

**CIHM
Microfiche
Series
(Monographs)**

**ICMH
Collection de
microfiches
(monographies)**



Canadian Institute for Historical Microreproductions / Institut canadien de microreproductions historiques

© 1997

Technical and Bibliographic Notes / Notes techniques et bibliographiques

The Institute has attempted to obtain the best original copy available for filming. Features of this copy which may be bibliographically unique, which may alter any of the images in the reproduction, or which may significantly change the usual method of filming, are checked below.

L'Institut a microfilmé le meilleur exemplaire qu'il lui a été possible de se procurer. Les détails de cet exemplaire qui sont peut-être uniques du point de vue bibliographique, qui peuvent modifier une image reproduite, ou qui peuvent exiger une modification dans la méthode normale de filmage sont indiqués ci-dessous.

Coloured covers/
Couverture de couleur

Covers damaged/
Couverture endommagée

Covers restored and/or laminated/
Couverture restaurée et/ou pelliculée

Cover title missing/
Le titre de couverture manque

Coloured maps/
Cartes géographiques en couleur

Coloured ink (i.e. other than blue or black)/
Encre de couleur (i.e. autre que bleue ou noire)

Coloured plates and/or illustrations/
Planches et/ou illustrations en couleur

Bound with other material/
Relié avec d'autres documents

Tight binding may cause shadows or distortion
along interior margin/
La reliure serrée peut causer de l'ombre ou de la
distorsion le long de la marge intérieure

Blank leaves added during restoration may appear
within the text. Whenever possible, these have
been omitted from filming/
Il se peut que certaines pages blanches ajoutées
lors d'une restauration apparaissent dans le texte,
mais, lorsque cela était possible, ces pages n'ont
pas été filmées.

Additional comments: /
Commentaires supplémentaires:

There are some creases in the middle of the pages.
Pages wholly or partially obscured by errata slips, tissues,
etc., have been refilmed to ensure the best possible image.

This item is filmed at the reduction ratio checked below /
Ce document est filmé au taux de réduction indiqué ci-dessous.

| | | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 10X | 14X | 18X | 22X | 26X | 30X |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 12X | 16X | 20X | 24X | 28X | 32X |

Coloured pages/
Pages de couleur

Pages damaged/
Pages endommagées

Pages restored and/or laminated/
Pages restaurées et/ou pelliculées

Pages discoloured, stained or foxed/
Pages décolorées, tachetées ou piquées

Pages detached/
Pages détachées

Showthrough/
Transparence

Quality of print varies/
Qualité inégale de l'impression

Continuous pagination/
Pagination continue

Includes index(es)/
Comprend un (des) index

Title on header taken from: /
Le titre de l'en-tête provient:

Title page of issue/
Page de titre de la livraison

Caption of issue/
Titre de départ de la livraison

Masthead/
Générique (périodiques) de la livraison

The copy filmed here has been reproduced thanks to the generosity of:

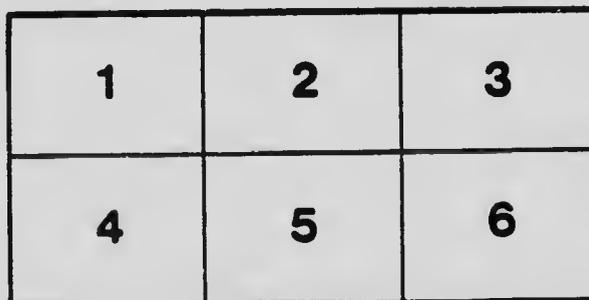
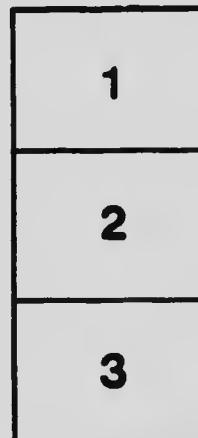
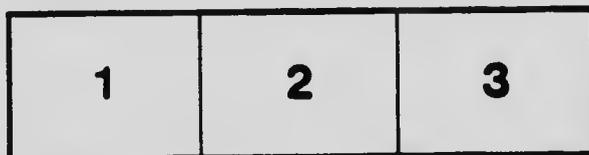
Metropolitan Toronto Reference Library

The images appearing here are the best quality possible considering the condition and legibility of the original copy and in keeping with the filming contract specifications.

Original copies in printed paper covers are filmed beginning with the front cover and ending on the last page with a printed or illustrated impression, or the back cover when appropriate. All other original copies are filmed beginning on the first page with a printed or illustrated impression, and ending on the last page with a printed or illustrated impression.

The last recorded frame on each microfiche shall contain the symbol \rightarrow (meaning "CONTINUED"), or the symbol ∇ (meaning "END"), whichever applies.

Maps, plates, charts, etc., may be filmed at different reduction ratios. Those too large to be entirely included in one exposure are filmed beginning in the upper left hand corner, left to right and top to bottom, as many frames as required. The following diagrams illustrate the method:



L'exemplaire filmé fut reproduit grâce à la générosité de:

Bibliothèque de référence de la communauté urbaine de Toronto

Les images suivantes ont été reproduites avec le plus grand soin, compte tenu de la condition et de la netteté de l'exemplaire filmé, et en conformité avec les conditions du contrat de filmage.

Les exemplaires originaux dont la couverture en papier est imprimée sont filmés en commençant par le premier plat et en terminant soit par la dernière page qui comporte une empreinte d'impression ou d'illustration, soit par le second plat, selon le cas. Tous les autres exemplaires originaux sont filmés en commençant par la première page qui comporte une empreinte d'impression ou d'illustration et en terminant par la dernière page qui comporte une telle empreinte.

Un des symboles suivants apparaîtra sur la dernière image de chaque microfiche, selon le cas: le symbole \rightarrow signifie "A SUIVRE", le symbole ∇ signifie "FIN".

Les cartes, planches, tableaux, etc., peuvent être filmés à des taux de réduction différents. Lorsque le document est trop grand pour être reproduit en un seul cliché, il est filmé à partir de l'angle supérieur gauche, de gauche à droite, et de haut en bas, en prenant le nombre d'images nécessaire. Les diagrammes suivants illustrent la méthode.



4.5

5.0

5.6

6.3

7.1

8.0

9.0

10

11.2

12.5

14

16

18

20

22.4

25

28

31.5

36

40

45

50

56

63

71



MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART
NATIONAL BUREAU OF STANDARDS
STANDARD REFERENCE MATERIAL 1010a
(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)



HANSAVI BINNU -

No good ever comes of half understandings

THE PROFESSOR'S MYSTERY

By

WELLS HASTINGS
AND
BRIAN HOOKER

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
HANSON BOOTH

TORONTO
MCLEOD & ALLEN, PUBLISHERS



James Smith

... ver co ... d h ...

THE PROFESSOR'S MYSTERY

By

WELLS HASTINGS
AND
BRIAN HOOKER

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
HANSON BOOTH

TORONTO
McLEOD & ALLEN, PUBLISHERS

COPYRIGHT 1911
THE BOBBS-MERRILL COMPANY

METROPOLITAN
TORONTO
LIBRARY

Literature

813.52
H136

AUG 8 1979

CONTENTS

| CHAPTER | PAGE |
|--|------|
| I IN WHICH THINGS ARE TURNED UPSIDE DOWN | 1 |
| II THE MEADOW OF ILLUSION | 17 |
| III AN ALARM IN THE NIGHT | 27 |
| IV AN INSULT IN THE MORNING | 41 |
| V BESIDE THE SUMMER SEA: AN INTERLUDE | 51 |
| VI A RETURN TO THE ORIGINAL THEME | 65 |
| VII SENTENCE OF BANISHMENT CONFIRMED WITH COS. | 77 |
| VIII HOW WE MADE AN UNCONVENTIONAL JOURNEY TO TOWN | 90 |
| IX HOW WE ESCAPED FROM WHAT WE FOUND THERE | 104 |
| X AND HOW WE BROUGHT HOME A DIFFICULTY | 116 |
| XI EXPRESSIONS OF THE FAMILY AND IMPRESSIONS OF THE PRESS | 127 |
| XII AN AMATEUR MAN-HUNT WHEREIN MY OWN POSITION IS SOMEWHAT ANXIOUS | 143 |
| XIII THE PRESENCE IN THE ROOM | 161 |
| XIV A DISAPPEARANCE AND AN ENCOUNTER | 172 |
| XV MENTAL RESERVATIONS | 187 |
| XVI MEAGER REVELATIONS | 197 |
| XVII THE BORDERLAND AND A NAME | 212 |
| XVIII DOCTOR REID REMOVES A SOURCE OF INFORMATION | 223 |
| XIX IN WHICH I CAN NOT BELIEVE HALF I HEAR | 235 |

CONTENTS—*Continued*

| CHAPTER | PAGE |
|---|------|
| XX NOR UNDERSTAND ALL I SEE | 247 |
| XXI CONCERNING THE IDENTITY OF THE MAN WITH THE HIGH VOICE | 258 |
| XXII I LEARN WHAT I HAVE TO DO | 271 |
| XXIII I STAND BETWEEN TWO WORLDS | 284 |
| XXIV THE CONSULTATION OF AN EXPERT AND A LAYMAN | 302 |
| XXV FIGHTING WITH SHADOWS | 317 |
| XXVI AND REDISCOVERING REALITIES | 332 |

THE PROFESSOR'S MYSTERY



THE PROFESSOR'S MYSTERY

CHAPTER I

IN WHICH THINGS ARE TURNED UPSIDE DOWN

HAS the two-forty-five for Boston gone yet?" The train announcer looked at me a long time; then he shifted his plug of tobacco to the other cheek and drawled:

"Naouw. Reported forty minutes late."

At this point I believe I swore. At least I have no recollection of not doing so, and I should hardly have forgotten so eminent an act of virtue under such difficult circumstances. It was not only that I had worked myself into a heat for nothing. But the train could hardly fail of losing yet more time on its way to Boston, and my chances of making the steamer were about one in three. My trunk would go to Liverpool without me, a prey to the inquisitive alien; and as for me I was at the mercy of the steamship company. For a moment I wondered how

2 THE PROFESSOR'S MYSTERY

I could possibly have doubted my desire to go abroad that summer and to go on that boat though the heavens fell. I thought insanely of automobiles and special trains. Then came the reaction and I settled back comfortably hopeless into the hands of fate. After all I did not care an improper fraction whether I stayed or went: let the gods decide. Only I wished something would happen. The shining rails reached away to lose themselves in a haze of heat. Somewhere a switching engine was puffing like a tired dog. Knots of listless humanity stood about under the dingy roof of the platform; and the wind across the harbor brought a refreshing aroma of tidal mud and dead clams. It occurred to me that my collar was rather sticky on the inside.

I walked the platform fanning myself with my hat. I bought cigarettes, magazines and a shine. I explored the station, scrutinizing faces and searching vainly for matters of interest. I exhausted my resources in filling up fifteen minutes, and the hand of the electric clock seemed as tremulous with indecision as it had before been jerky with haste. Nothing happened. Nothing would happen or could happen anywhere. Romance was dead.

Feet scraped; a bell chattered; then breathing

THINGS ARE TURNED UPSIDE DOWN 3

flame and smoke, and with a shriek that would have put Saint George to utter rout, the down express rumbled between me and the sky, and ground heavily to a standstill. And there, framed in the wide Pullman window, was a face that altered all the colors of the day, and sent me back among sleigh-bells and holly. Not that I had known her well; but the week of intimate gaiety at a Christmas house party had shown her so sweetly merry, so well fashioned in heart and brain and body that the sight of her renewed pleasant memories, like the reopening of a familiar book. She was smiling now; not at me, but with the same humorously pensive little smile that I remembered, that seemed to come wholly from within and to summarize her outlook upon the world. Her dark brows were lifted in cool and friendly interest as she glanced over the comfortless crowd; and although I was now somewhat more at peace with the world, and no longer hot nor hurried, she seemed to me to sit there in the window of her sweltering car a thing aloof and apart, the embodiment of all unruffled daintiness.

Her eyes found me and she nodded, smiling. I went forward eagerly. Here, at least, in a stuffy and uninteresting world was somebody cool, somebody

amusing, somebody I knew. I picked up my bag and ran up the steps of her car. As I came down the aisle she half rose and stretched out a welcoming slim hand. I dropped into the chair beside her.

"Well, this is luck," I said. "But what are you doing here in the world in July? You belong to Christmas in a setting of frosty white and green. You're out of season now."

She laughed. "Surely I have as much right in July as you have, Mr. Crosby. You are only a sort of yule-tide phantom yourself."

"Wasn't it a jolly week?" I asked.

Miss Tabor's smile answered me. Then turning half away with a face grown suddenly and strangely bleak: "I think it was the best Christmas of my life," she said mechanically. And then with a sudden return to sunshine: "I suppose I see the professor starting on his learned pilgrimage. Is it Europe this summer, or the great libraries of America?"

She had twitted me before upon my lack of scholarly bearing which, as I had always explained, was but a mask unsuspected profundity.

"Well,"—I began, deliberately groping for a decision among the tangled fates of the afternoon,

THINGS ARE TURNED UPSIDE DOWN 5

my doubtful steamer and my grudging pians, "to tell you the truth, Miss Tabor—"

She touched my arm and pointed out of the window. "Look," she said, "you haven't nearly time enough for that now. Do hurry—you mustn't take chances."

The platform was slipping by faster and faster, and with it sobriety and common sense and the wisdom of the beaten path. On the other hand lay the comedy of the present and that flouting of one's own arrangements which is the last word of freedom. I glanced down at her ticket, where it lay face upward on the window-sill.

"To tell you the truth, Miss Tabor," I finished, "I am on my way to Stamford," and I settled back comfortably into my seat.

Miss Tabor regarded me tolerantly, with the air of a collector examining a doubtful specimen: one eyebrow a trifle raised, and an adorable twist at the corners of her mouth. As for me, I tried to look innocently unconcerned. It may be possible to do this; but no one is ever conscious of success at the time.

"I'm going there myself," she said suddenly. "Isn't this a coincidence?"

6 THE PROFESSOR'S MYSTERY

"Easily that. Let me amend the word and call it a dispensation. But appearances are against you. You ought to be going to a lawn party—in a dog-cart."

"I wonder where you ought to be going," she mused. "Probably to the British museum to dig up a lot of dead authors that everybody ought to know about and nobody reads."

This was altogether too near the truth. "I didn't know you lived in Stamford," I said. "You appeared last Christmas in a character of the daughter of Gotham. Wasn't there an ancestor of yours who went to sea in a bowl?"

Her smile faded as if a light had gone out in her. After a pause she answered rather wearily, "We've only been in Stamford a few months. We had always lived in town before."

We looked out of the window for a few moments in silence, while I formulated a hasty hypothesis of financial reverses which had driven the family from their city home, and registered a resolution to avoid the uncomfortable subject. Still, I reflected, the lower shore of the Sound is not precisely the resort of impoverished pride. Had I touched upon some personal sorrow of her own? She was not in

mourning. Yet as she lay back in the green chair, one hand listless in her lap, the other twisting at the slender chain that ran about her neck and lost itself in the bosom of her gown, the fringe of her eyelid clear against the soft shadows of her profile, I imagined in her something of the enchanted princess bound by evil spells in some dark castle of despair. And immediately, with a surge of absurd valor, I saw myself striding, sword in hand, across the drawbridge to blow the brazen horn and do battle with the enchanter. The next moment she routed my imagination by returning lightly to the subject.

"It's a lovely place. I'm out of doors the whole time, and I'm so well I get positively bored trying to work off energy. I can't get tired enough to sit still and improve my uneducated mind. Ever so many nice people, too. By the way, whom do you know there?"

I was on the defensive again. "Why—I don't know anybody exactly there—but there are some friends of mine down at one of those beach-places in the neighborhood—the Ainslies. Bob was in my class."

She resumed the air of the connoisseur. "Why, I know them. I'm going to visit Mrs. Ainslie my-

8 THE PROFESSOR'S MYSTERY

self over the week-end. Do they know you're coming?"

"I'm not going to them," I said desperately. "This is, I may while I'm near by, but I haven't any definite plans. For once in my life I'm not going to have any definite plans, but just start out and see what happens to me. For six months I've been telling things I care about to a lot of kids that aren't old enough to care about anything; and now I want adventures. I went down to the station to take the first train that came along, go wherever it took me and let things happen."

"You might have gone to some romantic place," she suggested. "Three months would hardly be long enough for the Far East, but you might have tried Russia or the Mediterranean."

"That's just the point," I returned. "Romantic and adventure don't depend on time; they only depend on people. If you're the kind of person for whom things happen to you can have adventures on Fifth Avenue. If you're not, you might walk through the Arabian Nights and only feel bored and uncomfortable. It all depends upon turning out of your way to pick up surprises. You're walking through the wood and you see something that looks like

root peeping out from between the rocks. Well, if you're the right kind of person you'll catch hold of it and pull. It may be only a root; or it may be the tail of a dragon. And in that case you ought to thank Heaven for excitement, even if you're scared to death."

By this time I almost believed in my own explanation. But Miss Tabor did not seem particularly impressed.

She put on the voice and manner of a child of ten. "You must be awfully brave to like being afraid of things," she lisped; then with a sudden change of tone, "Mr. Crosby, suppose—only for the sake of argument—that you're making this up as you go along and that you did know perfectly well where you were going, where do you think you would have gone?"

Then I gave up and explained, "I was going to Europe to study," I said, "for no better reason than that I had nothing more interesting to do. Then my train was late and I should have missed my steamer anyway and—and then you came along and I thought I might just as well make the most of the situation. Now I can go down and tell the Ainslies they want to see me and all will be well."

After some meditating she said, "Are you as irresponsible as that about everything?"

"I don't see where all the irresponsibility comes in," I protested. "It isn't a sacred and solemn duty to follow out one's own plans, especially when they were only made to fill up the want of anything more worth while, and have fallen through already. I didn't care about going to Europe in the first place; then I couldn't—at least not at once; then I found something else that I did care about doing."

"Men," said Miss Taber, "usually find a logical reason for what they do on impulse, without any reason at all."

"And the proof that women always act reasonably," I retorted, "is that they never give you the reason."

Instead of taking that for the flippancy it was, she thought about it for some minutes; or else it reminded her of something.

"Besides," I went on, "this is an adventure, as far as it goes; a little one, if you like, but still with all the earmarks of romance. It was unexpected, and it fits into itself perfectly—all the parts of the scene match like a picture-puzzle—and it happened through a mixture of chance and the taking of

chances. It's just that snatching at casual excitement that makes things happen to people."

"Don't things enough happen to people without their seeking them out?" she asked.

"Not to most people; and not nowadays, if they ever did. Do you remember Humpty Dumpty's objection to Alice's face, that it was just like other faces—two eyes above, nose in the middle, mouth under? Well, that's the only objection I have to life; days and doings are too regular, too much according to schedule. Why is a train less romantic than a stage-coach? Because it runs on time and on a track; it can't do anything but be late. But the stage-coach dallies along through the countryside, with inns and highwaymen, and pretty girls driving geese to market, and all the chances of the open road. The horse of the knight-errant was better still, and for the same reason."

"I don't think anything very much has ever happened to you," she said slowly.

"Well," said I, "I'm not pretending to be Ulysses; and you've reminded me of my tender age so often that I can hardly forget it in your presence. But I have had a few exciting moments, and I want more. I don't care whether they are pleasant or not, so

long as I come safe out of them somehow. They'll pay for themselves with the gold of memory."

"That's just what I mean," she returned. "You talk about things as if the only question of importance were whether they are exciting. One looks at books that way, and pictures, and things that are not real. A moment ago, you put highwaymen in the same class with inns and goose-girls. Do you suppose any one that was actually held up and robbed of his fortune would think of the robber as merely a pleasant thrill?"

"I'd rather be robbed by a highwayman than by a railroad, anyway. At the worst, I'd have had a run for my money."

She went on without smiling: "And even trains run off the track sometimes. Do you think you would enjoy the memory of a railroad accident—even if you weren't hurt yourself?"

"Perhaps not. But there's another disadvantage of the train. It's so regular and mechanical that if anything does go wrong there is an ugly smash. It's the same way with modern people. Most of us live such an ordinary habitual life that if we get thrown off the track we're likely to break up altogether."

I had struck the wrong note again. The light went out in her face, as a cloud-shadow darkens a sunny field, and she looked away without answering. Not to make my mistake worse by taking notice of it, I said, "After all, what should we do if things always went smoothly and there weren't any adventures?"

She said quietly, "We might be normal and wholesome and comfortable," and continued looking out of the window and toying with her chain, while I cursed myself for a tactless clodhopper without the sense to avoid a danger sign. Then I found myself wondering what this trouble could be that by the mere touch of an accidental allusion could strike the joy out of a creature so naturally radiant. Whatever it was, it had come upon her within the last six months, or the chances of our Christmas week had been singularly free from reminders of it. Could there be possibly any connection between it and that chain with its hidden pendant? Or was it only by accident that her hand went to it in her moments of brooding? I seemed to have noticed the chain before, and her habit of playing with it in idleness, but I could not be sure.

She roused herself presently, and the talk went

on, though with an undercurrent of discomfort. For my part, I was still repenting my clumsiness; and she, I suppose, felt annoyed at having shown so palpably an emotion which she had not intended for my eyes. So that, in spite of regret for the approaching end of the adventure, I was hardly sorry when our arrival at Stamford supplemented speech with action.

"Are you expecting any one to meet you?" I asked, as the platform emptied and left us standing alone.

"No, they didn't know what train I was coming on. But there's the trolley now. And it's your car, too, that is, if you're still going to the Ainslies'."

A short open car, with an air of putting its wheels close together in order to buck, squeaked around the curve and took us aboard. When we were well under way a short, heavy man came around the corner of the station on an unsteady run and pursued a little distance with inarticulate shoutings and violent gestures. We were too far off to see him very distinctly, but I thought he had somehow a foreign look; and unless my ears were at fault he was cursing us in Italian. We left him standing in the mid-

dle of the road, shaking his fist and mopping his face with a red handkerchief.

There was only one other passenger on the car, a fattish woman with blonde hair, who sat at the farther end; but for all that, it could hardly be called either a private or a comfortable conveyance. There was a badly flattened wheel forward, which banged and jolted abominably; and the motorman, instead of running slowly on that account, seemed possessed of a speed mania induced by artificial happiness. He bumped over crossings and rocked around curves at an alarming rate, accompanying the performance with occasional snatches of song; while the conductor, balanced on the back platform, read a newspaper and chewed a toothpick without paying the slightest attention. Where we ran for a long stretch along the highway, an automobile came along and proceeded to have fun with us after the manner of joyous automobiles. It ran languidly beside us until we were at our best speed; then with a derisive toot, buzzed half a mile ahead. Then it waited for us to come up, and repeated the evolution, "barking" at us with the engine. The motorman's songs turned to muttered anathemas. And as we turned from the roadside along a low em-

16 THE PROFESSOR'S MYSTERY

bankment of sand across the meadows we held to a rate of speed that was really exciting.

"Are we making up time?" I asked. "Or is it only the festive motorman?"

Miss Tabor shook her head. "I never went so fast before. The man must be—"

Just then we struck a curve. I had one instant's sickening sense of danger as the front wheels bumped and thudded over the ties. Miss Tabor caught at my arm with a smothered cry. Then the car lurched drunkenly to the edge of the embankment and slowly rolled over.

CHAPTER II

THE MEADOW OF ILLUSION

I LAY for a moment half stunned, my face buried in the moist depths of the grass. It was as if Earth had been suddenly engulfed in a wandering star, as if all known and familiar things had come to an instant end and I must gather my vague soul to face unimagined eternities.

Cautiously I raised my head and looked about. A meadow stretched blooming before me. To my left loomed the absurd bulk of the upturned trolley, on its back with wheels in air, looking for all the world a stupid mastodon puppy. A very much frightened conductor stood near by.

"Say," he asked tersely, "is you all right? Kin you look after things till Joe an' me git back?"

"Look after things?" I repeated dully.

"Sure, the lydies, I mean. Sure you kin. We'll beat it right off, an' I hope to gosh Joe sobers up on the way! So long."

He was gone before I could gather my wits for a question, and uncomprehendingly I watched the two blue-coated figures scrambling up the steep, scarred sides of the viaduct. Frantically they scaled the top and made off down the tracks without so much as another glance in my direction.

Then of a sudden memory came upon me, and my heart contracted with a greatness of fear that I had never known.

For a moment I could see her nowhere, then as I staggered to uncertain feet I found her. She lay behind me, her hand pillowing her cheek as if she slept. And as I knelt beside her to listen fearfully at her heart I laughed with half a sob, for the beat came surely and with growing strength.

The sudden easing of my fear came over me drowsily until it seemed as if all the world lay in the hollow of the meadow about me and time had been blotted out. In the grass beside her I sat down to wait.

To my bewildered sense we were two shadowy people in an impossible dream. A wayward tendril of dark hair had fallen across her eyes. I smoothed it softly back and my fingers brushed her hair lightly and strayingly, as my mother's had mine in bygone

days, tenderly and as if we shared in the secret of sleep.

I do not know when her eyes opened, but looking down I found them turned to mine. She smiled, sighed softly, and closed them. Then again they opened.

"I think that I should like to sit up," she said.

I helped her carefully. "Are you all right?" I asked.

She smiled uncertainly. "I think so. I am very dizzy."

My arm was half about her, and for a long moment her head rested against me. Then she sat up very straight and a little apart, busying herself about her dress, giving a practised touch to her hair and the laces at her neck, and smoothing the scarcely ruffled breadths of her skirt.

I gazed out across our meadow to where three black and white cows stood sleepily knee-deep in a small pool. A meadow-lark rose and crossed the field in erratic, wavering flight. A little cloud tempered the brightness and passed.

"What happened?" she asked softly at last.

I pointed to where the trolley lay towering behind her.

She lost color a little and sprang to her feet, then she turned to me laughing.

"I never saw anything look so ashamed of itself in my life," she said. "Speak to it kindly, Mr. Crosby; it can't lie there with its feet in the air for ever."

I shook my head ruefully. "I am afraid that it will have to stay there for the afternoon, at least."

"But how are we—how am I—going to get home? Where are the crew, and wasn't there another passenger?"

I gasped. I had absolutely forgotten the other woman.

She was lying not far from us in a little hollow of the long grass, and for the moment I thought that she was dead. The sallow, foreign face was yellow white, the plump hands were gripped, as if in some past convulsive agony, above her head, and this same muscular rigidity seemed to underlie incongruously every formless line of the flabby body.

Miss Tabor's hand trembled upon my arm. "Do you think that she—that she is dead?" she whispered.

I stooped to the woman's wrist. The pulse came faintly with a dull throb that was unbelievably slow.

But as I still fumbled the pulpy hand caught mine in a grip that made me wince, the bloodless lips stirred in a shuddering moan, and without opening her eyes she spoke.

"It is hard, hard," she said, "there is too much light. Will some one turn down the light?" A long convulsive tremor ran over the entire body and the hand in mine struggled in anguish.

Miss Tabor shivered.

"I am afraid that she is very much hurt," I said as gently as I could. I was ashamed of myself, but fear seemed to clutch me. Then I gave myself a mental shake and caught my hat from the ground. "You will have to stay with her, I suppose, while I get some water. You might loosen her dress." It was all that I could think of.

Miss Tabor knelt to the work without a word, and I made off across the meadow to the pool, running at my best speed.

In a moment I was back again and dashed what little water my hat still held over the twitching, yellow face.

The eyelids fluttered and lack-luster eyes looked into mine. The woman gasped and sat up.

"That is a very dangerous thing to do, young

man." The voice beneath its severity of tone was softly unctuous and vaguely Latin. "A very dangerous thing, indeed. Sudden shock has killed us many times. That is well known."

Miss Tabor looked at her with pity. Evidently the woman was still out of her head.

"If you will sit quietly for a little while you will be better," I said.

She nodded, looking curiously about her. Comprehension was coming back. She took out a crumpled handkerchief and wiped the water from her face.

"What on earth are we to do now?" Miss Tabor whispered. "We must do something, for they are expecting me home already." She glanced anxiously at the little watch at her wrist. "But I don't see how we can leave this poor woman here all by herself."

"No, I don't see how we can," I answered, "but perhaps she can walk. Do you think that she could climb that bank, even if you could?"

Miss Tabor shook her head. "We must walk back and look for an easier place. But I am afraid that the car will come before we can find one."

We had spoken in very low voices, but the woman looked up.

"You have ten minutes before the car will arrive. I will be myself by then."

"Are you sure?" I asked, for I had not seen her look at a watch.

She smiled scornfully. "You have ten minutes. The car will arrive then. Have you lost anything in your fall?"

Mechanically I put my hand in my pocket, to find it empty. For a second I was thunderstruck, then I stepped over to the place where I had fallen and poked about in the grass. My pocketbook, I found immediately, and after a moment came upon my keys and change in a scarcely scattered pile.

Miss Tabor was watching me. "Nothing missing," I said. "How about you?"

"Oh, all my things are in my bag." And she pointed to where it lay near mine, in a tangle of blackberry vines.

But when I turned from rescuing them I found her standing with her hand at her neck, searching distractedly among her laces.

"What! you have lost something?" I cried.

"Yes," she said, and it seemed to me that her eyes were afraid, "there was a little gold chain that I wore. Oh, it can't be lost, it can't be!"

Her manner surprised me. To all my knowledge she had been so unruffled, had borne herself with such a certain serenity, that to see her now, with frightened eyes staring and full of tears, pain written clear between the lovely brows, and with hands that trembled at her breast, startled me out of my own composure.

"Certainly it's not lost," I said harshly, for I was puzzled. After all, there was nothing so tragic in the loss of a little chain. Then I knew better, knew that if she valued it so I would find it if it took me my vacation. "Come," I said more gently, "we will look."

She had gained some control over herself, and now began to search the ground where we had fallen, carefully and on her knees. I thought that she was crying softly and glanced to see if the other woman noticed.

Her back was turned to us and her face seemed buried in her hands. As I looked at her she spoke.

"If you seek a small chain," she said listlessly, "you will find it close beside the fallen car."

And there as I walked directly to it I saw the glimmer of a strand of gold straggling from beneath the upturned roof.

THE MEADOW OF ILLUSION 25

"Here it is," I cried wonderingly and drew it forth. Then I stood dumbly, the thing in my hands, my mind reeling. For from the mangled clasp hung a woman's wedding-ring.

CHAPTER III

AN ALARM IN THE NIGHT

THERE was nothing that I could ask, nothing that I could say, and aside from her thanks she was silent. So without a word I turned and helped the other woman to her feet, and still in silence the three of us walked along until we came to an easy rise where I helped them both to the track. We were just in time, for as we gained the track our trolley rounded the curve and took us aboard.

So for a mile or so Miss Tabor and I sat in intimate aloofness, while the car bore us through the beauty of the fading summer day. Everywhere birds were chanting the evening, and ever and again with growing insistence the vivid breath of the nearing sea blew past us. All my life this first summer tang of salt air had never failed to stir me. It had meant vacation and the vague trumpet call of the unknown. But now I sat unheeding, burning with an unreasoning and sullen resentment. I knew that I

was a fool. What possible difference could it make to me if the acquaintance of a merry week and a few more intimate hours chose to hide a wedding-ring in her breast. It certainly was no business of mine, nor could she owe me any explanation. Yet I wanted explanation more than anything else in the world. It certainly could not be her own and yet—whose was it, anyway? Certainly not her mother's, for her mother I knew was alive. But then, whose could it be? And why did it matter so much? Why should such a patent terror fill her at the thought of its loss? Why was it again so finally and so quickly hidden away? It was even strange, I thought, that she should let the emotion that she must know I had seen, pass with no effort of explanation.

I glanced at her. She was sitting, looking wearily ahead, distress was in her eyes, and every little line of her body spoke fatigue without hope; only her hands, tightly clasped in her lap, showed the determination of some hidden thought. The blue of a little bruise had begun to show near her temple. A wave of tenderness swept over me, the pity of a man for a woman tired and in unvoiced distress. Who was I that I should question her? What possible claim had I upon even the least of her thoughts?

She was pathetically weary and disturbed, and I was a sullen brute.

I spoke to her as if conversation had been unbroken. "Of course I am to take you home."

