meaning.

On one of them I was almost positive that I could trace the word "youth." On another scrap was a word that a little stretch of the imagination might decipher as "her."

"Youth" and "Her."

A NEW MYSTERY

They might mean much or nothing. They might have some bearing on the great mystery I was trying to solve. They might have none. Perhaps they were, after all, merely phrases from a letter that had brought disappointment to a loving woman. In all likelihood this suicide had no connection with the others. But why, then, the yellow paper?

So intent was I on my thoughts that I did not observe the return of the policeman until I heard his voice.

"What have you got there?"

There was suspicion in his tone—the natural suspicion of the representative of the law. It was on the tip of my tongue to say: "Another yellow letter."

For once prudence restrained me. I recalled how my too hasty speech at the coroner's inquest had led me into trouble. I could hardly expect a twelve-hundred-dollar policeman to assist in solving the mystery that was still perplexing Davis.

"Just some scraps of paper," I said carelessly. "After you had gone I noticed that she was clutching a bit of paper in one hand. I searched around the lake to see if I could find more. I found these.

THE YELLOW LETTER

It is evidently part of a letter, but the ink has run so you can make nothing out of them."

"Let's see them."

I handed him all of them.

"This," I explained, "I found in her hand and the others were over there under those bushes."

One by one the policeman examined them, turning them carefully over and over.

"There's nothing to them," he finally announced. "The wagon will be here in a minute. I don't suppose you'll want to be claiming any credit for finding the body?"

I had feared that he would insist on my accompanying him to testify to its finding. It was quite a relief to hear him take this view of it.

"Of course not," I answered hastily.

"Then," said he with utmost candor, "you might as well beat it. It don't do a cop no good to have other people finding things on his post. If you ain't here when the wagon comes, there ain't nobody to say it wasn't me that found the body. I want to thank you, though, for coming and telling me about it. There's a lot of fools would have gone and tele-

A NEW MYSTERY

phoned the arsenal and then I'd been on the carpet for not covering my post properly."

I was glad indeed of the opportunity to get away. It was nearing ten o'clock. My trousers and shoes were in such condition that I wanted to get to my apartments for a change before seeing Louise. I hastened to the park entrance and hailed a taxi. By the time I left my rooms and reached the Farrish home it was ten minutes after ten.

As my taxi turned into the street I saw another one stop before the Farrish door. At first I thought it must be the doctor or one of his assistants, but as the front door closed behind the tall figure of a man who had been admitted to the house I realized that it was some one I had seen before. There was something reminiscent in the broad shoulders, in the walk. It was some one I knew, or ought to have recognized, yet who it was or where I had seen him I could not at the moment recall.

I was not three minutes behind him in reaching the door. Though the other visitor had been admitted at once, there was no immediate response to my ring. I waited a while and rang again. It seemed

THE YELLOW LETTER

minutes before any one answered, then one of the maids opened the door a trifle and peered out.

"Mr. Kent to see Miss Louise," I said.

To my great amazement she did not open the door to me, but still holding it just barely enough to enable her to talk to me, said: "I'm sorry, but I have orders to admit no one to the house."

Dumfounded at such a reception, I still thought she was only carrying out a general order, the wisdom for which I could readily see.

"Of course, I understand that you have your orders, but please tell Miss Louise that Mr. Kent is here."

"I'll tell her, if you wish," she said doubtfully, carefully closing the door before she went on the mission.

The shutting of the door in my face gave me an odd sense of desolation. It seemed as if I were being shut out of the life of the woman I loved. Yet on second thought I smiled at my perturbation. The maid was only carrying out a necessary order. As soon as Louise knew I was there she would come running to the door herself. In a minute she would

A NEW MYSTERY

be folded in my arms and all misunderstanding would be cleared away. Undoubtedly she would have a good explanation for her telephone message of the night before. I told myself that it was only lack of sleep and the incident in the park that had upset my nerves. My misgivings were utterly foolish.

At length the door opened slowly. I had expected to see Louise herself behind it, but it was the same maid. This time she held the door hardly as wide as before.

"I'm sorry, sir," she said, "but Miss Louise says she can not see you now."

"What?" I gasped.

She repeated her message while I stood there dazed. There must be some mistake. Louise must have misunderstood the name.

"Did you tell her it was Mr. Kent?"

"Yes, sir, I told her."

"What did she say?"

"She said she could not see you or any one else now."

I was puzzled beyond expression. Why should

THE YELLOW LETTER

Louise refuse to see me? I was conscious of having done nothing to offend her. If only I could see her for just a minute to find out what was the matter! I felt that I must reach her. For an instant I was tempted to brush past the maid and force my way in. Surely Louise of her own accord would not treat me thus. She must be beside herself with grief. Perhaps she was under the same malign influence that so distressed her sister. Yet even in the depths of despair we observe the conventionalities.

"Will you ask Miss Louise when she can see me?" I found myself saying in calm tones to the maid.

Again she closed the door in my face. Again I waited.

"Miss Louise says that she will see you if you will return in an hour," was the message that was brought to me.

I left the Farrish door and stumbled blindly up the street. The plight in which I found myself seemed inexplicable, maddening. I was sure Louise loved me. Had she not turned to me in the first hour of her distress? Had she not telephoned me when her sister shot herself? Had she not permitted

A NEW MYSTERY

me to take her in my arms? Had she not commissioned me to solve the mystery of the yellow letter? Yet why had she bade me discontinue my search? Why had she shut her door to me? What could be her motive? What could have influenced her against me?

Torn by a hundred conflicting emotions, I traversed street after street, not knowing or caring whither my feet were taking me. I must have retraced my steps, for I found myself in the block where the Farrishs lived. I looked at my watch and saw it was still half an hour before the time I had been told to return. I turned away from the house and wandered aimlessly on. There was some mystery in Louise's conduct I could not fathom. She refused to see me, yet just ahead of me some one else had been admitted to the house. A wave of jealousy swept over me. Who was this other man? I racked my brain, striving to recall his appearance, trying to remember what there was that was familiar about him.

All at once it came to me. A wild rage filled me. I knew now who he was. A picture of the office in

THE YELLOW LETTER

that little hotel in New Jersey came to my mind, as it looked when I stood by the stove drying my clothes. A man had come to the desk and got his key and had walked past me as he went to his room. I knew now where I had seen that man who was admitted to the Farrish home. It was the man called Cook.

It was Hugh Crandall.

CHAPTER X

WHO WAS THE THIEF?

AN unbidden and unwelcome guest, jealousy came and sat by the altar of my heart, stirring the fires of my love for Louise into furious darts of flame that scarred my soul. That Crandall—for I was positive now that the visitor who had entered the Farrish home had been he—should have been admitted to the house when so many things pointed to his guilt, while I, an accepted lover, and certainly Louise's faithful servitor, had been barred with such scant courtesy, filled me with dumb, unreasoning rage. I felt that all the claims of friendship and of service, even disregarding the still stronger claims of honest love, entitled me to far different treatment.

Yet even in the burst of anger that overwhelmed me there was not a single thought of harshness toward Louise. I felt that if I could but see her she

THE YELLOW LETTER

would explain everything satisfactorily. It was toward Crandall that all my wrath was directed. Feeling as I did, sure that he was responsible for Katharine's attempted suicide and for her poor father's plight, I feared that his visit to the house boded ill for Louise. Undoubtedly his malign influence had persuaded her to bid me drop my efforts to solve the mystery. He must have realized that I was close on his trail, so dangerously close that with the effrontery of the daring criminal he had ventured to come to the house in one last effort to thwart my plans for his exposure.

As I became calmer I resolved on a course of action. Louise's strange request to me over the telephone must have been made because she was dominated by the fear of this villain who had brought disaster on her father and sister. Perhaps she feared that some evil might befall me if I persisted in trying to run him to earth. Possibly she was afraid that still greater evil might come to those she loved. I felt that for her own happiness it was necessary that I should continue my course. I would go on with my investigation and once for all free her from

WHO WAS THE THIEF?

the crushing thrall of this hidden evil. I would wait where I was until Crandall had left the house, then I would insist on seeing her and telling her my resolve, nor would I permit her to dissuade me from it.

On the corner was a drug-store. Sheltered by its awning I took my stand to wait until Crandall left the house. I could see the Farrish door, yet my presence there under the awning would hardly be noticed. I had not long to wait. In about five minutes the door opened and the caller emerged. This time I had an opportunity to get a good look at him. I was right. His face was that of the man who had been registered in the Ardway hotel as Henry Cook, who had so abruptly left the room when the inquest was being held as I had begun to ask questions about the yellow letter, who had driven from the town behind the fastest horse obtainable.

He came swinging down the street past where I stood. As he came closer I was amazed to note that his face was not the unnatural color of the morphine user's that I expected, but ruddy with health. His eyes, however, wore a strained expression and his

THE YELLOW LETTER

brow was knotted with wrinkles. I was strongly tempted to spring out from where I stood as he passed, to seize him by the throat and to make him tell me all I wished to know about the hideous mystery. Yet better judgment withheld my hand. After all, the evidence I had against him was not of the tangible sort that would convict. Even though I knew of his telephoning Katharine just before she shot herself, even though General Farrish had learned something about him that barred him from the house, even though we had found in his rooms a hypodermic syringe and the address in New Jersey where the third suicide had taken place, even though I myself had noted his suspicious actions there, there was nothing definite enough to warrant seizing him as yet. I watched him as far down the avenue as my eye could follow and then turned toward the Farrish house. This time I was admitted without delay. Apparently the maid had new instructions.

"I'll tell Miss Louise you are here," she said as she showed me into the reception-room.

As I waited I tried to think how I should greet

WHO WAS THE THIEF?

Louise. While there was much that I might reproach her for, I felt that surely it had not been her fault. I knew she must be acting under compulsion. I was determined, though, to let her know that I knew that Hugh Crandall had been in the house.

Suddenly I heard a smothered scream up-stairs and a second later Louise burst into the room. There was terror in her face as she ran to me.

"Oh, Harding," she gasped, "it's gone—stolen!"

"What do you mean? What's stolen?" I cried, seizing her hands tight in my own.

She was trembling all over and her breath came in quick, short jerks. She was dressed in an automobile hat and coat, but even through the thick folds of her coat I could feel the palpitating of her heart. The new mystery, whatever it was, had been too much for her already overstrained nerves. She was in a condition closely bordering on hysteria.

"Tell me about it, what was it?" I said.

"The yellow letter—it's gone, stolen!"

"Where was it?"

I had taken it with me the morning I went down to Inspector Davis' office, but after he had compared

THE YELLOW LETTER

it with the Elser fragment he had returned it to me. I had restored it to Louise when Davis and I called on her after our visit to Mrs. Trask's boarding-house. I had not seen it since then. My last recollection of it was placing it in her hand as Davis and I left the house.

"Let me think," she said, trying hard to regain her composure. "When you and Mr. Davis were here the other day you gave it back to me. I took it up-stairs and put it in a drawer in a little desk in my room. I locked the desk and hid the key in a vase on the mantel. I went to the desk just now to get it and it was gone."

"Was the desk locked?"

She nodded.

"Who could have taken it?" I asked. Even as I framed the question there came to me the thought of Crandall's visit. He had been in the hotel in Ardway where the woman committed suicide after reading a yellow letter and tearing it up. The scraps of that letter had disappeared. More than likely he had come here just to get that scrap of yellow paper lest its evidence might bring home his crimes.

WHO WAS THE THIEF?

"Who has been in the house?"

"No one but the doctors and nurses and the servants," said Louise, flushing uneasily as she spoke.

I waited, expecting her to mention Crandall's visit, but though she hesitated for a second she said nothing of it.

"I wonder who could have taken it?" she said after an awkward pause.

"What motive could any one have?" I asked, determined to direct her thoughts to Crandall. "The only person who would have a reason for making away with it would be some one who feared that it might be used against him."

There was silence while we both pondered the situation.

"You remember," said Louise suddenly, "the agitation my father showed at sight of that paper. If he were not lying paralyzed up-stairs I think he would have tried to gain possession of it."

"How is your father, and your sister?" I asked, suddenly recalling that I had asked after neither of them.

"Katharine is much better," said Louise. "She

THE YELLOW LETTER

is entirely conscious, though very weak, but the doctor says that she will in all probability recover quickly. My father's condition remains the same, though he seems to have regained the use of his right hand. He wrote some brief directions to-day about his business."

"Are you sure of all the servants?" I asked.

"All of them have been with us for years; all but one, ever since before my mother's death. I would not think of distrusting any of them."

"Are you certain the house has not been entered in the night?"

I was asking these questions with a view of convincing her that it was impossible for any one but Crandall to have taken the yellow scrap—for any one else to have even a motive for taking it.

"That would be impossible," she said. "All the doors and windows are protected by burglar alarms and I know they are in working order or I would have heard about it."

"There is or there must have been," I said slowly, "some traitor in the house, some thief, some one who had an object in getting hold of that paper."

WHO WAS THE THIEF?

"There has been no one here," said Louise with a painful effort, "no one answering that description."

"How did you come to look for the paper in your desk?"

"I wanted—" she stopped short.

"Mr. Kent," she said, her entire manner toward me stiffening as she withdrew her hands from mine, "I asked you last night if you would not cease your inquiries at once."

"But—but—" I protestingly began.

"I asked you to do what I requested without any questions. You have told me that you loved me. If that is the case I know you will do what I ask without trying to force my confidence. Isn't it enough for you to know that I wish you to do it?"

"Louise, dear," I said firmly, "a mysterious trail of hidden evil in some way has crossed your home. It has stricken your sister and your father. You yourself asked me to try to find the secret and I vowed that I would. I don't know what your motive is in making this strange request, but I can't believe you are doing it of your own vo-

THE YELLOW LETTER

lition. I am certain that you are influenced by fear—fear lest some greater evil will befall, if my efforts to unmask the criminal are successful. Is it not so?"

"Don't ask me, Harding," she begged piteously. "I can't tell you. It is not my secret. I can tell you nothing. Please don't ask me."

More than ever now I was convinced that fear of Crandall dominated her. Quickly following on his telephone message he had come to the house and had cast over her the same mysterious spell as had fallen on her sister. More than ever was I determined to follow the trail of mystery to its end, no matter where it lay or what it cost. What was life to me if the woman I loved was to be for ever under a shadow, in the power of some hidden criminal who might prey on her as he had done on the other members of her family? I felt it my duty toward her to go on and, if I could, compel her to divulge something of what she was holding back from me.

"Why did you want that bit of the yellow letter? What were you going to do with it?"

"I can't tell you. Please don't ask me."

"Why do you want me to stop my inquiries?"

WHO WAS THE THIEF?

"I can't tell you. Please don't ask."

"What was Hugh Crandall doing here this morning?"

The question, direct and blunt as I put it, had almost the same effect as if I had fired a bullet at her. She caught her breath quickly and her face turned pale. I thought that she was going to faint. With a great effort she recovered and, looking me straight in the eye, she answered slowly: "Mr. Crandall was not here this morning. What made you think he was?"

I did not try to conceal the open-eyed amazement with which I stared at her as she gave me this unequivocal reply. What could it mean? I could not, would not believe that this high principled, honorable girl would wilfully deceive me, yet I was as sure as that I was standing there that Hugh Crandall had been in the house that morning. Could it have been that he had entered without her knowledge? Was it possible that one of the maids in the Farrish home was in his pay and had permitted him to enter without Louise's knowledge? That might explain the rifling of the locked desk. The maid might know of

THE YELLOW LETTER

Louise's habit of hiding the key in a vase. It began to look as if I had a solution of this new mystery. Yet it could hardly be possible for Crandall to have been in the house for fully half an hour without Louise knowing it. Furthermore, why had admittance been denied me when I first called?

"I saw Hugh Crandall leaving this house not ten minutes ago," I said.

"Really!"

Her tone was cold, hard, forced, though she tried to make it sound natural.

"It was he who broke open your desk," I cried. "He wanted to regain possession of that scrap of paper and thus remove all evidence of his guilt."

"I am afraid," said Louise with the manner of offended dignity, "that you are entirely mistaken. I was not aware that you knew Mr. Crandall by sight."

"If that wasn't Hugh Crandall who came out of your house just now who was it?" I asked, my anger at this man whom I believed responsible for the chain of evil getting the better of me. "I don't know Crandall, but I know the evil he is responsible for,

WHO WAS THE THIEF?

for the tragedy of your sister, the plight of your father, the suicide of old Andrew Elser, the suicide of that poor woman out in Ardway. Why, not an hour ago I helped drag from the park lake a fifth victim, a poor young girl, driven to death by another of his accursed yellow letters. I found the fragments of it, water-soaked and illegible, in the lake.”

“Mr. Kent,” interrupted Louise, “you were kind enough to undertake a mission on my behalf and I appreciate it greatly. Certain circumstances have arisen that have entirely altered matters. I called you up last night and asked you to drop all investigations. You have said that you love me. By that love you say you hold for me I now ask you, no—more—I order you to make no further attempts to solve this mystery—please, Harding, please.”

Her voice broke, and with one last gesture of appeal she flung herself into a chair and covered her face with her hands.

Perplexed beyond measure at the turn affairs had taken, with my heart aching with sympathy for her, I stood watching her slender form as it shook with sobs, trying to make up my mind what to do. My

THE YELLOW LETTER

heart bade me promise her anything, everything, if it would bring her peace of mind, yet my brain told me that it was best for her, best for every one, if I should go ahead as my friend, the inspector, had advised.

"Louise," I began, trying to keep my voice steady, "if you will answer me one question—"

"Don't, Harding, please don't," she sobbed, lifting her tear-stained face to me in entreaty. "You mustn't. You mustn't ask me any questions. If you love me, please do just as I say."

"Louise," I replied almost sternly, "you are not yourself. Can't you rely on me? Can't you trust me? Don't you know that I will do nothing that is not for the best?"

I gathered her into my arms and held her close. I pressed my lips against her fragrant hair where it strayed from under her automobile bonnet. As she lay unresisting in my arms her sobs decreased and she became calmer.

"My darling," I said, "I know that Hugh Crandall has been here. I feel that he has been influ-

WHO WAS THE THIEF?

encing you against me. Won't you do what your heart bids you and tell me everything about it?"

She drew a long deep breath and gently freed herself from my encircling arms and, facing me, looked at me with firm resolution written all over her lovely face.

"You must do what I tell you. I can answer no questions. I wish I could, but I can't. You mustn't ask me. It isn't my secret."

"The car is waiting, Miss Louise."

As the maid's voice interrupted she gave a start, and reaching her hands out impulsively to me, in more like her own dear voice, said to me: "Harding, I must go. Please trust me, and please, please, do what I ask of you. Good-by."

She broke from my restraining hands and ran to the front door.

By the time I reached it after her she was already in the car. I tried to catch the direction she whispered to the chauffeur but could not. Before I could collect my thoughts the great sixty horse-power machine had vanished around the corner.

THE YELLOW LETTER

Where was she going? It seemed to me that every hour added to the chain of mysteries in which I had become involved. I was convinced that in some way Louise, too, had been ensnared by the master of crime who had plotted all this evil, but how, I could not imagine. Yet more and more, it seemed to me, all clues pointed to Hugh Crandall. What could have been Louise's motive in denying to me that he had been in the house? She must have known it.

I began to wish that I had taken Davis' advice and remained in Ardway. Perhaps by this time I would have had some definite clue. I resolved to go back there at once. The inspector seemed to think that that was the most fruitful field for investigation, and probably he was right. Hailing a taxi, I bade him drive me to the ferry, but to my great annoyance reached it just two minutes too late to make a train. Too dispirited to do anything else, I entered the waiting ferryboat, and, sinking into a seat in the corner, gave myself up to bitter reflection on my failure to solve the problem I had set myself. The more I thought about it the more firmly I became convinced that it was wise to disregard Louise's re-

WHO WAS THE THIEF?

quest. My love for her, my duty to her, demanded that I go on.

So absorbed was I in my reflections that I did not notice that the boat had reached its slip, and I was almost the last to leave it. Just as I stepped off the gang-plank a huge machine shot by me, giving me barely time to catch a look at the occupants, but in that fleeting glimpse I recognized them both.

It was Louise with Hugh Crandall.

CHAPTER XI

MORE DISCOVERIES

THE worse the injury the less it hurts at the moment. I once saw a man with both legs cut off laughing and joking with the men who pulled him from under a car. Though he died in ten minutes, I doubt if he suffered half as much as if he had bumped his head or had run a splinter under his thumb-nail. It is when you are mortally hurt and live that the pain becomes so terrible.

In the few minutes I had had with Louise I had not realized the depth of the wound in my heart her conduct toward me had made. Even when I saw her dash away from me in an automobile, pained though I was that our interview should have been cut short, I still did not comprehend what a terrible blow it was that had befallen me. It was the sight as I left the ferry of the automobile dashing by, with Louise—the woman I loved—seated beside Hugh

MORE DISCOVERIES

Crandall, that gave new poignancy to my pain, that added to the fires of jealousy, that made me understand to the full the dire import of what had happened.

Louise had lied to me.

Crandall had been in the house. She had seen him. She had left me to join him. She had even deserted her helpless sister and her dying father to go with him. And all the while her lips had protested that no one had been in the house but the doctors and nurses.

As I paced the platform and paced it back again, waiting two weary hours for an Ardway train, as I sat for two unending hours more in the long ride through New Jersey, like a poisoned knife, cutting my heart to shreds and cutting the shreds again, the thought kept coming back to me over and over: "She lied to me."

Quarter a man alive, pour molten metal into his eyeballs, feed him salt fish and cut off water, bury him alive in quicklime, devise what torture you will and double it, the pain and agony can not equal that which comes to a man who, believing in and trusting

THE YELLOW LETTER

and loving a woman with his whole heart, is forced to admit to himself that she has deceived him—that she has lied to him. In those awful hours I came to know the seven hells. I went through all of them.

Only one ray of comfort came to me. As I asked myself "Why did she lie?" I found myself believing that she had done so, not of her own free will, but impelled by some motive so powerful that she could not resist it. That it was the influence of Crandall I could not doubt. He had so preyed on her fears for her father and sister, perhaps on her fear for me, that he had induced her to try to persuade me to give up my investigation and had made her promise to accompany him on some doubtful secret mission.

"It is not my secret."

I recalled the piteous cry my entreaties had wrung from her lips, and found the logical explanation of it in her having been terrorized by that villain, Crandall. If I could have found him at the moment I could have killed him with my naked hands.

Yet even though I was convinced that Louise had

MORE DISCOVERIES

lied to me, I began to feel that whatever she had done, whatever she was now doing, was in the belief that she was acting for the best for her dear ones, for me.

My duty to her, my duty to myself, I reasoned, demanded that I did my utmost to solve the hideous mystery and free her from the fear that I was sure was responsible for her strange actions. I swung off the train at Ardway and hastened to the hotel, eager to tell Davis what I had learned about the movements of Hugh Crandall, but Davis was not there. All that I could learn was that he had hired a horse and buggy early in the morning and had driven off in the direction taken by Crandall the day before.

"If he is following Crandall's trail," said I to myself, "he is just a day too late."

So long as Davis was not about I decided I might as well see if the missing postmaster had been found. As I walked up the street I could not help thinking how dumfounded Davis would be when he returned from his fruitless chase for Crandall and listened to my tale of Crandall's actions. While he had advised

THE YELLOW LETTER

against my return to the city, he would have to admit that it had not been without result.

As I entered the post-office I found that Miss Cox was still in charge. Approaching the letter window, I bade her good afternoon and asked if there was any news of the missing postmaster. It was late in the afternoon and the last mail for the day having been distributed, she sat crocheting. She motioned to me to come around to the rear door.

"How about it?" I asked as I entered the office, "has anything been heard of Rouser?"

She shook her head.

"That's about the eighty-ninth time I've answered that question to-day. Seems like the whole town was in here wanting to know."

"Has the post-office inspector been here?"

"He was in here this morning and made just the routine examination. He didn't ask no questions, though I understand he has been sleuthing around up to Widow Smith's, where Charlie Rouser boards. If he's looking for anything wrong with Charlie's accounts it's my private opinion that he ain't going to

MORE DISCOVERIES

find it. I've been over all the books twice to-day and there ain't anything out of the way."

"Have you any idea where all that money came from that we found behind the cash-drawer?"

"No, and I don't see that it's any of my affair. His books is right, and his stamps and his stamped envelopes is all accounted for. Maybe he made it in Wall Street, or maybe somebody left it there with him for safe-keeping."

As I recalled Davis' parting instructions to me when I had first come out to Ardway, I was more and more surprised that he had not investigated further at the post-office. He had seemed to think that the clue to the whole mystery would be found there, and he had particularly charged me to find out to whom Lock Box No. 17 had been rented. I decided to ask Miss Cox if she knew anything about it.

"Seventeen has never been rented so long as I have had anything to do with the office. It is away off there in the corner where it is hard to see into. There's always been more boxes than there was any call for. Not one of them in the lower row ever

THE YELLOW LETTER

has been rented, even in summer, when there's a lot of city folks out here."

"Do you ever remember of seeing any mail addressed to that box?"

She worked industriously at her crocheting for a minute or two before replying and then, putting it aside, said thoughtfully:

"It's funny that you should have asked me that."

"Why?"

"I don't know that I've any business telling you," said Miss Cox, as she debated with herself whether or not she was talking too much, "but I am as anxious as anybody to find out what's become of Charlie Rouser, and from what I've seen of you I guess you're a sight more likely to find him than Jim Dobbs, the constable. If I wasn't sure in my own mind that Charlie hadn't done nothing out of the way, I don't know as I'd even be telling you about it. But since you've asked me, I guess I will."

She hesitated, studying my face as if trying to read there whether or not I meant harm to the missing postmaster. I tried not to exhibit undue interest, though inwardly I felt quite jubilant. I was

MORE DISCOVERIES

certain that I was on the track of important revelations.

“Let me see,” she continued, “it was a week ago Tuesday—no, it was Wednesday, for I went over to my sister’s Tuesday and Mr. Rouser left word for me, and I found it waiting for me when I came back. He asked me to come over and take the office for the day. I was surprised when I come over here to open up to find him here, for I’d understood that he was going to be gone all day. He explained that he didn’t have to go till after the mail was in, and he stayed here and helped me sort. There was a lot of mail that day, for people round here are great for answering advertisements and getting circulars. Besides that, some of them get-rich-quick concerns have got hold of our telephone subscribers’ book and there’s always a lot of mining-stock letters. There was no less than four good-sized bundles of letters from New York. Rouser was sorting the letters and I was handling the second class and the papers. I got through with that and picked up the last bundle of letters. In it was no less than six letters addressed to Lock Box 17. ‘Seventeen’s

THE YELLOW LETTER

rented at last,' says I, thinking it funny that I didn't know the name on them, Henry Malcolm Stewart. Who's got it? 'I'll take charge of them,' says he, taking the letters right out of my hand before I had a chance to look at the postmarks or anything. I noticed, too, that he didn't put them in the box, but jammed them into his pocket along with a lot of other letters he had. I couldn't say who the other letters was addressed to, for I didn't get a chance to see them. They might have been his own, for all I know. But I couldn't help thinking that the only reason he'd waited till the mail was distributed was to get hold of them Lock Box 17 letters. As soon as he got them he went away, and he didn't come back till after closing time."

"Have you any idea where he went?"

"When I come over here that day I supposed he was going to the city, but a few minutes after he left the office I saw him driving past in one of the livery rigs."

"Which direction did he go?" I asked, feeling more and more sure that I had struck the right trail. In all probability this young fellow in the

MORE DISCOVERIES

post-office was merely an innocent tool of Crandall. He had driven off somewhere to meet Crandall and give him the Lock Box 17 letters, for I was convinced that Stewart was merely an alias of the villain who had been sending out the yellow letters. If I could learn where the postmaster had gone on this visit, I might be able to find him now.