She shook her head.

"That's perfectly absurd," I said. "There must be some inn or other near you. I can put up there for the night and go on in the morning. In fact, I am pretty tired, myself; the nearest place that I can get supper and a bed is the best place for me."

She considered for a long moment. "Very well," she said at last, "I am tired and still a little dizzy; it would be nice to be taken all the way home. I don't generally mind the dark, but I suppose that we were a good deal shaken up. There is an inn, too, but it would be very silly of you to go there, unless—unless for some reason we could not put you up."

"Oh, come," I said, "you probably have a houseful at the present moment, and you know it. Nothing is more upsetting in the world than the unexpected guest."

"Well, we shall see," she answered. "I am pretty sure that nobody but the family is at home, and father will want to see you and thank you. Knight-



Still in silence the three of us walked along



errantry appeals to him. We will leave the asking to mother. If she can she will want you to stay. If she can't, well the inn is not so bad after all. There it is, by the way, on that little hill. I had no idea that we were so near home. We get off at that next electric light. Will you please signal to the conductor?"

The car stopped and I helped her down, taking our two bags with the strange feeling that I was suddenly coming to the end of a brief sentimental journey. Car companion in misfortune, who had chosen a seat by herself, scarcely looked up. It was no great walk to the house and presently Miss Tabor pointed it out to me. It was large and low, set well back upon a great lawn that a tall, dark hedge divided from the outer world.

As we neared the pillared gate a high-shouldered man stepped out nervously from the shadow. Miss Tabor put her hand upon my arm. "Just wait here a moment, please," she said and ran forward to him.

It had grown almost dark, but I could see that she leaned toward him, placing both hands upon his shoulders. The soft sibilance of her whispered words and the startling rumble of his bass came to me indistinctly, merely wordless tones. I grew red

in the darkness and turned my back, for I had caught myself trying to listen.

Presently Miss Tabor came to me. "I didn't mean to keep you so long," she apologized, "but you see—"

"It wasn't long," I said shortly, surprised to find myself angry. So as we climbed the steps the shadow had dropped between us again.

For a moment I stood blinking when the door had shut behind us. The large, low room in which we stood was not brilliantly lighted, but the sudden change from the soft outdoor gloom dazzled me. The room was very large indeed, floored with dull red tile, paneled in dark oak; a great Dutch fireplace, filled with flowers, breathed fragrance. Opening from the room's far end, and raised three steps above its level, was a dining-room. On our entrance two chairs had been pushed back from the table, and now a slim, pretty little woman came running down the steps and across the big room.

"Lady, dear," she cried, "what on earth has made you so late?" She flung herself into Miss Tabor's arms, hugging her as a child would.

Miss Tabor kissed her gaily. "We will tell you all about it, mother, dear," she laughed. "Let me

introduce Mr. Crosby, without whose help I should have probably been much later. And, Mr. Crosby, this is my mother."

She greeted me graciously, turning to introduce me to her husband, who had followed her more slowly. He was a florid man and rather tall, his gray eyes being level with my own

When places had been made for us at the table, and we were gathered in the close radius of the table lights, I found myself surprised that the daughter looked so little like either. Her mother was much smaller than she, one of those women who never grow thin or fat, but whose age comes upon them only as sort of dimming of color and outline. And indeed, in the more intimate light I found her looking more her years, pretty and soft and doll-like, but too delicate a vessel for any great strength of spirit, a sweet little woman, affectionate and inconsequent. Her words came quickly and with a certain merry insistence, but with little nervous pauses that were almost sad in their intensity; and once when a bicycle sounded faintly from the street she stopped altogether, her hand at her heart, her head turned and listening, until her husband's quick laugh brought her blue eyes questioningly to him. Then we all

plunged into conversation at once as if ashamed of the sudden pause it had given us.

Miss Tabor and I were made to give an account of our accident, or rather she gave it, and a very nicely tempered account it was, too. I was kept busy devising plausible confirmation of surprising understatements. She seemed for some reason very anxious to hide a possible seriousness in the matter, and her first brief, pleading glance bound me to her, freely accepting the judgment of her conscience for my own. Under these circumstances I expected no mention of the loss and finding of the ring and there was none.

Both mother and father called Miss Tabor "Lady"; so, I remembered, had all her intimates at the Christmas house party. Yet her bag had been initialed "M. B. T." I thought the nickname a gracious one and well suited to all the manner of her bearing. I wondered idly as they talked what the M. stood for, sure in my heart that it, too, was graceful and fitting. And as "Lady" told of the beauty of the meadow where we had been delayed "almost two hours by an old flat wheel, or something like that—isn't that the term, Mr. Crosby?" I decided that if the rest of my three months were

spent in the most humdrum of ways, my vacation as a whole would not have been a barren one.

There was little conversation after we had left the table. Miss Tabor said that she was too sleepy to sit up—and, indeed, the strain that she had been under was already beginning to show through even the vivacity of her acting. For my part, I had no inclination to sit in the family circle that she left. I, too, was tired, and I had many things to think and little to say. So that as she got up I, too, pleaded fatigue, and my need of finding my room at the inn.

“The inn! Indeed you will do nothing of the sort,” said Mrs. Tabor. “There is a bed just waiting for tired young men here.” She glanced for confirmation at her daughter.

Miss Tabor said nothing but looked across to her father. He paused an uncomfortable second, then turned to me with a smile.

“Of course you are to stay here,” he said.

His pause had troubled me, and I hesitated, but Mrs. Tabor would hear no arguments or excuses, and overwhelmed my stammering in a rippling torrent of proof that I was a very silly young man and that she would not hear another word about any

such an absurdity as my going; and as I stood embarrassed, Mr. Tabor, with another glance at his daughter, took my back himself, and, his hand upon my shoulder, fairly bore me off to my room. I was too comfortably tired to lie long awake, even with so eventful a day to turn over in retrospect. As I floated downward into the dark through a flood of incongruous images, green meadows and roaring trains, clamorous streets and calm rooms, delicate with white and silver, I distinctly heard a step upon the porch, the click and closure of the front door, and the deep voice of the man we had met at the gate. But even my angry interest in him was weaker than the waves of drowsiness. . . .

I roused into that dubious half-consciousness which is the territory of the powers of darkness; in which the senses are vaguely alive, while no judgment restrains or questions the vagaries of imagination; the place of evil memories and needless fears, of sweeping reforms whose vanity appears with the new light, and of remembered dreams whose beauty faints upon the threshold of the day. It was still so dark that before I could place myself amid my unfamiliar surroundings, I was aware of smothered commotion. People were awake and in trouble;

the house was full of swishing garments and the hurry of uncomfortable feet. Some one passed my door swiftly, carrying a light, whose rays swept through the cracks and swung uncannily across the ceiling. Another door opened somewhere, letting out a blur of voices, among which I seemed to distinguish the bass growl of the man at the gate. My first thought was of fire; and with the shock of that I sprang up and across the room, groping for the handle of the door. It would not open. I pulled and tugged at it, feeling above and below for a bolt. There was none, nor was any key in the keyhole. After some stumbling, I found the switch of the electric light, and in the sudden radiance explored the floor for the fallen key. It was not there; and a hurried examination of the crack showed me that the lock had been turned from the outside.

I sat down on the bed and tried to gather my common sense. I remembered perfectly having left the door unlocked and the key in its place within. By what conceivable design or accident had I been made a prisoner? The melodramatic suggestions born of the hour and my excited fancy were simply absurd in such a place. I was in a Connecticut suburb, a home of lawn parties and electric lights,

and this was the Twentieth Century; yet I could find no explanation more reasonable. Fire was by this time out of the question; and an accident or practical joke would have been evident by now. Meanwhile, the muffled turmoil of the house continued. A man's voice and a woman's broke into inarticulate altercation, and presently I thought I heard a cry and a sound like the fall of something soft and heavy. I sprang to the door again and shook it with all my strength, but it was so solidly fitted that it did not even rattle. Then some one ran softly downstairs; the front door banged sharply; and, looking out, I saw the figure of a man, his shoulders raised and his elbows bent with haste, run swiftly across the bar of light that streamed from my window and disappear in the dark. Could he have broken into the house, locking the bedrooms against interruption, and fled upon being discovered? I was opening my window to shout for help when I was arrested by a voice that there was no mistaking.

"I can't! We mustn't!" she wailed. "What will he think of us?"

An angry whisper answered, and of the rest I could distinguish only the tone. The whisper grew more volubly urgent, while her replies hesitated. At

last she came quietly down the hall and knocked at my door.

"Mr. Crosby—are you awake?"

"I should think so," I answered. "What has happened? I'm locked in."

"Nothing. It's all right—really. Will you come down-stairs as soon as you can, very quietly?"

"Certainly. Half a minute. What's the matter?"

"Nothing," she said. "Hurry!" The key turned in the lock and she was gone. I dressed with a haste that made my fingers clumsy, and ran down-stairs. The bustle in the house had quieted into an irregular murmur.

Miss Tabor was waiting for me in the hall below. The lights were not on, and I could see only that she was wrapped in something long and dark, her hair gathered into a loose knot above her head. Perhaps only the dim light made me imagine traces of tears.

"Thank you for being so ready," she began in a quick undertone. "Now, listen! you must—"

"Tell me what's the trouble," I broke in. "Is it burglary, or is somebody taken suddenly ill?"

"There isn't any trouble," she repeated. "You must believe that, and you must do as I tell you. I'm

terribly sorry, but it's impossible for you to remain here any longer. You must go away—now, at once, and without knowing or asking anything. Of course there's a good reason, and of course you can be trusted not to talk or inquire. That's all. It's perfectly simple; there's nothing really surprising about it."

"You mean I'm to leave this minute—in the middle of the night?"

"Yes; now. Don't wonder or worry. Think as well of us as you can—don't think about us at all! There's nothing the matter. I ought to have known. Accept my apologies for all of us, and—good-by." She held out her hand.

"That's all very well," I said. "Of course I'll go if you wish it, and ask no questions. Only tell me when I can see you again, and if there's anything in the world I can do for you. I'll be staying at the inn."

A latch-key clicked behind us, and the man I had seen at the gate tiptoed in. "All right?" he whispered.

"I think so; hurry," she replied, and he passed swiftly and quietly up-stairs. She turned to me a drawn face, speaking in strained monotone.

"You must never see me again. You mustn't stay in town, nor try to do anything. Oh, can't you understand? The only help you can give is to go—go away utterly and forget all about it as if you had never met me. Honestly I'm grateful, and I think everything good of you, but—oh, go away!"

"As you please," I said. "What about my things?"

"Wait a minute." She ran lightly up to the landing and returned with my suit-case, closed and strapped. I took my hat from the table by the door.

"Good-by," she said. "Promise me not to try to come back."

What is there in darkness and the sense of night to make even the plainest woman so lovely? She was close before me as I turned, the mysterious oval of her face wavering upward as though rising through dim water; her hair a heavier shadow against the gloom, her lips a living blossom, and her eyes luminous out of undiscoverable depths. The dark wrap she wore lost itself downward in long, fading lines; and all the hidden form and the nameless fragrance of her were wonderfully the same, one with midnight and midsummer. As I took her hand, I do not know what agony of restraint held my arms from around her; only I kept repeating

over and over to myself, "I have no right—I have no right"—and because of that I could not for a moment answer her in words. Suddenly from above came a sharp shock and the metallic splash of broken glass. The voices broke out in a quick murmur, and she shrank and shook as if cringing away from a blow.

"Oh, go quickly!" she cried. "They need me!"

I opened the door. "Good-by," I said weakly, "and—God bless you!" And even as I turned on the threshold to lift my hat the latch clicked behind me.

CHAPTER IV

AN INSULT IN THE MORNING

I PAUSED at the gate and looked back. In the upper windows lights were showing behind the shades, and now and then a swift shadow passed across the pane. Yet the house was altogether quiet, free within and without from any evidence of the unusual. A waning moon glowed large and distorted through the shrubbery, and from all about rose the sweet breath and innumerable tiny voices of the night, comfortable chirps and rustlings, the creak of frogs and the rasp of an occasional katydid; accentuating by their multiety and smallness the sense of overwhelming peace. As I went on, a quick movement at my feet made me start; then I smiled to recognize the clumsy hurry of a toad; and the incident seemed to point the contrast between the human tension of the last half-hour and the huge normality of the outer world. With every step it grew more difficult for me to believe in the turmoil

from which I had come; the strain and secrecy, the troubled voices and the moving lights became fictitious; as the scenes of a sensational story, plausible in the reading, turn to pasteboard and tinsel when we have closed the book. Only the quiet gloom was real, the hush and fresh aroma of ordinary night.

I had anticipated some difficulty in gaining admission to a country inn at such an hour, but as I climbed the hill I was surprised to see it still open and alight; and a glance at my watch deepened my surprise into astonishment. It was not yet midnight, and I had felt that it was at least two or three in the morning. So here was another contrast to add to the sense of unreality; and I entered the low-ceiled and dingy little office feeling like Tennyson's Prince returning from a fight with shadows.

My room was cool and pleasant enough, but sleep and excitement had evaporated my drowsiness and I lay thinking in reminiscent circles, trying in vain to puzzle out some theory that would fit the circumstances of the night. The more I reviewed details, the more they seemed to fly apart from any reasonable association, charged as they were with one mysterious electricity. If some accident or sudden trouble had befallen the house, the nocturnal alarm

would be motivated; but what motive would that furnish for driving out the guest? Some unwitting provocation of my own (though I could imagine nothing of the sort) might have made my further presence unbearable; but what of the anxious bustle, the hasty conferences, the errands of the man we had met at the gate? And who was he, by the way, that he should have a latch-key and the airs of intimacy, without being, from what I had observed, an inmate of the house? The fear of infectious disease was the only thing that I could imagine that would explain the immediacy of my expulsion. But if I was the bearer of a plague, why had Lady been allowed to talk with me in the hall? Or if one of themselves had been stricken, why had she denied me for all time, or indeed made any mystery of the matter? Then I remembered her silences during the day, the ring, hidden in her breast, and her hesitation and doubt over asking me to stay the night. Whatever the trouble was, it had cast its shadow before: and I could not rid my mind of the conviction that all these matters must be fitted in, that they must all ultimately find their places in the explanation. At any rate, an explanation was due me, and I meant to have it. Either there had been some foolish mis-

take or I had been treated outrageously. It was not curiosity, I told myself; the sorrows or the skeletons of this family were no business of mine; but I would know by what right they had ejected me.

Over the telephone next morning, Mr. Tabor was omnisciently agreeable. "Certainly," he said. "You have a perfect right to the reason. When you have it, I think you will agree that you have no more cause for complaint than you have for remaining in the neighborhood. I will be down at once."

Half an hour later he was seated in my room, polished, choleric, aquiline, a man to be a fierce friend or a difficult enemy. He wasted no time in approaches.

"You ask why you were sent from the house last night. Well, here it is: You have arranged to go to Europe, and are actually on your way there. You see my daughter on a train. You force yourself into her company, presuming upon a very slight acquaintance, and follow her home. You come upon us in such a way that we can hardly avoid receiving you as a guest. Then it develops that you spent two or three hours between here and the station instead of coming straight over; and you arrive after dark. Now, in any case—"

"That's distorted and unjust," I interrupted, "I haven't forced myself upon anybody. Besides, we came home as quickly as possible. The trolley—"

"Well?" he asked, drawing his white brows together.

I had remembered Miss Tabor's version of the accident. "Go on," I said, "let me hear the whole of this first."

"We needn't discuss terms; the facts are that you throw aside your arrangements very conspicuously; that you follow a young lady entirely out of your way; and that you bring her home at an unreasonable hour, after wandering or loitering about the country. In any case this would have been officious and inconsiderate. But in the case of a man with such a past as yours, it might compromise her seriously. To have you staying at the house afterward was out of the question."

This was too much. "What do you mean?" I said. "There's nothing the matter with my past. I've nothing whatever to be ashamed of, and this is the first time in my life I've been accused of any such thing. My university position is proof enough of that. It's a mistake or an infernal slander."

He looked me straight in the eye. "I know more

about you, Mr. Crosby, than you were prepared for," he said quietly. "Don't waste time in posturing."

"I beg your pardon," I retorted; "you know nothing about me, but you've said decidedly more than one gentleman can say to another without explaining himself. We're two men together. Be so good as to tell me just what you charge me with."

I had risen from my chair, struggling hard for enough self-control to make my words carry conviction. Mr. Tabor sat unmoved while he deliberately lighted a cigar, watching me over the end of it.

"I have no desire to dig over your life with you," he said, "any more than I have to continue your acquaintance. I came here to tell you why our invitation to you was withdrawn. Well, I've done so; you have an evil reputation. That's all."

"Excuse me, but that isn't all. It isn't true, and—"

"There is just one more point," he went on; "when you arrived, of course none of us realized who you were or how you had come. Later, when we understood the facts, you would not, under ordinary circumstances, have left until this morning. But Mrs. Tabor was so much excited over the mat-

ter that I saw fit to relieve her immediately, at the cost of disturbing your sleep. I owe you an apology for that, and for that only."

"Look here, Mr. Tabor," said I, more calmly, "I don't know what you have been told about me, but if it's dishonorable it's a damned lie. Now, I'll wait here while you make any inquiries you like. I'll put you in communication with anybody you choose. And when you've looked me up and are satisfied, I shall expect a very complete apology for this whole matter."

"Thank you," he answered, "I am quite satisfied with my present information. I have no further curiosity. And now perhaps I have taken enough of your time." He rose.

Then I lost my temper. "That's altogether too thin!" I cried. "I'm received as your guest, and then I'm locked into my room. I'm sent away in the middle of the night, and told not to ask why. You explain it on the absurd ground that I'm a disreputable character, and then you won't either specify your charges or investigate them. I believe you are making up the whole story to cover something in your own house; and if you were a younger man I'd have it out of you."

While I was speaking he had turned composedly to pick up his hat and stick. He faced me now without a quiver of the eyes.

"Don't bluster, Mr. Crosby," he said slowly, uncovering the tip of one yellow tooth in the faintest suspicion of a smile, "it isn't any real use. Well, I won't offer to shake hands, but I'll wish you a pleasant summer after you've forgotten this row. Shall I go first?"

If there was anything more to say, I was too angry to think of it. "After you," I said through shut jaws. "Good morning."

I followed him down to the veranda where we went through a comedy of leave-taking for the benefit of the people in the wicker chairs. At the corner of the building, discreet swinging doors gave entrance to the bar; and as Mr. Tabor started down the drive, there came from within a stream of savage gutturals and the squeak and clatter of an over-tilted chair. A stocky fellow in a flannel shirt lurched through the swinging doors and followed him at a clumsy run, cursing in a tangle of English and Italian so rapid and furious that by the ear alone I should have thought half a dozen people were involved. It had the multiplied brilliancy of a vir-

tuoso's piano playing. Of the dispute which followed, the words were indistinguishable; but there was no question that each was threatening the other. The Italian danced and raved and gesticulated, while Mr. Tabor pointed a steady forefinger and retorted in low and frosty monosyllables. And presently the foreigner slouched back into the bar, which immediately filled with babbling bystanders. I followed to find him standing physically with his foot upon the low rail, and metaphorically with his back against the wall. He was the same man that had pursued our trolley-car on the day previous; a medium-sized, stocky, leather-colored rascal in a shiny black suit and blue flannel shirt, with a blue fur upon his face, and blue tattoo-marks on his hairy hands.

Public opinion, led by the bartender, was against him to the point of throwing him out or sending for the police; and his attempts at a defense were rendered unintelligible by volubility and by the strangest mixture of languages I ever heard in my life. Imagine a slightly drunk and thoroughly excited Neapolitan speaking broken English with an Irish brogue, and you may have some faint impression of the effect. His muddy blur of intona-

tions was impossible to follow; and I tried him in Italian, becoming thereby a person of authority and interest. He understood me readily enough, but his own spattering patois gave me a good deal of trouble. By what I could make out, he was a sailor, formerly on ships owned by Mr. Tabor; and Mr. Tabor had discharged him and had kidnapped his wife. This sounded puzzling enough; but I could get nothing else out of him; and my further questions brought forth only angry reiterations and indefinite vows to have justice at any price. Finally I persuaded the bartender to give him one more drink on condition that he went away immediately, and satisfied the crowd with some patched-up story of a hated employer whose resemblance to Mr. Tabor had caused an unfortunate mistake.

CHAPTER V

BESIDE THE SUMMER SEA: AN INTERLUDE

IF I had been at my wit's end before, I was now beyond it, in such a chaos of puzzled anger that I could not even think reasonably, much less come to sensible conclusions. The Italian sailor with his impossible charge against Mr. Tabor's own impossible charge against me, were new elements which might or might not work into the situation; but at least I could not plan them now; nor, for want of a motive that would bear dissection, was I ready to confess my own desire to stay on the ground until I had seen the matter through. I would go away to the solitude of the seaside, and give the vexation of the case a few days time to clear. The whole experience had been so strange that I must have more perspective through which to view it clearly; and I saw nothing to gain by haste. For all that, I was perfectly clear that at length everything must come out right. Not that I could define to myself

exactly what "coming out right" would mean, except making Mr. Tabor admit himself outrageously mistaken, and his daughter—but it was better not to think about his daughter; unless I was ready to risk thinking too much about her. The very memory of her vivid face in the car-window, of her quizzical impertinences on the way, the sight of her lying motionless in the unnatural meadow, and most poignant of all, her distressed and shrouded beauty in the dim hall, lit up the last few hours as with the glamour of a dream broken suddenly by a nightmare monstrous and unconvincing. She must be put aside if possible with the rest until I could see clearly. Bob Ainslie and Mrs. Bob, boating, bathing, golf, and tennis, should be my devouring interests for the next week. After that—we should see.

For a couple of miles my car traveled through open country; then with the Sound on its left, passed through small wooded patches that gave way continually to open glades where lawns from little cottages and great ran down to the water's edge. My destined hostelry, I remembered, flourished under the original name of "Bellevue." I did not especially pine for it, with its green-lined matting, white enameled furniture, and chattering piazzas; but it had

the unquestionable advantage of being only a couple of hundred yards from the Ainslies' cottage. There I hurried into my flannels and set forth in search of Bob, whom I found playing the gentle game of croquet with himself, the pink ball against the green. When he saw me, he gave a viking whoop that brought Mrs. Ainslie from her chair upon the veranda, while he executed a solemn war-dance around me.

"Where, O where are the Hebrew children?" he chanted, "Safe now in the promised land—where's your bag?"

"Why, how do you do, Mr. Crosby?" said Mrs. Ainslie. "Bob, what on earth will the neighbors think of you? And Mr. Crosby will hardly like being called a Hebrew—not that I have anything against the Hebrews. They are really a very fine people, but—"

"But, my dear, you are talking nonsense. Laurie, where is that bag? Or Heaven grant it be a trunk."

"It's a bag," I said, "and I left it in my room at the Bellevue, and a very good room it is."

"Bellefiddlesticks," Bob snorted. "You go back to that whited caravansary and wrest away your belongings and come over here. We are going to

house-party in a couple of days, and we need you in our business. Your room is now southeast corner second floor, beautiful view of the Sound or within sound of the view—whichever you please.”

“You are an idiot, but I love you,” said I. “Nevertheless, I’m going to stay where I am. Can’t be bothered with house parties. I came down here for some exercise.”

“I think you look tired,” Mrs. Ainslie put in thoughtfully.

“He looks sulky to me,” said Bob. “All right, stay where you are until you feel the need of a decent bed. Bet I can beat you at croquet and give you two wickets.”

“You are a fattening, indolent person,” I said. “What I want, and what you stand in crying need of, is exercise,” and I dragged him off to the hotel tennis-courts.

I was very sure in my own mind that I wanted the scuffling solitude of a hotel. My temper felt unsettled, and the last people in the world I wanted to meet were a lot of conversational visitors. Bob had a hard future cut out for him, and indeed for three days I led him a life that must have nearly killed him. Perhaps he may have scented some trouble be-

hind my unusual energy, for he stuck to me like a man losing to me at tennis, beating me in long games of golf, bathing with me in the morning, and taking an oar as we rowed Mrs. Bob about in the evening.

Miss Tabor had spoken of a coming visit; but of course after the disturbances in her home she would have abandoned all plans. And I certainly did not care to start the bantering flood of questions which I knew Bob could not restrain should I show even the mildest curiosity about her coming. And yet she came. I had come over prepared to drag Bob to the altar of another strenuous day, and I found her sitting alone on the veranda as quietly at ease as though nothing had happened. I was not even sure that she looked tired; certainly she looked serene. She stood up and shook hands with me smilingly. I thought the blue veins throbbed a trifle in her throat, but her manner was frankly free from embarrassment.

"You are getting a very seaside color, Mr. Crosby," she said. "Your vacation must be agreeing with you."

I could not answer for a moment; then, as she drew her hand from mine, "What have I done?" I

stammered. "What was it all about? Did you too really believe—"

I stopped, for she was looking coldly past me, her face blank and her eyebrows raised.

"I beg your pardon," I said, taken utterly aback. Her silence seemed to strike across me like a blow. "I beg your pardon, Miss Tabor," and I swung upon my heel.

When I reached the steps, she called after me.

"Mr. Crosby!" I turned. "Bob wants to know why we shouldn't all play tennis together. He thinks that he and Mary can beat us."

I stood amazed. She was looking at me gaily, almost provokingly, every trace of coldness gone from the eyes that looked frankly into mine. She moved mentally too fast for me. I could read nothing but the end of our friendship in her look of a moment ago; and now she spoke as if no shadow of mystery or misunderstanding had ever fallen between us. Of course, the surface of it was that I had blundered, and that she had taken the only way of showing me that my memories of her trouble must be really forgotten. The last few days were never to have been.

The Ainslies came out of the door together.

"And you never told us that you had met Miss Tabor last Christmas," said Bob. "I call that rather cool. I just mentioned you last night, and she asked all sorts of questions about how long you had been here and how long you expected to stay. For my part, I think you must have made quite an impression."

"Indeed he has," laughed Miss Tabor. "Do you know, Mary, Mr. Crosby is the only thoroughly frivolous institution of learning I ever saw. He never spoke a word all Christmas that added to the party's fund of information, except to tell us of a new and a more indigestible way to make Welsh rarebit."

Evidently Christmas was to be the last and only time that we had met. I thanked fate and my own discomfiture that I had let fall no word to the Ainslies and we went off to our tennis. We won our game rather easily. Miss Tabor played a shade better than the average woman, covering her court with a forethoughtful ease that did the work without wasting exertion. She seemed not athletic, but to do outdoor things as some other woman might move through a ball-room. When we had finished playing, Bob was a dripping ruin, and Mrs. Ainslie

and I vigorously hot ; but Miss Tabor, who had done no less than her share, laid aside her racquet as coolly as she had taken it up.

All the way down to the beach she kept the three of us in such a shout of laughter that staid people glanced aside at us. I made the change into a bathing-suit with abandoned haste, yet I found her waiting. The sea was evidently a passion with her as it was with me. Her eyes were shining with excitement, her head thrown a little back, and all her slim body, tender in every graceful line, was vibrant with the thrill of the salt air. She gave me her hand as a child might have done, and we turned up the beach, running lightly until the voices of the bathers died behind us.

Suddenly she stopped. "Do you feel that way about it, too?" she asked.

"What way? As if the first plunge of the year were a sort of sacred rite?"

"Yes," she answered. "There is something about it—you feel as if it were such a splendid thing that after all your waiting for it—now, when the water is there before you, you must wait a little sacrificial moment. I didn't feel like going in just at the first among all those people. Do you understand what I

mean? I suppose it's because on the first day I have always gone in alone early in the morning."

I nodded, for that had been my custom also. Without a word we turned together and went slowly down into the water. When it reached her waist, she threw her hands above her head and dived, swimming under water with long easy strokes. I looked after her a moment, then followed. We came to the surface together, drawing our breath deep and shaking the salt water from our eyes. We swam slowly back to the more crowded beach, mutually glorying in our pagan rite of baptism.

We stretched out lazily in the hot sand, leaning back against a battered and upturned dory. Lady had shaken down her hair, which her bathing cap had failed to keep altogether dry; and spread it lustreously dark upon the clean, sun-bleached planking.

"I think I understand you now a little better, Mr. Crosby," she said.

"Why?" I asked.

"I suppose because of the solemn rite of the first plunge. It somehow makes you clearer. If that is what you mean by romance, why I can agree with you."

I had to be honest. "No, that's not all I mean—

only part. I want things to happen to me, not merely sensations. I'm always foolishly expecting some tilt with fortune at the next turn of the road. I suppose you were right that nothing much has happened to me, or I shouldn't hunt so for the physical uplift of the unexpected. I don't want to be merely selfish—I want to help in the world, not to harm. I know that sounds crudely sentimental, but it's hard to say. I mean, for instance, that I don't want distress to prove myself against, but I do want the shock of battle where distress exists."

"Then people must seem to you merely means to an end."

"I suppose it must look that way to you," I said uncomfortably. "I'm getting tangled, but I want you to understand—" I hesitated. "When I asked questions in the hurry of the other night, it wasn't any desire to force my way into things that didn't concern me, to make an adventure of what distressed you—you mustn't think that. But it seemed to me that you were in trouble, and I wanted—"

I stopped, for her face had clouded as I spoke until now I dared speak no more, blaming myself that the perplexities that possessed me had again blundered across her pain. Her eyes were upon the

rely
tilt
oose
d to
t of
h—
now
ay.
to
of
to
aid
ant
ed
n't
n't
ed
ne
ke
lf
in
ne



Howan York -

"I suppose it must look that way to you"



ground where her fingers borrowed absently in the sand. When she raised them, to mine there were tears in them; but they were tears unshed, and eyes that looked at me kindly.

"Please don't," she said. "I do understand. I would like to let you help, but—there is nothing you can help about, nothing that I can ask or tell."

"Forgive me," I said, and looked away from her.

I think that from that morning we were better friends. Neither of us again made any allusion to the night of alarm; but it was as if both now felt a share in it, a kind of blindfold sympathy not altogether comfortless. Once when we were making a long tour of woods and beaches, she said suddenly: "You don't talk much about yourself, Mr. Crosby."

"Don't I?" I answered. "Well, I don't suppose that what I am or have done in the world would be particularly interesting. You were right the other day, after all: nothing much has happened to me, or I shouldn't be so hungry for adventures."

"Oh, but you must have had some adventure; everybody has."

I launched into a tale of a green parrot confiscated from an itinerant vendor and sold at auction in a candy store. I stopped suddenly. Was this her way

of verifying her father's opinion of me? She read my half-formed suspicion like a flash.

"Listen," she said with quick seriousness. "If I had, or could have, the faintest belief in anything really bad about you, don't you see that I shouldn't be here? I want you to remember that "

"I ought to have known," I replied. "I'm very sorry."

With that she swung back into gaiety, demanding the conclusion of the tale; but I was for the moment too deeply touched to follow. We were on our way home; and before us where the path took a little turn about a tree larger than its neighbors, a man stepped into our sight. He was walking fast, covering the ground in long nervous strides. He carried a bit of stick with which he switched smartly at the bushes along the path. For a moment we were both silent, then Lady caught her breath in a long sigh. It was the man we had met at the gate. He saw us then, and took off his hat.

"Why, Walter," Lady cried; "when did you come?"

"Just now," he said, "just now. Ainslie told me where to look for you. Good fellow, Ainslie. Said you and Mr. What's-his-name—beg pardon, I never

can remember names—said you had gone for a walk.”

She flushed a little. “Mr. Crosby, let me introduce Doctor Reid. His memory never can catch up with him, but you mustn’t mind that. Walter, Mr. Crosby was a classmate of Bob Ainslie’s, you know.”

“So he said; so he said.” Doctor Reid jerked out the words, frowning and biting his forefinger. “Excuse me, Lady, but—hold on a second. Got to go back next car, twelve forty-five.” He looked at his watch. “Twelve seven now. Beg your pardon, Mr.—Mr. Crosby. Beg your pardon.”

They spoke together for a moment, and we continued our walk uncomfortably. Miss Tabor seemed uneasy, and I thought that Doctor Reid restrained himself to our slower pace as if he resented having to wait and thought ill of me for my very existence. I caught him frowning sidelong at me once or twice, and shooting little anxious glances at Lady that angered me unreasonably.