"Every time Charlie Rouser goes driving," said Miss Cox, "he always goes that way," indicating the opposite direction from the station. "I shouldn't be surprised in the least if he was keeping company with some farmer's daughter."

A sudden light came into her eyes and a smile of satisfaction spread over her face.

"Land alive, I never thought of it before," she exclaimed, "but I'd bet anything that he's gone off to get married."

"Hardly likely," said I. "He wouldn't go off and leave the office unguarded without telling any one. And he wouldn't leave five thousand dollars lying there in the drawer."

"That's just what he would do. I'll bet he had a windfall of some sort and the minute he got the

THE YELLOW LETTER

money in his hands he just couldn't wait to go and tell the girl."

"Somebody would have known it if he got a horse at the livery stable, would they not?"

"Oh, that's neither here nor there. He might have gone on his bicycle. He generally keeps it over there in the corner, and it ain't there now."

"It might be up at his boarding-house."

"It might be," said Miss Cox.

It came to me that if Davis had thought it worth while to go to the Widow Smith's to make inquiries, it might be worth my while, too. After asking Miss Cox for directions, I told her I was going to see if Rouser's wheel was missing, and made my way up one of the side streets to the boarding-house. Davis' visit evidently had ruffled the widow. I found her in anything but a communicative mood.

"If you're another of those detective men coming prying around here," she said, "you might just as well get out. I've said all I'm going to say, and that's all there is to it."

"Please don't mistake me for a detective," I said as pleasantly as I could. "I'm—a—friend of Miss

MORE DISCOVERIES

Cox down at the post-office and we were wondering whether Charlie had taken his bicycle when he went away, and Miss Cox thought you might know."

"If you're a friend of Jennie Cox," said Mrs. Smith, "I guess I'd be likely to know it, being her own cousin and knowing as well as I know my own face that she hasn't had a man friend for eleven years, since Aleck Thompson died. As for Charlie Rouser going away on his bicycle, I don't know nothing about it. All I know is his wheel ain't here, but he never kept it here anyway. He always kept it down to the post-office."

With that she slammed the door in my face, but I went away well satisfied. As I walked down the dusty path of the so-called street toward the hotel I reviewed all I had learned and was delighted to think how amazed Davis would be when I presented my facts gathered in the last twenty-four hours, which were these:

Hugh Crandall was aware that we were on his trail.

Unable to learn anything from Louise over the telephone, he had dared to go to the Farrish home.

THE YELLOW LETTER

He had so intimidated Louise that she had asked me to withdraw at once from the inquiry.

Acting on her fears, he had persuaded her to accompany him to some place in New Jersey.

Lock Box 17 was used for the mail of some one who had taken the alias of Henry Malcolm Stewart.

All the mail that came to that address was taken care of by Charlie Rouser, the postmaster.

Rouser was in the habit of going at frequent intervals either on his bicycle or in a buggy out the road that led away from the station.

Rouser, when he disappeared, undoubtedly had gone away on his bicycle.

Everything, to my mind, pointed to his having gone to meet Crandall.

How to account for the fact that Rouser had not returned was still a poser to me, but as I reviewed Crandall's connection with the chain of persons who had been driven to death I found myself believing that it was not at all out of the range of possibility for Crandall to have made away with Rouser for fear of betrayal. From all I had learned about the missing postmaster, I was convinced that he was

MORE DISCOVERIES

weak rather than vicious, and I felt that he probably was an innocent party to the nefarious plot of the yellow letters. Davis' theory that it was a crime of two persons, after all, was only a theory. When the mystery was cleared up I was positive that the only criminal who would be uncovered would be Hugh Crandall. I shuddered as I recalled that Louise even now was somewhere with him, not exactly alone, to be sure, for the car was driven by her own chauffeur, but still it was a most disconcerting thought.

As I approached the hotel I saw a buggy stop before it, the occupants of which were Davis and the constable. As Davis dismounted I heard him say to the constable:

"To-night at eight."

"I'll be on hand, you bet," said the constable as he drove off.

I quickened my steps and overtook Davis just as he started up the stairs to his room.

"I've got some great news for you," I whispered and went on up with him.

The minute he got into the room he flung himself

THE YELLOW LETTER

on the bed, as if utterly worn out, and lighted a cigarette. I had expected that he would be eager to question me but this did not seem to be the case. He lay there with eyes half closed as if unaware of my presence.

Annoyed as I was at his seeming indifference, I was sure that when I told him my amazing news about Crandall and my discoveries about the post-master he would be effectually aroused. I took it for granted that his mood was due to despondency over his failure to find either of them.

"I have seen Hugh Crandall twice, no, three times, to-day," I said by way of beginning, "and I have found out how Rouser went when he left the post-office."

"Yes," he said absent-mindedly.

"What's more," I cried impatiently, "I know who had Lock Box No. 17. I know what was done with the mail that came to that address."

Davis, without answering me, reached for another cigarette, lighting it from the butt he had been smoking. His nonchalant indifference grated on my nerves and I lost my temper.

MORE DISCOVERIES

"Confound it, Kent," he said with considerable asperity, "I was so busy thinking out something I really didn't hear what you said. Sit down and tell me all about it."

Mollified by his apology, I sat down on the foot of the bed and told him the story of my day, how I had seen a man going into the Farrish home and had recognized him later as Hugh Crandall, or at least as the man who had registered at the hotel as Cook; how I had been barred from the house; how I had discovered another yellow-letter suicide in the park; how, when I returned to the Farrish home after Crandall had left, Louise had told me of the theft of the scrap of yellow paper from her desk; how she had left me to go off in her automobile after insisting that I drop the investigation; how I had seen her again, crossing the ferry with Crandall in the machine; how I had returned to Ardway and had learned that Lock Box 17 was held in the name of Henry Malcolm Stewart; how the missing postmaster himself had been in the habit of putting the mail that came to that address into his own pocket and going off with it, and finally, how Miss Cox and

THE YELLOW LETTER

I had determined that when he disappeared he had gone off on his bicycle.

"From all I have learned," I said in conclusion, "I am convinced that Rouser was the tool—in all probability the innocent tool—of Hugh Crandall in carrying out his nefarious schemes. Crandall apparently had him take the Lock Box 17 mail to some agreed meeting-place. It would not surprise me in the least if Crandall, finding himself in danger of exposure, had made away with the postmaster. I am convinced that Crandall is aware that he is being watched. In his desperation he had the hardihood to visit the Farrish home and to abstract that fragment of the yellow letter, lest it should be used as evidence against him. I am convinced, too, that he has succeeded in terrorizing Louise by the same methods that he used with her sister, so that she is trying to dissuade me from pursuing Crandall. Rouser, when he left the post-office, went away on his wheel on the road that leads from the station. If you follow that road with me, perhaps we can find him. Pretty good for one day's work, don't you think?"

MORE DISCOVERIES

"Not bad," said Davis, "if only you would not persist in mistaking your own deductions for facts; but you overlooked the most important fact."

"What do you mean?"

"You didn't happen to find out from Miss Cox or from the Widow Smith, did you, whether or not the missing postmaster was left-handed?"

"What's that got to do with it?" I cried, convinced that as usual he was amusing himself at my expense.

"Much more than you think," he answered gravely. "It was the knowledge that the criminal must, or at least one of the pair, must have been a left-handed man that gave me one of the most important clues in this case."

"Confound you and your clues!" I exclaimed. "Where have they led you? What more do you know about this chain of crime than when we started?"

He listened unruffled to my tirade and as I finished remarked calmly:

"I only know this much: Constable Dodds and I are going out at eight o'clock to-night to arrest the

THE YELLOW LETTER

missing postmaster and his accomplice. I know where they both are, or where they will be to-night. You may come with us if you wish. And now I am going to get a couple of hours' sleep. I expect we will have a rather busy night of it."

As he concluded his amazing statement he rolled over on his side and closed his eyes, and in a few seconds was apparently fast asleep.

CHAPTER XII

THE RIDE IN THE DARK

NOT since my early boyhood has the terrible fear of darkness come over me as it did that night at eight as the three of us set out from Ardway. The mystery of the journey, too, added to its terrors. I had not seen Davis after his startling announcement of his nocturnal mission until he came into the hotel dining-room for supper. All through the meal he had laughed and chatted on all sorts of immaterial subjects, influenced undoubtedly by the fact that there were several others seated at the table with us. There had been no opportunity for private conversation between us before we left the hotel together a little before eight for a side street where Dodds, the constable, was waiting for us with a vehicle.

We had lingered at the table until all the others had left. Just as we got up, Davis turned to me and in a hardly perceptible tone asked :

THE YELLOW LETTER

"Have you got that revolver I gave you?"

"It's up-stairs," I answered, in the same undertone. "Do you want it?"

"No," he said significantly, touching his hip pocket, "but you may."

I hastened up-stairs to get the weapon and when I returned he was waiting for me at the door and hurried me around the corner and into the buck-board. With Dodds crowded in between us we drove along the street leading away from the station and soon struck what is locally known as the Plank Road, skirting a chain of hills which the residents dignify by the name of mountains. So precipitous and rocky are these that little effort had been made to cultivate them and the habitations are few and far between. There seemed to be practically no travel at night. We encountered only one vehicle of any sort, and that was about two miles out from Ardway, when we heard an automobile in the distance behind us.

"Turn out," whispered Davis to Dodds, "and stop until it has passed us."

The constable drew in under the shade of some

THE RIDE IN THE DARK

trees. It was pitch dark, the only light coming from an ancient lantern hung over the dashboard. As the automobile came nearer Davis unhooked the lantern and holding it down between his legs shielded it with the folds of a long raincoat he was wearing. The automobile dashed by us, apparently unaware of our presence.

"All right," said Davis, as soon as it had vanished in the distance, "go on."

Dodds drove on in silence for perhaps two miles farther. We passed a little stone cottage nestling in a clearing under the hill.

"It's just beyond here?" said Davis, a note of inquiry in his voice.

"Yep," said the constable, "Miller's Lane, they call it."

Though to my city eyes there was no sign of a road, Dodds, about three hundred yards beyond the cottage, pulled the horse sharply to the right and we began ascending a rocky lane that led almost straight up the hill.

"Wait a minute," said Davis, and the constable checked the horse.

THE YELLOW LETTER

Jumping out quickly the inspector seized the lantern and dropping back a few paces began making what appeared to be a minute examination of the road.

"'Tain't much of a road," the constable whispered to me while we waited. "It's only used for logging, though when we come up here this afternoon there was automobile tracks both going and coming."

"Any idea who made them?" I asked.

"Nope, but I guess he knows," with a gesture in the direction of the lantern light.

Just then Davis rejoined us, hanging the lantern over the dashboard again. Instead of resuming his seat, he knelt on the floor of the buckboard, peering down at the road as it was dimly revealed by the lantern.

"Go ahead slowly," he ordered.

As Dodds clucked to the horse I leaned down beside Davis and asked:

"What did you find?"

"Just what I expected. The automobile is somewhere ahead of us."

THE RIDE IN THE DARK

"Whose is it?"

"I don't know yet."

My curiosity would be denied no longer. Hitherto I had kept silent, hoping that Davis would confide in me the object of our strange journey.

"Whom are we coming out here after?" I asked.

"The postmaster and his accomplice, of course."

"Who is his accomplice?"

"I'm afraid I misstated the case," said Davis with a grim chuckle. "The postmaster is the accomplice. The other is the master criminal."

"Who is the other?" I persisted. "Is it Hugh Crandall?"

He was silent for a moment before answering. I attributed it to hesitation in admitting that he had been wrong and I right, and it was with considerable satisfaction that I finally heard him answer: "I should not be surprised if we found Crandall somewhere in the vicinity."

He continued to peer down into the road as the horse struggled up the hill till we came to a comparatively level plateau.

"Stop here," he called out authoritatively.

THE YELLOW LETTER

"The deserted cottage is at least a mile farther on," volunteered the constable.

"We'll walk it," said Davis. "We can not take any chances of the wheels being heard."

Dodds pulled off the road and fastened the horse to a tree. Again taking the lantern Davis made a search of the road, finally returning the lantern to its place, after carefully extinguishing it.

"Come on this way, as quietly as you can," he directed.

"I've got this," I said, showing him the little pocket electric light with which I had explored the post-office. "Do you want it?"

"Keep it in your pocket. We may need it, but it is better not to show a light if we can avoid it."

I put it back in my pocket and took the precaution of placing the revolver Davis had given me in the side-pocket of my coat where it would be more easily available. Davis moved off soundlessly through the clearing with the constable, I close at his heels. There was more light here than there had been on the shaded road, but even so we could see hardly twenty feet ahead of us.

THE RIDE IN THE DARK

"This ain't the direction of the cottage," whispered Dodds.

"I know. I want to find something else first," Davis explained, keeping straight on through the darkness, like a hound on a fresh scent.

He moved rapidly forward for a hundred and fifty yards and then brought us up short with a sharp "Hist." As we strained our eyes into blackness we made out the shape of an automobile just ahead. Its lights had been extinguished and its engine was dead.

"Wait here," Davis again commanded as he crept silently toward it to make sure that the tonneau was unoccupied. He was back with us in a minute.

"Let me have that lamp of yours, Kent," he whispered, at the same time lighting a cigarette.

"Is that safe?" I exclaimed in surprise, amazed that he would dare to smoke when he had been taking such precautions against our being discovered.

"Sure," he replied laconically. "Whoever was in that automobile is at least half a mile away by now. The glass on the front lamps is nearly cold. I want to see the number, though. We may find it useful."

THE YELLOW LETTER

Taking my little electric lamp he advanced toward the machine again, flashing the light for a second on the number, and then peering by its light into the tonneau, exclaiming as he straightened up: "I thought so."

If it was safe for him to smoke, the constable and I felt that it was safe for us, too, to relax our precautions, and together we had advanced until we were beside him.

"What did you find?" I asked, wondering at his exclamation.

"What I expected," he replied enigmatically.

The manner of his answer provoked me and I determined then and there to have it out with him.

"Look here, Davis," I said; "I brought you into this case and I do not like the way you have acted about it. I have freely told you everything I have discovered and have aided you in every way I can. Before I go a step farther on this trip I want to know more about it."