I left them at the Ainslies’ and went on to a hurried luncheon made tasteless by irritation. Who in Heaven’s name was the man? A family physician would hardly go running about the country in the

daughter's wake—for I could not doubt that it was she that had brought him here. Why on earth should he be rude to me? I had never met the man. What business had he to behave as if he resented my being with her—or for that matter, to resent anything she did? We had planned a game of tennis for the afternoon, and Doctor Reid, I reflected, with savage satisfaction, could hardly be expected to make a third.

Bob met me at the door. "Hello, old man," he said, "we have had a bitter loss; Doctor Reid has carried Lady off with him to his distant lair."

CHAPTER VI

A RETURN TO THE ORIGINAL THEME

FOR a moment I did not know which feeling was apparent; surprise, anger, or a new and abominable sensation that combined the sense of personal injury with an intolerable sense of loss. Then I saw in Bob's face the reflection of my own astonishment, and tried to pull myself together.

"Brace up, man," he said, pounding me heartily on the shoulder. "Don't look as if you saw Hamlet's grandmother. She's neither married nor dead—he's only taken her home in a hurry. Good Lord, if I'd known you were going to be so tragic I'd have broken it as gently as a sucking dove."

By that time I found words. "I'm all right," I said, "only you made me jump with your ornamental way of putting things. Who is he, anyway, and what the devil right has he to come and drag her away like this in the middle of her visit?"

"Reid? He's only her brother."

"Her half-brother, you mean."

"I suppose so, since the name's different. Anyhow, he's no relation to Bluebeard, so you needn't go looking for blood and thunder. I know *you*. It's just that somebody wasn't well at home, and they wanted her. Nothing at all serious, he said; only if Lady was on the ground she could be useful. Her mother's heart is a little weak, you know. I suppose it's that."

"Look here, Bob," said I. "There's something mysterious about that family; and although it's none of my business, I want to know whatever you can tell me about them. I want to tell you first what I know, and see if you can help me clear it up."

"Nonsense! You never saw a windmill yet without swearing it was a green dragon with yellow eyes and a three-pronged tail. They are not half so mysterious as you are with that hush-hush expression on your innocent countenance. Tabor's an importer, with a flourishing business in red ink and spaghetti and other products of Sunny It'. Mrs. Tabor's a dear little soul with nerves and an occasional palpitation. Lady's a pippin, and Reid's a strenuous sawbones that lost half a second once in

his youth and has been chasing it ever since. You've been reading too much classical literature."

"Have you known them long?"

"Why, no, not so very. Oh, come in out of the sun and take a sedative. You won't be happy till you've relieved your florid mind."

I followed him into his den and accepted a cigarette and something cool to drink. Then without more preface I told the tale of my adventure, beginning with my arrival at the Tabors' home.

"Fine!" was his unfeeling comment, "I shall lie awake nights waiting for your next instalment of confidences. What are you going to do next?"

"That's what I'm trying to decide," I growled. "And I wish you'd give me a little serious thought, if you can stand the strain. I like adventures, but my end of this one is getting rather unmanageable."

"My dear man, I'm as serious as a caged owl. You've been treated outrageously, if that's any comfort to you. Only I fail to see where your mystery comes in. Of course, it's just as they said: Mr. Tabor has heard some absurd slander, or got you mixed up with somebody else; and Mrs. Tabor worried herself into a state about it, and they turned you out. It's a shame—or it would be if the thought

of you as a desperate character who couldn't be allowed overnight in a decent family were not so ridiculous. I'll write to Tabor myself and tell him that he's got the wrong mule by the wrong leg; or if you prefer, we'll delegate the job to one of your older and wiser friends. That's all there is to it."

"You're leaving out altogether too much. How about my door being locked? How about the dago sailor at the inn? How about Miss Tabor's warning me off for all time, and then meeting me here as if she hadn't seen me since Christmas?"

Bob smoked and frowned a moment, then brushed the difficulty aside.

"Accidents, old fellow, accidents. The locked door was a mistake, unless somebody thought you were too dangerous a reprobate to leave at large. The guinea was drunk, on your own showing. As for Lady, she has a better head than the average, but you can't get me to waste any time figuring out how any woman's mind works. I've been married three years."

"Well, I'm going to find out what it all means."

"It doesn't all mean anything. That's where your kaleidoscopic imagination gets to work. There isn't any conceivable connection between these details,

and you talk as if they were veiled and awful hints all pointing one way. Your dragons are windmills, I tell you, and your helmet's a copper kettle."

"You'd think differently if you had been there. Besides, I know—" I stopped short. Bob was my friend, and whatever I chose to tell him was my own business; but even to him I was not betraying confidences.

"Bob," I said, "I can't prove it, even to you, but I know that there is something wrong; and I firmly believe that somehow or other all these things work into it. Now, if you can throw any light at all, help me out."

"I've told you all I know. I'm not exactly an intimate of these people, but I've known them off and on for three or four years, and there simply isn't anything unusual about them. They're just like every one else, only a little nicer—the last people on earth to act queerly or have a closet skeleton."

"At any rate, they seem to want to get rid of me," I said. "Well, they can't do it. If they've got some scandalous idea of me, they're going to apologize; and if they're in trouble, I'm going to make myself useful. I've fallen into an adventure, and I'm going through with it."

"I'll tell you one thing," said Bob, very solemnly for him, "if there is any family secret, it's nothing against Lady. She's about as good and white and honest—but you don't need to be told that."

"No," said I, "I don't. And perhaps that's the reason."

I waited where I was for the rest of the week; partly because I was resolved not to put myself in the wrong afresh by following Miss Tabor's movements too immediately, and partly to give time for Bob's promised vindication of my character to take effect. I could not, however, believe that it would, in itself, make any great difference; for the more I considered, the more it seemed to me that I had been right in my suspicion, and that the whole empty charge had been merely an excuse for driving me from the house and a device for terminating the acquaintance. I discovered during those few days the truth of the saying that to think is the hardest thing in the world; for my attempts to reason out the situation persistently resolved themselves into adventurous dreams and emotional reminiscences until I suspended judgment in despair and put the whole matter from my mind. And it was with an eager relief at last that I bade good-by to the

Ainslies and retraced my journey. Bob had received in the meantime no answer to his letter; but by that time I was not to be surprised.

I took my old room at the inn, got myself into white flannels with leisurely determination, and set forth to call upon Miss Tabor. It was not hot, and all the air was clear with that sparkling zest common enough in autumn but rare in the heat of midsummer; and as I hurried along, the beauty of the world flowed over me in a great, joyous wave of hope and resolution. The little distance between the inn and the Tabors' I covered before I realized it.

"Is Miss Tabor at home?" I asked the maid at the door.

She took my card and hesitated. "I'll go and see, sir," she said finally, and ushered me into the big living-room.

I was all alone; voices came dimly from other parts of the house, and the room where I sat was cool and pleasant. I found my heart beating a little faster, and wondered at myself. Presently the maid returned.

"Miss Tabor is not at home," she said.

Somehow, I had not expected it, and for a moment I stood looking at her foolishly as she held

open the door. "She is in town, is she not?" I asked clumsily.

"I am not sure, sir; she is not at home, sir," the woman repeated woodenly.

I trudged back through the glare of the impossibly brilliant day sick with disappointment, and wondering if she had really been away. Could there be any reason why my card had not been taken to her? Had some general order gone out against me? Then I brought my imagination to a sudden halt. I was getting to be a fool. The probability was that the maid had simply spoken the truth; and in any case, the whole matter was easy of determination. At the inn I wrote a short note to Miss Tabor, saying that I was in town for a few days, regretting that I had missed her and asking when I should find a convenient hour to call. This despatched, I found myself in a state of empty hurry with nothing to do; and after supper and a game or so of erratic pool, I set out to walk off an incipient and unreasoning attack of blues.

By the time I had tramped through a couple of townships and turned toward home I was fairly cheerful again. Landmarks had begun to look unfamiliar in the gathering gloom, and I took my

turnings a little uncertainly; so that it was with a thrill of surprise that I found myself on a cross-road that ran alongside the Tabor place. The great house was largely dark and peaceful. Windows below glowed dimly through the dusk; and above, a single square shone brightly. Two men were coming slowly up the long driveway in front, which paralleled the road on which I stood; and as they approached the house, it seemed to me that they were walking not upon the gravel of the drive, but upon the grass beside it. When they reached the steps they turned aside, and skirting the house with a more evident avoidance of paths, crossed a stretch of lawn to what appeared to be a stable or garage some distance behind it. There was a furtiveness about the whole proceeding that I did not like, and I stood still a moment watching. Presently a match was struck in a room above the garage, and the gas flared on. Then, after a little, one of the men came out, running quietly across the lawn until he came to a stop beside the house and directly before me. The light from the upper window fell upon him and he stepped aside into the shade, but not before I had plainly seen his face. It was Lady's half-brother, Doctor Reid.

He seemed excited, or perhaps anxious; for his movements were more jerky than ever, and he moved restlessly and continually as he waited in the shadow. Once or twice he glanced nervously over his shoulder, and I instinctively drew back under the bulk of a big maple beside the road. Then he would move out beyond the edge of the shrubbery where he could see the lighted room above the garage, then return to his watching under the window. Once or twice he whistled softly. There was no answer, and at last I saw his hand go back and a tiny pebble tinkled against the glass. Then I held my breath, my heart hammering in my ears, for Lady Tabor had come to the window.

She softly raised it and leaned out, her face very white in the darkness.

"Is that you, Walter?" she called under her breath.

"Yes," he answered, "I have him in the garage. All clear in there? He mustn't be seen, you know, mustn't be seen at all."

She laid her finger on her lips and nodded. Then the window closed silently and she was gone. Reid turned and ran back to the garage. When he came out again the other man was with him, and they

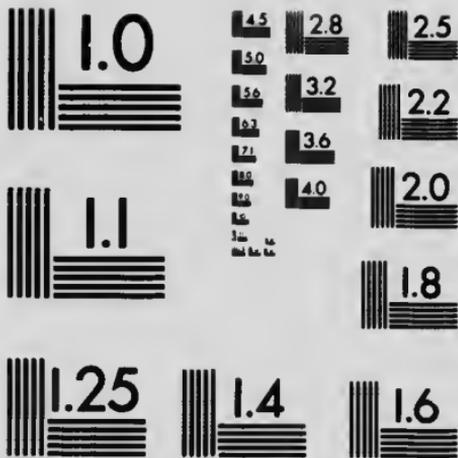
crept past me among the shrubs, talking softly. The other man was tall, with a breadth of shoulder and thickness of chest that would have done credit to a professional strong man; yet his voice came in an absurd treble squeak, with an odd precision of articulation and phrasing.

"It is very important that we shall go quietly," he was saying.

"Of course, of course," Reid whispered. Then they passed beyond hearing under the shadow of the house. Presently I saw them again, silhouetted against the gray wall. They were standing close together upon the narrow terrace that ran between the driveway and the side of the house, and Reid was fumbling at a pair of French windows. They opened with a faint click; and motioning the other man before him, he stepped in, closing the windows after them.

I walked on, full of an impatient wonder at this new mystery, which, like its predecessors, would neither fit into any reasonable explanation nor suffer itself to be put aside as unmeaning. In front of the house I passed a big limousine, drawn up by the roadside, its engine purring softly and its lamps boring bright tunnels through the gloom.





MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART
NATIONAL BUREAU OF STANDARDS
STANDARD REFERENCE MATERIAL 1010a
(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)

I knew it for the Tabors' by the monogram on the panels; and as I went by, I noticed the chauffeur lying sleepily back in his seat puffing at a cigar. Of course it had brought the stranger, and was waiting to take him back; but on what errand a man could be brought to the house like a guest and sneak in at a window like a thief was a question beyond me to fathom.

After all, I thought, as I reached my room, what business was it of mine? By every canon of custom and good taste I should accept my rebuke and drop quietly out of the lives of the Tabors. By staying I was forcing myself upon them, certainly against the wishes of Doctor Reid and Mr. Tabor, and possibly even against those of Miss Tabor, herself. Nevertheless, I made up my mind perversely. Of course, if Miss Tabor wished it, I should go, but unless she told me to go herself and of her own free will, canons of politeness might go hang; rightly or wrongly, I would see the thing to a finish.

CHAPTER VII

SENTENCE OF BANISHMENT CONFIRMED WITH COSTS

I WENT to bed with my natural pleasure in the unexpected surfeited into a baffled irritation. I was the more annoyed when the morning brought no answer to my note; nor did the arrival of Doctor Reid about the middle of the forenoon tend to improve my state of mind. I found him fidgeting on the veranda, winding his watch and frowning at the furniture.

"Good morning, Mr. Crosby, good morning," he began. "I came down to have a few minutes' talk with you, but," he looked again at his watch, "I'm on my way down to my office and I find I'm a little late. Would it trouble you too much to walk along with me? Sorry to ask you, but I'm late already."

I got my hat, and we hurried out into the glaring sunshine. Reid gave the impression, I discovered, of being a much faster walker than he actually was: I had no difficulty in keeping up with him. Some-

thing of the same quality was noticeable in his conversation.

"Beautiful morning. I always like to get in a little exercise before work. Beautiful morning for a walk. Fine. Fine. Now about that note of yours. No reason at all for your coming back here, you know. Acquaintance must be entirely broken off. No excuse whatever for going on with it. Impossible. Perfectly impossible."

I bristled at once. "Is that a message from Miss Tabor or an objection on the part of the family? I'd like to understand this."

"By my—Miss Tabor's authority, of course. Certainly. She regrets the necessity you impose on her of telling you that she can't receive your call. Maid told you yesterday she was not at home. Civil answer. No occasion for carrying the matter any further. Nothing more to be said. Nothing." He looked at his watch again and kicked the head off a feathery dandelion.

"Mr. Tabor told me," I said, made deliberate by his jerkiness, "that I was not a fit acquaintance for his family. That was absurd, and by this time he knows it. If I'm forbidden to call, that settles the matter; but there's got to be some sensible reason."

"Certainly that settles the matter. Nothing more to be said. Nothing at all against your character. I don't know anything about that. Haven't heard a word about it. Nothing against you. Mrs.— Miss Tabor doesn't wish to see you, that's all. Very unpleasant position for you. I see that. Very unpleasant for me to say so. But you bring it on yourself. Ought to have stayed away. Nothing else to do."

"Do you mean to say," I demanded, "that now that my reputation is cleared that makes no difference?"

"Exactly. No objection to you, whatever. Must have been all a mistake. Very unfortunate. Very much to be regretted. Simply, you aren't wanted. Very distressing to have to say this. You ought to have seen it. Nothing for you to come back for. Nothing to do but to drop it. Drop it right where it is. Nothing to be done."

The situation opened under me. Indefinite slander had been at least something to fight about, but to this there was simply no answer. I felt like a fool, and what was worse, like an intrusive fool; and I had a sickening sense that all the delightful kindness of the days at the beach might have been

the exaggeration of unwilling courtesy. But another moment of that memory brought back my faith. For me, I was certainly in the wrong, and probably an officious idiot. Yet the one thing of which I could be sure was Lady's honesty. I was not running from my guns just yet.

"You make me out an intruder," I retorted. "Well, that's been the whole case from the first. All along, I've done nothing out of the ordinary course of acquaintance with an ordinary family. But your family isn't ordinary. You put up invisible fences and then accuse me of trespassing. I don't want to drag your skeleton out of the closet; but a blind man can see that it's there. If you had a counterfeiting plant in the house, for instance, I could understand all this nonsense. It's too palpably manufactured."

I could see that I had hit him, for he grew jerkier than ever. "Counterfeiting, nonsense. Absolutely absurd. Insult to suggest such a thing. Now, let's drop this and come right down to the facts. May as well be practical. Nothing more to say. You're not to call. Told you so already. Very disagreeable business. But, of course, you won't make any further trouble. Absolutely impossible. Hard on you, of course, but nothing to be done."

"Very well," said I, "you tell me this matter is between Miss Tabor and myself. We'll keep it so, and the rest of you may toast in Tophet. I tell you plainly I don't doubt your literal word, but I do doubt your motives and your authority. If Miss Tabor herself tells me to go, I'll go. Otherwise, I'll await my chance to see her; and if that's intruding, why, I'll intrude. Now, be as practical as you please."

He gave way with a suddenness that astonished me. "Just as you say, Mr. Crosby, just as you say. No difference whatever to me. Glad to be relieved of the business. Better call this afternoon, and have it over with. Always best to settle things at once. She'll be in all day. Quickest way of ending the whole trouble."

"I'll call this afternoon."

"Right. Say about three-thirty. I go in here. Sorry to have brought you so far. Sorry to have had this to do at all. Very unpleasant for both of us, but life's full of unpleasantness. Sorry I shan't see you again. Can't be helped. Good-by."

I made the best of my way back, with an indistinct sense of having fought with a small tornado, and wondering whether I had won a minor victory

or sealed an irrevocable defeat. True, I had gained the point of receiving my dismissal in person, but Reid's very readiness of acquiescence indicated the completeness of his confidence in my discomfiture. I spent the interim planning things to say which I knew I should miserably forget when the time came to say them; and I went to keep my appointment with Miss Tabor feeling illogically like a malefactor going up for trial, and remembering with sickly lucidity every word of the skeptical common sense that I had been flouting from the first.

She was sitting near the great Dutch fireplace, and as I crossed the room she slid her book upon the table and stood up. She did not offer me her hand, nor did she notice mine.

"How do you do, Mr. Crosby?" she said.

There was an acid formality about the meaningless little sentence that took the color out of all I had intended to say. There was no answer except that I was very well; and the hollow inanity of that under the circumstances left me standing speechless, defeated before the beginning. She was standing very straight, and her eyes looked beyond me blankly, as they had on the Ainslies' veranda. Now she brought them to mine for an instant, and

motioned me to a chair that faced hers at a little distance as if it had been placed there beforehand.

"We had better sit down," she said. "I want to talk quietly to you, Mr. Crosby."

"Your brother told me that this would be a good time for me to come," said I unmeaningly.

For a long time she was silent, turning over and over with her fingers a little ivory paper cutter. The handle was carved to represent a fish with its mouth open grasping the blade. Somewhere in the room a clock ticked twice to every three of my heart-beats. Finally she looked up decisively.

"You wanted to see me, Mr. Crosby. I suppose it is about something in particular. Please tell me what it is."

"You must know as well as I do," I answered, trying to steady my tone. "I have been told that my attempt to call is an intrusion, and that you do not wish to see me again. I preferred to be told that by you, yourself."

Her eyes rested steadily upon mine. "Well," she said, "I tell you now that it is perfectly true."

There was the same formality about it all, the same sense of mechanical arrangement; not as if she were playing a part, but as if she were going

84 THE PROFESSOR'S MYSTERY

through with an unpleasant purpose according to a preconceived plan. I tried to shift the burden of the situation.

"Why?" I asked. "It seems to me that this part of intruder has been made up and put upon me. Except for crossing lines that need never have been drawn, I don't understand what I have done."

"Perhaps not. If you think a little, you will remember that when I asked you to go that night when—when you brought me here, I told you to forget us—that you were not to ask questions, nor try to see me again. I thought I made it very clear at that time. Are you the judge of my right to close my own door?"

For a moment I was too much bewildered to answer. "When we met at the Ainslies'," I blurted, "you met me as a friend, as though nothing had broken what we began in the holidays. I can't believe that you were only playing a courteous part. You were your own open self. Everything was all right, I am very sure, until—until this man, this—your brother came for you."

She gave a scornful little laugh, leaning back indolently in her chair.

"Really, Mr. Crosby, aren't you rather overstat-

ing the case? Have we been such very great friends? I have known you ten days—twelve days.”

I nodded dumbly.

“I have no wish to hurt you,” she went on more gently, “but we have really nothing like a friendship to appeal to. I am not breaking anything, because there is nothing to break. When you left here—I thought that you understood me. I don’t know what my family disliked in you, and I don’t think I care to know. It has nothing to do with me. But this is what I dislike. You called up my father the next morning, and demanded reasons. You went to the beach, where you knew I was invited. Was I to cut you there? Was I to explain to mutual friends that I didn’t want to meet you? I don’t think you have treated our acquaintanceship particularly well, or that you have shown much regard for my plain request.”

I sat stunned, the bulk of my offense looming stark before me. Then, with a great surge, the memory came back of the girl who had stood with me by the water’s edge, who had run childishly hand in hand with me upon the beach, who had walked with me and talked with me, who had shown me unembarrassed her gay and sweet imaginings.

These things had been the truth; this was the unreality.

Perhaps she saw something of what was passing in my mind, for she shook her head. "Don't think that because I had no heart to mar your outing, I did not mean what I had said. It was easier to be friends for a little—easier for us both. But surely you should have played your part. At the Ainslies' I wanted to treat you as I should have treated anybody. Do you think that you have been fair? Do you think you should have risked following me? For it was a risk. You have come back here where we are the only people you know, and as soon as you come you ask for me. I don't like to say it, Mr. Crosby, but you have acted inconsiderately. I am very anxious that this time you should clearly understand."

I got to my feet in silence. Something had happened that I could not help; and as I stood there, I knew that my world had come to an end, and as in the first shock of a physical injury, felt numbly conscious of the deliberate suffering that was to follow. She had risen too, looking somehow curiously small and frail. Then, of a sudden, my manhood caught at me. The wall was without seam or crevice, dark-

ening the sky; and I knew that I could break it with a breath.

"I will go," I said, "when I am sure. Look at me, Lady, for you know that I know."

There was a sharp snap. She glanced at her hands, then dropped the broken paper knife at her feet and faced me haughtily. "Know?" she said, with a dry tension in her voice, "I only know that this is to be good-by." She held out a rigid hand.

I took it and stood looking soberly down at her.

"Is that all?" I asked.

"Yes," she answered. "Don't make it hard for me." Then her eyes grew suddenly afraid. She caught away her hand and shrank back a step, catching at the chain about her throat.

"Oh, don't, don't," she begged. "Please, please go—you don't understand."

I held myself with all my strength. "No, I don't understand," I whispered.

She caught her breath with half a sob, forlornly and as a child might.

"You must not understand. You are never to see me again."

"You know I can't do that," I said.

"You must do it," she answered very gravely.

"Be kind to me—" she paused, "because it's hard for me to send you away."

"You must tell me one thing more than that," said I; "is there—is there any one else?"

Her eyes fell. "That is it," she said at last, "there is somebody else."

"That is all, then," I said quietly. "I shall stay away until you send for me;" and I left her.

I have no remembrance of the walk back to the inn; but I closed my door behind me softly, as if I were shutting a door upon my dreams. Now I knew that the dull round of daily life, of little happenings and usual days, stretched before me, weary and indefinite. It made little difference to think that I might some day be sent for. Evidently it was to be Europe this summer after all. My only desire was to make my going a thing immediate and complete; to rupture so absolutely the threads of the woof that we had woven that I could feel myself separated from all, enough aloof from love to think of life. I did not stop to ask myself questions or to wonder precisely what was the nature of the impossibility that was driving me away. There would be time enough for that.

I began to pack feverishly, gathering my belong-

ings from their disposition about the room. I felt tired, as a man feels tired who has lost a battle; so that after I had packed a little I sank wearily into the chair before my bureau. Then after what may have been a minute or an hour of dull unconscious thought, I fell again to my task; pulling open the drawers from where I sat, and searching their depths for little odds and ends which I piled upon the bureau top. The bottom of the second drawer was covered with an old newspaper; and I smiled as I noticed that its fabric was already turning brittle and yellowish, and read the obsolete violence of the head-lines. Then a name half-way down the page caught me with a shock, and I slowly read and re-read the lines of tiny print, forming the empty phrases in my mind with no clear sense of their meaning. They were like the streams of silly words that run through one's head in a fever, or half-way along the road to sleep; and it was an eternity before they meant anything.

“REID-TABOR. On May 24, at the home of the bride's parents, Miriam, daughter of George and Charlotte Bennett Tabor, to Doctor Walter Reid.”

CHAPTER VIII

HOW WE MADE AN UNCONVENTIONAL JOURNEY TO TOWN

VERY carefully, and wondering the while in a listless fashion why I should do so at all, I tore out the notice and put it carefully away in my pocketbook. I had the explanation now; I understood it all—the hidden ring at the end of the chain, and the shadow of which it was the symbol, the mystery and disturbance of the house, the continual pretexts to get rid of me, the effort to disguise any strangeness of appearance in the life of the family. And I understood why it was true that I must go away and utterly forget. And yet—was the explanation so perfect, after all? Mechanically I pulled the paper out of the drawer, and searched for the date. It was only three years back; but even that length of time would have made Lady a mere child when she was married. She could not be very far beyond twenty now, certainly not more than twenty-two or three. And in any case, why should the marriage be

concealed and the husband retained as a member of the family, masquerading as a brother? And how, after the ordinary announcement in the press, could the marriage have become a secret at all? Then once more the whispers and pointings of a score of abnormal circumstances, uncertain, suggestive, indefinite, crowded in upon my understanding, like the confusion of simultaneous voices. It was no use. I could not imagine what it all meant, and for the moment I was too sick and weary to wonder. The bare fact was more than enough; she was married and beyond my reach, and I must go away.

I went through a pantomime of supper, making the discovery that my appetite was supplemented by an unquenchable thirst and an immeasurable desire for tobacco. After that I walked, read, made dull conversation with casual acquaintances—anything to kill the interminable time, and quiet for the moment that weary spirit of unrest which kept urging me to useless thought and unprofitable action, to examine my trouble as one irritates a trivial wound, to decide or do something where nothing was to be decided or to be done. An inhabitant of the nearest comfortless piazza chair contributed the only episode worth remembering.

"Say," he began, "do you remember that guinea that was here the other day and started the argument with the old gent out in front? Well, what did you make of that feller, anyway?"

"I don't know. He was drunk, I suppose, and got the wrong man."

"Well, now, you take it from me, there was more to it than that. Yes, sir, there's a shady story around there somewhere. You hear what I say."

"Is the man still around here?" I asked.

"Well, not now, he ain't. That's what I'm telling you. He hung about town for two or three days, I guess. Maybe he got after the old man some more. He was in here after a drink once, and the barkeep threw him out. He's a good mixer, Harry is, men or drinks; but he don't like guineas. Well, I don't go much on them foreigners, myself."

"Where does your shady story come in?"

"Well, now, that's just it. You listen. I was coming along the street the other night, and I passed this guinea standing under a street lamp, talking to that Reid feller that lives up to Tabors'. Doc Reid, you know whom I mean? Well, I was going past and I heard Reid say: 'Now, you understand what you got to do,' he says, 'keep quiet and keep away. The

AN UNCONVENTIONAL JOURNEY 95

minute you show up here again or give any trouble,' he says, 'the money stops. You understand that?' he says. And you can call me a liar if you like, but I swear I saw him slip the guinea a roll. Now, what do you know about that?"

I put him off as well as I could. Here was another point in the labyrinth, but I had no energy to think about it. I got away from the gossip at last only by taking refuge in my room. And the rest of the evening was a dreary nightmare of unreality which only expanded without changing when I tried to sleep. I tossed about endlessly, thinking thoughts that were not thoughts, dreaming evil dreams even while I watched the swollen shadows about the room and listened to the unmeaning voices and footsteps in the hallways. It seemed so much a part of this when some one pounded on my door and told me that I was wanted on the telephone, that it was a troublesome task to make me understand.

I pulled on a sweater and ran down-stairs, wondering who could have called me up at one in the morning. I was not left long in doubt.

"Hello! This Mr. Crosby? Hello! Hello there! Mr. Crosby? Hello!"

"Yes!" I said savagely, "what is it?"

"Doctor Reid talking. Can you—what? All right—hold the line a second." Then Lady's voice: "Mr. Crosby? Listen: I have to go to New York in the machine now, right away. Can you come with me?"

"Can I—? Why, of course; but why doesn't—why don't you take some one else?"

"No one else can go. If you're not willing—"

"Of course I'm willing," I said, "if I can be of use."

"I knew you would. The car will be there for you in five minutes, or—wait: there's no need of waking up the whole inn. Walk up to the first street corner this way, and the car will meet you there."

Five minutes later I was standing on the corner, shivering with interrupted sleep, while four flaming yellow eyes swung toward me down the hill. It was the same big limousine I had noticed the night before. I climbed in beside the chauffeur. With a clash and a grinding lurch the car swung around and panted up the hill again, toward the Tabors'. There was power and to spare, but I noticed that one cylinder was missing now and again.

"Your ignition isn't very steady," I said to the chauffeur. "What is it—valves?"

He turned and looked at me with supercilious respect. "Poor petrol, sir. I fancy she'll run well enough, sir."

Lady came running out, veiled and muffled. "Come inside," she said, as I sprang down to help her in, "I'd rather have you with me." The door slammed, and we were off with a jerk that threw us back against the deep leather cushions. For a few moments we flashed under lamps and sidled around corners to an accompaniment of growling brakes and squeaking springs; then we ran out upon the smooth macadam of the highway, and settled into our speed with a steady purr. Lady sat up in her corner and patted at her veil.

"It was very good of you to come," she said, "but I knew we could count on you. Here, take this thing—I don't want it."

It was a very serviceable revolver, cold and smooth as I slipped it out of its leather holster. I made sure that it was ready for use.

"It's perfectly ridiculous taking it along," she added. "We're not going on any desperate midnight errand. The mere time of night is the only thing that's even unconventional. But Walter wouldn't let me come without it."

I asked no questions. By this time I had learned better; and besides I did not greatly care what we were doing, or what was to happen next. I would be of service if I could, that was all. Since it was to be hopelessly, it might as well be blindly, too; and the sense of adventure was gone out of me. The car swayed and sidled gently to the irregular mutter of the engine and the drowsy whining of the gears. We might almost have been motionless, except when the flare of some passing light swept across us, filling with an uncanny and sudden illumination the polished interior of the limousine, and showing me as by the glimpse of a lightning-flash the veiled and silent figure by my side. Here was romance beyond my wildest imagination: night and hurry and mysterious need, the swift rush onward through the warm gloom, the womanhood of the breathing shadow so close to me, whose thought I could not know, whose anxiety I could not seek to fathom, whose trouble I could only help by doing ignorantly what she asked of me and then leaving her in other hands. And all this that should have stirred me to chivalry seemed only dull and weary, a thankless task. The lines of *The Last Ride Together* began running in my mind, and I turned them over and

over, trying vaguely to fill in forgotten phrases, until the rocking of the car reminded me where I was, and the sardonic incongruity of it jarred me back to earth. It was always like that: the deed a parody of the dream, the details of actual happenings making mouths at the truth that lay behind them, life sneering at itself. Here were two lovers hurrying together through the night, held silent by a secret and bound by a blind trust. And they were riding through Westchester in a motor-car, and the thought of a fussy medical man with a bass voice was the naked sword which lay between them.

A trolley car, looking like a huge and luminous caterpillar, hung alongside us for a moment, then fell behind. Car engine had not been running perfectly from the first; and now as we jolted over a section of newly mended road and began to climb a bumpy hill, the trouble suddenly became so much worse that it looked as though it meant delay. Impure gasolene does not make one cylinder miss fire regularly for many revolutions and then explode once or twice with a croupy grunt.

"There's something the matter with the car," said Lady nervously. "I hope we're not going to break down. We mustn't break down."

"The chauffeur says it's the gasolene," I answered, "but I don't believe it. It's ignition by the sound."

"Do you know anything about a car?"

"A little," I said; and as we drew up at the side of the road, I was out and in front of the machine almost before the chauffeur had lumbered from his seat. He got out his electric lamp, and began tinkering with the carburetor.

"Hold on a minute," I said. "If you ball up that adjustment, it may take half an hour to get it right again. Are you sure it isn't ignition?"

"Ignition's all right, sir," he grunted; "she's getting too much gas."

"Then why are three of your cylinders all right and one all wrong?" I snapped. "Come around here with that lamp."

Once the bonnet was open it was not hard to find the trouble. The nut which held one of the wires to its connection on the magneto had dropped off, and the end of the wire was hanging loose, connecting only when the vibration of the car swung it against the binding-post. The chauffeur did not appear grieved.

"We're dished," he remarked cheerfully, "I've no other nut like that."