"What is it you wish to know?" he asked. The constable edged nearer for fear he might miss something of our conversation.

THE RIDE IN THE DARK

"First, where are we going?"

"To what is known as the deserted cottage, about a half mile farther on, at the edge of this clearing, a shack that was built for a shelter for lumbermen or quarrymen—which was it, Dodds?"

"Built for one and used by t'other," the constable replied, "but 'tain't been used by either, so far as I know, for a dozen years."

"How do you know the missing postmaster is there?"

"Traced him."

"How?"

"Bicycle tracks," he answered with a chuckle. "You were not the only person who discovered that Rouser, when he disappeared, went on a bicycle. In fact, Kent, you are a little slow as a detective. By the time you had ascertained that much, I ascertained where the bicycle tracks led to and had even gone so far as to have Dodds get warrants for Rouser and his accomplice."

"I still do not see how you got evidence enough to get a warrant for Crandall. Did you find him out here with the missing postmaster?"

THE YELLOW LETTER

"I didn't say I had a warrant for Crandall," replied the inspector sharply. "Did you ever hear of a John Doe warrant?"

"How do you know they are out here now?" I asked.

"We'll soon find out. Come on," he answered, starting across the clearing almost at a dog-trot.

There were many more questions I wanted to put to him, but there was no opportunity, and, besides, I doubted much if he would have answered them. At first he made little effort to move quietly, but after we had gone a quarter of a mile or more he called back in a whisper, "Quietly now."

We had come to a path which led us through a short thick growth of underbrush. As noiselessly as Indians following a trail we felt our way along, the silence broken now and then by the sound of a bough bent back, or a rustling leaf. Soon the path brought us out on some rising ground. Not fifty yards ahead of us appeared the deserted cottage.

"That's it," whispered Dodds.

"Ssh!" answered Davis. "Wait here!"

We stopped there just at the edge of the under-

THE RIDE IN THE DARK

brush, peering into the darkness, straining our eyes to see and our ears to hear. From the one window in the side of the one-story log hut a dim light shone, proving that the place was either occupied or had been very recently. As we became more and more accustomed to the darkness I could see that there were apparently two paths, the one on which we were standing and another leading off at almost a right angle.

As we looked and listened I heard a sharp crack, like the breaking of a twig that had been stepped on.

The sound, so far as I could judge, came from the other path, apparently a hundred feet away from the cottage. I turned toward Davis and saw that he, too, had heard it. He was standing with his whole body tense, his head bent forward a little as if ready to spring at any instant. Almost unconsciously my hand went into my pocket and brought out my revolver. I felt that affairs were rapidly approaching a crisis.

As we listened, another sound came to our ears. At first indistinct, it quickly took the rhythm of footsteps hurrying along the path, a man walking rap-

THE YELLOW LETTER

idly, I decided. The hurrying footsteps came nearer and nearer. Davis now was crouching like a runner about to make a hundred-yard dash.

It was only a minute of suspense and yet the effect on my nerves was indescribable. I wanted to scream like a hysterical girl; I wanted to run, forward or back, it made no difference; I wanted to do something, anything—anything but stand there and wait in the darkness.

All of a sudden the form of a man hurrying along the other path became visible. He seemed to be carrying something. Davis took two or three noiseless steps forward and stopped abruptly. From the shadows, from nowhere it seemed, the figure of another man appeared directly in the path of the oncomer.

“Hold on here!” it said, or something like that.

With a curse the first man dropped whatever he was carrying and started to run. The second man started after him. With not more than ten paces between them the pursued man suddenly wheeled. A revolver flashed and the pursuer with a muttered curse fell headlong in the path. The hunted man

THE RIDE IN THE DARK

turned and, with headlong speed, plunged down the path.

At the revolver shot Davis had leaped forward, and, needless to say, Dodds and I were not far behind him. Fast as the fugitive was vanishing Davis was even faster. With the movement of a trained runner he, the wiry inspector, quickly outdistanced Dodds and myself and was close on the heels of his man.

As I ran breathless behind him, hoping to arrive in time to help him in his capture, I saw the man ahead halt and turn. Instinctively I knew he was about to shoot again, and, raising the revolver I had been carrying all the while, without even trying to aim, I fired in his direction just as I saw the flash from his revolver.

There was hardly a second between the two reports and then—

A woman shrieked.

I turned sick with horror. There could be no mistaking it.

It was the voice of Louise Farrish.

With overwhelming dismay it came to me that

THE YELLOW LETTER

I had shot the woman I loved. Too stunned to move I stood there. My whole body seemed turned to stone. My arms hung helpless at my sides. My legs refused to move. My mouth was fever-dry and my tongue lay lifeless. Yet my vision, I recall, seemed clear and strong, penetrating the darkness as if it had been broad day. I seemed to see, as if the sight belonged to some one else, some one outside myself. I saw the inspector and the constable, both apparently unhurt by the shots, dash on in pursuit. I saw a man's figure rise up from the path. I seemed to hear him call out: "Louise, Louise, where are you? Are you hurt?"

There was no answer. Almost I had persuaded myself that the strain on my nerves, the horror of the night and the shock of the shooting had given me a hallucination, that the woman's shriek I had heard was but a phantasm of a fevered brain, when the figure I had seen rise from the path, dashed into the thicket, repeating its agonized cry of "Louise, Louise, where are you?"

At the sound, life came again into me. I dashed my revolver to the ground and sprang after him. I

THE RIDE IN THE DARK

found him bending over an unconscious form on the ground. Just as I reached the spot he had lighted a match. He lifted it to see my face, and as he did so I saw that the woman lying there apparently lifeless was indeed my Louise.

Overwhelmed with anguish and remorse, I flung myself beside her, entreating her forgiveness. The other man shoved me roughly aside.

"Don't be a fool," he exclaimed. "She has only fainted."

"She's shot! She's killed!" I cried. "I shot her!"

"I tell you she has only fainted," he cried angrily. "Help me carry her over there by the window."

Together we lifted her and bore her gently to the side of the cottage, where we laid her on the ground. Joy surged in my heart as I saw and heard that she was still breathing, joy that was not even abated when I saw by the window light that my companion was none other than Hugh Crandall.

But just then all other thoughts were driven out of my head by the sight of a thin stream of blood trickling down the sleeve of Louise's automobile coat.

THE YELLOW LETTER

"I tell you she is shot. See," I cried, all my anguish coming back anew.

With trembling hands I helped Crandall cut away her sleeve, dreading all the time to see and know the worst.

"It's only a scratch," said Crandall, with a sigh of relief.

Across her rounded arm was a reddening gash where the bullet had cut its way through the tender flesh. While my head told me that Crandall was right, that it was only a flesh wound and not in the least dangerous, in my heart I still felt little better than a murderer. Three inches to the right, and the bullet from my revolver would have stilled her heart for ever.

She opened her eyes and stared at us in a puzzled way.

"Why, Harding, dear," she said in feeble surprise, "are you here—here with Mr. Crandall?"

For answer I bent and kissed her. What mattered it if Hugh Crandall was the criminal? What mattered it if the chain of mystery was still unsolved? What mattered it if the author of the yellow letters



For answer I bent and kissed her



THE RIDE IN THE DARK

had escaped from the inspector? Louise lived! She loved me!

Davis and the constable came running up the path, panting from their chase, but empty-handed.

"Is she hurt?" asked Davis as he saw the three of us grouped under the window.

"A flesh wound, not at all dangerous," Crandall answered, while I knelt there caressing Louise's hair and whispering softly to her.

"How about you?" asked Davis.

"He didn't hit me," Crandall answered with a short laugh. "I tumbled over the bucket of milk he was carrying and dropped when he saw me. Didn't you get him?"

"He's safe," answered the inspector. "He ran plump over the edge of a precipice in the dark. We heard the thud of his body on the rocks below. He must have been instantly killed. We'll get the body in the morning. He must have fallen two hundred feet."

"A good two hundred," the constable added as Davis turned to peer in the window of the hut.

"And inside there," said the inspector after a min-

THE YELLOW LETTER

ute's survey of the interior, "is the other one, the master criminal—safe enough for the present."

"Why," said the constable, who had followed the inspector's example in looking through the window, "why, that's Aleck Young."

CHAPTER XIII

THE STRANGE VIGIL

DAWN found Inspector Davis and me keeping strange vigil in the deserted cottage. Louise was gone. Crandall was gone. Constable Dodds was gone. Only the two of us were there, and on a rude couch in the corner, inert, unconscious with the death-like stupor of the confirmed user of morphine, lay the wreck of a man whom Davis had termed the master criminal.

On the inspector's return from his pursuit of the postmaster he had at once assumed the position of director-general of the little group at the cottage. He had decreed that Crandall should take Louise back to town in the automobile as soon as she was able to travel.

"After she has had an hour's rest here," he said authoritatively, "her nerves will have recovered sufficiently. It is important that the wound in her arm

THE YELLOW LETTER

should be dressed as quickly as possible. It will be well, too, for her to return as speedily as possible to her father and sister. Her continued absence, if it reaches their ears, will needlessly alarm them both. You, Mr. Crandall, will take her back in the machine in which you came, of course."

"Certainly," said Crandall — over-eagerly, I thought—"but, if you will pardon me for asking, who are you?"

For reply Davis handed him his card which bore his official title.

"But," stammered Crandall, "I don't understand you. What are you doing out here?"

"I'm here," said the inspector, "I fancy on the same mission that brought both you and Kent here—to find the sender of the yellow letters that have been menacing the peace and happiness of the house of Farrish."

"But," protested Crandall again, "how did you know it was Aleck Young?"

"So you know him?" said the inspector, with a note of inquiry in his voice.

I had been taking no part in the conversation. I

THE STRANGE VIGIL

was sitting with Louise's head pillowed on my knee, endeavoring with my handkerchief to staunch the slight flow of blood that was still coming from the bullet wound. I had been strongly tempted to voice a protest, when I heard Davis arrange for Louise's return in the automobile with Crandall, for while Davis seemed to think he, like ourselves, had been in pursuit of the criminals, I still believed it was for the purpose of warning them instead of capturing them. Yet, on the other hand, I knew nothing about running a car. It was clearly out of the question for me to take Louise back, much as I distrusted Crandall. Anxiously I waited for his confession of acquaintance with the man in the hut.

"Yes, I knew him—only too well," said Crandall.

"Tell me about him," said the inspector. "But wait—let us carry Miss Farrish inside the cottage where she will be sheltered from the night air until you are ready to start."

"I can walk," said Louise. "In fact, I think I was more frightened than hurt."

I helped her to her feet and assisted her into the cottage, where I piled some cushions that were lying

THE YELLOW LETTER

about and made her comfortable. The noise of our entrance made no impression on the drug-stupefied man who lay on the other side of the room, but Davis and Crandall crossed to where he lay and examined him closely.

"He will not wake for several hours," said Davis after feeling his pulse. "Kent and I will stay here until then. You, Mr. Crandall, will take Miss Farish home, and you, Dodds, as soon as it's daylight, had better go look for Rouser's body."

"I don't have to look for it," said the constable with a shudder. "I know just where it is. It's a long ways round by the road, though."

"Take the buckboard," said Davis, "and when you reach the body go through all the pockets carefully and bring me everything you find. You'd better not take the body back to Ardway yet. Is there some place else you can take it?"

"Sure," said Dobbs, "I can take it over to Miller-vale. It's just about as far in the other direction. But what in the land's sake I'll tell about it, gets me."

"That's easy," said the inspector. "You can ex-

THE STRANGE VIGIL

plain that you were driving over there and as you came by you saw the body lying on the road. You can explain that he must have fallen over the cliff in the dark. By the time they get through talking about it and having an inquest over in Millervale we will have had a chance to finish any more investigating we want to do. You can start about dawn."

"All right," said the constable, "but what will I do with them warrants?"

"Leave them with me. After you have disposed of Rouser's body you can stop on your way back and we'll take this one in with us. Come on outside, Dodds, and you, too, Crandall, I want to ask you some questions about our friend over there. You, Kent, stay here with Miss Farrish."

The three of them went out, leaving Louise and me alone together, a circumstance that I couldn't doubt that Davis had planned, realizing that there was much we would say to each other. Hardly were they out of the door before Louise turned to me, with suppliant arms, and cried out, with a sob in her voice: "Harding, forgive me for having deceived you."

THE YELLOW LETTER

"It is you," I cried, "you, who must forgive me for having disobeyed your wish, for having come out here after you had asked me not to, for having almost put a bullet through your dear heart."

"You didn't know—you couldn't know that I was here," she sobbed. "But how can you ever pardon the lies I told you?"

"Lies," I protested. "Dear girl, you never lied to me. Whatever these dear lips have said, I knew, I always knew your heart was true."

"Katharine asked it and I had to promise her."

"You mean about Hugh Crandall."

"Yes," she breathed. "I don't know yet what it is that is between them. It's something about—about my father. Crandall knew it and Katharine found it out. Whatever it is, they determined to keep it secret between them. Katharine made me promise that I would tell no one, not even you. She swore me not to reveal to any one that I had even seen Hugh Crandall. I had to promise her, you understand, don't you?"

My answer was a kiss full on her lips, while my arms went about her and held her tight to me.

THE STRANGE VIGIL

"Of course, dear girl," I breathed, "I understand. I understood all the while."

"I was so afraid," she murmured, "afraid you would think I was deceiving you, that I didn't love you."

As our lips met in a long, sweet kiss, a wave of joy swept over me that all but obliterated thoughts of the dreadful yellow letter. I forgot for the moment the drug-sodden creature lying in the corner, not twenty feet away from us. I knew but one thing. Louise loved me. What mattered anything? In the rhapsody that only those who have loved can understand, we held each other in close embrace in a delightful silence—it may have been for one minute—it may have been for ten or twenty. Time for either of us had lost its power. We were the world, just we ourselves.

The spell was broken by a slight twitching of the man across the room. We came to ourselves with a start as from a dream. I went over to his side and looked at him. He was still dead to all around him.

"You understand, Harding, dear, don't you?"