"It's probably in the underpan," I retorted. We got the pan off, and after some search in the puddle of grimy grease, were fortunate enough to find it. A moment later we were throbbing steadily on our way.

"That man of yours isn't exactly delighted with his work," I commented.

"I don't blame him. He isn't supposed to be waked up for forty-mile trips in the middle of the night, and he's English and worships his habits. Are we all right now?"

"Yes; it wasn't anything. We're nearly there now; there's Woodlawn."

She did not speak again for some time, and I began to wonder if I had again trodden upon trouble. I seemed fated to do so at every turn. But presently she broke in with a comfortable triviality.

"Look here, why don't you smoke if you want to? I forgot all about it, but of course you may. . . . in your mind."

I had not noticed it before, but the cigarette was exactly what I wanted. The bodily comfort balanced things again, and made me feel at home with the situation. We ran down Riverside Drive, the dark bulk of the city on our left, and on our right

the glimmering breadth of the Hudson, streaked with yellow gleams. Thence we crossed over and continued on down Fifth Avenue, between blank houses and unnatural lights, the occasional clack of hoofs and hollow growl of wheels accentuating the unwonted stillness. I had somehow taken it for granted that we were going for a doctor. But when we passed Madison Square and kept on south along Broadway, that errand became unlikely; and when we turned eastward over the rough cobbles of narrow side streets, I was in a state of blank wonder. We ran slowly, lurching and bumping, through interminable chasms of squalor where iron railings mounted to the doors and clots of bedding hung from open windows; where evil odors hung and drifted like clouds, and a sick heat lay prisoned between wall and pavement, and stragglers turned to stare after us as we went by. Now and then we crossed some wider thoroughfare with its noise of cars and tangle of sagging wires overhead, and signs in foreign tongues under the corner lights. And at last we came into a city of dreadful sleep, dim and deserted and still. The scattered lamps were only yellow splotches in the dusk, the stores were barred and bared, and there was no human thing in sight

save here and there a huddle of grimy clothes under the half shelter of a doorway. Puffs of salt air from the river troubled the stagnant mixture of fish, leather and stale beer.

We stopped before a narrow doorway pinched sidewise between two shop windows like a fish's mouth. Lady leaned across me to scan the bleak windows above.

"There should be a light on the top floor," she said, "yes, there it is. Ask Thomas to make sure of the number."

He was back in a moment to say that the number was right: "And all asleep, Miss, by the look of it. Shall I knock somebody up? There's no bell."

"No, not yet. What time is it, Mr. Crosby?"

"Twenty minutes of three," I told her.

"She must have got the message before now," she said, half to herself. Then, after a little thought, "Stay here with the car, Thomas. Mr. Crosby and I are going in."

"You're not going into such a place at this hour!" I protested. "Tell me what it is and let me go."

"No, I'm coming too. Don't stop to talk about it, please."

The door yielded and let us into a stained and

choking hallway, faintly lighted by a blue flicker of gas at the far end. The stairs were worn into creaking hollows, and the noise of our passing, though instinctively we crept upward like thieves, awakened a multitude of squeaks and scuffings behind the plaster. The banisters were everywhere loose and shaky, and in places they were entirely broken away, so that we went close along the filthy wall rather than trust to them. Each hallway was like the one below; narrow, dusty and airless, with its blue spurt of gas giving us just light enough to find our way without groping. At last we reached the top, and Lady knocked softly on the door at the end of the hall.

There was no answer. She knocked again. I turned up the gas, and as I did so a fat beetle ran from under my feet. I stepped on it, and wished that I had not done so.

"Are you sure this is the place?" I whispered.

"Yes; I've been here before. But I don't understand. Sheila knew that we were coming."

"Look," said I, "the door is unlatched. Shall I go in?"

For an instant the oppression of the place was too much for her, and she clung to my arm whisper-

ing, "I'm afraid—I'm afraid!" Then before I could speak, she had caught up her courage.

"Yes," she said. "Open it if you can."

The door swung a few inches, then resisted. Something soft and heavy, like a mattress, seemed to be braced against the bottom of it. I felt for the revolver in my pocket, then put my weight against the panel. The thing inside moved a little, then rolled over with a thud, and the door swung wide. What had lain against it, and now lay across the opening clearly visible in the light from behind us was the body of a woman with blood soaking into her hair.

CHAPTER IX

HOW WE ESCAPED FROM WHAT WE FOUND THERE

WE stood looking down upon her without speech. She was a tall, rather thin woman of about fifty; Irish by the look of her, and still with some share of earlier good looks. The hair that fell away loosely from her broad forehead was black and straight, showing only here and there a thread of silver. The large hands lay limply open, and the face was deathly white. She had fallen away from the door with her knees pressed closely against it, as though she had been trying to open it when the blow came.

“Do you think she is dead?” Lady breathed at last.

“Of course not,” I answered, but I was very much afraid. I knelt down beside her and listened to her heart. I was not sure, but it seemed to me that it beat faintly; so faintly that it might have been only the drumming of my own pulses in my ears.

"Can you find a mirror?" I asked from the floor.

Lady glanced vaguely about the room, then came back to me with uncomprehending eyes. "No, I can't see any. What for?" she said dully.

I sprang quickly to my feet. A chair lay overturned on the bare white boards of the floor, and I picked it up, setting it near the window.

"Sit there," I said, "while I rummage," and I drew her to it, half forcing her down into it. She sat very still, mechanically obedient, while I looked around me.

It was a strange little room to find in this decaying tenement. On the sill of the single window that gave upon the street blossomed an uneven row of geraniums. One pot had fallen to the floor and lay shattered, the fresh green of its broken plant piteous in a sprawl of scattered earth. The whole place bore evidence of an insistent struggle for the cheerfulness of a home. White, starchy curtains were at the windows; the walls were fairly covered with pictures, colored prints for the most part, and supplements of Sunday papers. A bird-cage had hung in one corner, and now lay, cage and bottom fallen apart, upon a muddle of seed and water; and a frightened canary perched upon the leg of a fallen

table, blinking in the unsteady flare of the gas. The floor was spotlessly clean, its worn boards white with scrubbing, save where the flower-pot and bird-cage had been overturned, and the dark stain spread from beneath the woman's hair. The whole scene was unnaturally and strangely vivid, all its little details leaping to the eye with the stark brilliance of a flashlight.

To the right of the door by which the woman lay was another door, and I crossed over to it. It opened with a squeak, and for a moment I stood looking in. This was evidently the sleeping-room. It held only a washstand, a chest and an iron bedstead; and here, too, an unextinguished gas-jet flared. I stepped in and closed the door behind me, for upon the bed lay another huddled figure. It was a man lying face downward, breathing heavily and evidently very drunk; for the whole place reeked sourly of alcohol. I pulled at his shoulder, turning him half over. For half a minute I held him so, then let him fall back as I had found him. I glanced behind me to be sure that the door was shut. The man on the bed muttered thickly, shifting his position; and something thudded upon the floor, and rolled to my feet. It was a short bit of iron, rather more thick

at one end than at the other; and as I turned it over in my hands, it left a stain. Somewhere I had seen such an instrument before, but I could not at the moment recall where; and I dropped the thing into my pocket not without some feeling of disgust. A small mirror hung over the wash-stand. This I hurriedly took down, and as hurriedly left the room, closing the door behind me. Lady was still sitting where I had left her, but as I came across the room she got up.

"What are you going to do?" she asked. "I'm sure I can help in some way. You were gone a long time, but I waited."

"I'll show you in a moment," I said. We talked in whispers as if in the presence of death; and yet I was almost sure that the woman was alive. Nevertheless, it was with a great deal of relief that I saw the mirror softly closed before her lips.

"It's all right," she said. "She's alive."

"Are you sure?"

"Absolutely."

"Oh, thank God!" Lady breathed.

"Amen," said I. "What are we to do now?"

"What do you think we had better do? Is there any water in there?"

"There's nothing in there that's of any use," I said quickly. "I should say the first thing would be to send for an ambulance, and the next for the police."

"No, no!" Lady cried. "Whatever is to be done we must do ourselves. I came here to take her away. Can't we take her as she is?"

"She could be carried down-stairs easily enough," said I, surprised, "but somebody ought to be arrested for this thing. Have you any notion who did it?"

"Her husband, I suppose," answered Lady bitterly. "He is like that when he has been drinking. Sheila was afraid something would happen when he came back."

"Sheila?"

Lady glanced at the figure before us. "That is Sheila," she said. "She used to be my nurse."

I picked the woman up in my arms. She was heavier than I had thought; not beyond my strength, but more than I could walk with safely down those crazy stairs.

"I'll call the chauffeur," I said. "He can help carry her down."

"Yes; but I'd rather he didn't see this."

"He'd see her anyhow, when we brought her

down; and we can't do anything for her here. Where shall I put her?"

"Wasn't there a bed in that room?" she asked.

"Slip off your coat; she will be all right on the floor for a minute."

Lady took off the long coat and spread it upon the boards, taking Sheila's hand in her lap as I laid her down upon it. I raised the little window, and looked down into the street. The car stood there, its lights glaring monstrously down the empty street.

"Hi!" I called. "You chauffeur! Leave the car and come up here."

Below, a figure detached itself from the shadow of the car. "What, sir?" he shouted up.

"Come up here; we want you."

The man did not answer, and turned back to his car. I watched him angrily, but after a moment he crossed the sidewalk and disappeared in the hall doorway.

"I wouldn't blame her husband too surely," I said, as I turned from the window. "I think the man who struck her was an Italian."

Lady started. "What makes you think so?" she asked in a whisper.

I shook my head, but did not answer.

"Never mind," said Lady, "but you are right. Her husband is an Italian."

It was my turn to start. "What?" I cried. "Was he by any chance also a sailor?"

She nodded, frightened eyes upon me. And I wondered what it was all about, for the man lying upon the bed in the inner room was the man whom I had seen at the inn bar, the man who had threatened her father, the man to whom her—her husband had given money.

I met the chauffeur in the hall, puffing and evidently disgusted.

"A very low quarter, sir. I was afraid for my life below; and this is a dirty, bad-smelling 'ouse, sir."

"Well," I said, "there is a woman who is sick in here, and Miss Tabor has come to take her away in the car. You are to help me to carry her down."

He sniffed dolefully, and I opened the door, closing it quickly behind him.

"Mrs. Carucci has been hurt," said Miss Tabor. "You are to help Mr. Crosby carry her down to the car."

The man stared at the woman on the floor. "Hurt?" he cried. "Mr. Crosby said she was ill." He glanced about the clean little room, disordered by

the violence that had passed, and shrank back against the wall, white and staring.

"What's that?" He pointed to the dark stain near the door.

"That," I answered lightly, "is none of your business. Suppose you take her feet."

The man turned a sick green. "It's blood," he whispered. "It's murder."

"Nonsense, man; the woman is alive. She fell and hurt her head, that's all. At any rate, we are going to take her where she can be cared for. Take her feet. We ought not to leave the car too long."

The fellow shook his head.

"She is dead," he repeated sullenly. "There has been murder done. I'll have nothing to do with it."

Miss Tabor broke in: "Thomas, you heard what Mr. Crosby said. You are to help him this instant."

"I am not," he said. "I have done more and seen more than a decent man should, already. A fine district this is for this hour of the night, with cut-throats asleep in the street and a dead woman lying above. I give notice now, and I go now."

"You'll do nothing of the kind," I retorted. "Have you no loyalty?"

"I am as honest as the next," he answered, "too

honest, or I should have gone a month ago. 'Tis no place for a decent, quiet man, what with a fly-by-night sawbones living in my garage, and all sorts of strange folks going and coming at the house, and calls at all hours, and Lord knows what going on. 'Tis no decent place. I'm through right now! For the love of God, what's that?"

The sound had startled us all, and it was repeated—a sound betwixt a groan and a growl. I glanced toward the door of the inner room.

"My God!" cried Thomas. "There's another of them!" He started across the room, but I was before him. I turned the key in the door, and placed my back against it. From within the growls came with greater frequency. The chauffeur stood before me, shaking with the anger of terror.

"Very well," I said, "you go down to your car and start the engine. I will carry the woman down without you."

The man hesitated.

"Go!" I cried, and took a step forward. He whimpered out an oath, and turning, clattered down the stairs as if the devil were after him. I turned to find Lady on her feet, staring at the closed door.

"Carucci?" she whispered.

I nodded, and went over to take up the woman.

"Wait a minute," cried Lady. "We can't leave the bird loose. She thinks everything of him."

Somehow I did not laugh. "Very well," I said, "but be quick," and even as I spoke there came a muttering of Italian; the bed creaked, the feet came heavily to the floor. Lady stretched out her hand for the bird, but it fluttered off frightened to the geranium plants. A thud came against the locked door, and another drunken mutter of Italian. But now Lady had the bird safe, and I latched the cage top to its flooring, and held open the door for her capture.

"You carry it," I said. "I'll take the woman."

We were just in time; for Carucci began to realize that he was locked in, and the door shook under his fury. It was a weak-looking door at best, and as we left the room, a lower panel splintered. We fairly ran down-stairs, fearful every moment that the door would not hold long enough; for the whole building seemed to vibrate with the savage uproar above. Here and there, as we turned down the dark hall, doors opened, and frightened faces, dull with sleep, looked out.

Once in the street, I pushed hurriedly through the

knot of roughs that had gathered peering and jeering around the car, and tore open the door.

"Quick! Get in!" I cried. Lady slipped past me and up the step.

"Give her to me," she said.

I put the woman in gently upon the seat, where Lady held her close. Then I turned to the chauffeur in a fury, for the engine was not running. He was fumbling at the dash, while the onlookers jostled about him. I shook him angrily.

"Start it, you fool!" I growled.

He shrank away from me. "I'm through, I told you. I'll have nothing to do with mur—" I slapped the word short with a swing of my open hand across his mouth. Without a word he turned and elbowed his way through the press behind us. I caught him by the arm.

"Give me that plug," I said, twisting it from his hand. And as I jammed it into its socket, I heard Lady's voice at my shoulder. She was standing on the curb, one hand upon the open door of the car.

"Can't you make it go?"

"It's all right," I shouted, reaching for the spark, "get inside!" and the engine started with a snort and a howl. The crowd had begun to mutter threaten-

ingly, and as I sprang for the other side of the car they jostled me back.

"Murder!" some one shouted hoarsely. "Police! police! police!"

From far down the block came the regular thud of running feet, and the shrill blast of a whistle; and along with it, a stumbling clatter from the tenement hallway, and Carucci, a great smear of blood across his convulsed and swollen face, lurched drunkenly to the sidewalk.

CHAPTER X

AND HOW WE BROUGHT HOME A DIFFICULTY

IT was a matter of seconds. I vaulted over the spare tires into the chauffeur's seat, pulling the throttle open while I felt for my pedals; and as I did so, I heard the door of the limousine slam behind me. A hasty glance over my shoulder showed me that the back of the car was clear. I jerked in the reverse and raised my feet; and with a roar and a stream of blue smoke, the machine swung backward across the street, while I twisted furiously at the wheel. One of the men caught at me as we began to move, but the suddenness of our starting helped the push I gave him to throw him off his balance. He sprawled on his back in the gutter, and an instant later I was in my second speed and half-way up the block. The policeman behind us was firing his revolver; whether at us or our tires or the sky I had no time to guess. And I took the first corner with my heart in my mouth and an empty feeling in

my stomach, praying that we might get around it right side up. A shadow ran out from the curb and sprang for the running-board; but my hands and eyes were so busy in front of me that I did not know whether we missed him or ran him down.

Speed was impossible over the cobbles; our only chance was to take as many turnings as possible to avoid being headed, and for the next few minutes we swayed and slid around treacherous corners through a darkness that was full of shouts and whistlings and gesticulating enemies. I wondered that every blue-coated figure running blindly up the lane of our lights did not stop us, and that at every turning we had neither upset nor skidded into the opposite curb. It was wild work at the best; and considering that I was driving a heavy and unfamiliar car over slimy pavements, I can not understand now how we avoided either accident or capture. But presently the headlights showed a long, dark street, clear of interference. We raced up it at a rate that seemed to loosen every tooth in my head, and numbed my fingers upon the rattling wheel. The noise was fairly behind us. After a couple more turns, it had grown fainter; and I slowed to a saner speed, watching the street lamps for knowledge of

my whereabouts. Then I became conscious that there was a man beside me in the car.

He was huddled in a heap on the floor, between the seat and the dash, hanging on desperately, and crowding himself into the least possible space as if to keep out of sight. As soon as I could spare a hand, I began to pound him over the head and neck. I was in no mood for half measures. He covered back on to the running-board, shielding himself with an arm and turning up an absurd and ugly face of terror. It was our highly respectable chauffeur.

"Oh, for God's sake, don't, sir!" he croaked, shrinking back out of reach. "I won't interfere with you nor nothing. I'll get out as soon as we get fair away. Only I'd ha' been took up sure, sir, and there's me character gone."

"Get into that seat and keep still," I said, "or you'll have us all taken up. Get in, I tell you."

He crawled into the seat, shaking and protesting. There were tears in his voice, and I think actually in his eyes.

"Do you know your way out of this?" I demanded.

"No, sir. I haven't a notion. I'll get out and ask." He was apparently too frightened to know

his own mind, but I had made up mine. He was better with us than wandering about the city, telling murder stories.

"Stay where you are," I snapped, "you'll go home with us, and keep your head shut."

"Oh, I can't think of it, sir. We'll never get home after this. I'll get out here for my murder and resisting arrest and endangering traffic. They'll have me an accomplice."

I caught at his collar as he tried to stand up, and jerked him back into the seat. Before he could make another move, I had shut off and got my right hand on the revolver. I held it across my knees under the wheel, and slipped the holster off it.

"You're going to sit still and keep quiet," I said, "and you're going wherever we go. Do you understand?"

He sat like a graven image after that, with no sound but an occasional sniff. I slid the revolver between me and the edge of the seat, and we went on. He might have known that I should never have dared to use it; but either he was too shaken and stupid to put himself in my place, or he lacked the nerve to try me. All this time we had been working westward as fast as the rough going and my divided

attention would allow. Now and then some one shouted after us. But it was still dark and we were soon out of sight around a corner, and the few policemen who concerned themselves with us at all did not trouble themselves to whistle up a hue and cry. Presently the black bulk of the elevated gave me my bearings, and I turned north under it, running along the car tracks. The lights and the scattered traffic, and the occasional roaring of a train overhead, seemed curiously homelike and comfortable. I felt as if I were waking out of a nightmare.

We crossed over to Union Square and hurried carefully through civilization. I was afraid of Fifth Avenue; even at this hour, too many of the guardians of the peace there were provided with better means of speed than their own feet; and I did not like the attention we still seemed to attract, now that we were safe away from our original trouble and running at an ordinary rate. Madison Avenue was decently asleep; and its empty length must have tempted me to unreasonable speed, for the few people we passed stopped to stare, and call after us unmeaningly. I expected every moment to meet a mounted policeman, and held myself ready to slow down or take a sudden corner; but none appeared,

and I turned into the leafy darkness of Central Park with a sigh of relief. I was more than a little anxious for the safety of my passengers within.

I stopped in the deepest shade I could find, and clambered out. Lady's face was at the door almost before I could open it.

"Are you all right?" she panted. I could see only her eyes and the outline of her face like a white shadow.

"Yes; are you?"

She laughed nervously. "I'm as well as when we started, and Sheila is better. She has come to herself now. Can you find some water? I have a flask here."

"There are fountains all along these drives. We'll run ahead until we come to one of them."

As I spoke, there was a thud behind me, and a quick patter of running feet. The excellent Thomas had taken advantage of my forgetfulness to break for liberty. He was out of sight almost before I turned; and he had been thoughtful enough to throw the revolver away as he jumped.

"I'm a clever idiot," I said ruefully, "your chauffeur has been trying to desert all along, and now he's done it."

"But you were driving, yourself. What difference does it make?"

"I was thinking of what he might say," said I. "But for that matter, I suppose I have got you into a newspaper scrape anyhow, if nothing worse. Every policeman on the East Side must have our number."

"I was just going to ask you about that," said Lady, with a queer little crow in her voice. "Perhaps we had better carry this outside now." She felt about her feet and handed me a muddy strip of metal. "I took this off while you were starting the car. And I put out that red lantern thing, too."

For an instant I forgot Doctor Reid and all the mountain of impossibility that lay between us. She had always been more than other women. And now she was that rarest thing of all, a comrade ready in a moment of need. I reached out my hand, as if she had been a man.

"You're a miracle," I said, "and I'm not half good enough to be your lieutenant. Good work."

There was a broken whisper from the darkness within.

"The water," said Lady, "we're forgetting Sheila."

I replaced our number, lighted the tail-lamp, and a little farther on found a drinking fountain and got the water. Mrs. Carucci was able to speak only a few words of unsteady thanks; but that was enough to make me fall in love with the crooning voice of her. We pushed on out of town without any further adventure; and on the open roads off to the northward were free to make the most of our speed.

The night slowly faded, not as if any light were coming, but as if the darkness itself were growing faint and weak. The road-side trees were still mysterious bulks against remoter gloom, but their blackness now gave a dull hint of green and the yellow glare of our lamps grew washed out and lifeless. The crowing of cocks, reiterated from place to place, sounded fictitious and unnatural. The air chilled a little and here and there we ran through a momentary blindness of mist, as if a small cloud had fallen to drift along the surface of the earth. I sat back half drowsily, with relaxed nerves; and although I had no desire for sleep, although I never loosened my hands upon the wheel, nor took my eyes for a second from the wavering end of the ribbon of light that unwound itself continually toward me, yet I

felt somehow unreal and very peaceful, without will or memory, like a person in a dream. The car obeyed me without my being conscious of any movement, as if I guided it by my mere volition. Slowly the pallor around me changed from green to gray; the air freshened as the stars went out; and the twitter of birds and the scattered barking of dogs underran the unvarying, inevitable drumming of the engine. That sound itself dried and hardened in the keener atmosphere. And in the pleasure of the perfect power under me, I let the car out nearly to the limit of its speed, until the sidelong sway of the body warned me that I was driving too fast for the road. We passed a milk wagon or two and an occasional early trolley. Then came the dawn, so swiftly that it was full day of sunlight and shadow before I thought to look for color in the east. Somehow it did not seem like morning, but like coming out of a curtained house into the midst of afternoon.

It was part of this same strangeness that I only felt the exhilaration of the present without any thought of trouble that lay before me and behind. I was a conquering hero, carrying my princess home in triumph out of the castle of the enchanter. I had

overcome desperate accidents and won my spurs; this page of the fairy-tale bore a picture in shining colors, and I knew of neither the last page nor the next. It was in this mood that I passed, unheeding, through the gathering familiarity of nearer landmarks, past the inn and up the winding hill, and drew up at last before the Tabors' door with some vague fancy that I should hear a trumpet blown. I suppose that I was unconsciously very tired and in part asleep, so that it came upon me with the shock of a violent awakening when the front door swung open and Mr. Tabor hurried out to meet us, followed by Doctor Reid.

The fairy-tale burst like a bubble, and the actuality of all that those two men stood for in my last few days and all the days to come drowned me in a breath. I got down mechanically to help them. I suppose we must have spoken a few words while Lady was getting out of the car and Mrs. Carucci was helped down and half-carried into the house between the two men. But I do not remember. I remember only the three figures in the doorway, the drooping woman, with their arms about her. Then the door closed, and Lady stood alone upon the steps above me. Her eyes were larger for the shadows

under them; but there was no bloom upon her, and I wondered why I had thought her really beautiful.

"I'll take the car around and leave it," I said. "Good-by."

"You're a strange man," she muttered; then with her sudden smile, "Aren't you coming in to breakfast? You've had an adventure, and you ought to be hungry."

Her tone jarred. "Never mind that," I said bitterly. "I was to go this morning, and I'm going. There's still plenty of time for my train. The sooner it's over with, the better."

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"Mean? I mean what you told me—and one thing more, I understand now what you meant yesterday, because I found your marriage notice in an old paper."

"What marriage notice? I don't understand."

"Yours; on the twenty-sixth of May three years ago, to Doctor Reid. That's all. I beg your pardon."

The color came back into her face; and under the trouble of her brows I thought she almost smiled.

"That was my sister," she said quietly. "My name's Margaret; I thought you knew."

CHAPTER XI

EXPRESSIONS OF THE FAMILY AND IMPRESSIONS OF THE PRESS

WITH that, all the strangeness of the day, all the feeling of moving in an unnatural world which had hung about me since the dawn, blew away like the shadow of smoke. It was a summer morning of breezes and cool lights, garrulous with innumerable birds; and I was standing with my feet upon solid earth, glad beyond measure for the knowledge that I was a fool. The very idea of it had been absurd; and best of all, there were still things to be done.

"God be thanked," said I to Lady.

She smiled down at me very sweetly. "So much as that? It doesn't sound as if you appreciated Walter, Mr. Crosby. I can easily imagine a worse husband myself."

"I don't mean that," said I hastily. "At least—"

"At least you may as well come in to breakfast."

"I should say he might," Mr. Tabor cried behind her. "I have Sheila safely stowed away, and now I must make sure of you."

I must have looked nearly as puzzled as I felt.

"You see, Mr. Crosby, I owe you an apology. You helped us out of a tight place last night, and we are deeply in your debt; your coals of fire are upon all our heads."

"But—" I said, and hesitated.

"'But;' but that's what I say. I owe you an apology. We fired you out the other night because we had to. We had something going on here then which we did not care to have a stranger mixed up in. We had every regard for you—but, after all, you were an outsider, and we simply could not risk you.' So we threw you out. You understand that I am speaking to you now in confidence, and because I take you to be a gallant gentleman. Neither can I explain. Of course, the explanation I did give you was a sheer bit of bluff. I know nothing against you whatever; but you forced me into saying something, and that was the most effective thing I could think of to say to a man of your kind. Believe me, I hated to do it. Will you shake hands?"

By that time I had got my breath again. "I will

do more," I said laughing: "I will congratulate you. You are one of the ablest and most convincingly finished—a—"

"Liars," he prompted.

"That I ever had the privilege of meeting," I concluded unblushingly.

Mr. Tabor clapped me on the shoulder. "Thank you. I am honored. We shall get along very well, I promise you. Lady, lead the way where breakfast waits; this low fellow and I will follow."

So the three of us made a very comfortable meal. Mrs. Tabor was not at table, and I supposed her breakfasting in bed, if indeed she were awake; and Doctor Reid, it appeared, was yet busy with his patient. We told Mr. Tabor our adventure, turn and turn about, and I found myself listening to Lady's warm praise of what she was pleased to call my resource, with a tingling at the heart-strings. When we had done, and Mr. Tabor had listened very carefully, he sat frowning before him for a while; and I thought that he saw more in the recital than did we ourselves.

"Well," he said at last, "I suppose all's well that ends well; but I do hope that it has all ended. Are you quite sure, Mr. Crosby, that nobody got a look

at you or Lady or the car who would be likely to have mind enough to give the affair clearly to the newspapers?"

"I'm pretty sure of it, sir," I answered. "The only people who got a good look at anything were the little group of the usual slum roughs; and from their general air and the hour of the night, the probability is that there wasn't one of them that was not pretty well befuddled."

"How about the police?"

"I didn't get a good look at the police myself; but I think that we were too fast for them. You see, Miss Tabor had the number off, and we started with considerable speed. They may have a general idea of the car, but I think that is about all."

"I wonder what Carucci will do?" mused Miss Tabor. "He looked rather unpleasant on the sidewalk."

"He will have to say something," I said uneasily. "He couldn't have careened around there very long without falling into the hands of the police; and they would certainly arrest him. They usually arrest everybody in sight when one person has got away and they don't know quite what the trouble is."

Mr. Tabor nodded. "Yes, they doubtless have

him safe behind the bars by now; but I don't think that will hurt us any. Personally, I can imagine no place where I should rather have him, unless it were far upon or under the deep blue sea."

"But, father dear, that is terrible. If they have him in jail, he will have to talk, and he will be blamed for that poor wrecked room and everything. He'll have to give some explanation to save himself; and he must know that we are the only people that would be likely to come for Sheila in an automobile."

"The Italian, my dear, is not that breed of man. We may be very glad for once that he is an Italian. There is only about one thing in the world that a man of his race and class will not do—and that is, talk to the police. It is part of his faith not to. He will either invent some all-enfolding lie that tells nothing whatsoever, or else he will not say a word."

"But he must have struck her *with* something," said Lady. "Suppose they should find *that*, father. He'd have to tell them to save himself."

I slipped my hand into my pocket. "I don't think they will find it," said I, and showed the thing above the table. Lady shuddered, and I quickly returned it to my pocket.

"Just what you would expect," said Mr. Tabor, "and if you had left it, I am afraid Carucci would have had some difficulty in explaining things. A marlinespike, isn't it? Poor Sheila was really very fortunate that he didn't stab her with the sharp end. A stab would have been more in his line—the beast. As it is, I don't believe the police will ever find out any of the truth of the matter."

"Well, even if they do," said I, "it won't do any great amount of harm. They might arrest me for speeding, but that would be about all. No one in his senses would be likely to accuse us of murder."

"My good young man," Mr. Tabor answered, "they absolutely mustn't dream that we had any hand in it at all. They mustn't even hear of us. And neither must anybody else."

Lady sighed wearily. "I'm sure that it will be all right, father," she said.

"The chauffeur will be quiet for the sake of his own character," I added. "He's as anxious to avoid any connection with it as we are. And as for me, sir, you may be sure that nothing shall leak out through any indiscretion of mine."

Mr. Tabor pushed aside his finger-bowl. "I understand that, Mr. Crosby—and I appreciate how

uncomfortable it must be for you to act in the dark. Believe me, I regret very much the necessity for it, and appreciate your generosity."

Lady was looking at us, and I colored. "I'm very much at your service, Mr. Tabor," I said.

"You may perhaps wonder what this Italian has to do with us at all. That, at least, I can tell you. He was a sailor on one of my ships in years past, and when the girls were—" He paused. "When Lady was a little girl, you understand, we took quite a large wage for Mrs. Tabor's health. Sheila was her nurse—and a very pretty slip of an Irish lass she was. Naturally we took her along, and the rest is one of those whimsies of fate that you can never explain. This Carucci fell in love with her; what attracted *her* was more than any one of us could imagine, but at any rate she married him. Married him as soon as we got back to New York. Well, after that things gradually went wrong. The man got a taste for drink, which is unusual—the Italians aren't a drunken people—and although I kept him on against my captain's advice for Sheila's sake, in the end I had to let him go. From time to time, when there has been trouble, we have taken Sheila into our family to give the poor woman some pro-

tection, though her loyalty makes it pretty hard to do much for her. Carucci, however, resents our interference, and pretends that we force her from him. He is becoming very troublesome."

Mr. Tabor had lighted a cigar, puffing it slowly throughout his story. He talked very easily; and I was ashamed of myself for wondering whether he was telling all the truth. Perhaps my encounter with him had made me suspicious, but I could not forget that Doctor Reid had given Carucci money. I felt uncomfortable; and with the mental discomfort, I realized that I had been through a sleepless and violent night, and that I was very tired. I must have shown some shadow of this sudden weariness, for Lady rose from her chair decidedly and stretched out her hand.

"Now you must go back to your room and get some sleep, Mr. Crosby. You can come back this evening if you like—we should have the evening papers by then, and we shall see how much notice has been taken of us."

"Oh, I'm all right," I protested.

"You are tired out," said Lady, "I know. I'm tired myself, and I—" she stopped, flushing.

Her father was looking at us with half a frown,

and it was to him that I turned. "Well, then, I'm off," said I, "but I'll be back to help you dissect the associated press."

I had not thought that I could sleep during the day, or even rest, except from worry. But the strain, and perhaps even more, the relief of the last twenty-four hours, must have relaxed me more than I knew; for I did sleep soundly until late in the afternoon. When I returned to the Tabors in the evening, Mrs. Tabor was still invisible; and the others were seated about the big lamp in the living-room, busy over a bale of last editions. The floor was strewn with open sheets from which wild pictures and wilder words stared upward.

"Come in and be thrilled," was Lady's greeting. "You're an unknown slayer and a mysterious criminal. We seem to be sufficiently notorious, but thus far we remain unidentified."