THE YELLOW LETTER

said Louise, as I resumed my place beside her, "why I asked you to drop your search? As soon as Katharine became conscious and I told her that you were on the trail of the yellow letter, she became greatly excited. She insisted that I should make you withdraw at once. She was determined to know all about what you had done, and I told her of your being here in Ardway. She, weak and ill as she was, made me swear that I would recall you by telephone. She wanted me to telephone to Hugh Crandall, too, but I did not know how to reach him. I had to promise her everything she asked."

"Of course you did," I said. "But, dear, I loved you so that I could not rest while this terrible mystery that hung over your dear ones was unsolved. I felt that it was my duty to disregard your wish. I realized that you were being compelled by some influence you could not withstand to act as you did. You are not angry with me, are you, dearest?"

"Of course I'm not," she said with a wan smile, patting my hand gently.

"But tell me," I asked, "what of Hugh Crandall? What is his connection with this dreadful mystery?"

THE STRANGE VIGIL

"I don't know," she answered thoughtfully.

"I have thought all along that he had something to do with it, and you saw just now that he admitted knowing this man here whom the inspector insists is at the root of everything."

"Katharine trusts him, yet I know my father for some reason forbade him the house."

"I'm sure he is guilty," I cried. "Katharine's eyes have been blinded by love to his real character."

"I think you must be mistaken," said Louise. "He knows about the existence of a paper that gave some man a strange hold on my father. Katharine knew of it, too. He may have told her. She insisted on my accompanying him out here to try to help recover it."

"Didn't he tell you about it on the way out?"

"No. I asked him what it was. He told me that too many people knew its contents now. The more I think about it the more perplexed I am about the mysterious manner in which both he and Katharine acted about this document."

"Tell me everything," I insisted, all my suspicion against Crandall returning anew.

THE YELLOW LETTER

"To begin with, he insisted on our leaving the chauffeur in Newark, though it had been my intention to have him come with us. Crandall would not hear of it. 'Katharine put you in my charge,' he said, 'and it is her wish as well as my own that we take every precaution for secrecy. It is better that only you and I go on this mission. We want no servant gossiping about this matter.' 'But where are we going, and why?' I asked him. 'Surely I have a right to know that.' 'We are going to try to recover from the hands of the wickedest black-guard on earth a certain document that has come into his possession. It is a question whether or not we shall succeed. If we do, I shall put this document in your hands and you must promise that it shall not go out of your possession until you have placed it in your sister's hands. You must promise me, too, that you will ask no questions about it and that you will not read it. When Katharine has seen it, do with it whatever she tells you. She probably will say that you are to burn it without reading.'

"Can't you see, Harding, what a dilemma I was in? I felt that what Mr. Crandall asked me to do

THE STRANGE VIGIL

was Katharine's wish. They had talked together for nearly half an hour just before you came to the house. I had to promise what he asked, though I protested first. It seemed to me that carrying back the document to Katharine would excite her and retard her recovery, and I told him so."

"The sight of that document safe in her own hands will do more to cure her speedily than all the doctors in the world," he answered."

"Did he mean the yellow letter?" I queried.

"I don't know. I asked him if that was what he meant and he would not answer me. The only thing he did tell me was that there had been strange developments in the case since he had undertaken to get this paper for Katharine. They seemed to puzzle him greatly. He said that something with which he had nothing to do had alarmed the man we were going to see and that he had disappeared, gone into hiding."

"How will we find him?" I asked.

"He is as anxious to see me as he is not to see some one else," Crandall told me. 'He wrote me plain directions how to reach a place he calls the de-

THE YELLOW LETTER

serted cottage, and made an appointment there for nine o'clock to-night.' ”

As I listened to Louise's story I did not know what to think about Crandall's part in the affair. It seemed now that he had been acting in Katharine's behalf, though this did not explain his acquaintance and relations with the man he had called Aleck Young. I could account for his determination that Louise should not read the document by the hypothesis that it was something reflecting on the honor of her father. Indeed, I felt it must be that. I could conceive nothing that would have driven Katharine Farrish to attempt her own life except the approaching disgrace of some member of the family. Pride of name was one of her strongest characteristics. I could well conceive that even on a bed of illness she would try to shield Louise from all knowledge of any family shame. For many years her relation toward her younger sister had been almost that of a mother. One thing that puzzled me was why she and Crandall should have thought it necessary for Louise to accompany him, and, even with this explained, there was still the greater mystery of the

THE STRANGE VIGIL

chain of suicides that centered at Ardway, bound together by fragmentary bits of yellow letters.

"Why," I asked Louise, "do you suppose that he and Katharine insisted on you coming out here? Why could not Crandall himself have recovered the document and restored it to Katharine?"

"I asked him that. He told me that the man who held it had made the condition that it should be received by either my father or Katharine. They did not wish it known that my fa— what had happened, and as they were certain this man knew neither Katharine nor me, I was to go with him and impersonate my sister."

"Did you get the document?"

"No, we failed," said Louise, "and I do not know what in the world I am to tell Katharine. We came out here in the afternoon. Crandall thought it advisable to find the place by daylight. We ran the automobile up the lane that leads to this place and crept through the thicket until we came in sight of the cottage. There were two men moving about in the cottage, Young and another man whom Mr. Crandall told me was the postmaster at Ardway.

THE YELLOW LETTER

He seemed surprised at the presence of the postmaster. We watched for half an hour and then took the automobile back to a little hotel about three miles away from Ardway. For some reason, Mr. Crandall did not want to stop in Ardway."

"I guess I was the reason," I replied. "But when did you return here?"

"We had dinner at the little hotel, and as soon as it was dark, started back for the cottage. When we arrived we found a light in the window and saw Young there in a stupor just as you see him. The other man was nowhere around. After trying to awaken Young, without success, Mr. Crandall searched his clothes, but there was nothing in any of his pockets. He even felt all the seams, and took off his shoes in search of the paper we wanted, but it was nowhere on him. He ransacked the cottage as well as was possible in this dim light, but could not find any suggestion of a hiding-place. Out in the little shed that serves as a kitchen he found a slip on which was written a list of eatables—bread, milk, eggs and such things. We decided from this that the other man—Rouser, I think Mr. Crandall

THE STRANGE VIGIL

had said his name was—had gone to some neighboring farm-house or store to lay in supplies and probably would soon return. Mr. Crandall suggested our hiding in the bushes until his arrival, and we did so. We had hardly taken our place behind the bushes before we heard him coming. Mr. Crandall stepped out, and the rest is so mixed up I don't know just what happened. I heard shots and felt a pain in my arm and I think I screamed and then I don't remember any more until I found you bending over me."

"To think that it was my bullet that hit you!" I cried. "I might have killed you."

"It's only the lightest sort of scratch," she protested. "It doesn't even hurt any more. It does not bother me half so much as to know how to tell Katharine that we failed in our mission."

"Tell her," said I, "that one of the conspirators is dead and that the other is safe in the hands of Inspector Davis and myself. Tell her that any document either of us finds that in any way relates to her father will be placed in her hands at once. Tell her that I will not leave the prisoner's side until I have

THE YELLOW LETTER

it safe and that my honor is pledged both for Davis and myself that no word affecting her father will ever become public. Crandall is out there now talking with Davis, and I think you will find that he, too, will tell her the same thing."

As if in corroboration of my words, the three of them, Crandall, Davis and the constable, returned just at this moment.

"Come, Miss Farrish," said Crandall, "I think it time I was starting home with you, if you feel able to travel. I have run the car up just outside the cottage. I think we can safely leave the completion of our mission to the inspector and Mr. Kent."

"I wish Mr. Kent was coming back with us," said Louise in a sweetly plaintive tone that made me long to gratify her wish.

"I need him here," said the inspector almost roughly.

"And that comes first for all of us," she said bravely, as I helped her to the car.

Whether or not Crandall knew our relations I do not know, but he considerably busied himself with the engine for a few minutes, leaving it to me to

THE STRANGE VIGIL

make Louise comfortable with blankets and cushions on the rear seat, and enabling us to have a few brief words of parting alone.

I watched the automobile out of sight and then turned back into the cottage, where I found the constable stretched on the floor, already fast asleep. Davis, sitting on the floor before some smoldering logs that had been placed in a rudely-constructed open fireplace, seemed wrapped in thought and did not even look up when I entered.

Nevertheless, I seated myself on the floor beside him and, placing my hand on his shoulder, I said once more: "And now I want to know all about it."

"Shut up," he said, savagely shaking off my hand. "Can't you see I want to think?"

Rebuffed and amazed by his rudeness, I sprang to my feet, only to get a new surprise as, in tones as courteous as his others had been rude, he said: "If I were you, Harding, I'd follow the constable's example and try to get some sleep. You and I have a hard day ahead of us to-morrow."

Seeing that he was in no mood to be questioned, I smothered back the many things I wanted to ask

THE YELLOW LETTER

him and stretched myself on the floor, not to sleep, but to ponder. As I reviewed the amazing events of to-day, of yesterday, of the day before, it seemed as if ages and ages—grim, mystifying, terrifying ages—had passed since that hour when I left my office light-heartedly to call on Louise Farrish.

And the morning—the inspector had said—was to bring a hard day for both of us.

What new terror could to-morrow hold?

CHAPTER XIV,

THE INSPECTOR EXPLAINS

THUMP, thump, thump!

I had not thought slumber possible for me, and yet I must have slept. My bewildered senses, dazed by a sudden recall to activity, took subconscious cognizance of a regular, persistent pounding and eventually succeeded in stirring me to attention. I suddenly sat up and looked about me. I found myself in the deserted cottage, the drug slave still motionless on his couch and the logs still smoldering in the fireplace.

That thumping—I quickly saw where it came from. Davis was standing over the sleeping form of Dodds, the constable, engaged in the work of awakening him by the park policeman's method—kicking him on the soles of his shoes.

The process was successful. The constable snorted, drew up his legs, rubbed his eyes and sprang to his feet.

THE YELLOW LETTER

"It will be daylight in half an hour," I heard Davis tell him. "I want you to go and get the buckboard and drive around to where Rouser's body lies. Bring me any papers you find in his pockets. Leave his money and his watch and keys, so as not to arouse any suspicion of robbery. As soon as you have done that I want you to drive back and pick up the body before any one else finds it. Drive with it to Millervale and leave it there. Don't talk too much. Tell everybody that you found the body at the foot of the precipice and impress on them that it must have been an accident in the dark. As soon as you can conveniently get away, come back here. Make sure, though, that nobody follows you."

As soon as the constable had gone, Davis lit a cigarette, turned up his coat collar and took a seat on a rough bench just outside the door.

"Come on out here, Harding, and watch the sun rise," he called to me.

I rose hastily from where I had been sitting gazing stupidly about me and joined him on the bench.

"There was something you wanted to ask me, wasn't there?" he said pleasantly.

THE INSPECTOR EXPLAINS

There were so many things I wanted to ask him I hardly knew where to begin, but the first thing I blurted out was:

"Is Hugh Crandall guilty?"

"He's guilty only of being in love with Katharine Farrish against her father's wishes," he replied.

"But surely," I said doggedly, "he has some connection with the crime of the yellow letters. He knew Young. He knew where to find him. There are many things about his actions that to my mind call for explanation."

"Did you notice his eyes?" asked Davis. It was still too dark for me to see the inspector's face, but I felt sure that he was laughing at me. He made me feel that way all too often.

"I didn't," I answered rather crossly, "but what's that got to do with it?"

"I'm afraid, Kent, as I have said before, you will never make a good detective. You are entirely too unobservant of important details. Do you recall my asking early in our investigation whether or not Crandall had blue eyes?"

"Yes," I grudgingly admitted, "I recall it."

THE YELLOW LETTER

"As soon as I discovered that Crandall had blue eyes that eliminated him as the probable criminal."

"I don't see your logic."

"I've told you before," said Davis, after a pause long enough to permit him to light another cigarette, "that there are classes of crime and types of criminals, each strongly marked after its own sort. I saw right at the start that this crime was of the hidden sort, of the kind that includes conspiracy, blackmail, secret plotting—the kind that requires a skilful sneak. You never in your life found a blue-eyed sneak. There are lots of blue-eyed desperadoes and burglars. Most of the notorious bad men of the West were blue-eyed, but you don't find a man with blue eyes shooting or stabbing a man in the back or kidnapping a child or writing blackmailing letters."

While I was not at all convinced by his argument, I felt that it would be useless for me to dispute it, for I would be invading comparatively unknown territory, whereas he undoubtedly had dozens of cases at his finger-tips ready to illustrate his theory. I decided to change the subject.

"I recall, too," I said, "that you asked if Crandall

THE INSPECTOR EXPLAINS

was left-handed. So far as I saw, he is not. What of that? Is that another proof of Crandall's innocence?"

"No," said Davis, "that didn't prove Crandall's innocence. It proved Rouser's guilt. In fact, it was the left-handed clue that put me on the right track and eventually led me to this very cottage."

"For Heaven's sake," said I impatiently, "don't talk in riddles. Go on and explain it."

"You're not to blame," he continued calmly, "for not having seen the left-handed clue. You lack the education. Only a person who had seen hundreds and hundreds of envelopes and had studied them closely would have observed it. You remember that a policeman brought me part of a yellow envelope that had been found in old Andrew Elser's room. On it was a stamp and part of the postmark. The first thing that I noticed was that the stamp was put on crooked. This might mean much or nothing. A left-handed person stamping a letter invariably gets the stamp on crooked. It ordinarily is put in the upper right-hand corner of the envelope. A right-handed person stamping a letter has the two

THE YELLOW LETTER

edges of the envelope as a guide. Try putting on a stamp with your left hand and you will see that your hand comes in such a position that the edges of the envelope are hidden and in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred the stamp is out of plumb. On the other hand, as a post-office inspector, I am well aware that in a business house or office where there is a large correspondence, an office boy mailing hundreds of letters at a time, is apt to get most of the stamps on crooked. If this yellow letter was one that had been mailed in a business office, the crooked stamp meant nothing. If, on the other hand, it had been mailed singly or with a few others, it was pretty safe betting that the man who mailed it was left-handed. It was easy after I came to Ardway, especially as Rouser was already missing and every one was talking about him, to learn that he was left-handed."

"I still fail to see," I said stubbornly, "why you did not suspect Crandall. There were many things that seemed to point to him—his telephoning to Katharine just before she shot herself, his sudden disappearance, the finding of the morphine syringe in his rooms, the Ardway address in his note-book,

THE INSPECTOR EXPLAINS

coupled with the fact that General Farrish had forbidden him the house. I do not see how you could help suspecting him."

"I'll admit that on the surface these things all did look damaging, but against this was the one important fact that he was too well-balanced—too sane, if I might put it that way. I quickly learned that he was a reputable business man, that he was one of the governors in two clubs, and you yourself informed me that Katharine Farrish had thought highly of him. No well-balanced man commits crimes of this sort. You might find an insane man conducting a successful business and getting away with it, but it is highly improbable that he could succeed in not betraying his mental condition to his club-fellows or his women friends. On the other hand, a man might be sane enough in society, but you would find the vagaries of his brain manifesting themselves in business. As soon as I convinced myself that Crandall was sane and well-balanced, I felt that all possibility of his being the criminal was eliminated."

"Do you mean to tell me," I cried angrily, "that all criminals are insane?"

THE YELLOW LETTER

"Yes," said Davis thoughtfully, "I mean exactly that. The time will come when our courts will not be punitive but curative. Men are criminals because they can not help it. The great well-balanced majority of people see that in the observance of the laws the community has made for itself lies the only hope of a happy, regular life. The unbalanced few, the unhealthy product of unfit parents, in their poor misshapen brains are unable to comprehend this. They become the rebels against authority, the slaves of alcohol and narcotics, like that poor devil in there. They can not help themselves. It's the fault of their parents, it's the shape of their heads, it's the diseased condition of their nerves. It's our fault for not taking the same care in breeding the human race that we would in breeding horses or dogs."

"Oh, bosh!" said I. "I ask you how you account for the hypodermic syringe in Crandall's rooms and I get a sermon."

"Lawyer though you are," retorted Davis, "I'm afraid that you are weak in logic. Having decided that Crandall had no criminal connection with the case, what then? I set up the theory that his con-

THE INSPECTOR EXPLAINS

nection was exactly the same as your own. You were in love with Louise and were determined to trace the hidden danger that was threatening her father. He was in love with Katharine and was trying to do the same thing. In fact, he had several weeks the start of you. Every one of his actions which you regarded as so suspicious and damnatory was perfectly explicable on this theory."

"Yes," I grudgingly admitted as I hastily reviewed them in my mind, "I suppose they could all be explained in that way."

"The question then came to me," continued Davis, "how could Crandall have known of the hidden danger that threatened General Farrish? It was highly improbable that the general would confide a thing of this sort, either to his daughter or to her fiancé. He must have come on it in some other way. I judged that when he revealed his knowledge to the general, the latter, in fear that his daughter might learn what he had been trying to keep from her, in rage ordered Crandall from the house.

"The only logical way for Crandall to be restored to favor was for him to clear up the mystery that

THE YELLOW LETTER

was menacing the general. As he had been at work on it for some time, I felt sure that in his rooms we would find a clue to the address of the persons we were seeking. I was confident, too, that affairs were approaching a crisis. Crandall apparently had taken Katharine into his confidence. It looked as if some plan they might have made had failed and that this failure had driven Katharine to despair. With the lock box in Ardway as a clue, with the left-handed stamp as evidence and with Crandall's movements to watch, I felt certain that we could quickly solve the whole mystery."

"But how about the morphine syringe?" I asked again.

"I hardly gave it a second thought. For all I knew, it may have come there by accident, yet Crandall quickly explained its presence in the talk that I have just had with him. He kept this chap, Young, there in his rooms for two weeks, trying to worm out of him the secret with which Young had been trying to blackmail the old general. When Young disappeared he left the syringe behind him."

"So," I exclaimed in excitement, "the mystery of

THE INSPECTOR EXPLAINS

the yellow letter was a blackmailing plot against General Farrish."

"No," said Davis, "I don't think the Farrish case had anything to do with the other chain of suicides, unless it was that both devilish plots originated in the drug-fevered, malevolent brain of the poor fellow in yonder. It is true that General Farrish got yellow letters. Once a week for months and months he has found one in his mail, each more threatening, more menacing, than its predecessors. He has for a long, long time been living in daily dread that the anonymous writer of these letters might at any moment carry out his threats and expose him to public shame, and disgrace him in the eyes of his beloved daughters."

"But how did you learn all this?" I asked.

"Young boasted to Crandall about the weekly letters. So sure did he feel that General Farrish would not dare openly to prosecute him that with fiendish malignity he took delight in retailing to Crandall the dread-inspiring phrases he had employed and in dilating on the terror they undoubtedly were causing the general. It is small wonder that the sight of you

THE YELLOW LETTER

and Louise examining a scrap of one of the yellow letters, coming as it did right on top of Katharine's desperate act, brought on a stroke of paralysis."

"Poor old man," I said, "how he must have suffered!"

"Far more than we can imagine," said Davis. "I do not think any one but a half-crazed drug fiend, either, could have conceived of such refinement of torture as of always using the same peculiar yellow stationery. Think what a shock it must have given General Farrish each time he saw one of those yellow envelopes lurking among his morning mail! Think what a strain it must have been as he waited morning after morning for them, bearing the burden of his awful fear in silence! Think what horrible specters in yellow must have haunted his brain as he tried to sleep! No wonder he collapsed when he did."

"It must have been terrible," I said as I tried to picture to myself the agony that had been General Farrish's for months and months. "No one but a mad drug fiend would have thought of it. I wonder why he chose yellow."

THE INSPECTOR EXPLAINS

"There is perhaps a scientific reason why yellow appeals to the criminal and the insane," said Davis thoughtfully, "but the higher significance of color has not yet been satisfactorily explained. A crazy woman often delights to deck herself in yellow. The color appeals, too, to the lower orders of the human race, an illiterate negro, for instance. It is the color of gold, over which thousands and thousands have gone mad. It is the color of the moon, which the ancients believed to have a peculiar influence on mad persons. Some day, I hope, some scientist will be able to tabulate the psychic effect of the spectrum on the human race. It would be well worth doing. Everybody realizes, even now, in a general way, that colors do directly affect the senses. What a jar discordant combinations give us!"

"But are you sure Young wrote all the yellow letters?"

"Certainly," said the inspector, getting up from the bench and entering the cottage.

When he returned a few minutes later he had in his hand a bundle of yellow paper and envelopes. As I examined them I saw that they were of exactly

THE YELLOW LETTER

the color and texture of all the fragments of yellow letters that I had seen.

"Where did you find them?" I asked.

"In a cupboard over there by the fireplace. I don't know whether you noticed it or not, but over there, too, is the type-writer on which Young wrote the letters that he gave Rouser to mail for him."

"What makes you think Rouser mailed them?"

"There are six different things that prove Rouser's connection with Young's fiendish plots. The stamps were put on by a left-handed man, and Rouser was left-handed. The answers were received in the Ardway post-office, where Rouser was post-master. Lock Box No. 17, to which they were addressed, was not entered in the list of box-holders. You yourself found a large sum of money in the post-office cash-drawer that had no business being there. Rouser himself mysteriously disappeared when he found that some one was on the trail of the yellow letters. And lastly, Rouser and Young for weeks have been together most of the time."

"How did you learn that?"

"Young, it seems," the inspector continued, "is

THE INSPECTOR EXPLAINS

well known in Ardway, his boyhood having been spent in the town. His father was a well-to-do lawyer who became addicted to drugs. His mother died in the state asylum for the insane. The constable, Dodds, has known him for many years. He went to Harvard and there was a classmate for a while of Crandall. He has been going from bad to worse, each time he returned to Ardway on his periodic visits seeming to be more and more addicted to morphine. His inheritance was spent long ago and it has been a mystery to every one where he got considerable sums that he has had at times. With all his faults, he has much magnetism and a plausible tongue and makes friends readily. So far as I can discover, after he had concocted his plot against General Farrish he had some difficulty in obtaining satisfaction and tried to enlist the aid of Crandall. Crandall went at once to General Farrish and was ordered out of the house. Crandall, despite his treatment by the general, was determined to solve the mystery, and for months kept track of Young, trying to worm out the secret and render him powerless. At times he gave Young small sums and for a while, as I have

THE YELLOW LETTER

said, had him in his rooms. One day Young disappeared, taking with him some jewelry of Crandall's, and it was only a few days ago that Crandall succeeded in finding him here in Ardway. Young, having failed to blackmail General Farrish, tried to open up negotiations for the sale of his documents through Crandall. Crandall, of course, could not communicate with General Farrish, so he called Katharine on the telephone and made an appointment with her. Evidently he explained the whole affair to her, and when the negotiations failed it was more than she could bear."

"That all seems logical," I said, "but I fail to see yet what connection there is between General Farrish and old Andrew Elser. Nor do I see the connection between the suicide of the old woman in the hotel at Ardway and the suicide of the young woman in the park lake, yet in each of these cases there were yellow letters."

"I do not see it myself, yet," said Davis frankly, "and yet I know it exists. I know the hellish idea that drove them all to death was planned by that distorted brain inside the cottage there."

THE INSPECTOR EXPLAINS

He was silent for several minutes as he gazed at the rising sun, seemingly absorbed in the glorious spectacle.

"I'll find out!" he said explosively. "I'll make him tell."

"What are you going to do?" I asked. "How will you make him?"

For answer he took from the pocket of his coat two sets of thin steel cuffs, one for the arms and the other for the ankles, and stepped within the cottage. I followed wonderingly and watched him as he turned Young over on his face and, bringing his hands together behind him, snapped on the cuffs. He shackled his feet, too, and then picking up a stout rope, passed it between the two sets of shackles and around a beam in the side of the cottage wall, leaving enough slack to permit the shackled man a small amount of liberty. During the whole operation Young hung limp and apparently lifeless, still in the drug stupor, but as Davis finished his work he began to talk incoherently.

"The shaking up I gave him in fastening him up," said Davis, "will bring him to. He will wake up in

THE YELLOW LETTER

a few minutes and then I'll find out everything I want to know. I'll make him tell."

"What are you going to do," I gasped, "torture him?"

"No," said the inspector grimly as he dragged a stool over near the couch and placed on it a hypodermic syringe he had found in the cabin, and with it a morphine preparation.

He gaged the distance with his eye, and moved the stool so that while it would be in plain sight of the shackled man when he awoke, it would be utterly impossible for him to reach it.

He eyed his complete arrangements with satisfaction.

"No," he said, "I'm not going to torture him. His drug-wracked nerves will do it for me."

CHAPTER XV,

THE TORTURE

HELL is a place of unsatisfied desires, and in its lowest depths are those, who, writhing in the agony of their decaying nerves, shriek for their beloved morphine and shriek in vain.

Many times in my life I have seen the souls of men, and women, too, put to hard and bitter tests.

Once I saw a motorman whose car had crushed a lovely child. Around him pressed a howling, angry mob, led by the baby's father, who would have had his life. With bold daring, he stood on his platform as on a throne, with his controller bar for his only weapon, and defied them all. Yet, even as he stood there, outwardly so bold, I saw in his eyes a misery as great as man could bear and live. For days and months I doubt not that his nightly dreams brought him constant horror-pictures of the child he had killed.

Once, too, I had to be the bearer of the news when

THE YELLOW LETTER

a workman's misstep on a frame of steel sent him plunging down eighteen stories to death. In the foul tenement where I told my news I saw a tired, gaunt woman walk the floor and scream and moan, three frightened little children clinging to her skirts.

Often, too, in my practice in the courts, I have seen men in dreadful misery—a ruffian bold and defiant despite the blood-guilt on his soul, face all the world courageously until the jury's foreman said the word that brought the death-chair's horror to his heart and crumpled him weeping to the floor. I have seen men of good repute sentenced for shameful crimes with their saddened families looking on as they burned with grief and shame that their sins had found them out.

Yet all the concepts that my brain had formed of the utmost in pain and shame and misery faded into insignificance before the things I saw in that rude cottage in the Jersey hills where for two long days Davis and myself kept watch on the fettered master criminal—waiting, waiting, waiting till his drug-tortured nerves should make him tell us the secret of his yellow letters.

THE TORTURE

Shackled hand and foot though he had found himself when he came out of his stupor, his self-control was at first wonderful. For a few minutes after Davis had fastened his bonds he lay there tossing and twitching, then suddenly opened his eyes—piercing, devilish, uncanny black eyes they were—and tried to sit up.

The rope through the manacles behind him stopped him short and threw him back on his couch. At the same time he caught sight of Davis sitting near the foot of his couch. In silence they eyed each other, neither of them saying a word. Stealthily Young shifted, first his hands and then his feet, as if to ascertain the extent of his bonds. Finding himself securely fastened, he let his eyes rove around the room, and discovered me. He studied my face sharply, as if to read my mission, but quickly turned his gaze to Davis again, as if recognizing in him his master captor.

Then he laughed—a hideous, chilling, defiant laugh, that ended in an unhealthy gurgle in his throat.

“Well?” he asked inquiringly.

THE YELLOW LETTER

I looked for Davis to seize on this propitious moment, when Young, just aroused from drug-slumber, would be weak and nervous, to ply him with questions about the things we wished to know, but the inspector was too much a master of his craft for that. As if he had not heard his prisoner's question, he sat there staring fixedly at the man before him.

One minute passed, two minutes—three, and still Davis sat silent and unanswering. The cumulative force of prolonged silence began to grow on my nerves. This waiting, waiting, was torture. If only one of them would speak. To Young it must have been far worse.

Still they kept at it, Davis staring straight into Young's eyes and Young trying to stare back. For a few minutes he succeeded, and then his eyes shifted and fell. With a master effort of his will he brought them back to Davis and held them steady. There the two of them sat as in a duel, the prisoner's baleful eyes shooting forth venom, hate, murder, while in the other's steady glance was pictured relentless justice.