"Outrageous, the tone of these things," growled her father. "I never realized it before. They haven't got our names, though."

As for Doctor Reid, his mind was so concentrated upon the matter in hand that he barely looked up for a mechanical salutation and plunged again into the abyss of journalism.

"How is Mrs. Tabor?" I said, "and Mrs. Carucci—is she badly hurt?"

"Oh, mother's perfectly well. She was tired a little after sitting up for us, and went to bed early, that's all. And Sheila is doing splendidly."

Doctor Reid came abruptly to the surface. "Fine. Fine. Very rapid recovery. Blow only glanced along the bone. No fracture, no concussion. Strong vitality, too. Astonishing what resistance those unhygienic people have. Soon be all over it."

"Look here," Lady broke in, "here's a bird's-eye view of the tenement house, with—no, it's an X-ray view, the walls are transparent. 'Arrow points to room in which Mrs. Carucci was discovered; cross marks location of blood-stain; inner room with disordered bed; dotted line shows how the body was carried down-stairs.' See, they've got little pictures of us carrying her down, on each floor. And here's the automobile starting away with me leaning out of the window."

"And vignettes of Carucci and the policeman, and a fancy sketch of Sheila," said I. "Like those early Italian paintings, where they have two or three successive scenes on one canvas."

"This is about the fullest account, too. It's pretty

nearly all here, except who we are. 'Carucci is in custody.' Do you suppose they interviewed him?"

"I doubt it," said her father. "It was probably the tenants and the men in the street."

"Listen to this," put in Doctor Reid, with an indignant snort. "Outrageous, the flippant way this sheet takes everything. Send a clever young ignoramus to write up important surgical cases. Poke fun at every thing. Listen:

"'Antonio Carucci is a true son of Neptune, born, as his name implies, under the shadow of Vesuvius. He goes down to the sea in ships; and, like all good mariners since old Noah himself, returns with a throat parched by many days of briny breezes. Last night, being new landed from a long cruise, Giuseppe sought solace in flowing flagons of Chianti, until, when he tacked through the breakers of River Street toward the beacon light which his lass kept ever burning in her wifely window, he had almost forgotten his own name amid the rosy aromas of his national potation. Arrived at his domicile, Geronimo fell into a deep sleep, with a sinuous string of spaghetti clasped firmly in his corded hand; and as he slept, he dreamed a dream.' Then it goes on to treat the whole affair as a hallucination, distort-

ing or evading all the facts. Ridiculous account. Rubbish. Perfect rubbish."

"At least, it can do us no harm," said Mr. Tabor, while Lady and I exchanged mirthful glances. "The more the whole affair is belittled, the less danger there is of any serious gossip or investigation. What I don't like is this sort of thing." He crumpled a red and black page across his knee. "There is no substance in it, but it might stir up trouble.

"Last night the perpetrators of a brutal and mysterious crime escaped without a struggle.

"They abducted a poor woman, a wife and mother, from her home. They left behind them destruction and a red stain upon the threshold.

"How did these wretches escape? Why were they not apprehended?

"The answer is simple: They were rich.

"A swift automobile awaited them. The police were powerless to stop them as they sped away.

"If a poor laboring man, crazed by sorrow, commits a crime, the utmost rigor of the law awaits him. He can not purchase a great machine to speed his flight.

"Neither can he purchase the machinery of jus-

tice, the skill of eminent lawyers, the shifts and delays of appeal. He must pay the penalty.

“But the rich man pays only his myrmidons. The dastards who committed last night’s atrocity vanished behind a cloud of gold.

“Shall we permit these things to be so? Shall we allow the wealthy to avoid those punishments which we impose upon the poor? *This means you.*

“They deem themselves already secure; but though they exhaust every device of plutocracy, they shall be brought to justice in the end.

“We say to them, *We know you, and we will find you yet.*”

“That sounds threatening,” I said. “But, after all, isn’t it just as empty as the rest? People read that same shriek three hundred and sixty-five days in the year, and nothing much ever happens. Do you think there will actually be any extra search because of that?”

“I’m not so sure,” Mr. Tabor answered. “It may not matter to the police, but the paper itself is quite capable of seeking us out. Indeed, I think we are really most likely to have trouble, not from the authorities, but from reporters.”

“That’s it,” Reid added. “You’ve put your finger

on it. That's what we've got to look out for. Reporters."

"But what can they do?" asked Lady. "Suppose some reporter comes here; we won't tell him anything, and nobody else has anything to tell."

"My dear child, you haven't the slightest idea what a newspaper investigation means. If they once get a hint of who we are we shall have a dozen men and women here, questioning everybody in sight—the neighbors, the servants—trying in every possible way to get at something which can be made to look sensational, and printing conjectures if they can't find facts."

"Besides," said Doctor Reid, "the poking and prying would be just as bad as the publicity. Let's look at the case: 'Tisn't that we're trying to conceal a specific fact; we're trying to avoid gossip, trying to avoid appearing in any way unusual, trying to seem like other people. We are like other people, except—well, now, here's the situation. Three points: First, we mustn't be bothered by the police; secondly, we mustn't get into the papers; thirdly, we mustn't be investigated or talked about."

"We're tolerably safe from the first," said I, "if Mr. Tabor is right."

"Good. Safe from the first. Then we'll pass right on to the next. Now let's see what the papers will try to do. Their whole purpose—"

The tiny tinkle of a bell rippled from overhead. Reid was on his feet in a flash and started for the door, Lady following. I had risen, too, startled at the tense faces of the rest.

"Don't you come, father dear," she said, turning for an instant in the doorway. "It's probably only for Sheila. We'll call if we need you." I heard their careful footsteps on the stairs.

Mr. Tabor had settled back into his chair, the paper lying on his knee, his head forward, and the muscles of his neck rigid with listening. Somehow in the sharp sidelong light he looked much older than I had seen him: more conquerable, more marked by time and trial; and with the listless hands and deep eyes of his night's unrest went a strange look of being physically lighter and less virile than the formidable old man I had begun to know. And as the noiseless minutes went by I grew presumptuously sorry for him.

After a little he relaxed himself with an evident effort and turned to me with his careful smile.

"A family man gets very fussy, Mr. Crosby," he

said. "You learn so many things outside yourself to worry about."

"Hadn't I better go and leave you all free?" I asked. "It's getting time, anyway."

"I wish you'd stay," he growled, "it's easier to wait when there are two."

I sat down again and tried to talk; but neither of us could keep any movement in the conversation. We fell into long silences, through which the weight of the silent anxiety above pressed down like a palpable thing. At last Lady's voice called softly, and we rose.

"Don't tell me anything," I said, as I opened the front door, "but if I can be of any earthly use, I will."

"Thank you, Mr. Crosby," he answered, shaking my hand slowly, "I know that."

CHAPTER XII

AN AMATEUR MAN-HUNT WHEREIN MY OWN POSITION IS SOMEWHAT ANXIOUS

SHEILA herself opened the door for me. "You're Mr. Crosby, I suppose," she said, with that elusive reminiscence of a brogue that may not be put into words. "Sure, I'm obliged to you. An awful night I must have been."

"You were in leather," I grinned. "Where is Miss Tabor?"

"She's in the library, sir, with a young gentleman. There's a letter here for you." She pointed to a mail-strewn table near the door. "Sure enough there was one—from Bob Ainslie, I judged, by the scrawled address."

A young gentleman in the library—who on earth could he be, and what did the fellow want?

"I've been three days finding you, you see," he was saying, "but I guess there's no doubt I've got

you right. Now, I don't want to make any trouble—”

The rest of the sentence was too low to hear. I had been ripping absently at the letter, and now I glanced down at it. Then I stared with startled eyes and turned over the envelop to re-read the address. It was a dirty envelop, of the same shape as my own which still lay upon the table, and addressed not to me, but to Mr. Tabor. I carefully replaced the single sheet and as carefully stowed the whole in an inner pocket. It seemed a matter for Mr. Tabor's eyes alone.

Lady's voice came clearly through the curtained door. I thought it sounded a little strained.

“Mr. Maclean, I don't see why you should come to me at all about this matter. If we have a dark green automobile, so have ten thousand people. And your story of millionaire kidnappers on an errand of violence is hardly the kind of thing—if this is a joke, it seems to me in very poor taste.”

“It won't quite do, Miss Tabor,” the man answered. “'Tisn't a joke, and maybe the best thing you can do is to be frank with me.”

“What am I to be frank about? You see, Mr. Maclean, the last man that came in to talk frankly

wanted to sell us silver polish. Excuse me, but you have really nothing to sell, have you?"

He laughed, humorously embarrassed. "Why, no. At least, I don't want to sell you anythin'. Don't you sometimes call yourself Lady?"

"Mr. Maclean!"

"I only mean," he hurried on, "that I found your telegram on the floor. 'Coming for you in the car,' you said. Honestly, don't you think we're wastin' time?"

Lady gave a little cry, and with two strides I was at the door and had jerked aside the curtain. "If this fellow is annoying you—" I began.

The two were standing before me, Lady leaning back against the table as if at bay. The man was taller than I, and thin with vibrant energy. He turned half about at my voice.

"Jumping June-bugs!" he cried airily. "It's Crosby!"

"No other, Mac," I laughed. "What in the world are you ragging Miss Tabor about?"

Maclean blushed. "See here, Laurie," he stammered, "I'm a newspaper man, you see? What's more, I'm thought by some to be a good one. I've got the goods on this story, and you people ought

to come across. It won't hurt you any. Were you the cheese that lugged the murdered scrubess down three flights of stairs?"

Lady looked at me imploringly. But the cat was so far out of the bag by now that I had to use my judgment. "I was," I answered. "What are you going to make out of it?"

"Now you're talkin'. Tell me the story."

"Not for publication," said I, with a glance at Lady, "because there's no story to publish. In the first place, you're barking up the right tree, but it's a mighty little one. In the second place, I've fallen so low as to be an assistant professor with a dignified reputation. Neither Miss Tabor nor I is going to be head-lined to make a journalistic holiday; and if we were, you wouldn't write it."

Maclean gnawed a bony knuckle, and pondered. "Darn you," he said. "Beg your pardon, Miss Tabor—I s'pose I can't, after that. But you'll admit I had the goods. I don't see how I can go back with nothing. They send me out on these things because I generally make good, you see?"

"Your imagination always was your greatest charm. Get to work, and use it. Miss Tabor, this human ginlet is 'Stride' Maclean. Let me give him

a decent introduction: he probably slighted the matter. This gentleman, for he was a gentleman before he became a star reporter, had the honor to belong to my class, and he sings a beautiful tenor. Naturally he was popular; he may even have friends yet. We'll tell him all about it, and then perhaps we'll drown him. One crime more or less matters little to people of our dye."

Maclean scowled at me and laughed.

"Well, it all amounts to this. First, nobody has been murdered—as yet!" and I frowned at him. "Secondly, nobody has been kidnapped; lastly, it isn't a story, unless you are on the comic supplement. This Mrs. Carucci used to be Miss Tabor's nurse, and when Antonio beats her up too frequent, she comes up here for a vacation. Well, we were late going for her because the car broke down; so when we got there, he had just smitten her over the brow and retired to a well-earned slumber. Then the neighbors got inquisitive, and we ran away to escape precisely that immediate fame you were planning to give us. That's all. I will only add that branderine revived this wash-lady and we can prove it."

"Oh, fudge," said Maclean, "I can't write any-

thing out of that at all. We had it before, all but you people. I hate to go back without a story, too."

The front door clicked, and I heard Mr. Tabor's voice in the hall.

"Wait a minute," I said, with a sudden inspiration, "perhaps I can dig up another story for you. But I'll have to see Mr. Tabor first."

I found Mr. Tabor in his study, glooming over a paper. "What is it?" he asked, half rising. "Is anything the matter?"

"I don't know," I said. "I opened a letter of yours by mistake, and it looked as if I had better bring it to you myself."

He took the dirty envelop gingerly, and drew out the inclosure. Across the top was a badly drawn human hand smudged in with lead-pencil. Below this ran an almost illegible scrawl.

"If yu dont giv her back she wil be taken."

"What on earth does that mean?" I asked.

Mr. Tabor knit his white brows. "It begins to look as though Carucci had been let out of jail for want of proof against him. Evidently he is going into the black hand business. I suppose a demand for money will come next."

"But who is 'her'—his wife?"

"Of course," he answered quickly. "Who else could it possibly be?" Then, more thoughtfully, "I don't like the fellow around, but I hardly see how to get rid of him. We can't appear in court against him; and money would only make him want more."

"Mr. Tabor," I said, "there's a man named Maclean in the other room, who went to college with me. He is a reporter—"

"A *what?*"

"A reporter. He found Miss Tabor's telegram—we were careless not to have looked for it—and that gave him enough to work on until he found us. However, you needn't have any uneasiness about him. He has promised me not to use the story."

"Good, Crosby, very good. Well, what about him?"

"I only thought, sir, that if he would help me, we might be able to find Carucci, and scare the life out of him so that he will keep away. He can't be certain that he hasn't killed his wife, and we can threaten him with that. If he's out of jail, you certainly don't want him about. And Maclean would help, I think, for the story in it. I'm sure that we could trust him not to bring us in."

"Very well. Suppose that you try your hand at it.

Only you mustn't go to making inquiries that will mix us up in the matter."

"I'll be careful, sir," I answered.

When I spread the note out before Mac he sniffed and wrinkled his nose.

"Well?" I said.

"Nothin'. There ain't any black hand. It's all dope. Just a signature that any dago uses, like 'unknown friend.'"

"You ought to know," said I, "but here we are with this man hanging around. Take it or leave it. I should think there might be a story in it merely from his side, now that you can really connect him with the assault. Anyhow, I'm going after him."

"All right," Mac said, "I'm with you. Good afternoon, Miss Tabor."

"Good-by," she called after us; and I thought that she watched us from the window.

We pursued a trolley car and settled down panting on the rear seat. Maclean lay back in a meditative silence, his hands thrust deep into his trousers pockets, his shoulders hunched forward and his hat on the back of his head. Staring before him where his feet loomed up in the distance. At the inn he suddenly straightened himself and slid off the car.

"I thought we were going up to town?" I said as I followed.

He glowered hollowly at me above a cavernous grin. "We are. But not in those flannels or that nice new college rah-rah shirt. We'd have the whole place wonderin' what you wanted, and the mothers showin' their little ones how a real gentleman ought to look."

"But you're respectable enough," I protested, laughing. "Are we both going to be disguised?"

"Disguise nothin'. You just want to cut out the comedy-chorus-man, you see? Put on a jersey, or anyhow a collar that don't meet in the middle, an' old shoes. Me, I look low-life anyway."

I rebelled when he rolled my gray suit into a ball and jumped on it, in the interest of realism. But at last we got started. On the car, Mac unfolded his plan of campaign.

"This guinea didn't put the cops on, because he wanted to get you himself, you see? He's out for the money—the mazume. So he beats it up here and drops Tabor a love-letter. *But*, he's just out of the jug, you see? An' he knows the force'll watch out for hi.n. So he'll mix up with a lot of other dagoes, an' maybe get a job daytimes, so's to have an excuse

for bein' here. Well, he don't love work, but he does love booze; an' he gets through at five P. M. with an awful thirst. So we'll hunt for him first where they sell the demon rum."

He dived into the police station, leaving me standing outside, and presently emerged with the lust of the hunter in his eye.

"I've located every cheap red-eye emporium in our beautiful little city. Now you spot all the fruit stores an' shoeblacks an' guinea grocers we pass, an' we'll take them later."

"You'll have to be careful how you inquire after him," I said.

"I ain't. I'm lookin' for his cousin, Guiseppe, that looks like him. Blue, an' hairy, an' tattoo-marks on his hands, you said. Come on."

We went through two or three saloons, where Maclean loitered what seemed to me an unconscionable time, weaving into an elaborate discussion of things in general, some curiosity as to the whereabouts of an Italian debtor whose name and personal affairs varied surprisingly without in the least altering his description. I knew that Mac had an inventive genius, but I was astonished at its fertility of detail.

"I didn't expect anythin' in those joints," he confided, as we pushed through a swinging door. "They're a peg too good for him. I just wanted to hear myself talk, an' get up my speed. Now, this place looks better. You take seltzer after this, or a cigar. Their snake-medicine'd poison you. Me, I'm immune."

It was low-ceiled and smoky, and full of large cuspidors and small tables. The bottles were fewer, and glittered with gilt ornamentation, like the bottles in a barber shop. A veil of dingy mosquito netting protected the mirrors. The bartender was blue-shaven and deliberate, with a neat trick of sliding bottles and glasses, without upsetting them, several feet along the dark, dull surface of the bar.

"Giovanni Scalpiccio been in to-night?" Mac asked casually, after ten minutes of excise problems and the pure food law.

"If he has, he ain't left his visiting-card," returned the bartender. "What do you think I am—delegate from the organ-grinders' union? I don't keep tab on every Italian dago that comes into the place. What kind of a lookin' feller is he?"

"I don't know. They all look alike to me. Oh, a monkey-faced guy, all tattooed—works up the line

here a little. His wife owes me on a sewin'-machine. Told me he was down here."

"Seems to me I seen that feller," the bartender reflected. "Talks all chokey, don't he? Yes, he was in to-night, about half an hour ago. Made an argument becuz I wouldn't hang him up—if that's him."

I waited, shuffling with impatience, while Maclean bought cigars and slowly changed the subject. Then I burst out of doors so hurriedly that I collided with two harmless-looking individuals who were coming in.

"What shall we do now?" I demanded.

"Take a cigarette instead o' that Simsbury cabbage, an' cool off. If it's our guinea, he's huntin' free drinks all up the street. We'll run into him the next two or three places, somewhere."

In the next we drew a blank, but in the one after that we learned that our man had just left; and to my disgust, were forced to listen to a circumstantial account of his pleas and expedients in quest of liquor on credit. I was more certain than ever that it was Carucci himself, and hurried Mac on to the next saloon. To my surprise, he led the way to a table

in the farthest corner and sat down with his back to the door.

"You look here, Laurie," he muttered, leaning across the table as the bartender went back for our order. "There's more doing in this than we're wise to. Did you see those two ginks that we ran into in the door back there?"

"No," said I, "what about them?"

"Well, that's what little Mac wants to know, the first thing he does. They're after the same dago, or else they're after us, you see? Every joint we've been in, those two float along after a couple of minutes, all cagey, not seein' anybody. An' they look like guineas themselves. There they come now."

He spoke without turning his head, and I looked past him at the two men entering the room. They were small, sallow, and respectable, one of them decidedly fat; and they looked to me like small Italian tradesmen in their Sunday or traveling clothes. They stood at the bar, talking between themselves with rapid speech and gesture, and paying not the smallest attention to us. They did not even glance around the room, so absorbed were they in their own conversation.

"You're crazy," said I, "they don't even know we're here."

"All right. Maybe you think I've covered police stuff five years without knowin' when I'm being gum-shoed. I've seen that fat bologna before, somewhere, too. I ain't after a martyr's crown. Now, I tell you what you do. You pike out an' go back to that first place where we got the scent, an' wait around till I come. If they follow you there, you duck for the busy street, an' go home. If they don't I'll be along myself pretty quick. I want to know who they're after, you see?"

"What do you think they are?"

"I don't think yet: I'm goin' to know. Now you beat it—an' for Heaven's sake, jolly the barkeep for all you know how, an' try not to look as if you were wanted for arson."

I obeyed, wondering if Maclean's instinct for sensation had got the better of him. The two men took no notice whatever as I passed them, but went on with their talk. I heard enough to gather that they were discussing the price of butter. Yet, despite my skepticism, I walked up the street with something the sensation of having just passed a small boy with an ominous snowball. The other

saloon was fairly crowded, and it was some minutes before I found myself drinking a very evil beer.

"Say," said the bartender, sliding my change down to me, "you're the guy that asked about the guinea, ain't yer?"

"Why, my friend was," I said carelessly. "Has he been back? He owes him for a —"

"That'll do all right to tell." He leaned across the bar, dropping his voice, "The reason I asked yer's because there's two other fellers after him, too. Guess *they* sold him a grand piano, likely."

He moved along to attend to other customers, leaving me staring excitedly about the room. A moment later, he came back again, swabbing the bespattered bar with a towel. As he passed me without a look, he turned his thumb over and motioned, as if the gesture were part of his work, toward the corner by the door. There sat the two little men at a table, still absorbed in discussion.

My throat became suddenly dry. I had started out hunting with the hounds to find myself running with the hare; and the notion of being shadowed by unknown Italians was more melodramatic than agreeable. With a confused memory of all the detective stories I had ever read seething in my mind

I lounged toward the door, gained the street, and started off on a run. I turned the first corner, ran half way down the block, then walked quietly back. The two men were nowhere to be seen. As I stood on the corner, one of them, the thinner one, came slowly out of the saloon, pausing to light a cigarette, and strolled casually away from me up the street. It seemed impossible that he had any interest in me, but I would be sure. I followed carefully after him for half a dozen blocks. He neither looked around nor altered his pace in the least; and where we crossed the car tracks, I stood and watched him go steadily on out of sight. Then I jumped on a passing car, congratulating myself on having carried out my instructions, even though they had been rather unnecessary. And on the outskirts of the town, I stepped off to wait for my own car. Just as it turned the corner, some one touched me on the arm.

"Pardon; have you a match?"

I swallowed my heart down again with a gulp. The fat Italian scratched the match on his shoe, and breathed a soft cloud of smoke.

"Thank you, sare. Now tell me," he took me

, confidentially by the elbow, "w'at is it you want with Antonio Carucci?"

My car was passing. "I never heard of him," said I as blankly as I could. "You've got the wrong man."

"Excuse me, sare. No mistake at all." He smiled deprecatingly.

The car was almost beyond reach. "All right," I said. "Come in here, and if you can show any right to ask, I'll tell you." Then, as we turned together toward the hotel behind us, I flung him on his face with a sudden wrench, and sprinted after the car. As I clung gasping on the back platform, I heard a shout, and saw him following at a waddling run, waving his arm angrily. The car stopped; and for a sickening instant, I thought that my last device had been in vain. But at that moment a couple of men ran from the sidewalk behind my pursuer and caught him by the coat. The three stood in the middle of the street, wrangling and gesticulating; and the conductor, with a disgusted jerk of the bell, started the car again.

Later in the evening, Maclean called me up on the telephone.

"Say, you made a pretty good getaway for an amateur. Did you see us stop your fat friend?"

"What? Was that you?"

"Sure was it; me and the other one. Now listen. Hello! Can you hear? Those two parties are plain-clothes men after the other party. That's what they let him out for, to watch him, you see? I'm with 'em now. You people better just lie as low as you can, and do nothin' at all, if you want to keep out of it. And if I get wise to anythin' I'll call you up. Good-by."

And his receiver went up with a cluck.

CHAPTER XIII

THE PRESENCE IN THE ROOM

I WONDER how we shall come out of it all," said Lady.

She was sitting at the big dining-table before a treasury of bowls and vases, with a many-colored heap of cut flowers reflected from the polished wood and the drops and splashes of spilled water. In the open window, Sheila's canary was whistling merrily down a deep shaft of sunlight; and from the garden outside came the purr of a lawn-mower and the cool freshness of new-cut grass. Across the still dimness of the house behind us, the further windows gave upon squares of blinding green. Mr. Tabor and the doctor had gone to the city upon some business of our common defense. The house hung sleepily at the heart of the hot forenoon, very quiet and open; overhead, Sheila was shuffling about, with a crooning of soft Irish minors.

"It seems to be just a case of waiting," said I,

"but the newspaper excitement is blowing over already, and we can trust Maclean to keep us clear. As for the detectives, if they arrest Carucci again so much the better, provided we don't appear in it. He'd be no more likely to talk then, than before."

"I wonder if we can trust Mr. Maclean."

"I'm rather sure of Mac," I said.

"It isn't that exactly; I'm not doubting your friend; but even so, he knows—knows absolutely that we were involved in that New York disturbance the other night. Think of all we did to keep you from even suspecting something far less exciting. And he's a reporter after all, and in no way one of us. Of course he's honorable, but—he's working up the Carucci side of it. I'm afraid of what he may bring out, perfectly removed from us in itself, but that might suggest— Oh, you see what I mean."

"I wish I could hear from him," I said. "I want to know what's happening. But honestly, I think I took the safe way with him, whatever happens. It's much better to have him know what he mustn't say than to have him guessing all sorts of things with no reason for not airing them."

"Yes; but I wish nobody knew anything. We took a terrible risk."

"I did, you mean. If I spoke beyond my authority, the fault is certainly mine. Still, I'm not sure that I'm sorry, and I won't plead that I meant well."

She searched carefully through the heap of flowers. "No, you're one of us now—in a way. What you did was ours, not your own— Oh, I'm sure it's all right anyway, and you acted wisely. Only I'm nervous about it, I suppose." She leaned back wearily. "I do get so tired of all this unnaturalness. Why can't God let us live like other people?"

It was the first time I had ever heard her complain; the first open confession of the weary weight that had lain so long upon her eyes; and it shook me so that for a little I did not trust myself to speak, for fear I should not speak quietly enough. She sat silent, the light gone out of her as I had seen it go on that first day, her hand twisting listlessly at her chain.

"I only wish I could be more use," I said at last.

She turned half toward me: "Sometimes I wish you could know," she said and her eyes of a sudden glimmered and grew wet.

That was more than I could bear. "Lady," I cried, "why can't I know? What difference does it make? Oh, I'm not questioning you; I don't want

to satisfy my mere mind with your mystery. I don't care what the explanation is; I'm not after answers to questions. But it can't matter to us, whatever it is. Nothing can. When I thought you were married, that didn't change anything really. It meant that I must go away, that I must never come back to you perhaps—but even that was a little thing. And nothing else in the world could be as bad as that even.”

“Don't. Please don't make it any worse—oh, stop telling me—*listen!*” She caught herself suddenly, holding up her hand. The canary poured out a long trill that sounded like tiny laughter.

“Sheila,” I said. “She's been walking about up there all the morning. You've got so that this nightmare doesn't give you an hour's peace. I don't care what it is. You know that. You know that I couldn't be troubled by anything behind you or about you. I never shall want to know. But I want the whole right to stand in front of you and fight it, to take you away from this place and make you forget and be alive. And you know that no reason—”

I do not know what stopped me. The canary was silent, and the clock ticked twice across the hush. Then from the floor above a horrible scream cut

through me like a frozen knife; then another, mixed with a heavy clatter of feet.

We both sprang for the stairs, Lady a little before me. As I tried to pass her at the foot, she caught me by the arm and clung desperately to me, her breath coming hard and fast.

"No, you mustn't. Don't come, do you hear? Wait until I call you." The dry tension in her voice was not a thing to disregard blindly. I waited with my foot on the lowest step, my heart staggering in my ears, while she sped above out of sight. The screams had broken into a choking wail of utter terror. A door slammed. Sheila's strong voice rang out angrily, then sank under a broken clamor of stumbling steps. A man leaped roughly down the first few stairs, stopped and turned as I bent forward just enough to get a half glimpse of coarse clothes and clumsy feet, and sprang back again, trampling across the upper hall. I hesitated an instant, then followed him three steps at a stride. Whatever happened, I would not leave the three women alone with him.

In the hall I paused, for it was empty. From the front room which I took to be Mrs. Tabor's came voices, Lady's full and sweet, her mother's fright-

ened and childish, and the resonant whisper of Mrs. Carucci.

"He was here, I tell you, Lady." Mrs. Tabor's treble rose above the murmur, and as suddenly ceased. I looked about me, uncertain. I had only been above stairs once before, and then at night. My room then had been at the rear of the house, with the whole length of hall between it and Mrs. Tabor's; and the stair-head where I now stood was an even midway between the two. I felt vaguely ill at ease. I knew that I should look for the intruder, and look for him upon the instant; but something held me back—perhaps a feeling that I had little right to blunder about upon this floor, to stumble perhaps into Lady's own room, an intruder upon her intimate privacy. This, however, was no time for doubtful sentiment. Minutes were passing, and the man must be found. I was sure that he was still in the house. Very carefully I tiptoed down the hall toward the room that I had occupied. Fate might grant that he was hidden there, and so I should have to search only where I had already seen. But before I reached my door, I paused before another. It was slightly ajar; and half instinctively I pushed it open.

In the doorway I stood looking about me. This was Lady's room, after all. A deep bed stood in the corner against the outer wall to my left; and close by, a little table with a book face-down upon it. A dress of some filmy blue stuff lay across the foot of the bed, and from beneath peeped a pair of little slippers. My face burned at my intrusion, but I held my ground. The sunlight fell heavily through the two closed windows, across the wide rug, and almost to my feet. In the outer right-hand corner was a small desk. A low table, piled with dainty feminine miscellany, stood in the center of the room. A riding-crop lay carelessly across it; and I remembered absently that the Tabors had no horses. I stepped within, and cautiously closed the door behind me. Then I knew. There was some one in the room. It was unmistakable, this feeling of a presence. I listened closely, but there was not a sound. The skin crawled at my temples, and I could feel the stir of hair upon my scalp, the strange primal bristling that has stirred man conscious of the unseen, since the beginning of time. For a heartbeat, I stood there with much of the clutching terror of a child, a child willing enough to face a fight, but hesitating before the sudden mystery of a place that

he must pass. Then I got hold of myself, and crossed over to the bed. I knew that he was not under it; but I looked to see. Behind me something tinkled sweetly, and I sprang to my feet with every muscle tense. Across the room and above the little desk, hung a circle of bronze with tiny bronze pendants shaped like birds and fish and leaves swinging from it on silken threads—such a thing as the Japanese hang above the bed of a child to ward off evil and to chime with every breath of air. I glanced uneasily at closed door and windows as I started across the room. Upon the big central table before me lay a thin film of dust, invisible save for the contrast of a streak across its edge where something had brushed along. Tiptoeing around it, I glanced down at the little desk and the half-written sheet upon it. "Lady, dearest," it began; and I gripped my hands at my sides. This was not Lady's room, but— One of the long outer curtains of the window shivered—shivered humanly with a trembling behind it; and I reached out my hand to grip through the fold the solid shoulder of a man.

In a sudden warm rush of relief, I struck at him savagely through the curtain, shouting as I struck. Then I gripped the curtain about, throwing all my

weight against him and crushing him back against the side of the embrasure. He grunted, and an arm tore itself free from the folds above my bent head. Then there was a splash of light and a curious sharp smell that seemed to come from inside my own brain. And then nothing.

I knew that I had not lain there long, when I opened my eyes. Lady was kneeling on the floor beside me, very white and piteously lovely. As my mind grew clearer, the color seemed to come back into her face.

"Mr. Crosby," she said, "I asked you not to come up-stairs at all. I want to be able to trust you. What has happened?"

"Happened?" I repeated dizzily. "Why, I had to come up. I chased the man up here, and then I saw this door open and came in, and felt as if there was some one in here—and there *was* some one, there behind that curtain. I tackled him, and he hit me." I raised my head sharply: "Listen—the fellow is here yet."

Lady pointed to the window behind me. "I think not," she said.

"But I tell you he's still in the room."

She smiled a little. "You are dizzy yet. Come





5.0

5.6

6.3

7.1

8.0

9.0

10

11.2

12.5

14

16

18

20

22.4

25

28

31.5

36

40

45

50

56

63

71

80

90

10



MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART
NATIONAL BUREAU OF STANDARDS
STANDARD REFERENCE MATERIAL 1010a
(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)

here and look, and you will see what I mean." The window was flung wide, and beneath at the foot of the wall a syringa bush lay broken.

"It looks as if you were right," I said, as she carefully closed the window. "I think I'll scout around a little outside; he may not have gone clear away." I noticed that she locked the door behind us.

My ideas were rather indefinite as I examined the syringa bush after the most approved fashion, and discovered no more than that somebody had broken it by dropping from above, and had gone away. So I started vaguely across the lawn toward the road. At the gate, I ran into the men who followed us on our man-hunt.

"He did not come this way," said the fat one, catching me by the arm.

"How do you know?" I asked.

The thin Italian smiled. "Then you *are* after Antonio Carucci?"

I had been almost trapped. "Carucci?" said I. "No, I was looking for Doctor Reid. Some one wants him on the 'phone."

"Why did you search the side of the house, then?"

"Look here," said I, "I haven't the slightest idea what you people are getting at, and I doubt if you have, either. But if you've seen Doctor Reid—a stocky man with a jerky walk—I wish you'd say so. They won't hold that line for ever."

"We might take a look about the place for him," the fat one smiled, "while you go back to the telephone."

"I won't trouble you," I retorted. "If you have any errand inside, go straight to the door. Mr. Tabor doesn't like his lawns trampled. Good morning."

I stood at the gate while they moved unwillingly away, and then went back to the house.

CHAPTER XIV

A DISAPPEARANCE AND AN ENCOUNTER

THE next few days passed by without event; and the absence of excitement was a welcome enough relief, even to me. Adventures in themselves are all very well, but I prefer mine uncomplicated with nervous anxiety; and although my enlistment in the family garrison had relieved me in some measure from that torment of personal worry which had hounded me before, yet the trouble had only taken another form, the more heavy for being less selfish. I was inside the mystery now, in action if not in knowledge. What the root of the matter might be, I knew no better than before; but somehow, I had been quite sincere in saying that I did not really care. It was as if the nerve of curiosity had been blunted in me through overstrain. And I knew now that come what might, Lady had begun to care for me, and that left little in the world which for myself I could fear. Only for her I feared

everything; and the necessity of her remaining here at the mercy of dangers which I could neither dispel nor understand was too heavy a burden for my frivolous enjoyment of adventure. I could not say so, nor try again to persuade her away from the fight. As her way was, she had dropped my interrupted protest into nothingness, as though it had never been; and my only comfort was the hope that, knowing how wholly my blindfold loyalty to them all was for her sake, might be a secret help to her.

Beyond taking care that one of us three men should be always in the house, we did nothing, so far as I knew, except to await events passively. Doctor Reid, of course, went daily to his office, where he remained often until late in the afternoon; and Mr. Tabor, though I understood that he was retired from active business, made two or three all-day trips to the city. What they might be doing to safeguard us from Carucci or in affairs more intimate to the situation, I could not guess. At any rate, my own periods of guardianship were generally lonely; for Mrs. Tabor was still too shaken by our recent alarm to be much out of her room, and Lady made occasion of shopping to accompany her father. Perhaps I was touchy; but it seemed that

she avoided the strain of being long alone with me, skating on thin ice above emotion.

Mrs. Tabor had gone to lie down after luncheon, and I was trying to forget in a book the prospect of a long uninteresting afternoon within doors, when the telephone in the den across the hall began to ring. I hurried across, with an irritable impulse to shout, "Yes, I'm coming," and picked it up.

"Hello!" drawled the little voice. "Who is this?"

I gave the number, with a mental reservation concerning some unknown person's telephone manners.

"Yes, I know; but who's there? Who is this speaking?"

"This is Mr. Tabor's house," said I sharply. "Do you want some one in particular, or will you leave a message?" It may have been partly the voice which annoyed me: a thick, soft voice unnaturally sweet in its inflection, a voice like the caress of a fat hand. I thought there was a trace of foreign accent, but that might be imagination.

"Oh—might I speak with Mrs. Tabor, please?"

"Hold the line a moment," said I; and as I turned, there was Mrs. Tabor herself in the doorway.

"Is it for me?" she asked. "You know, I'm sure

it's the very same person I was going to call. Telephone calls cross that way all the time, just like letters."

I left her, and went back to my book. A few minutes later Sheila came.

"Mrs. Tabor"—she began. Then with an astonished look about the room, "Why, where is she?"

"She was in Mr. Tabor's study, telephoning, a moment ago," I said. "Is anything the matter?"

"She never came up-stairs again at all. Will she be out around the garden anywhere, I wonder? Would you mind looking, sir, while I'll be seeing if she's in the house?"

I searched not only the garden, but the entire grounds; and I did it with hurried thoroughness and a growing anxiety. Sheila's alarm when I returned put an edge upon my own.

"Ah, the Saints preserve us, what'll we do now, with Mr. Tabor away in the city and that black villain of mine runnin' around the country after us? If it's him has anything to do with her—"

"Nonsense!" I said uneasily. "She's probably only gone over to one of the neighbors. You'd better telephone Doctor Reid, while I go and see."

But Sheila refused absolutely to use the telephone.

"I never did like them things," she said, "a little ugly voice in your ear out of nowhere, like a ghost. Ah, I know they're all right, but I wouldn't touch it."

So I called up Reid myself. He plunged in and took immediate command of the situation with his usual busy efficiency; but I could see that he was alarmed.

"Probably just gone to one of the floors. Certainly. No occasion for any uneasiness. None at all. I'll just call up the people she might be with, and be sure. Glad you told me. Quite right. Glad you told me."

"You don't think there's any chance that Carucci—?"

"Not the least. No chance at all. Still, you might scout around the neighborhood a bit, and see if you see anything of him. And tell Sheila to go to Stamford and go through all the stores. Might have gone shopping. I'll come right up and stay at the house myself."

"How about Mr. Tabor?" I asked.

"All right. No need to alarm him. Not a bit. I'll call him up later, if necessary. But, of course, we'll find her at once. Hurry up and get started.

Always best to act at once. Sure to be all right. Don't wait for me."

It occurred to me as I started out that Doctor Reid did not have a very high opinion of my ability. He was one of those cocksure men who confine their sureness mostly to their own mental processes. Well, we should see; and if I found myself right, I promised Carucci a beating that would dampen his black hand imaginings for some time to come.

My first move on leaving the house was to call up New York from the telephone booth at the inn. I was lucky enough to find Maclean at the office of his paper.

"Say, Mac," I asked him, "what did you make of that dago story?"

"Nothin'," Mac sniffed. "Nothin' at all. The gum-shoes think he croaked his old woman, an' they're waitin' for him to give himself or somebody else away, you see? Then they'll grab him. Course, I could have told 'em she was alive; but then that might have brought you people in, an' besides, those fellows wouldn't come across for me. Reciprocity's my cry, an' always has been."

"Well, do you know where I can find our friend? I want to talk to him?"

"Sure. I found him myself, but he wouldn't scare for a darn. Said Tabor had his wife all right, and not one of you dared touch him. You'll find Mr. Giuseppe workin' on the railroad, all the live-long day—that new trolley embankment we passed on the line. They have a guinea camp back in the woods a piece. Say, Laurie, course your friends are all right, an' it's none o' my business; but they smell fishy to me a mile off. If I was you, I'd duck 'em right now. There's some nigger in this wood-pile that we don't know anythin' about, you see?"

"Thanks, Mac," I said. "I know better than that, though. There's no trouble."

"Well, I'm only tellin' you what I think. That guinea put up a long howl to me about the old man that I wouldn't use and didn't more'n half believe; but I want to see you about it when you come in town, all the same. Say, you ain't sore, are you?"

"All right, old man," said I; and I hung up the receiver.

Maclean's warning came too patently from his point of view on the sinister surface of the situation to give me the slightest additional uneasiness; but it made me all the more determined to talk with Carucci and at least learn whatever he thought he

knew, even though he should prove innocent of Mrs. Tabor's disappearance. I took the trolley to the nearest switch, and walked the couple of hundred yards between it and the new embankment. Construction was in full blast, and about seventy-five Italians swarmed over the work under the direction of lordly Irish foremen. I sauntered about the place with as much idle curiosity as I could assume, stopping to watch little groups, going from place to place, even making a second round; but no Carucci was to be seen. One or two of the men glanced at me with what I imagined was a certain sullen suspicion; but that may have been purely imaginary. From the embankment I cast about for the construction camp. The nearest wooded spot that I could see was half a mile or so across country, and I made toward this, skirting a little swamp or so, and climbing an occasional fence. As I went along, I made more and more sure that I was right; for a trodden path developed, and fence-rails were broken or left carelessly out of place.

With the ugly huddle of tin-roofed huts in sight, I came upon Carucci; or perhaps I should say that he came upon me. He came running to meet me down the pathway, with a sort of rolling, dancing

gait that would have been very funny had I not known him.

"Whata you want?" he shouted. "Go-a da 'way!"

"That is what I am asking you," I said in Italian. "You know well enough that your wife can come to you whenever she pleases. What do you want of Mr. Tabor?"

He had stopped a little way from me, pulling off his jacket, and throwing it over his left arm. Now he showed his teeth in a mechanical grin.

"Come-a here," he grunted, "I show you."

He must have been drunk to imagine that I had not seen the knife. I took half a dozen quick steps, my hands opening and shutting, and as soon as I was within reach, I dived. I had him by the knees with a shock that reminded me that I was growing older; and as he sprawled on his back, I sprang away from him, and with a kick that must have nearly broken his fingers, sent the knife spinning away behind him. He was upon his feet in a second, and I looked for him at my throat. Instead, he threw his jacket full in my face, and leaped after it. I could feel his teeth gripping at the muscles of my upper arm. It was fighting of a new kind for me,

and I kneed him joyfully in the stomach, tearing with my free arm at the jacket which blinded me. For a moment he fell away, and I hurled the coat from me, and struck him in the mouth; then again, my shoulder behind it; and he went down with a grunt. I flung myself promptly on top of him, clutching him by the throat. Then an arm was thrown about my neck from behind, while a strong hand ripped at my hair.

'Ye murtherin' baste, ye black scun, lave him alone, ye limb av hell, come out av it!'

I shook myself roughly free, and whirled about to face the unexpected.

"Why, Sheila!" I cried, "how in the world did you get here?"

"Oi had me rasons, an' 'twas hoigh toime," he was very angry, and her brogue was faint no longer. "'Tis a swate blayguard ye are, an' bad cess to ye, sthrikin' a bit av a lad half the soize av yersilf."

I glanced at the burly Carucci, and laughed. The murder had died out of his eyes, and he scrambled to his feet, looking sheepish.

"This seems to be rather a family meeting," I said, and pointed behind him to the shanties. "Perhaps we had better be going."

Carucci turned to see the fat central office man trotting down the path, for all the world as if he were taking a little cross-country scamper to reduce his weight. He came on with such an inevitable matter-of-factness that it all seemed suddenly funny, like the conclusion of a farce; and when I looked around to see the other Italian coming up from behind, it was quite what I expected. The fat one in front of us stooped a second in the long grass, and picked up the knife that I had kicked away. He turned it over thoughtfully, and dropped it into his pocket.

"Antonio Carucci," he said calmly, "I arrest you for this assault with intent to kill, and for the murder of Sheila Carucci, your wife. And I arrest you, Laurence Crosby, as accessory after the fact."

"What!" I cried.

"Anything that either of you say," put in the thin Italian, "will be used against you."

Sheila broke into a peal of laughter. "'Tis fine countrymen ye have, Antonio, an' fine bloodhounds they make, to be sure! Ye poor, ignorant little men, open your mouths an' shut your eyes. 'Tis a miracle I'll be showin' ye. Look here—Sheila Macnamara, for her sins called Carucci, stands before ye—an'

ye say I'm murdered! Ye little black, beady-eyed divils, 'tis the likes av ye that goes makin' trouble for my man. Take off your dhirty little fat paws; I'll have none av it. Take thim off, ye thief, ye zany loon! Do ye think I look like a dead woman?"

The fat Italian dangled his handcuffs as if they had been eye-glasses.

"It is true," he said, "she is like the description; but then, how did she come here?"

"Whisper!" said Sheila, "I do not love me husband," Antonio glared. "So while he was asleep I eloped with this other handsome young gentleman here."

The two little men grew very red.

"Look here," I said, "you can see there has been a mistake. Mrs. Carucci is as well as ever, and she isn't going to make any charge against her husband. The only thing you've got on me is breaking the speed law. Five dollars apiece would about cover my fine, wouldn't it?"

Two gravely beautiful Italian smiles answered me. We watched them well out of sight; then Sheila turned to her crestfallen lord and master.

"Out with it, ye dhrunken beast," she said, "where is she?"

So that was why Sheila had come here.

"Who?" Carucci asked blankly.

"Who? You look innocent, don't ye, standin' there askin' me who! What have ye done with her, you an' your silly revenges? I'll teach ye to keep out av things that're none av your business, ye leather-headed, garlic-eatin' baboon, ye!" She grasped him solidly by both ears, and shook him till his greasy hair flapped.

All the fight seemed to have gone out of Carucci, and he squirmed away, appealing and protesting in a torrent of Italian too fast and mutilated for my ear. Sheila answered incongruously in the same language.

"He says he don't know anything about it," she told me finally, "and for once I believe him, sir. He can lie well enough to some folks, but he can't lie to me."

"Well," said I, "if you believe him, you ought to know. But I wish you'd get him away from here, Sheila. He's been sending black hand letters to Mr. Tabor."

"He has, has he, the sphalpeen!" and again came the dual and ludicrous torrent of Neapolitan.

"'Twas just the lovin' heart of him, sir. He's



"Do ye think I look like a dead woman?"



that impetuous. But I'll learn him manners. You go on back to the house, an' you'll hear no more from Antonio. It's a beast he is sometimes when he is drunk, but he's sober enough now, sir, and when sober he has the sense to be afraid of me. Have no fear, I'll send him packin'. Leave him to me."

I laughed. "All right, Sheila," I said. "If you use the same persuasion with him that you've been using, I think you can teach him almost anything."

I reached the Tabors' out of breath, and stumbied panting up the steps; and at the door I stood a moment to gather my breath and thought wondering if Lady and Mr. Tabor had returned. Mr. Tabor's hat was still missing from the rack; and I lit a cigarette as I strolled into the living-room to wait. Mrs. Tabor was sitting over a piece of embroidery by the window.

"You look hot," she said, glancing up, "what is the matter? Have you been running?"

"I've been looking for you," I stammered. "Sheila thought you were lost or something." The words were out before I could stop them.

"Lost?" Mrs. Tabor repeated, raising her brows, "lost? What should make you think I was lost?"

"Why, Sheila said you hadn't told her you were going, and she couldn't find you anywhere, and—"

"You are all the strangest people," said Mrs. Tabor. "I have been out of town at an afternoon tea with friends at Greenwich. It was the shortest little trip imaginable. Has Lady got back yet?"

CHAPTER XV

MENTAL RESERVATIONS

I SAT down rather uncomfortably. We had all of us been made to look foolish, and I was here to bear the brunt of it alone. What had become of Reid, I did not know; but I was much mistaken in him if he had not gone off upon some highly efficient search of his own, after alarming Lady and her father. So the whole family had been upset because a rather thoughtless little woman had gone out without thinking to give notice of her intended absence, and because an officious young son-in-law had jumped at the chance to exploit his executive ability. If Sheila and I had been disturbed, we had at least only acted under his direction; and the whole foolish flurry, with its risk of attracting public attention, had emanated from the jerky mind of Reid.

"I must plead guilty," I said, "of giving the first alarm. Sheila seemed worried, and I called up Doctor Reid on the telephone."

Mrs. Tabor's face clouded, and it seemed to me that something like anger gathered in her eyes. "It was very like him," she said, "he is the most selfish man in the world." She paused. "If you don't mind, Mr. Crosby, we will not talk about him. I am tired."

I got to my feet, feeling as if I had heard something to which I had no right.

"Mrs. Tabor," said I, "you must forgive me for having troubled you with the matter at all. I am stupid sometimes, and forgot that we had been officious and that you might be tired."

She flashed forth an appealing little hand. "No, you are not to go; I didn't mean that. I'm not so truly tired that I want to be alone. In fact, I shall rest much better if you stay and keep me company."

"I shall be very glad to," I answered. "I've regretted all along that I haven't been able to see you more often. Besides, I'm the only man in the house for the moment, and I suppose I oughtn't to leave my post until the others come home."

She raised her brows. "Why, what do you mean? That sounds as if we were in a state of siege. You're a guest, Mr. Crosby, not a sentry on duty."

I had said too much, evidently, and I felt angrily

that if Mrs. Tabor knew nothing of affairs I should have been warned of the fact. "I didn't mean that," I said, as easily as I could manage. "Only that the others are still looking for you, and I ought to let them know as soon as may be that I've been more fortunate. I'd telephone if I knew where they were."

"But it's all so ridiculous. I'm not a child, you know." Her petulance was rising again. "Because a tramp came into the house the other day is no reason for hedging me about as if we were all back in the dark ages. It's never likely to happen again; and besides, there was no danger at the time of anything worse than losing some of the silver. I can't see the least excuse for all this mysterious caution. And it's been going on so for months—long before there was even that shadow of a reason."

I tried to play up to the situation. "It's just the exaggeration of their care for you, I suppose. You haven't been quite well, and they worry needlessly because it matters so much. Didn't you used to feel the same way about Lady when she was little and getting over the measles?"

The next instant I realized that I should hardly have used the nickname; but Mrs. Tabor did not

seem to have noticed my slip. She was looking fixedly out through the parted curtains as though there were some one in the hall, and I instinctively glanced in the same direction. When I looked back again, she was still distraught, and I went on; "And anyway, it's splendid to see you so well at last."

She smiled. "I haven't really been much laid up at all. I've only been a little overtired. People worry about me too much, Mr. Crosby. I have a poor heart, but I'm always pretty careful of myself; yet neither Mr. Tabor nor Lady can seem to let me out of their sight. I don't like it."

She brushed the hair from her forehead with a weary little gesture of impatience. She looked very much as a pretty spoiled child might have. Yet I felt rather disloyal to the rest of them in listening. Of course, Mrs. Tabor meant nothing; she was merely tired and fretful; but still, I did not like being made the confidant of these family petulances. Lady, I knew, loved her mother devotedly, and so did Mr. Tabor—at least, he had given every evidence of affection.

"How would you like it, Mr. Crosby," she added, "if you could never go out for even a walk all alone? And Mr. Tabor has been acting so strangely all this

while—as if he and Lady shared some secret that they were anxious to keep from me of all people.”

I was by now frankly embarrassed, and I must have shown it. “I don’t quite see why—” I began.

“Are you in the secret too?” she asked suddenly.

My hair prickled. “No, of course not,” I stammered. “And I don’t really think that there can be any secret, Mrs. Tabor, or anything they would keep from you.” Yet I began to wonder whether she were acting cleverly in ignorance of how much I really did know, or were actually guarded from all knowledge of the admitted mystery. While I scrambled after a safe word, I heard the crunch of wheels upon the gravel.

“There they are now,” I said.

Lady and her father came hurrying into the room with all the air of having come home merely to tour—as the children say; as if they but wished to inquire themselves of developments before starting out upon another quest. Lady saw her mother first.

“Why, mother dear!” she cried. “We—” she stopped.

Mr. Tabor coughed. “Where is Walter?” he asked.

"Indeed, I don't know," Mrs. Tabor answered rather sharply. "What on earth do you want of him?"

Mr. Tabor smiled slowly and expansively. "I don't want him at all, my dear; but I do very much want my dinner. Do you think it is nearly ready? Lady, suppose you poke things up in the kitchen a little, if you can. I am nearly famished."

"Well," said I, "I had nearly forgotten about supper, and I believe we are to have waffles at the inn to-night," and I got to my feet.

"Mr. Crosby, waffles or no waffles, you are not to go," said Mrs. Tabor. "Here we are just started upon a nice little visit, and these ravenous people of mine come bursting in from goodness knows where or what, and begin clamoring for food. Since we must eat, you are to eat with us."

I said something conventional, with an apologetic glance at Mr. Tabor. He was frowning at the ceiling as if he had not heard.

It was hardly a comfortable meal. I felt that I should not be there, and that the others, though for no personal fault of mine, were wishing me out of the way; while Mrs. Tabor confined her conversation almost entirely to me in a way that made me

obviously a bulwark against them. She was bright and chatty enough, but I could plainly feel the uneasiness under it; and as the meal progressed she became more uneasy still, now and then turning suddenly in her chair or laying down her fork with little abrupt decisions that came to nothing, as if she were hesitating on the brink of a plunge. Twice she stretched out a hand for silence, listening over her shoulder a moment, and then hurrying back into the meaningless and disrupted conversation.

As we were eating dessert, Doctor Reid came in for a moment. That is, he came as far as the door, and I thought Mr. Tabor made some sort of gesture to him below the table-top. At any rate, he turned on his heel and left, after a nervous word or two. I looked around to see Mrs. Tabor's face set and stern, every little prettiness of expression fled. I must have stared, for she smiled after a moment, and nodded at me mysteriously as if I alone shared the secret of the dislike she had voiced in the afternoon.

"Come, mother dear," Lady said softly. "Here are the rest of us nearly through, and you've hardly touched your ice."

Mrs. Tabor looked up, vaguely apologetic. "Why,

Miriam, I'm sure I beg your pardon," she said. And very meekly she took up her spoon.

Of course it was the most natural slip in the world, and meant absolutely nothing; but I could not put out of my mind the feeling that some unrecognized bomb had been exploded in our midst. I could not be merely imagining Lady's deepening color, nor the nervous hurry with which she forced the conversation; Mr. Tabor and I helping as best we might, and at best ungracefully. I could not shake off that sense of a common consciousness whose existence none of us admitted, of something vividly present in all our minds but not to be noticed in words, which makes it so difficult for a whole company to keep their countenance in the face of an untactful situation; the strain which people feel when one unconscious bore afflicts the rest, when a stranger rushes in upon the heels of an unfinished intimacy, or when somebody makes an unmentionable slip of the tongue. I knew that Lady and her father were embarrassed by the same trifle which embarrassed me; and through the laborious unconsciousness of the next few minutes, the name of Miriam rang in all our ears until the very air seemed as it were to grow heavy with the weight of her in-

visible presence. The tension grew minute by minute as we talked, until I felt as if I could hardly keep on. And Mrs. Tabor, looking up in a comfortless pause and finding us all at gaze, broke down entirely. Her eyes filled, and she pushed back her chair.

"George, dear," she asked piteously, "what is the matter? What has come to you all?" Then as Mr. Tabor hesitated for an answer, she turned with a despairing little gesture to her daughter. "You tell me what it is, Miriam," she cried.

Mr. Tabor rose from the table. "With your permission, my dear, Crosby and I will go out and smoke," he said. "There isn't anything the matter. You only imagine it, and you need Lady to tell you so."

Mrs. Tabor turned to me quickly. "You can smoke here just as well," she said hurriedly, "I like it. And besides, you are the only one who seems to have anything to say this evening. These other dear stupid people are both acting as if we were sitting at baked meats instead of a pleasant ice. I can't imagine what has got into them, unless they have some dark secret of their own." She was cheering visibly as she spoke, but with the last words her face clouded again. I did my best to keep the

talk moving after that, though Heaven knows what I found to say. And at last the meal was over.

As soon as we left the table, Mr. Tabor suggested that his wife was very tired, and that she should be off to bed. She agreed reluctantly enough only when Lady joined her father in his importunity and said that she would go up with her. At last she rose and bade us all good night; but when she and Lady were at the very door, she turned and looked back at us. Then, of a sudden she ran lightly across the room and stooped to my ear. "I have a little secret of my own," she laughed across at her husband. Then very swiftly, and with a catch in her voice, she whispered, "They are trying to take Miriam away from me!"

CHAPTER XVI

MEAGER REVELATIONS

I GLANCED instinctively across at Mr. Tabor, to see if he had overheard; but he gave no sign of having done so. He stood with one broad hand slowly tightening and relaxing over the back of his chair, his eyes following unwaveringly the slight figure as it paused beyond the curtains and Lady let them fall into place, then he sat wearily down again, with a smile that did not smooth the white bristle of his brows.

"That shows how tired Mrs. Tabor is," he said casually. "I never knew her to confuse the names in that way before."

My first shock changed unreasonably into the feeling of a suspected conspirator. I was sure that he had not heard; his reference was only to his wife's calling Lady "Miriam," not to her whispered words; but what could those words mean? Where was

Miriam? And if this house were in some way divided against itself, on what side was I? Then I became suddenly conscious of my silence.

"Surely there is nothing at all strange in that," I answered. "For a mother to call her children by one another's names is the commonest thing in the world; especially when—" I stopped, wondering whether I were quite sure that Miriam was dead.

"Yes, natural enough, of course." He spoke absently; then went on as if answering my thought; "And then, Mrs. Tabor was greatly shaken by our first daughter's death: so much so that she has never quite recovered herself physically. Sometimes, even now, she hardly realizes, I think, that Miriam is not here." He looked down at his hand, then raised his eyes steadily to mine.

"That was several years ago?" I said, to say something.

"Two years. We have to keep Walter Reid out of her sight, although she is very fond of him, because his actual words and ways make her remember." Perhaps it was the effort to convince himself which made him seem needlessly eager to explain.

"She must be growing stronger though, all the while," I suggested. "And from now on, we shall

have peace from Carucci and all the other disturbances he brings in his train."

He did not answer, and the discomfort of silence settled heavily down. I began to hear the clock ticking, and to be half conscious of my own breathing. Some one crossed the room above us and went quietly down the upper hall toward the rear of the house. Had that been Miriam's room in which I found the intruder; and if so, why was it kept uncanonically the same when all the family were striving to guard the mother from remembrance? Presently Mr. Tabor roused himself with the decision of a man putting a thought away.

"I meant to ask you about that," he said. "Somehow or other, this black hand business must stop. I can't have reporters and detectives and blackmailing Italians lurking about to cause gossip and disturb Mrs. Tabor, and I won't have it. We've done no more than merely to hold off the spies, and that necessity in itself was bad enough. But when it comes to having Carucci break into the house and alarm the family—" He looked sharply at me. "Have you heard anything further from your friend?"

"Nothing more than you know; but I ran across

Carucci this afternoon, and I think that incident is closed." I went over the afternoon's events, adding: "So there's no murder mystery now, no newspaper story, and unless Sheila is very much mistaken in herself, we've heard the last of Carucci. That clears the atmosphere pretty thoroughly, doesn't it?"

He did not seem to be much relieved. "Y-e-s— if Sheila could or would really send him away. I don't doubt her loyalty to us, but she's too fond of her brute of a husband." Then abruptly, after some pondering, "You answered the telephone for Mrs. Tabor, as I understand. Did you hear the name, or recognize the voice?"

"No, sir," said I uncomfortably; for it sounded very much as if he were questioning his wife's word.

"It couldn't have been either of your Italian detectives, for instance?"

"I'm quite sure that it wasn't—that is, as sure as one can be of a voice over the 'phone. It was entirely different, a cooing, syrupy voice that seemed to be a woman's."

"Well," he said finally, "Carucci is the storm-center, in any case." He rose, and pressed the button by the door. "Ask Mrs. Carucci to step down to my study for a moment," he said to the maid.

Then he turned to me. "Come in here, Crosby, and we'll settle this thing."

Sheila appeared, bubbling with triumph, and volubly eager to recount her experiences. Antonio would never dare to show the face of him to any of us again. Indeed, he had promised to take the first ship he could find and be off to sea, out of mischief. His black hand bother was all nonsense anyway; he was nothing to be afraid of, more than a black-faced bogey to frighten children. "An' he'll keep his promise, sir, to me," she wound up, "for he knows well what I'll be givin' him if he don't. He's only waitin' till his week's out, so he can draw his pay; then off he goes to New York, an' away on the first steamer that'll take him. 'An' good riddance to ye, too,' says I, 'an' if ever ye bring trouble on my people again, I'll make ye wish ye'd died a bachelor,' I says to him."

"He's going before that," said Mr. Tabor decidedly. "This is Tuesday; the *Catalonia* sails on Thursday, and I'll get him a berth on her. What's more, I'll see that he takes it. You know where to find him, Sheila, I suppose?"

"Sure I do, sir. He'll be right where I saw him, workin' on the trolley. But it's hard on him, sir,

losin' his week's pay, and bein' shipped off like a thief. Leave him find his own ship like a man."

"He's not being shipped off. I'm finding a good berth for him, which is more than he deserves, and you both ought to be grateful. Now listen, I want you to go to New York with him to-morrow. Take him to your own place, and don't lose sight of him until he is safe aboard and away. If he leaves you, notify me at once. I intend to be certain that he has left the country; do you understand?"

"An' who's to be takin' care av me poor lamb upstairs all the while?" Sheila demanded, her brogue broadening, and her hands braced aggressively against her hips.

Mr. Tabor glanced quickly at me. "We can do that very well, as we have done. Of course your husband can be sent to prison for blackmail, if I can't otherwise be rid of him, but for your sake I should rather have him simply go away. If you are not willing to help, Sheila, you need only say so."

For a moment I thought she was going to refuse. But after a vain appeal or two, she gave way rather sullenly, and agreed to leave early in the morning.

"That's the pity of those people," Mr. Tabor said to me, as he closed the door after her. "Let the man

do or be what he will, the woman he has possessed will hold by him to the end of her days; he can't quite lie away her faith or kick away her tenderness. I suppose it's beautiful in its way, but it gives a foothold to a lot of misery—well, now, Crosby, the rest is your part. I believe Sheila will keep her word; but it's against her husband, after all, and I want to make sure. Will you go to New York, too, and keep an eye on them until Carucci has gone? It's an unpleasant service to ask, but I can't do it for myself. And—since your vacation trip would naturally start from New York, it won't be far out of your way." I looked full at him to be sure that I understood, but I knew already that he had weighed his words.

"I see," I said slowly. "Is that all, or do you really want me to watch the Caruccis?"

"Certainly I do, if you will. I'm going to be very frank with you, Crosby, because you've deserved it. I did feel at one time that your former trip was managed with a little too much gallantry—that you had with the best intentions involved us in a melodrama, been the means of bringing these people down on us. But that wasn't just. Nobody could have done better in your place; and if any one

was to blame, it was Reid, for allowing you to go at that time of night. Of course, I was away from home when you started. Well, you've helped us and been loyal to us, though we had no claim upon you. It all comes down to this: Mrs. Tabor's health is a cause of great concern to me, and has been for a long time. I feel that she must be guarded from every possible shock. As I told you, there is a condition here which we are keeping to ourselves, which is dangerous to her, and which—you must take my word for it—may be aggravated by your continual presence. I'm eliminating, so far as I can, every disturbing element, and you are such an element, through no fault of yours. I'm not banishing you, I only ask that your visits to us be no more than occasional. Once in a while, a little later, we shall be very glad to see you, I hope; but not just now. Is that clear?"

"All but the reason for it," I said, "and I won't ask that."

"I won't make any protestations or apologies," he added very deliberately. "I think you trust us. And I prove that I trust you more than you know, in telling you as much as I have."

I suppose that a more sensible man in my place

would have done very differently. On his own confession, Mr. Tabor was telling me only a part of the truth; accident and warning had combined to make me suspicious of him; and I knew by my own experience how plausibly he could lie. But whether it was his age, or his deference, or the fact that he was Lady's father, all the Don Quixote in me came suddenly to the surface.

"I'll do as you say, sir," I said. "Let me know when I can do anything more," and I held out my hand.

His own was moist and hot; and I noticed under the stronger light of the hall, that the veins in his temples were swollen and throbbing and that he moved listlessly, as though he had been under a great strain. Before I could think about it, Lady parted the curtains of the living-room.

"What is it?" she asked quickly. "Has anything happened?"

"Only that I am going to New York to see Carucci sail away," I answered, "and I don't know just when I shall be back." It was plain that Mr. Tabor had not meant me to say so much; but that was my own affair.

She followed me outside the front door. "That

means that you are going away—I knew it must come to that.” She was twisting nervously at her chain.

“One word from you, and I won’t go.”

She shook her head. “No, I want you to—good-by.”

“Promise me one thing,” I said. “That you’ll send me word if you want me.”

“I promise,” she answered quietly, “but I shall never have to keep that promise.”

As I went out of the gate, Doctor Reid was coming in, and stopped to speak to me. His companion stood meanwhile some distance away; but it was not too dark for me to recognize the big man with the shrill precision of speech whom I had seen him bring secretly to the house before.

I set out the next morning in a humor of suspicious disillusion, all my quixotism turned sour under the dry sun. Put it how I would, I was playing the part of a spy: if Carucci himself was no better, the honest Irish eyes of his wife made me vaguely ashamed of my task. Having nevertheless undertaken it, I must put it through as well as might be. To follow the pair about would be futile, since I must presently be seen and recognized; but I con-

ceived that merely by making sure of them at intervals during the next forty-eight hours I should be fulfilling my mission. I saw them safely on the train, and established myself in another car; and when we reached the Grand Central, I made straight for the scene of my midnight adventure. It was no less ugly by day than by night, and if possible even more malodorous. Push-carts vended unimaginable sweetmeats along the curb to a floating population of besmeared and screaming children; bleared slatterns, flabbily overflowing their bulging garments, jabbered in window and doorway; and the squat and dingy little saloon on the corner leered beerily at all. I waited half an hour before the Caruccis appeared. Then I made for a telephone in a state of disgusted relief, and called up Maclean.