Of course, there could be but one end to it. Pow-

THE TORTURE

erful as was the will in the drug-wracked body, the twitching of the muscles, the involuntary drawing up of the limbs and arms as far as the bonds would permit, and most of all the claspings and unclasping of the fingers told what torture the silence was bringing to Young.

He burst forth at last in a wild flow of profanity, cursing Davis, cursing me, cursing everything, cursing God, and still Davis sat there as rigid and as silent as the superior of a Trappist monastery doing penance. At times the prisoner's voice was raised to a hideous shriek, at times it sank to a pitiful sob, and all the while he tugged and strained at his bonds, twisting, turning, reaching, trying always to find some position in which he could gain possession of the morphine that lay on the chair just beyond his reach.

At last—it must have been an hour later—physical exhaustion conquered him and he lay back, after one last frantic struggle, weak and panting, unresisting.

The inspector arose, and, walking over to the couch, stood there looking down at him.

THE YELLOW LETTER

"Aleck Young," he said evenly, "your whole game is up. I know all about General Farrish and Andrew Elser and the woman from Bridgeport. I know about Dora Hastings, who committed suicide in the park lake yesterday, and about Henry Eberle, who sent you the five thousand. I know everything that your unfortunate aide, Rouser, knew, and now I want you to surrender all the letters and papers in your possession."

"You will never get them," sneered Young, as I sat there marveling at the inspector's revelations. It was news to me that he knew the name of the Central Park suicide, and while I myself had found the five thousand dollars, I had had not the slightest intimation that Davis knew from whom it had come.

"Either I get those letters," said Davis evenly, "or you get no more morphine."

Young laughed in his face.

"You haven't the slightest evidence against me for anything. Without letters or documents you can prove nothing. You have no right to keep me bound up here. I shall get free and shall make you pay for this. I don't care what Rouser has told you, you'll

THE TORTURE

get nothing out of me and you have proof of nothing."

"Very well," said the inspector, "no letters, no morphine."

Turning away from the couch, he spoke to me in a tone as indifferent as if we had been camping together:

"Come on, Kent, let's see what we can dig up for breakfast."

We found the cottage well supplied with provisions, as if it had been the intention of the conspirators to make it their headquarters for some time. In a very few minutes Davis had some bacon fried and toast and coffee made, which he spread in the little lean-to that was used as a kitchen.

"So you mean to starve him, too?" I asked in an undertone, pointing to the couch.

"It won't be necessary," said Davis. "Take something in to him if you like. You'll find that the only appetite he'll have will be for morphine."

Nevertheless, I took a cup of coffee and some toast in to the prisoner. A volley of oaths was my only reward, so I returned and sat with Davis while

THE YELLOW LETTER

he ate. I myself had no appetite, but the events of the night did not seem in the least to have affected his. I drank only part of a cup of coffee, though he urged me to eat something.

"It is apt to be a long siege," he said, "and you must keep your strength. Our prisoner is a man of considerable will power and is not going to confess readily. If you will keep guard on him for a couple of hours I am going to sleep."

"Of course, I will."

"Under no circumstances," said Davis, as he flung himself down on the floor of the lean-to, "loosen any of his bonds, and pay no attention to his pleas for mercy. He has a winning way about him that is dangerous."

"You need not fear," I replied. "Remember the agony he has caused to the woman I love."

"And to many others," said Davis.

"Speaking of that," said I, "I wish you would tell me before you go asleep how you learned where the five thousand came from."

"Rouser told me."

THE TORTURE

"I was not aware that you had any opportunity to talk with him."

"I didn't," said the inspector. "I just used my eyes in the post-office."

I thought I had used mine pretty well in the post-office, but certainly I had seen nothing that would lead me to identify the person who had sent the five thousand dollars I had found in the cash-drawer.

"Don't talk in riddles!" I exclaimed rather petulantly. "What did you find in the post-office?"

Davis grinned.

I nodded assent.

"Did it not strike you as peculiar that there should be over two thousand names and addresses in the forwarding list of a small post-office like Ardway, where probably not more than ten families move away in ten years?"

"I did not examine it closely," I replied, "but even if I had I am afraid I would have failed to identify it as important."

"If you had seen the name of Andrew Elser in it," said Davis, "would you not have examined it?"

THE YELLOW LETTER

"Was his name there?"

"Yes, and also the names of the Bridgeport victim and Dora Hastings and Henry Eberle. It was Young or Rouser who sent out the yellow letters and checked the list, using just plain, ordinary shorthand for such words as 'Sent,' 'Answered,' 'Five Thousand.' Fortunately, the list shows that while more than five hundred letters were sent out, hardly a dozen had brought responses, and in only three cases had money been received."

"Was General Farrish's name on the list?"

"No," answered Davis sleepily, "but I hardly expected to find it there."

"And the letters sent out," I persisted, "were they the yellow letters?"

"Of course."

"What was in them?"

"That's just what I've got to find out from Young," said Davis, and in another minute he was fast asleep.

As I saw Davis lying there a new thought came to me. If he could extract the information he wanted from Young, what was to hinder me from

THE TORTURE

doing it? Surely our prisoner by now had seen the hopelessness of his position and would be ready to talk. At least there would be no harm in trying.

I entered the room where Young was, and, approaching his couch, laid my hand on his shoulder. He had been lying there with his eyes closed, and the mere touch of my hand so jolted his shattered nerves that his whole body bounded to the limit of his bonds. His tightened lips showed how difficult it was for him to suppress a scream.

"Look here, Young," said I, "I've come to you as a friend to tell you just how the land lies. Rouser is dead and the inspector has possession of all his papers. He knows everything about the yellow letters."

An evil smile was Young's only answer—the cunning leer of the man who scents a trick.

"There are stacks and stacks of evidence against you. We have the list of people to whom Rouser sent letters."

"Damn your evidence!" he sneered. "You may have evidence against that fool Rouser, but you've nothing on me. If the inspector, as you call him,

THE YELLOW LETTER

had evidence enough to convict me, do you suppose he'd have me tied up here? He hasn't a bit of evidence against me. He never will have. Reach me that medicine."

He jerked his head in the direction of the morphine that lay so tantalizingly near. There was something in his voice, some indefinable power of persuasiveness that almost influenced me to do what he asked. Involuntarily my hand went out to the bottle containing the solution, but I caught myself in time.

"Go on, hand it to me," he begged. "Can't you see how I need it? Give it to me and I'll tell you anything you want to know."

"Tell me first," said I, "and you can have it."

"I can't talk, I can't think," he cried, "till I get it. You can see for yourself how shaky I am."

I could see for myself that he was suffering the torture of the damned. Every muscle in his body seemed to be jerking involuntarily, doubling itself into little hungry knots that joined his aching nerves in the shrill clamor for morphine—morphine.

"Give me just one dose," he pleaded, "and I'll

THE TORTURE

tell you anything, everything you want to know. I'll die if I don't get it."

So pitiable was his condition that I found myself sympathizing with him in spite of myself. My eyes followed his glance to the chair near the couch, where, beside the hypodermic syringe and the morphine, Davis, as if to accentuate the torture of his fetters, had placed the key that unlocked them. I would not have known how to administer the morphine, even if I had wished to do so, and besides, I had a strong aversion to drugging a fellow-man, but as I saw the key there, I thought of a solution.

"If I unlock the fetters on your arms," said I, "so that you can reach the morphine, will you promise me to answer my questions?"

"I'll promise on my word of honor to answer every question you ask," he replied, an eager light coming into his eyes.

"And you'll give me your word not to try to escape?"

"I swear it—on my mother's honor."

Thinking how amazed Davis would be when he awoke to learn that I had the prisoner's full con-

THE YELLOW LETTER

fession, I reached for the key. Young turned over as far as he could to permit me to unlock the fetters.

Then, quick as lightning, as the steel fell away from his wrists, his hands shot out and clutched my neck with maniac strength. I felt my eyes bulge, my lungs fill to bursting. I put forth my hands to try to shake off his grip, but I felt my strength fast failing.

Athletically inclined though I have always been, and matched though I was against a drug-weakened wretch with fettered feet, I found myself no equal for his maniacal desperation. Back and forth over the couch we swayed in a silent death-struggle, my cut-off breath all the while pounding unpurified through my bursting lungs, my brain turning weak, and my sight growing dim. I was beaten. I knew I could hold out but a few seconds longer. I saw nothing ahead of me but death—strangled to death by a drug fiend.

There passed through my mind in my struggles a vivid picture of what was about to happen. Young would silently choke me to death. Silently he would hobble with his fettered feet to where Davis lay in

THE TORTURE

the lean-to sound asleep and brain him with a blow. He would cast off his fetters and long before the constable would return to find our bodies would make his escape on Rouser's bicycle. The mystery of the yellow letters never would be explained. Poor Louise—

Young's hands fell from my throat and I staggered back gasping for breath. I thought at first that the strain had been too much for his drug-wracked body, but soon I saw what had happened. His muscles had not weakened, but his will. Standing over him was Davis with a revolver pointed at his head. Even before I had recovered myself Davis had the fetters readjusted and the rope passed through them.

Our lives were saved. The mystery might yet be solved, despite my foolhardiness. I turned to the inspector to express my gratitude, but dropping the key of the shackles on the chair where it had been before, he flung himself down on the floor to resume his interrupted sleep.

As soon as my aching throat would permit me to speak I began making abject apologies for my fool-

THE YELLOW LETTER

hardy conduct and trying to express my thanks, but he would not listen to me.

"I guess you'll guard him safely enough now," he said, and once more was fast asleep.

With something of the feeling of a chastised school-boy who knows he deserved far more than he got, I sat down beside the couch and for four long hours watched the struggles and heard the curses and listened to the entreaties of the drug-mad prisoner.

But now I had no sympathy left for him.

CHAPTER XVI

THE FORTY-NINTH HOUR

TWO days—two unforgettable days—we passed there in the hut, Davis and I and our self-tortured prisoner. Each day the constable came and went, the first day to tell us that the inspector's plan for disposing of the postmaster's body had been successful and that no suspicion had been aroused. The second day a pleasanter mission brought him to deliver telegrams from Crandall and Louise that all was well, that the general was slowly improving and that Katharine was recovering rapidly.

And all the while Young lay there bound, defying us, now cursing, now pleading, now in brilliant phrases striving to convince us by logical arguments so deft, so forceful, so cunning that a weaker and less wise man than Davis might have been convinced by them.

THE YELLOW LETTER

His logic failing, he would turn to merciless invective and ribald threats, his penetrating voice making the whole hut hideous as he prophesied for us both grotesque horrible deaths, brain-breaking punishments in this world and the next. Then, overcome once more by the intensity of his unsatisfied desire for the drug that had long been his master, he would moan and plead and weep for morphine. At times delusions would seize his brain. By the hour he would rave of beautiful cities and wonderfully fair women and pleasant pastimes. Majestic lines of poetry would flow from his fevered lips, to end in a shriek of agony as his quivering, knotted muscles all but tore his nerves apart. Again the weird morphine fantasies would take hold of him and a rush of horrible grotesque ribaldries would foul the air.

At times he dozed, moaning in agony even in his sleep. Three times a day we offered him food, and once or twice he took a little water, but the one thing only he craved, the one thing he hungered and thirsted for was morphine, and that Davis would not

THE FORTY-NINTH HOUR

let him have, though all the while it lay there almost within his reach, where he could see it.

And still he defied us.

But after forty-eight hours of this terrible torture nature would be put off no longer. She demanded rest. Young had sunk into a troubled, uneasy sleep about seven in the morning. Davis and I, having spelled each other as guards during the night, sat talking about our prisoner. I happened to remark that it was a pity that capital punishment could not remove such criminals as Young from the earth. The inspector, in spite of the rigorous way he had kept up the torture, seemed to have strong sympathy for Young.

"I don't believe in capital punishment at all," he said explosively. "Our whole system is wrong. It took us a good many centuries to discover that insane persons didn't need prisons, but doctoring. They just can't help being criminals. Stand behind a line of prisoners as they march in to breakfast in the penitentiary. Not one of them will have a normal head. Is that their fault? It is the fault of

THE YELLOW LETTER

society. It's our fault. This poor devil here, his father a drug fiend and his mother drinking herself into insanity, what chance did he have? Yet who knows, some day this marvelous new surgery may be able to take the children of even such parents as his were, reshape their skulls and make them honest, useful citizens."

There was a stir on the couch and Young opened his eyes. The fire of the drug-madness and the look of hate seemed to have vanished.

"I give up," he said. "I can't stand the strain any longer. I'll tell you anything you want to know."

He spoke quietly and calmly. Yet there was something in his voice that rang true. I felt that this time he meant what he said. Apparently Davis, too, realized that at last Young's spirit was broken. Without hesitation, he seized the hypodermic syringe and plunged it into Young's arm. The prisoner breathed a long sigh of relief. The color came back into his face and strength to his voice. His muscles stopped twitching.

THE FORTY-NINTH HOUR

"Now," said Davis gently, "where are the yellow letters hid?"

"In a tin-box under a flat stone near the spring," Young replied.

"Which stone?"

"It's the third from the spring coming this way."

Davis was up like a shot and out the door, reappearing quickly with an ordinary document box.

"And the Farrish papers—where are they?" he asked sharply.

"They are in the box, too," said Young wearily. "May I have another shot?"

Davis studied his face and felt his pulse and then reached for the syringe.

"Where's the key?" he asked as he finished administering the morphine.

"In my left trousers' pocket," Young answered apathetically.

Quickly Davis possessed himself of the key and opened the box. In the top tray were perhaps fifty letters, type-written on yellow paper, with a blank left for the name to be filled in. Without stopping

THE YELLOW LETTER

to read the letters, which seemed to be all after the same form, Davis lifted the tray. In the bottom of the box was a type-written list of names and a bulky sealed legal envelope, marked on the outside "Papers in the Farrish case."

"Here, Kent," said Davis, handing me the envelope, "take charge of these and give them to Miss Louise or Miss Katharine. You're entitled to that."

Joyfully I stowed the envelope in my breast pocket, my heart bounding at the thought of the relief the sight of the package would bring to the Farrish family. But as yet the whole affair was a blind puzzle to me and I waited eagerly for further developments.