"So you're in town now for a while," he said, in answer to my expurgated account of myself. "Well, I tell you how it is, Laurie, I'm pretty busy to-day. Let's have your number, an' I'll call you up later when I'm loose. You'll hang out at the Club, won't you?"

"I thought you wanted to see me about something."

"Oh, *that*. That wasn't anythin'— Why, yes,

I'll lunch with you if you're in such a hurry, but I'll have to beat it right afterwards, 'cause I've got an assignment this afternoon."

At the Club, he plunged immediately into the irrelevant subject.

"Say, I've got to slide out after grub, an' go on a spook-hunt. There's this gang of Psychics or Spiritualists or whatever they are, up the line here, you see? And I'm coverin' one of their séances. Hamlet's old grandfather comes in an' rough-houses the furniture, an' Little Eva says a lot more than her prayers, an' you sit in a circle holdin' hands to get a line on the higher life. Don't you want to come along? You'll get some thrillin' moments."

"Is it a fake, then?" I asked.

"Oh, they're all fakes, I guess. All I ever ran across, anyway. But this death-fancier's the real squeeze—only raises the graveyard in private an' don't take any money, an' a whole lot of big doctors an' psychology profs. are nutty about her, you see? It's the big show, the original New York company. You better come."

"All right," I said, "bring on your mysteries. I always thought there was something in that business, really; and here's a good chance. But look here,

Mac, I want you to tell me what you heard from Carucci."

"Tell you the truth," said Maclean, "I'm a little bit afraid there may be something in spookery, myself. That's why I'd just as soon have you along."

"It won't do, old fellow," said I; "let's have the dago story."

Maclean fidgeted and glowered at the table. "It's like this, Laurie, you see? Those folks are friends of yours, an' this yarn of the guinea's is just a dirty bit of scandal, that's all over an' done with. An' I told you I didn't believe it anyhow. I hadn't ought to have said anythin' to you in the first place; and I'd rather not say anythin' about it now unless you want. 'Tain't anythin'."

"Mac, I've gone so far with the Tabors that I need to know all I can. If it's a lie, why all right. If it's true, why you can trust me and so can they. I wasn't born last week."

"Well," Mac grunted after a pause, "I'd better tell you, I guess, than let you go it blind—here you are. You know that Doctor Reid that's in with the Tabors?" He lowered his voice, leaning across the table. "Accordin' to the dago, he got mixed up with some woman abroad, an' married her. Then

he leaves her, an' comes back, an' maybe he thinks she's dead. So he marries the Tabor girl, you see? Then the family get wise about the other woman, an' there's an awful row, an' finally they fix it up among them to move away, an' let on that Reid an' the daughter ain't married at all, not until this other woman dies, you see? An' that's what they're all keepin' so quiet about. Mind you, I don't believe it, myself."

"Why, it's impossible," I said. "It doesn't fit together. Miriam Tabor died a year after Reid married her, and why should they—"

"Sure, that's just it. Sure. I told you it was all over, an' anyhow it couldn't be so." He looked at his watch, and I noticed that the monogram on the back was cut in a quaint, antique fashion. "Come ahead—we've just got time."

I found his eyes and held them. "One minute, Mac. You're keeping back the point, so that I won't understand the story. It's no use."

"No, I ain't—honest—it's all over—well, damn it, Carucci says the Tabor girl didn't die. He says that's only the fake they put up, an' she's alive an' around the same as ever."

For a moment the words did not mean anything.

I was groping madly among a mass of reminiscences, the noises in the house, the room with the presence in it, into which Carucci had broken, the tangled half-confidences of the family. Then the picture of Lady twisting nervously at the slender chain came uppermost in imagination, and through the eddying fog of my mind the whole nightmare leaped forth in a flash of horrible clearness, a score of interwoven circumstances outlining it as with threads of fire: the wedding-ring worn hidden at her breast, her raising of unaccountable barriers, her hopelessness, the family's fear of publicity and growing anxiety over my intimate presence among them, the cloud upon Mrs. Tabor, her aversion to Reid and the elaborate explanation of her slip in calling her daughter Miriam—I leaned my forehead on my hands.

Maclean had me by the shoulder: "Brace up, man," he muttered; "here, drink your drink. You'll have everybody looking at you."

CHAPTER XVII

THE BORDERLAND, AND A NAME

"I T'S an infernal lie," I said dully.

"Sure it is." Maclean was thoroughly embarrassed and uncomfortable. "The way I work it out is, there's probably just enough in it somewhere for Carucci to build on. Maybe Reid did get into some mess or other 'way back before he was married, an' Carucci works that in with what he thinks he knows about the family now, an' dopes out this scandal in high life business. Or maybe he don't believe it himself, an' just has it in for the old man. You can't tell whether it's muck-rakin' or mud-slingin', but it's bound to be partly both, you see? I only told you so you'd know what was around. Well, are you comin'?"

I got my hat mechanically, and went out with him into the dust and the heat. The sense of unreality that had been upon me that early morning in the automobile was returned now in the breathless after-

noon. The hazy slit of sky overhead, the stark light and shadow of the street, had the tones of a cheap colored photograph. The very smell of the air was like a memory of itself. The roar and jangle of the traffic seemed to come from a distance through a stillness that listened; and the wail of a hand organ on the corner somehow completed and enhanced it all. I had only had one serious illness in my life, and that had been long ago; but I remembered that upon my first venturing out of doors after it, things had looked so; and I wondered for a moment whether I were going to be ill again. But that was nonsense. I was not a person to collapse upon the hearing of bad news; and besides, this news, I did not believe. Maclean had not believed it himself, in telling it to me. Only, he had so much less knowledge than I of its consistency. Grant for once that Lady was Miriam, that she was an only daughter—and they all would have done even as I had seen them doing. So Lady would have worn her ring, so feared our growing intimacy, so felt the burden of an abnormality not her own, so confessed to me the barrier and in extremity lied about her name, so the family would have shrunk from any notice, and striven to rid themselves of Carucci

and of me. Straight this way pointed every line of mystery since the beginning; here was one logical motive for all. The explanation fitted every fact; only, I could not believe it of the people. A small cloud covered the sun, and the hot street turned suddenly gray. A horse clogged heavily around the corner, the rumble of the wheels behind him suddenly muffled as they struck the asphalt of the avenue. We were going up the steps of a house, a house closed for the summer with lead-colored board shutters over the lower windows, and an outer door of the same, on which the bright brass disk of a spring lock took the place of a knob. Maclean glanced again up at the number as he pressed the bell.

"Admit one gent and phantoms," he said sniffing. "Now you put your soul in a safe pocket, an' button it in. This gang, they'd snitch it in a second."

A low-voiced man in a cutaway coat opened the door, and we stood for a moment in a dark hallway smelling of cloth and furniture, while he and Maclean talked together in a half-whisper, I suppose explaining my presence. Then he opened another door at the side of the hall, and ushered us into the front room, where we half groped our way to a seat on the farther side, amid a low rustle of whispers.

A grayish twilight filtered through the bright cracks of the shutters and between the closed folding doors at the rear. At first, the contrast with the glare of the street made it seem almost absolutely dark; and as my eyes gradually became adapted to the dimness, I remembered being shut in the closet when I was a child, and how the pale streaks from door-casing and keyhole had gradually diluted the gloom in just the same way. The recollection was so vivid that I half imagined here the same rustle and stuffiness of hanging clothes, and the sense of outrage at the shutting out of daylight. Then slowly the room formed itself out of darkness into grayness: the white ceiling, with its moving shadows and bulbous cloth-enfolded chandelier; the floor and furniture, all shrouded in summer covers of grayish denim; and the indefinite shade of the walls, lightened here and there by the square of a picture turned back outward, and darkened by the gloom of the corners and the blurred figures of the dozen people or so who sat about in twos and threes talking in whispers and mutterings. At the back of the room were large folding-doors, now tightly closed. In the corner on the side toward the hall stood a grand piano, enormous and bare under its pale covering; and the

outer wall was broken by a marble chimneypiece of the fifties whereupon stood lumps of bric-à-brac tied up in bags. Most of the furniture was ranged rigidly against the wall; but in the center of the floor glimmered dully the uncovered mahogany of a heavy round table. In spite of the dark and the coolness, the air was close and stuffy, as if with the presence of a multitude; and I was a trifle surprised to find that we were actually so few.

"What sort of a crowd is this?" I asked Maclean in an undertone. "I can't make them out."

"Every sort. I mean every sort that's got the social drag or the prominence in this business to get in with the crowd. But inside of that, you get 'em all kinds, you see? The chap that let us in is a philosophy prof. an' a psychic researcher—Shelburgh, his name is. That old gink over there alone by himself is some other pioneer o' modern thought. I've got to find out about him later. The rest are mostly social lights, I guess. This is the Emmet Langdons' house, an' they're here somewhere. I can't see faces yet, can you?"

I shook my head. "We seem to be in Sunday edition company, anyway."

"Sure. All head-liners. Faces on file in every office. Hullo, here's the spookstress. They're off in a bunch!"

A rather heavy woman in a long drab dust-coat had come in, followed by Professor Shelburgh, who closed the door behind them. I gathered a vague impression, only half visual, that she was middle-aged and of that plumply blond type which ages by imperceptible degrees. She made me think, somehow, of a mass of molasses candy after it has been pulled into paleness and before it has hardened; but I could not tell whether this suggestion came from her voice or from her sleepily effusive manner or was a mere fancy about a physical presence which I could hardly see. She took off her hat and coat, and sat down at the center-table, pushing back her hair and rubbing her hands over her face as if to shake off drowsiness; while the others, except Maclean and myself and the gentleman in the corner, drew up their seats in a circle about the table, and placed their hands upon it. The professor counted the hands aloud in a perfunctory tone, and they all leaned forward, hand touching hand around the circle.

"Are we all right, Mrs. Mahl?" the professor asked.

"All right—all right—" cooed the medium; "conditions are good to-day—I can feel 'em comin' already—sing to me, somebody."

The old gentleman in the corner made a dull sound that might have been a snort or a suppressed cough. One of the women began to sing *Suwanee River* just above her breath, and the others joined in, half-humming, half-crooning. It was like the singing of children in its toneless unison, in its dragged rhythms and slurring from note to note; and the absurd resemblance of the scene to a game of Jenkins-Up gave the final touch of incongruity. These people, or some of them at least, awaited the very presence of the dead; all were in quest of the supernatural or the unknown. Here were the dimness, the fragile tension, the impalpable weight of mutuality, the atmosphere of a coming crisis; and this in the commonplace room, closed up for the summer, with the traffic of the avenue outside and the commonplace people within, incongruous in their ordinary clothes, sitting with their hands upon a table and humming a hackneyed melody a little off the key. There was an unreality about it all, a touch

of theatrical tawdriness, of mummery and tinsel gold and canvas distances, an acuteness of that feeling which one always has in the climaxes of actual life that they can not be quite real because the setting is not strange enough. The monotonous sound and the close air made me drowsy, thinking with the hurried vividness of a doze. It was unnatural for mysteries to happen in a drawing-room; but then, mysteries were themselves unnatural, and must happen if at all in the world of there and then. Though it seemed somehow that a ghost should appear only upon the storied battlements of Elsinore to people in archaic dress, yet to Hamlet himself those surroundings were the scene of ordinary days; and the persons of all the wonder-stories had been in their own sight contemporary citizens. Macbeth saw Banquo at the dinner-table, and it was the people in the street who crowded to look upon the miracles.

The eventless waiting drew out interminably. There were long silences, then the humming of some other tune; and it was an episode when some one coughed or stirred. Yet the monotony, despite boredom and drowsiness, did not relax the nervous tension. I still felt that something was going to happen the next minute; the air grew closer and closer,

and the odd sense of crowded human intimacy was more oppressive than at first; and the rigid regularity of Maclean's audible breathing was enough to tell me that even his skepticism was not proof against the same influence. The circle about the table were swaying their heads a little in time with their singing, while the old gentleman in the corner fidgeted uneasily. In the street outside, a child began to cry loudly, and was taken away still wailing around the corner. Surely, I thought, I of all people ought to understand that incongruous look of strange things happening in actual life: my own had been for weeks a nightmare and a romance; and even now I was groping mentally in the maze of a revelation that had the lurid logic of a melodrama, flawlessly plausible and incredible only because I was unwilling to believe. Carucci's story was a fabrication, because tangled marriages and family mysteries happen in books and newspapers, among printed people, not among those we know; yet melodrama itself builds with the material of actuality, and I had been living amid family mysteries. Such things do happen to some one; and that one must be to— to others—the reality that Lady was to me.

I started violently, and sat bolt upright, my hair

tingling and every muscle tightened. A dull rapping, like the sound of a hammer upon wood covered with cloth, came from the table. The circle were silent, leaning back in their seats, their hands still joined before them. The medium had sunk down in her chair, her arms extended along the arms of it, so that those next her had to reach out to keep hold of her hands. And above the group I saw, or imagined that I saw, the vaguest conceivable cloudiness in mid-air, like mist on a foggy night or the glimmer seen inside closed eyelids after looking at a brightly lighted window. The more I tried to make sure that I saw it, the more I doubted whether it were not merely imagination. If you hold your spread hand before a dark background, you will seem to see a cloudy blur outlining the fingers; it was like that. The rapping was repeated more loudly, and through the throbbing in my ears and the almost suffocating oppression, I caught myself remembering the scene of the knocking at the gate in *Macbeth*. Then a voice began to speak: a querulous, throaty contralto that came in jerks and pauses.

"Here you are again," it said; "I don't—want to talk—to any of you—I feel trouble—somewhere. Where's mother?"

"That's Miriam," said Professor Shelburgh, in the tone of casual recognition.

I do not know whether it was the shock of the coincident name, or only that the heat and the excitement of the day had reached their natural climax. But I grew suddenly hot and cold in waves; my skin crawled, and I felt at once a strangling hurry of heart-beats and a hollow nausea. For an instant, I set my teeth and tried to master it; but it was no use. I must get out into the open light and air, or I should make an exhibition of myself. I rose and tiptoed hurriedly across the room through an atmosphere that seemed like a heavy liquid, dizzily aware that Maclean had followed me a step or two and that the group around the table looked after me in surprise. Somehow, I found the door-handle. While I groped for my hat in the hallway, I heard the querulous jerky voices speaking again inside the room. And the next moment I was standing on the sun-baked sidewalk, blinking my eyes against the glare, and breathing in deep gulps. A flower-vendor called on the corner, above the distant drone of a hand-organ. Horses clumped heavily past. And a sparrow sat for a second upon the green top of a hydrant, then fluttered away, chattering.

CHAPTER XVIII

DOCTOR REID REMOVES A SOURCE OF INFORMATION

FOR a block or so I still felt a little queer and giddy; but air and movement soon set all to rights; and after a walk back to the Club and a comfortable bath, I felt as well as ever, and rather wondered at my sudden upset. Evidently it had been only the heat and the nervous excitement of the day; and I had been foolish to take Scotch with my luncheon in such weather. I remembered that I had been out of gear a bit since the morning; Maclean's revelation must have shaken me more than I had admitted to myself; and it only wanted the startling coincidence of a "spirit" called Miriam to cap the climax. Besides, if you sit for two hours in a dark and stuffy room waiting for something strange to happen, something usually will. At any rate I had had an interesting experience. For a moment, it occurred to me that the episode might have been pre-arranged by Mac, with the idea of conveying to me

in that way something which he did not wish to tell; but that was not like him, and was absurdly far-fetched besides. If the name had been taken somehow from my own thoughts, it was a remarkable case of telepathy; but no, it had been the professor, not the medium, who had named the voice; and by his tone, this had been a familiar one often heard before. If the name had any other than a chance connection with my affair, I could not fathom it.

There must be in all of us an instinct for the occult, an affinity for illicit short-cuts through difficulty that comes of mental and moral indolence—the instinct that causes the school-boy to look up the answer to his problem in the back of the book, and sends ignorance running to the soothsayer. Here was I, an educated man with what I hoped was not less than ordinary intelligence, in the grip of a crushing question; and instead of seeking certainty through rational search, I was mulling over a mummery which purported to be a communication from another world. I was no better than a kitchen-maid at her dream-book and fortune-teller. Carucci had said that Lady was secretly Reid's wife—or rather that he had gone through a false form of marriage

with her, having already a wife or an entanglement abroad. It was too horrible and too ruinous to all that I most hoped for to be true; it was not like the people concerned; but it was unbearably like all that I knew them to have said and done. I must know what the truth was; and the more I shrank from knowing, the more need for me to understand fully and at once. To sit still and wonder was mere cowardice. I was here to watch Carucci on Mr. Tabor's account: before he should leave the country, I would make it my business to question him on my own.

By the time I had shaken myself into so much common sense, the afternoon was far gone; and after a very early meal, I set out again for the East Side with the strained calmness of a man who walks into the jaws of a crisis to escape the devils that dance with their shadows behind him. There was a mockery of evening freshness in the air, though the heat still poured upward relentlessly from the sun-baked uncleanness underfoot. The streets were so crowded with the weary turmoil of released workers, that I made my way against the stream with some difficulty; and as I neared my destination the difficulty increased. An eddying mass of humanity filled the narrow sidewalks and overflowed into the

street among rumbling drays and trampling, scrambling horses: gangs of workmen with their tools, nervous and preoccupied business men, pallid clerks and stenographers, and droves of factory hands, men and women together, clamoring in a very Babel of languages. I noticed but one other man going toward the waterside—a heavily built fellow with a red handkerchief about his neck, some yards in front of me; and presently, as he turned sidewise to avoid being jostled into a lamp-post, I saw that it was Carucci. There could be no mistake: it was he, in his best clothes apparently, and alone, a dozen blocks from his own street. Sheila was nowhere in sight: however he had become separated from her, with or against her will, it was my business to follow him. Here was my chance for a talk with him alone; and as he passed his own corner and still kept on his way southward, it began to look as if I should be killing two birds with one stone.

I found it no very hard matter to keep him in sight; for the peculiar brightness of the handkerchief at his neck marked him a block away. There were other Italians, to be sure, but none so gorgeously bedecked, nor whose gait was so wondrous a combination of a roll, a stagger, and a strut. To

overtake him, however, among that crowd was not so easy; and I was afraid besides that coming suddenly upon him from behind might spoil my whole opportunity by making him angrily suspicious. I followed, accordingly, as best I might, for some distance; and when at last, with a swagger of grimy magnificence, he pushed through a pair of swinging doors, I thought that my chance had arrived. I waited a moment outside, that I might not seem too patently to have followed him; and as I stood there, a precocious small boy came up and looked me over.

"Yu're a fly cop, ain't yu?" he ventured, after a familiar inspection.

I smiled, and shook my head, somehow vaguely flattered.

"Aw come off, y'are too. I watched yu trailin' de guinea fer de las' four blocks."

"Shhh!" I whispered melodramatically.

"Sure t'ing. Yu can't fool me. Wot's de game, havin' yu're pal chase along so far behind?"

"Yu can search me," I said, frankly puzzled. "Is some one else following?"

"Surest t'ing you know. He's right on de job."

I looked the youngster over; he seemed to be telling the truth. But the detectives, I knew, were off

the case; and besides them and Sheila, who could have the slightest interest in Carucci? He might, to be sure, have committed crimes of which I knew nothing; but then, the police could have known nothing further against him at the time of our encounter in the field, and he could hardly have done anything since. I glanced in the direction in which I had come, and saw the unmistakable jerky figure of Doctor Reid coming around the corner.

Without stopping for a second look, I plunged inside. It was one of these really enormous halls which are scattered through the lower East Side, places half saloon, half music-hall, where tables fill a great floor space, where dusty, dyed palm trees vaunt a degraded splendor about the walls, and upon a low stage at the far end of the room, rouge-smear'd slatterns dance in dreary simulation of a long-parted youth and mirth. A very fat and flabby woman was upon the stage as I entered, and the smoky air quivered to her raucous singsong and the jangle of a battered piano. Carucci was seated near by, watching the stumbling fingers of the pianist with the greatest interest and amiability. It pleased me vaguely that the woman did not interest him. Even when she had finished her crime

against harmony, and clambered from the stage to beg for treats about the room and so swell the bar receipts of the house, she only received a grinning and good-natured negative from Carucci. He seemed much pleased with the place, nodding and marking time to the music, and plainly puffed up at the grudging attentions of the waiter.

I had seated myself in an obscure corner near the door, where a person entering would pass me by unnoticed and where Carucci must have turned full about to see me. If Reid had really been following me, he would have appeared by this time; yet I could hardly imagine what other errand might have brought him to this part of town. If he had been following me, instead of Carucci—the very possibility made me angry. And just then Doctor Reid walked in at the door. There was another man with him, a very large man with a broken nose and what is known among the sporting fraternity as a cauliflower ear. They stood together, looking about them for a moment; and I bowed my head upon my folded arms. I did not want to talk to Doctor Reid in that place—or in any place, for that matter. When I looked up again, they were seated at Carucci's table, and the waiter was bringing up

drinks for all three. They seemed to be talking with the greatest good fellowship. Reid, I noticed, barely tasted his drink, and watched his chance to pour the rest with a certain medical accuracy into the cuspidor beneath the table. I smiled to see how pleased he was with the way he was carrying off a perfectly evident part. Every minute or so he would reach forth his hand and give the Italian a couple of staccato pats in the region of his shoulder, pulling back his hand as quickly, and beaming the while with a radiance of stagy friendliness. The giant with him took things more as a matter of course. He wasted none of his drink, but drained each glass as soon as it was set before him, leaning between whiles with mighty elbows upon the table, his great disfigured hands cradling his brutal face. He seemed the last person in the world that a man of Reid's type would sit at table with. Perhaps Reid had reason to be afraid of Carucci and had employed this fellow as a sort of bodyguard.

Another human mockery was upon the stage; a tall, scrawny creature with some remnant of good looks and a voice that retained a surprising sweetness and charm. She sang unhappily, with an occasional scowl at the piano, where the sot on the

stool jangled his notes tirelessly. Carucci was getting very drunk; he was commencing to wave his arms about, and now and then the splutter of his words reached even my far corner. As for Reid, he was plainly embarrassed and somewhat frightened. His hand rested beseechingly upon the Italian's arm, and he looked at his burly companion with evident appeal.

The big man grinned, and gave his order to the waiter with a leer that ended with thrown-back head and closed eyes. The waiter grinned in his turn and hurried off. I was getting more than a little interested. Carucci tossed off the fresh drink at a gulp, and pushed back his chair.

"I know," he shouted. "I knowa da troub' with all you. You can'ta fool Antonio, *non cio-è?*"

Reid had grown suddenly rigid in his seat. I got up from my table, and hurried across to them.

"Sit down," said the giant, and pushed Carucci back into his chair with a thud.

Carucci scowled sullenly. "Well, gimme da mon'. Gimme da mon'," he growled. "I needa da mon'," and he poured forth a torrent of Italian, threats for the most part about a secret he knew which he proposed to shout to the world unless somebody paid

him well. The room was fairly empty, but here and there people at the tables had begun to stare. The woman on the stage stumbled in her song, and paused wearily. Reid glanced again at his companion.

"Ah, give it to him, he's a good teller," laughed the giant. "Just play he's a bank, an' make a deposit."

Reid drew a roll of bills from his pocket, and began slowly counting them off. The giant grew impatient.

"Ah, hell," he said, "here, give 'em to me," and he snatched the roll from Reid's hand and gathered up the money from the table, crushing the whole into a bulging wad. "Here, you; take it all. That'll hold you for a while."

Reid got up in protest.

"Sit down, you dope," the other growled, "let him have it for a while."

Carucci grinned drunkenly, and crammed the handful carelessly into a deep pocket, swaying to his feet.

"Graz'. Alla ri'." His mouth opened loosely, and he slumped to the floor in a heap.

The waiter had come up, and with the giant's

help lifted Carucci; and between them they half carried him to a doorway at the side of the room. They moved for all the world like three boon companions, arm in arm. The door closed behind them, and I glanced around. Nobody appeared to be concerned in the least; and even Reid, almost dancing with nervousness, no longer attracted attention.

"See here," I said, "did you people drug that fellow, Reid?"

He whirled upon me. "You keep out of this, Crosby," he stuttered; "nothing to do with you, nothing whatever."

"Well," I answered, "Mr. Tabor asked me to keep an eye on him, that's all. What am I to report? What are you going to do with him?"

"Um, humph! That's why you're here, then. Beg pardon, I'm sure, but you startled me. Bad business. Bad business. But the man had to be made sure of. Getting dangerous. Man with me drugged him. Chloral, you know. Won't harm him. Not at all."

The giant was coming back. "Here's your roll, mister," he said, with an unfriendly glance at me. "Count 'em. I took out my twenty."

"Is he all right?" Reid asked.

"Sure!" grinned the other. "He won't wake up till morning, and then he'll be out o' sight o' land. I got a nice ship picked out fer him."

CHAPTER XIX

IN WHICH I CAN NOT BELIEVE ALL I HEAR

WE WERE all up on our feet, and now Reid, with a curious nod of farewell, turned away with his companion. I stepped to his other side.

"One moment," I said, "I want to know a little more about this . . . ; and right here is as good a place as any."

"Can't just stop Crosby." He motioned me away nervously. "Not possible. See you up in the country any time and tell you all you want. Not here," and he moved toward the door.

"You can't help yourself," said I, "and I won't keep you sitting down again, please." He had lugged on his watch. "You'll have to miss your train, but there are plenty more."

The giant scowled at me with obvious willingness to begin a disturbance then and there; and Reid glanced hesitatingly from the one to the other of us, his impulse printed plain upon his face.

"Certainly," I put in, "you can get rid of me in

that way, for the moment, if it's worth your while. Make up your mind—you're the doctor."

He started angrily, flushing to the roots of his close-cropped hair; and I thought for an instant that I had mistaken my man. Then the melodrama oozed out of him. He dismissed the unwilling bully with a whispered word or two, and sat sullenly down across the table.

"I'll make it as short as you please," I retorted. "Carucci's wife is sent down to see that he sails. I'm sent down to see that she makes good. Now you come down and have him shanghaied. Was this your own idea, or were you—"

"No. My own initiative entirely. Only practical way of making sure that he went. Best to see to it personally. Always better to do the thing yourself, and then you know it's done."

"I understand, then, that Mr. Tabor didn't suggest this to you?"

"Exactly. Tabor knows nothing about it. My own idea altogether." His triumph in his own efficiency was overriding his annoyance. "Better say nothing to him whatever. He has enough to think of. Always best to avoid trouble. The man's gone, and there's an end to it. Is that all?"

So Reid's own fear of Carucci had been intense enough to drive him to this dirty alternative rather than trust to our sending the man safely away. There was something unnatural here.

"Not quite," I said. "Of course, you know the exact nature of the fellow's blackmailing story?"

"Certainly. Pack of lies. Won't discuss it. Utterly absurd, the whole thing, but we can't have it go any further."

"Precisely, and it won't go any further, now. What I want to know is the foundation for it. You must see the reason for my knowing that much of the facts, and for trusting me with them. If there is any entanglement—"

"Look here, Crosby," Reid leaned forward across the table, his face scarlet and working, "that'll do. I don't propose to sift over my life with you. Not for a minute. What's more, if we could afford a row, I'd punch your head for having the assurance to repeat that infernal slander to my face. That's all, you understand? That's all."

"There's plenty of time for that," I said, lowering my voice instinctively, as I felt my own temper slipping. "I'll ask you just one more question. On your word, is Miriam Tabor alive, or not?"

I never saw a man so broken by a word. He turned from red to greenish white, the perspiration shining on his forehead; and for a moment it seemed that he could not speak. Then he dragged the words out hoarsely and unnaturally.

"You've taken a damned cowardly advantage—Miriam Tabor was my wife, and she's dead. Now are you satisfied? Because I'm not."

There was nothing to add. I rose in silence, and we made our way to the door. On the sidewalk, he waited for me to choose my direction; then without a word, turned pointedly in the opposite one, and walked quickly away.

I set out for the Carucci tenement in a state of no great comfort. By forcing a scene I had gained nothing; and I had made an overt enemy of Doctor Reid. Not that I was particularly concerned over that development; I had never liked the man from the first; and I was impressed not so much by what he had said as by his open and disproportionate confusion. Think what I might of my own side of the affair, Reid had confessed to a personal concern with Carucci; he had flown into a rage upon my asking for an explanation; and the name of Miriam had stricken him like a blow. He had told me

nothing, after all, and had made me the more anxious over what he refused to tell. If he had been absolutely in the right, I had done nothing worse than to touch upon a grief brutally; and he would have said precisely what he did say if I had been justified and he had been lying. Well, Carucci was out of reach, and Reid worse than silenced. What chance remained to me of an answer to my problem depended upon Sheila.

I had no time to doubt if I should find her; for her window was lighted up, and she herself plainly to be seen, leaning far out to watch the street below as I turned the corner. When I was still half way up the block, she called to me by name, bidding me come up at once; and I answered as I picked my way along, trying to reassure her. The scene for a moment resembled a ludicrous burlesque of a serenade; nor did the street miss anything of its humor. With one accord the women in the doorways, the lounging men about the lamps and the scurrying screaming groups of youngsters underfoot caught up the implication, and began a babel of jocosse advice and criticism in a dozen languages. And although I understood but little of it, and was somewhat preoccupied with graver matters, yet I

was fain to dive hurriedly into the doorway with a heated and tingling countenance. The little room was itself again, save for a dull spot upon the clean-scrubbed boards; and the canary in the window paused in a burst of singing as I entered.

"Sheila," I said, "I am very much afraid you won't like my news."

"Well, sir, what's happened him?" she asked briefly.

"You're right," I answered. "It's your husband, but it's nothing to be alarmed about, nothing at all dangerous. You must—"

"For the love av God, don't thry to break things to me, sir. Speak right out. He's not hurt, ye say; well, he's pinched then, I suppose."

"No, it's not the police. He's been shanghaied, if you know what that means."

"Crimped? It's thru for ye, I know; 'tis twice before he's been, but who done it I never could tell. Av I thought anny av my folk that's afraid av his silly tongue wud do that dhirty thrick—" she stopped short, her strong face working.

I was rather angry myself. "Well, Sheila, I don't believe they had anything to do with it before; but it was Doctor Reid who had it done to-day. I

was there, but it was over before I understood what was going on."

"Reid? I shud ha' known 'twas Reid, the sham-blin' scun he is, an' small good them that loved him best ever had av him! Now, the divil hould his dhirty little pinch av a soul! For why shud he harm my man?"

"That's what I want to know," I said. "He's afraid of what Antonio says about him, and you know—"

"As far as his story ever goes it'll harm no man," she burst out, "they know well he's all bark an' no bite, if they weren't all crazy-afraid together, an' a truer man any day than that blagyard body-snatch-in' pill-roller. His own guilty heart it is, whisperin' over his shoulder, an' me poor lamb that he married an' murdered, and the child av his own body on the one day! An' the poor mother they're callin' crazy, with the soul av the daughter she cudn't let free standin' between her an' the sunshine. Crazy she'll never be until they make her so, with their doctors an' questions an' whispers, an' that death-fetch Reid grinnin' before her face, with the blood not dhry on him!" She paused for breath, walking up and down the room and twisting her hands.

"Sit down, Sheila," I said, "you know this is absurd. I'm trying to get a little truth about people we both care for; and if you say things like that, how can you expect me to believe anything?" But my knees were trembling as I spoke.

"Mudhered it was all the same," she said sullenly, dropping back into a chair nevertheless. "When a docthor with all the learnin' that goes beyond the knowledge av a woman lets his wife die an' an innocent mite av a new-born baby go down to the grave with her, 'tis black murder it is, no less. How could she rest quiet after that, an' half her life callin' to her, an' the mother that wouldn't let her go, an' had the power to see? 'Tis no docthor she wants, but a priest, an' no medicine but a handful av holy wather, like my own sister's cousin Nora that used to sit an' talk with her lad that was dead evenin's by the byre wall, an' Father Tracy came behind an' sprinkled the two av thim, the one he could see an' the one he could not see."