"Now, Young," said the inspector, "tell me all about your scheme."

"If the damn thieves hadn't been such cowards as to go and kill themselves," said Young with a glow of enthusiasm, "I would have been a millionaire within a year. Read one of the letters and you can see for yourself just how good the scheme was."

Lifting the topmost sheet the inspector read the yellow letter aloud:

THE FORTY-NINTH HOUR

LOCK BOX 17.
ARDWAY, N. J., Feb. 8, 1910.

DEAR SIR:

I am writing to you in pursuance of my duty as executor of the late Edwin Green, who died here recently, leaving his entire estate, amounting to some \$880,000, in my hands for what he was pleased to term a "Defaulters' Fund."

I can best explain its purpose by briefly summarizing the founder's life. In his early youth Mr. Green was employed for a short time in a bank in a small city in another state. Becoming involved in speculation he used several hundred dollars of the bank's funds. He had no relatives but a sister, to whom he knew it was useless to apply for aid. As discovery seemed inevitable he was contemplating suicide, seeing nothing but prison and disgrace ahead of him. But an old friend of his father, who entirely by accident learned of his plight, advanced him the money he needed to make good his defalcation, exacting from him a promise that he would help others in similar plight whenever he had opportunity.

His subsequent life was of the highest rectitude. Though he amassed a fortune he never found opportunity to aid any one in a plight similar to the one in which he once found himself. It became almost a mania with him and resulted in his leaving his entire fortune to aid first offenders in turning back into the right path.

I know of no way of reaching the persons he in-

THE YELLOW LETTER

tended to aid. I am sending out this letter to persons employed in banks and positions of trust, hoping that you or others who receive it may know of some man, young or old, who has made the first misstep and is wrongfully using funds belonging to others, but is desirous of making good his peculations. If you should know of any such I will gladly make good his defalcation and endeavor to save him from exposure, disgrace and imprisonment, asking only his word that he will not err again, for Mr. Green, in the deed of trust, expressly specifies that this is the only security to be exacted. I am, sir,

Very truly yours,

HENRY MALCOLM STEWART.

As Davis finished reading the letter I took it from his hand and carefully re-read it. There could be no doubt that it was the same in form as the scrap Louise and I had found. As I scanned the lines, the words at the beginning of each, from the seventh on to the thirteenth, were the same as those over which we had racked our brains. The context now made them plain enough, but still I failed to see what deadly import the letter had or what sinister meaning in it should drive its recipients to desperation and suicide. Surely on its face it appeared to present the harmless whim of an old man's slightly

THE FORTY-NINTH HOUR

unbalanced brain. I turned to Davis for an explanation.

"An ingenious letter," Davis was saying. "And they fell for it?"

A look of pride came into the prisoner's face

"Wasn't it great?" he exclaimed. "Why, they ate it up like hot cakes!"

"Just plain blackmail," said the inspector.

"No, indeed—fancy blackmail," said Young indignantly. "They never had it dished up to them quite in this way before. I insist, if I've got to go to jail for it, on at least receiving credit for a new criminal invention."

"I fail to see," I interrupted, "just how the letter was a criminal one or why it should have bothered any one."

"I'm afraid you will never make a good detective," said the inspector pityingly. "Don't you see how it worked? Young devised this letter. He needed the coöperation of some one in the post-office to send it out without arousing suspicion. He tried yellow letters first on General Farrish to test the terrifying effects. Satisfied that his yellow letter

THE YELLOW LETTER

plan would bring results, he recalled his acquaintance with Rouser, whom he knew to be weak and easily led. He returned to Ardway—his old home—and found it child's play to enlist Rouser's services. It was part of his general scheme for Rouser to send and receive all the mail through a lock box with a false name. His object in this was to enable him, in case the postal or police authorities got on his trail, to have all the documentary evidence point to Rouser alone. Before his connection with the letters could be established he could make his escape with the money the letters brought in."

"I still don't see," I protested, "how these letters could bring in money. They read exactly the opposite. They promise to give away money."

"That's the cleverest thing about it," the inspector said, and Young's malevolent eyes glistened at this tribute. "Can't you see how it worked? Young and Rouser, from tax lists, bank directories, from telephone books—from a variety of sources—compiled a list of persons employed in positions of trust and began sending out these yellow letters broadcast. If one of these should reach an honest bank employee

THE FORTY-NINTH HOUR

or cashier, the conspirators figured that he would laugh at it and tear it up. But suppose one of them fell into the hands of a man who was guilty of peculations of some sort. Suppose, for instance, old Andrew Elser, when his law business had failed him, had begun to speculate with the funds belonging to the boy for whom he was guardian. His speculations are unfortunate. He plunges and loses still more. He becomes desperate. He sees no way of replacing the money he has stolen. It seems certain that his crime will be discovered and that he will be disgraced. He can not sleep nights. His brain, constantly agitated by fear and worry, will not permit him to rest. His judgment, never acute, or he would not have become a thief, becomes more and more unbalanced. Then one day this yellow letter comes. It reads convincingly. It promises immediate aid. It pledges secrecy. At last he sees an honorable way out. He hastens to send a reply to Lock Box No. 17, Ardway, N. J., as directed. Can't you imagine what happens then? Young communicates with him at once. You used the telephone, didn't you?"

The prisoner nodded.

THE YELLOW LETTER

"Sure," he said, "the telephone every time. It leaves no records behind it and the Bertillon system can't identify a voice."

"Now," the inspector went on, "what does Young say over the telephone to Elser? Something like this—'You're an old thief. I've got the proof. You are stealing somebody's money. Steal some more and give it to me or I'll tell.' Unfortunately, in old Elser's case there was no more money left to steal, so he killed himself. Am I right, Young?"

Again the prisoner nodded, and again he demanded another dose of morphine. His muscles were again getting beyond his control. As Davis fixed the hypodermic, I asked: "But where does the old maid from Connecticut come in? Surely she wasn't a defaulter."

"I suspect it was the brother with whom she made her home," said the inspector.

"Damn her," said Young bitterly, "it was she who queered the whole game. We tackled her brother for five hundred and it came so easily we decided to make another try. The weak-kneed old thief, in his terror of us, told his sister all about it. She insisted

THE FORTY-NINTH HOUR

on coming down here. She saw Rouser and tried to find the signer of the letter. Rouser denied knowing him. She was a wise old creature and pointed out that as postmaster he must know who got the mail. Her suspicion of Rouser scared him stiff. He wanted to give her the money back, but at first I wouldn't hear to it. She was threatening to commit suicide if we didn't. He was so scared that I finally consented to let him square her. I wanted to use him still further and wasn't ready to have him get cold feet. I gave him the money, and he went to the hotel late in the afternoon to see the old girl. He slipped up to her room and found her hanging there. It gave him such a shock that he dashed back to the post-office, grabbed his bicycle and hustled out here as fast as he could come, where I was waiting to meet Katharine Farrish."

With difficulty I suppressed an exclamation of astonishment. I could not doubt that he was telling the truth, for his story dovetailed so well with what Louise had told me. Yet it seemed impossible to believe, it surely was preposterous to imagine that General Farrish, wealthy and honorable as he was,

THE YELLOW LETTER

could have been a thief. I refused to believe it. I decided to demand an explanation from Young of why he had sought a meeting with Katharine.

"It's too bad Rouser was so easily frightened," Davis was saying sarcastically. "He was so scared that he left behind in the cash-drawer five thousand he had just received from Henry Eberle."

"The accursed fool!" screamed Young in a frenzy of rage that he had failed to get his hands on this bit of plunder. "The sneak didn't tell me that. All he said was that Dora Hastings, who was a restaurant cashier, had insisted that it was utterly impossible for her to pay up. The dirty, damned sneak!"

In a fit of madness he cursed and cursed again his dead associate, foul oaths rolling in streams from his parched lips. Anxiously I waited for his fury to subside to ask him about Katharine and Hugh Crandall. It seemed a desecration of her womanhood to mention Katharine's name in the presence of such a man, so as he subsided I merely asked: "But what about Hugh Crandall?"

"Damn him," he cried, "that was another of my mistakes! I knew Crandall in college. When I got

THE FORTY-NINTH HOUR

the goods on old Farrish I thought I could rely on Crandall to help me to turn the trick. I didn't know he was in love with the daughter. When I told him about it he refused to have anything to do with it and rushed off and squealed to the general. Much thanks he got for it! The haughty old general ordered him out of the house and wouldn't let the daughter have anything more to do with him. I tried then to get him in on the scheme, but it was no go. For weeks he kept trying to worm my secret from me. I fired yellow letter after yellow letter at the general, but he kept defying me, and all the while Crandall kept after me to make me give up the papers. I was afraid I'd weaken. There are times the dope gets me and I hardly know what I'm doing, so I vanished. It struck me that if the general wouldn't come across maybe the daughter would. I put it up to Crandall and we arranged a meeting. I was to put the papers in her hands and she was to pay over the money. I slipped up on the first appointment and I guess you must have spoiled the second."

I still was puzzled. What could be the terrible mystery in proud old General Farrish's life that

THE YELLOW LETTER

gave this miscreant such a hold on him? It was beyond my imagination to conjecture, so I put the question bluntly to the prisoner.

"Why ask me?" he snarled. "You've got the whole thing—every paper bearing on it in your pocket there."

Quickly I snatched the envelope from my pocket and was about to rip it open. At last I was to know the secret that had brought such unhappiness into the life of Louise. At last the mystery was to be cleared up. But just as my thumb went rudely under the flap, Davis laid a restraining hand on my arm.

"Wait," he said gently. "Would it not be just as well to deliver that envelope to Katharine just as it is? The fewer people know its contents the less unhappiness there will need to be."

Slowly and thoughtfully I put the envelope back in my pocket.

Davis was right.

I was beginning to think he was always right.

CHAPTER XVII

THE END OF THE MYSTERY

WITH one of the conspirators lying in the undertaking shop of Millervale and the other safe behind the prison bars in Ardway, the documentary evidence against him in our possession reinforced by his full confession signed and witnessed, Inspector Davis and I that same afternoon hastened back to New York, where, it can be imagined, I lost no time in reaching the Farrish home.

As we waited for the train I had telephoned Louise and she was expecting me. She met me in the lower hall. One glance at my radiant face told her that our mission had been successful and she flung herself into my arms while I rained happy kisses on her lips, her cheeks, her glorious hair. But thoughtful ever of others, even in such a moment of ecstasy, she gently unclasped my arms and whispered: "The papers—did you get them?"

THE YELLOW LETTER

A little cry of joy came from her lips as I handed her the envelope.

"Come," she cried jubilantly, "let's take it to Katharine at once! The sight of it will do more to cure her than all the doctors in the world."

Together we hastened to Katharine's room, where we found her sitting up in bed, much stronger than when I had last seen her, though a nurse was still in attendance. Hugh Crandall was seated in a chair beside the bed. The joy I read in the faces of Katharine and Crandall as Louise handed her sister the envelope was reward enough for all I had gone through since I had set out to solve the mystery.

Frantically Katharine tore open the envelope and inspected three documents it contained.

"They are all here," she exclaimed with a sigh of relief as she passed them to Crandall.

"Yes," echoed Crandall happily, "they are all here."

"Burn them, Hugh; burn them at once," she demanded.

Crandall, gathering them up with the envelope in which they had been encased, crossed to the grate

THE END OF THE MYSTERY

where a cheerful fire was burning and one by one fed the documents to the flames, watching carefully to see that every fragment was destroyed.

That was three months ago. Louise and I are married now and Katharine and Hugh are on their honeymoon, too, taking a six months' European trip. Though we never mention the mystery of the yellow letters in the presence of our wives, for it recalls too many sad memories unnecessarily, my new brother-in-law and I had a good laugh the night before I married Louise. As I at first suspected him of being one of the conspirators, so it seems he had suspected me. It was he who peered into the post-office that night as I was examining the books by the light of my electric lantern. He knew that Young had an associate and was trying to find him. I had to admit that my conduct in Ardway fully justified Crandall's suspicions of me, and he realizes that I was justified in suspecting him.

The mystery of the disappearance of the yellow fragment that had given us the first clue is a mystery no longer. It merely had slipped behind the drawer in which Louise had put it. Aleck Young is

THE YELLOW LETTER

-serving a well-deserved sentence of fourteen years, as nonchalantly, I presume, as he underwent his trial. So long as prison-keepers can be bribed to keep him supplied with his beloved drug, I doubt if he bothers over his lack of freedom. Sometimes I think his punishment falls far short when I recall all the misery and suffering he caused, yet my new-found happiness has softened my view of life. I find myself wondering whether after all Inspector Davis is not right when he says that criminals, even the worst of them, should be treated as sick children, to be cured, rather than as bad children, to be punished. I can not help but feel that the parents of Young were far more to blame for his crime than he.

As for General Farrish, he died three weeks after Young's arrest. Before the end he regained his faculties sufficiently to understand that the papers that had menaced his peace and reputation had been destroyed. In his last hour he put Katharine's hand into Hugh Crandall's.

What was in the documents that Katharine and Hugh Crandall burned? What was the secret with

THE END OF THE MYSTERY

which Young threatened him for months and months?

I do not know.

Louise does not know.

We never discuss it even among ourselves. It is better so. Only Katharine and Hugh Crandall and a poor drug sot in a distant cell know what those papers were. I might conjecture if I cared, but what would be the use? After General Farrish's death it came out that his vast estate had shrunk to almost nothing. Unfortunate investments in his old age had swept away his fortune. He was the custodian of various trust funds. It may be that in a senile effort to recoup his losses he had misused some one else's money and Young, with his devilish ingenuity, had found it out. Certain it is that while the papers commented widely on the small estate he left, in none of them was there the slightest hint of scandal. Equally certain am I that neither his daughters nor his sons-in-law bemoan the lack of an inheritance. Louise and I, I know, have learned that happiness lies not in wealth and luxury, but in loving service each to the other.

THE YELLOW LETTER

And one thing more.

Both Davis and myself have quietly withdrawn
our accounts from the Million Bank.

The cashier's name there is Henry Eberle.

THE END