"Who was it that died?" I asked sharply. "Was it Miriam? Did Reid lie to me when he said so, or did Carucci lie when he said that Reid was married to Lady?"

She grew suddenly quiet and cautious, as if she

had said too much already, and must weigh her words.

“Reid told ye the truth for once,” she muttered.
“’Twas Antonio lied.”

“Then Miriam was his wife, and Lady—”

“Yes,” she answered, “it was Miriam,” but she did not meet my eyes. Then she went on hastily, before I could speak again.

“Ye see, sir, ’twas like this: When Miriam died, her mother’s heart nearly went with her, an’ so because the poor dear loved her more than enough, she did not go quite away. ’Tis so some whiles, when the livin’ holds too close by the dead. She used to talk to her, an’ when the villain that let her die got doctors an’ looked like judgment, an’ said my poor soul was wrong in her head, an’ ought to be taken away, an’ they moved her out there in the country where they had no friends, an’ kept her hidden as if there was a shame upon her, sure the lovin’ soul of the dead girl followed her mother. They said she was crazy when she made them move her daughter’s room, an’ keep it up in the new house as it had been in the old, an’ would sit an’ talk to her there. Sure, ’twas no sign at all, an’ a black lie in Reid’s black heart to set the husband an’ the daughter again’

her. Some folks are that way, that can see the fairy folk an' the goblins, an' speak with the wandherin' dead. A good priest Mrs. Tabor should have when the power tires her, an' not a lyin' schemin' brute av a docthor that wants to put her away. 'Twas not much at first anyhow. But he turned their heads with his talk av asylums an' horrors to lead them away from his own wickedness."

"Is that the secret, then?" I asked. "Is the trouble no more than their fear that Mrs. Tabor is insane?"

"Secret? What secret? There's no secret they have at all, only a wicked lie." She was growing careful again. "'Tis all that docthor that's never happy but doin' harm. He's no more crazy than meself, an' no one thinks nor fears it, not even him. They only say so, because—" She stopped herself again.

"Sheila," I said, "tell me just one thing. How much truth is there in what your husband says?"

"How do I know what he says?" She was watching me closely, as if to see that I followed her words. "He's dhrunk half the time, poor divil, an' he says one thing to-day an' one to-morrow. Never ye mind him, sir."

"But there must have been something for him to

go on," I persisted. "Did Reid have some affair abroad before his marriage, or not?"

She hesitated, her apparent hatred of Reid struggling with her loyalty to the family and her recovered caution.

"There was some matther av a woman in Germany," she said at last, reluctantly, "but I never rightly knew about it, nor Antonio either." Then more rapidly: "An' it's angry I've been, Mr. Crosby, an' 'tis like I've said more meself than I mean." She paused.

"Has that nothing to do with the trouble in the family? Sheila, you know I'm their good friend, and I'm not merely gossiping. You must have seen—" for the life of me I could not go on.

"I'll say no more," she answered obstinately. "It's weary I am for you, an' the poor darlin' that's bewitched ye, but—" her eyes filled, and she shut her mouth with a snap. Say what I would after that, I could not move her. She had said enough already, and she trusted a gentleman like me that it should go no further. That was all.

"Sheila," I said, as I rose to go, "is all you have told me true?"

"Thru?" she started as if I had struck her.

"Yes, it's throe—an' sorrow fell them that made it so."

I took up my hat and stick from the table.

"We will have another talk about this some day, Sheila," I said. And I closed the door behind me.

CHAPTER XX

NOR UNDERSTAND ALL I SEE

FOR the next few days I think I must have been nearer to a nervous breakdown than I am ever likely to be again. All the strain and the anxiety of the whole summer seemed to fall upon me in a mass; I had not the relief of taking arms against my trouble, nor of any better business than to brood and to remember, sifting misery by the hour in hopeless search after some grain of decision; and the heat and hurry of the city broke my natural sleep, and went to make a nightmare of my days. Maclean was with me a good deal, taking me with him into strange corners of the town, and trying his best to bring me out of myself; but I could not talk to him of what was on my mind, and the irritation of constant pretense to carelessness vitiated much of the relief he tried to give. Wherever I might be to appearance, the same Spartan Fox was at my breast—Carucci's story and Sheila's at-

tempted contradiction, and the ambiguous trouble that overhung Lady and shut me out from her. I could not fathom it; and I dared not take dangerous action in the dark. Reid had passed through some scandal before his marriage; Sheila had admitted so much; and her denial that Miriam and Lady were the same had been involved in such a maze of surmise and superstition, so evidently and angrily put forward as a defense, that I could not believe what I would of it. It might well be that Mrs. Tabor was oppressed even to insanity by the situation. But what was the situation? If the mother's madness of bereavement were at the root of all, what had the family to conceal? Or why should not the remaining daughter marry whom she chose? Sheila's explanation of the first was absurdly tenuous; and the last she had not attempted to explain. No, there was one shadow over them all: the cause of the mother's grief was the cause of the daughter's terror, and of the irrational behavior of the sane and practical men of the family. I could find no alternative; either Mrs. Tabor was haunted by mediæval ghosts, or some part of the scandal must be true.

At last, one unbearably humid morning, when I was almost on the point of going blindly out to

Stamford on the chance of any happening that might let my anxiety escape into action, of any opportunity that might force a climax, Mr. Tabor called me on the telephone.

"Hello, Mr. Crosby? Mr. Laurence Crosby?—Well, Crosby, this is Mr. Tabor talking. Are you free this morning, so that you can give us a few hours of your time? You can help us very much if you will."

"Certainly; I'll be out as soon as I can get a train." The idea of seeing Lady again was a compensation under any circumstances; but the next words destroyed that hope.

"No, don't do that. What I want of you is right there in New York." He hesitated a moment. "Hello—that—that same situation which occurred the other day, when you were alone in the house, and we were in town, has arisen again. You understand me?—We're looking after this neighborhood. The person in question has been gone an hour, leaving no word; may have gone to New York. Now, will you meet all trains until further notice, and keep your eyes open? Call us up about every half hour. In case of success, use your own judgment—don't excite any one, don't be left behind, and tele-

phone as soon as possible. Am I making this explicit enough?"

"Yes, perfectly. I'm to meet trains, let matters take their own course as far as possible, keep in touch, and let you know."

"That's it exactly. I knew we could count on you."

I was not many minutes in getting to the Grand Central, laying my plan of action on the way. To be sure that no one arrived unobserved in that great labyrinth of tracks and exits was no such easy matter, even though I knew the point of departure. I began by a thorough search of the waiting-rooms. Then, finding, as I had expected, no trace of Mrs. Tabor, I learned the times and positions of all the Stamford trains, and set myself to meet each one as it arrived. I had to make certain of seeing every passenger, and at the same time to keep out of the expectant throng that crowded close to the restraining ropes on a similar errand; for if Mrs. Tabor should appear I must not seem to be watching for her. The next hour and a half was divided between studying the clock, running my eyes dizzily over streams of hurrying humanity, racing anxiously from place to place when a late train crowded close upon its suc-

cessor, and snatching a moment at the telephone in the intervals of nervous waiting. Even so, I could not be morally sure that she might not slip by me somewhere unnoticed. And when at last I recognized her fragile figure far down the long platform, I was less excited than relieved.

She came on quickly, carrying a little shopping-bag, and stepping with a certain birdlike alertness. It was hard to imagine that this eager, pretty lady, with her spun-glass hair and her bright eyes, could be either ill or in trouble. I let her pass me, and followed at a little distance into the waiting-room; then crossed over and met her face to face by the telephone booths on the west side. Her greeting was a fresh surprise.

"Why, Mr. Crosby, this is delightfully fortunate! I was just going to call you up, and here you spring from the earth as if I had rubbed a magic ring. You must have known that I was thinking about you. You're not going away, are you? Or meeting any one?"

If she meant anything in particular, I had reason to feel embarrassed; but the big, childish eyes that smiled into my own seemed wholly innocent of suspicion.

"No," I said. "I've been seeing somebody off, and I'm very gladly at your service for as long as you like." I was praying Heaven to inspire me with mendacity.

"Well, that's the best that could have happened. I came in town to see some friends, and I promised myself to see you at the same time. Excuse me just half a minute, while I telephone them."

She slipped into the booth, leaving me hesitating outside. Evidently here was my chance to call up Mr. Tabor, and report; but she kept glancing out at me through the glass doors as she talked, quite casually, but still with observant interest; and I dared not shut myself in a booth lest she should either suspect or escape. She was out again before I could make up my mind.

"Now take me to lunch," she said gaily, "and after that, if you haven't grown tired of such a frivolous old creature, you may take me where I am going. I'll set you free by two or three o'clock, at the latest."

I took her to the Waldorf, for no better reason than that it was cool and close at hand; wondering all the way how in the world I was to get word to the family, and keeping up my end rather absently

in a conversation, which with a younger woman would have been so frantically flirtatious, and wanted only relief from preoccupied anxiety to be very delightful fencing. Mrs. Tabor was in that state of fluffy exhilaration, that heightening and brightening of spirit which in a man would have been hilarity, and which in a woman may equally well mean the excitement of pleasure or the tension of imprisoned pain. She was a little above herself, but there was absolutely nothing to tell me why. And she kept me too busy in finding the next answer to plan what I should do the minute afterward.

"Of course, Mr. Crosby," she began when we were settled at our table, "this is another of my horrible and mysterious disappearances. I've actually come to the great city, in broad daylight, without a chaperon. Isn't it reckless of me?"

"Desperately," I answered. "And not a soul knows where you are? Won't they be shocked and surprised when they miss you?"

She shook out a little laugh. "Let them; it's their own fault. If I'm to be treated like an European school-girl, I shall at least have the pleasure of acting like one. They need imagination enough to conceive of my being able to take care of myself

now and then. I'm not in my second childhood yet—only in my second girlhood."

"At least let me telephone them that you're with me. I won't say why or where, and we can make a mystery of that."

"Not a bit of it." Her voice sharpened just a trifle. "That would spoil the whole lesson. They needn't worry unless they choose. Then when I come home, if they make a fuss over me I shall say: 'Now see how silly you've been. I've been having luncheon with Mr. Crosby.' You wouldn't take the edge off of that disclosure?" She tilted her head on one side.

"But they ought to know merely that you're safe," I ventured.

"Safe? What should I be but safe? No—" She put out an emphatic little hand. "I'm free from the convent, and I'm not going to be taken to task by so young and good-looking a confessor. Besides, I'm ashamed of you. Where's your gallantry? You don't seem to appreciate the honor of our secret at all."

"Perhaps the trouble is," I said cautiously, "that I don't understand the secret myself. What did you mean when you said—"

"Oh, *that!*" she laughed. "Why, I meant the hardest thing in the world for a man to understand, and that is—just nothing at all. You had all of you been so stupid and serious and uncomfortable that night that I felt it would serve you right to make you jump. So I made a little mystery of my own, and it worked beautifully. It sounded every bit as sensible as yours, too."

She was beyond me. Two or three times after that I worked around to the same subject, but she evaded me so deftly that I could not for the life of me be sure whether it was evasion or unconsciousness; and my attempts to communicate with the family met with no better fortune. At last I tried to leave her for a moment on the plea of calling a taxicab.

"You live on Table Mountain, and your name is Truthful James," was her comment. "Taxicabs are scarce in Stamford, Mr. Crosby, and it would take too long to get one here. Let the waiter call one of those outside."

At that, I gave up with a good grace. I should be free to report as soon as I had left her with her friends, and a few minutes more or less could not matter much by now. She gave the chauffeur an

address in the sixties and we were presently there: one of these new American basement houses sandwiched in among the older brownstone fronts of the more conservative blocks. During the short drive, she had been silent and I thought a little disturbed; but her farewell was bright with reawakened gaiety.

"I shall measure your enjoyment by your secrecy, Mr. Confessor," she purred, with tilted head and raised forefinger. "You may tell my anxious warders just as much as you please, and the less you confide in them the more I shall flatter myself of your confidence in me. Now I leave you to your conscience."

She was standing in the doorway, her hand upon the bell, and I had turned back to the waiting taxicab, when a somber and respectable electric brougham turned the corner and drew slowly up to the curb. I recognized with an uncomfortable shock that the driver was no other than the Tabors' former chauffeur, the unworthy Thomas who had deserted Lady and myself at the crisis of our midnight adventure; and I thought that under his mask of the impassive servant he recognized me somewhat uncomfortably. I glanced back to see if Mrs. Tabor had seen him also. She was leaning against the door of the house, clutching at the handle as if



And there he stood on the sidewalk



for support, or in a desperate anxiety to enter; every line of her face and figure writhing and agonized with unmistakable terror. The bang of the brougham door behind me and the sound of a shrill precise voice that I remembered made me turn my eyes to the street—and as I did so the bang of the front door sounded behind me like an echo. Mrs. Tabor had disappeared into the house, the brougham was starting rapidly away, and there on the sidewalk stood the man whom Reid had twice brought secretly home.

CHAPTER XXI

CONCERNING THE IDENTITY OF THE MAN WITH THE HIGH VOICE

I HAD my first good look at him while he moved deliberately past me and up to the door of the house: A man past middle age, in frock-coat and silk hat in spite of the season, heavy without portliness, a figure of an elderly athlete. A shock of iron-gray hair brushed the back of his collar, and his face was a face to ponder over, a face at once square and aquiline, broad forehead, predatory nose, and the massive lips and jawbones of a conqueror, clear-cut under a skin of creamy ivory. He might have been a Roman emperor in time-worn marble. While I stood irresolute, wondering whether to follow, and on what pretext I should do so, the door swung open and he passed ponderously within; and the next instant Mrs. Tabor appeared at the ground-floor window, motioning to me frantically. I came forward, but she as fran-

tically waved me back, and seemed to indicate by her gestures that I was to keep the taxicab where it was. A moment later she slipped out of the door like a fugitive, ran across the sidewalk, and fell in a heap inside the cab, crying: "Take me away, quickly! Oh, take me away!"

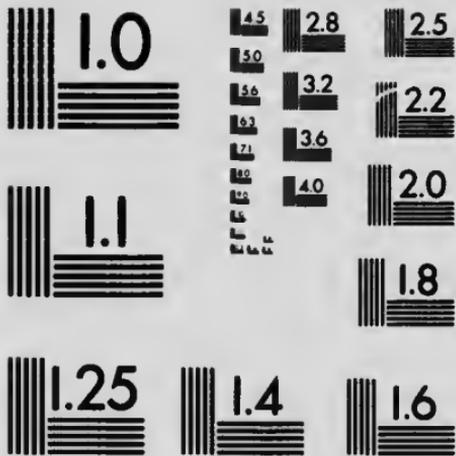
I directed the astonished driver to the Grand Central, and sprang in beside her. She was very pale and breathing in sobbing gasps; and remembering her weak heart, I was alarmed almost for her life. But she began to recover as soon as we were fairly in motion, and by the time we had gone a few blocks was apparently beyond the immediate danger of collapse. She was still, however, pitifully pale and shaken, clutching unconsciously at my arm, and whispering: "That man—that man—" like a frightened child.

"Whom do you mean?" I asked. "Not the chauffeur? He went the other way as soon as you were inside."

"Chauffeur? No, what chauffeur? I mean the old man that came in after me. He comes after me everywhere. I can't get away from him. Is he coming now?" She tried to look out of the window.

"There's no one coming," I said blindly. "He





MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART
NATIONAL BUREAU OF STANDARDS
STANDARD REFERENCE MATERIAL 1010a
(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)

sent his car away, and he couldn't follow us if he tried. It's all right."

"Really? Are you quite sure?" She sat up, and began setting her hair to rights with little aimless pats and pushes. "You must think me ill or crazy, Mr. Crosby," she went on with a faint smile, "but if you could only understand, you would see that I'm not so absurd as I seem."

"But who is he?"

"He's the worst of them all. He's the head of it. My own people would hear reason if it weren't for him. He knows—oh, he knows all the things that nobody ought to. He doesn't want me ever to see Miriam—I can't get away from him. I can't possibly get away from him." She was growing hysterical again, and I dared not let her go on, much as I wanted to hear more.

"He isn't here, anyway," I said. "He isn't anywhere about, and he isn't coming, and you have got away from him this time. And I'm going to take you safe home and see that no one troubles you any more."

I felt that I was talking like a fool, but my reassurance, fatuous as it was, had its suggestive effect. She grew steadier, and I was able to lead her mind

away from its terror, until, as we reached the station, she had become almost like herself.

"Mr. Crosby," she said as the cab stopped, "you've done me a difficult service very tactfully, and you are a wonderful nurse; I'm really quite myself now, and there's no need at all of your coming home with me. But I want you to understand a little why I had such an absurd shock. That man is insane, and I'm afraid of him. But I can't make the family believe it."

I tried to pay the least possible attention. "I'd better come with you anyhow," I said carelessly, "just to be on hand. There's no harm in having a man along."

She protested that she was quite well, and that there was not the slightest occasion for my trouble. And indeed, she was so marvelously recovered that it was hard for me to believe my own memory of the last few minutes: the oppression had passed from her as a slate is cleared by a sponge, and there was hardly a sign of visible nervousness to show that she had been excited. Nevertheless, I could not leave her so, though I was racking my brain for an explanation, and raging at the responsibility which prevented me from hurrying back to seek it.

As I was buying the tickets, a god from the machine appeared in the person of Sheila, armed for travel and looking more anxious than ourselves. She took possession of the older woman like a nurse discovering a lost child.

"Here ye are on your way home again," she cried, "an' me thinkin' I'd have to go all the way out alone on the hot thrain, with no one better than meself. That man of mine's off to sea, Mrs. Tabor, an' Miss Margaret sent me word to come back an' make meself useful. But ye'd be knowin' that already. Ye're only in the city for the day?"

"Mrs. Tabor and I have been lunching together," I said, "and it seemed so hot in town that I hardly liked to have her go home alone."

"Ye've been—" Sheila shot a quick glance at me. "Well, there'll be no need, Mr. Crosby, unless ye were to come to Stamford yourself anyway," and she began to inquire volubly after the health of the family.

Mrs. Tabor turned to me. "There really is nothing for you to do, Mr. Crosby, except to come soon and see me again," she said brightly. "I'm quite well, and I'm in safe hands, as you see—"

So far as I could tell, she was right; and I had

no further need of overriding dismissal. I saw them both safely on the train, and hurried back; resolved to reach the bottom of at least this new mystery before I slept that night. My telephone call was answered by Reid, upon whom I wasted no unnecessary words, telling him only that Mrs. Tabor had been continuously with me, and was now on her way home in charge of Sheila.

"Why on earth didn't you 'phone before?" he snapped.

"Couldn't," said I shortly. "Good-by," and I raced for the subway.

A north-bound express was just leaving, and I had barely time to squeeze inside the door. The nearest station to the house would be Sixty-sixth Street; but by taking the express to Seventy-second, and running back on a local, I should save time. I hung on my strap, fidgeting with impatience while we howled through the clashing darkness and flashed past the blurred brilliancy of the stations. As we passed Sixty-sixth Street, a local drew out in the same direction as ourselves, running for a moment side by side with us before it fell behind. Its rows of lighted windows balanced almost within reach; and close inside, in one of the cross-seats

amidships of the car, sat the man whose mere presence had so terrified Mrs. Tabor.

There was no mistaking that face, even if the silk hat and formal frock-coat had not been at that season almost an identification in themselves. I could as soon have mistaken Ibsen or Napoleon appearing before me in the flesh. The massive head was bent forward thoughtfully, and one broad white hand lay loose along the window-sill. I noticed a plain gold ring on the little finger. Then, as the express began to slacken speed, the window moved slowly past me and out of sight ahead. I had a strong sense of having seen the face many times before, though, try as I would, I could not fit it to a name. He was either some person well enough known to have his picture often in print or else the striking distinction of his features had given me that impression.

The local was standing at the platform as we drew into Seventy-second Street, and I pushed out and across to it with small regard for the amenities of the crowded station. A score of people, it seemed, were possessed of personal designs to block my way. I dodged a chanticleer hat, caromed off a hot and angry commuter or so, and found myself

scrambling at the tail of the impatient cluster before the sliding-doors.

"Little lively, please!" roared the guard. "Len-nux 'n West Farms, local train! Both gates!"

I did my best, but there were too many ahead of me. Even as I reached for that grip on the door-casing, which meant the right to squeeze inside the door clicked shut before my face; and two dull clanks of the gong sealed my disappointment. I ran wildly along the train, trying to overtake the relay of sliding doors and jangling bells; but it was of no use. Then for an infuriating minute or two the train stood still, locked and inviolable, while the station alarm chattered overhead, and through the gleaming window I could see my man sitting calmly in his place. As it creaked out into the darkness, another express growled in behind me; and I had still presence of mind enough to slip aboard. My one chance was that we might overtake that local in a favorable spot.

Seventy-ninth and Eighty-sixth Streets blurred past without a sign. Then a little beyond the latter I caught sight of the local, and gradually we drew alongside. He was still there, drumming idly on the window-pane with his white fingers, and look-

ing disinterestedly straight across at me. I had a momentary impulse to conceal my face, until I remembered that he had never seen me. So for a second we stared at each other, pursuer and pursued, the one utterly unconscious of the other. My train passed forward with increasing speed, while I counted the cars—one—two—three—he was in the fourth. Either he must come into Ninety-sixth Street or get off at Ninety-first; and the chances were in favor of my finding him still in the train at Ninety-sixth.

I got out there, crossed over to the local platform, and waited. When the train came in, I was opposite the fourth car. The center seat was empty, and I sought in vain among the passengers thronging to the doors. Then I hurried back ahead of the crowd, and from before the ticket window ran my eyes again over the platform to make sure. Well, he had left the train at the last station; it was a question of seconds. I was in the street above in less time than it takes to tell it, and swung myself recklessly aboard a passing south-bound surface car; but a stream of trucks and automobiles blocked the track; and before we passed the next corner I jumped off and ran. Three blocks I went at the top of my speed,

my breath growing shorter at every stride. And then, nearly a block away to the westward, I caught sight of the silk hat against the reddening sky.

It was an easy matter enough to overtake the man. He walked along slowly and rather heavily, glancing upward at the numbers of the houses; and when he paused to verify an address in a pocket-book, I might have spoken to him then, but I hesitated for a pretext. His name was what I wanted first; and in my ignorance of the circumstances it would be safer to settle one thing at a time. While I debated with myself, he went up the steps of a house near West End Avenue. Since it was evidently not his home, nothing could be lost by a little patient consideration; so lighting a cigarette, of which by now I felt considerable need, I strolled to and fro before the house, while I pondered my next move. Five or ten minutes went by, and I was on the point of ringing the bell and asking who it was that had just come in, when the electric brougham purred around the corner, with my friend Thomas sitting stolidly at the wheel. At the moment, I happened to be nearly at the other end of the block, and before I reached the spot where the brougham had drawn up my man had come out of the house.

I could hardly question his servant before his face. And the next minute he had clambered in and driven decorously away.

I ran as far as the corner, looking about in all directions for a taxicab. None was in sight; and to follow afoot for any distance was, of course, impossible. I should have to be content with the number of the brougham and such information as inquiries at the two houses I knew the man to have visited might yield. Then a boy came by on a decrepit bicycle, and I caught at his handles.

"Let me take your wheel," I panted. He twisted his face into position for a howl. "Nonsense, kid, I'm not going to steal it. Look at me. Here," I thrust a bill into his hand. "That's more than your machine's worth, and I'll send it back to you in an hour. Where do you live?"

He told me in a dazed sort of tone, and I was wavering on my way almost before he had finished. The wheel ran abominably hard, and was so much too low for me that my knees barely cleared the handle-bars; still, it meant all the difference between losing the brougham altogether and being able to follow it easily. All the way down to the fifties it led me, and eastward beyond Madison Avenue,

halting at last before a rigid-looking domicile whose lower window displayed a strip of ground glass with the legend: "Immanuel Paulus, M. D."

Somehow, the name was indefinitely familiar, as the face had been. I wasted no time in surmise, but went straight up to the door.

"Was that Doctor Paulus who just came in?" I asked the maid. She looked me over cautiously.

"Who was it wanted to see him, sir?"

"He wouldn't know me," I said, "it's only that I have something which I think he lost in the street."

The trick worked, as I had expected, and a moment later my man stood before me identified, even to the shrill precision of his voice with its tinge of German accent.

"I found this in front of your door, Doctor," said I, "and I thought you had dropped it as you went in." And I handed him my silver pocket-knife. Deliberately he produced his own, and with deliberate courtesy pointed out my mistake. I thought as the door closed behind me that there had been a glint of recognition in his eyes. But the final step remained to take; and with an aching swarm of suspicions writhing in my brain, I sought out a public telephone.

"Mac," I asked, "who and what is Doctor Immanuel Paulus?" and the answer I had expected set the keystone upon a whole arch of tottering reminiscences.

"Biggest alienist and nerve-shark in town; biggest in the country, I guess. He was the old guy sittin' alone in the corner at that spook-hunt. D'you remember?"

CHAPTER XXII

I LEARN WHAT I HAVE TO DO

I DID not sleep very much that night; but it was no longer the frustrate misery of indecision. I was done with all that, with beating myself aimlessly against blind bars and running weary circles in the wheel, with tossing helplessly in a mesh of irresoluble circumstances. I saw now what I had to do; and the problem was not what the trouble might be, not even what I must accomplish, but only how I should accomplish it. The Carucci story might be true wholly, or in part, or practically not at all; it did not matter. Assuming all of it, if Lady was Miriam, and Reid had married her when he was not free to do so, she was not his wife even in law. Whether his wife was now living or dead made no difference. Lady was not bound to him in theory and certainly not in reality. She was free to come to me if she chose, and I had only to make her see it.

But I did not for a moment believe that the

trouble was so directly her concern. Mrs. Tabor was insane, or was feared to be: that was beyond a doubt, and that beyond a doubt was the root and center of it all; that was what the family had so elaborately striven to conceal, either because of the nature of her illusion, or because of some scandal in the events which had brought it about. That was reason enough, granting their determination to keep it secret, for all that I had seen, from the midnight alarm, which had driven me out of the house, to Mrs. Tabor's terror of the alienist; and her absurd suggestion that he himself was insane clenched the matter. What supported it still more was that if this were so, then all these honest people had from point to point spoken the truth; Mr. Tabor had, as he said, trusted me to the edge of caution; Lady had told the truth in fear, and Reid under pressure; Sheila had told the truth, only inflated and colored by superstition. And as I thought over the substance of what she had told me, I wondered whether by some chance her tale had not been truer than I thought, nearer than even the others knew to the heart of reality. I would not take her ghosts too literally; but Mrs. Tabor might have some illusion of her dead daughter's presence, and I remembered

the voice called Miriam that had spoken in the circle of spirit-seekers. Was there not surely some connection here?

Yet, however that might be, it all closed round a single need. I cared nothing, after all, what the shadow might be, except as that concerned my taking Lady away from it. It would be like her loyalty to feel the family trouble a bond that she must not selfishly break, and like her girlhood to dream her mother's delusion a taint that must forbid her marrying. But she was wrong in both, and to-morrow I should tell her so and take her away with me. Even if she were right, I should do the same: I had grown to care for the others, and I was not wholly careless of humanity; but in the face of this greater matter, family and race and right itself, if need were, might go to the devil. I was fighting for her and for myself, and for that wherein we two were one desire.

I fell asleep at last thinking of that, and imagining what I should need to say and do; and the next morning I went out to Stamford in a curious mood of deliberation; feeling, on the threshold of crisis, unnaturally calm and sure; as if I were somehow going with the stream, a small embodiment of pre-

determined force, a mouthpiece of the thing which was to be.

As she had done once before, Sheila opened the door for me. It was very plain that she was glad of my coming.

"Sure it's Mr. Crosby!" she exclaimed softly. "What's the matter, sir? You look white and tired like. 'Tis all the world seems upset lately."

"I want to see Miss Tabor, Sheila. Will you tell her that I am here?"

"That's the very thing I'm not to tell her, sir. She said most particular that she was not to see any one to-day; but—" Sheila frowned at me forbiddingly, "you sit down an' wait a minute, sir, an' I'll do me best. I'm a servant-girl no longer—ordhers is nothing to me."

"But, Sheila—" I began nervously.

"But nothin', Mr. Crosby. You sit down an' wait," and she was gone before I could say another word. I sat in the great room, as if at the portals of judgment day, every fiber of me keenly alive, and yet my mind knowing no particular focus of thought. The future gaped before me like eternity, something too vaguely large for definition or comprehension. I remember that I kept whispering

dryly to myself that man was master of his fate, and feeling infinitesimally comforted by the sophistry.

The curtains at the door parted, and Lady stood looking into my eyes. I saw before she spoke that she knew why I had come.

"I was sure that it was you," she said at last. "Sheila told me that a young man was down-stairs, and that she could not get him to go away."

"She told me," I said, "that you did not wish to see me. Was that true?"

Lady sank wearily into a chair. "Sheila should not have let you in," she said. "I was afraid that you might come here; and you know that it was wrong of you to come. You know that as well as I do."

She spoke monotonously, with pauses between the words, leaning back along the deep chair. The last few days must have been hard ones for her. She was very pale, the little blue veins in her temples distinct and clearly lined. It tore me to see her so; and for a moment I wondered if I had done well to come, and felt a wave of that uncomfortable reaction which meets one on the threshold of a test; for a moment only, then I knew that even though I

tired her the more, it was a price that we must pay for her sake as well as mine. No good ever comes of half understandings.

"No, I don't know that," I said slowly. "You don't believe that I'm altogether selfish, or that I would come now, when I know that many things have distressed you, to give you any further reason for distress."

She leaned forward, one white hand raised. "Please," she said, "I am not sure—not really sure—why you have come. But I am certain of this, that you have made a mistake in coming. There's nothing on earth that you can do to help us just now—there's nothing anybody can do—there's nothing anybody can do."

"Oh, things aren't so bad as that." I knew that I was only temporizing, and raged inwardly at myself.

Lady's eyes dropped, and one hand played nervously with a loop of the chain that hung about her neck.

"I don't believe you can understand just how bad they are. The worst of it is that I can't tell you—oh, it wasn't fair of you to come to-day"—her voice broke ever so little, and her eyes brimmed with un-

shed tears—"I'm tired and disheartened, and I want advice and comfort—no, don't come near me—I can't tell you anything—there's nothing I can tell to anybody in the world."

I was standing before her. "No, I can't comfort you now," I said. "I'm here to ask you things, and perhaps to hurt you very much. But you mustn't think I've come carelessly. I came because I had to—because there are things I have to understand to go on living."

Her eyes were frightened, but she settled herself back as if to meet whatever blow my questioning might give. "I don't think that you are very generous to-day," she said; and her voice grew harder than I had ever heard it. "Neither shall I answer anything that I may not. But—but perhaps you are right—perhaps there are some things that you should know. Please say what you have to say and have it done."

"You told me once," I began gently, "that your name was Margaret. Was that true?"

"True?" she wrinkled her brow. "Of course it was true." It was evidently not a question that she had expected.

"Then who is Miriam?"

"Oh, I told you the truth then. Do you doubt it? Why should you ask these things again?"

I paused. Certainly she was not to hear that ugly story if it were not true and I could in any way prevent it.

"It may seem very strange to you," said I, "but some day I will tell you all about it. I have to know this now: Do you mean that it is true you have a sister, that her name is Miriam, and that she is—that she was Doctor Reid's wife?" The question was out at last, and my heart stopped for the answer.

"Why, yes," she answered, in the same disinterested tone, as if she were telling dry facts in distant history—"Miriam married Walter when he came back from studying abroad. She only lived about a year. They had a little girl, you know, that lived not more than about an hour. I think if she had lived, Miriam would have lived too. But it was too much for her to bear. She died three days after her baby died."

The unshed tears were falling now, falling quietly in the mere physical relief of tender sorrow. Every rigid line of tragedy and pain had disappeared, and her trouble came upon her naturally,

like sleep, a relaxation and a rest after hot-eyed days. I did not even feel any sorrow for her, so full was I of the new certainty that we were free. Very reverently I came closer to her, and like a child she turned to me and hid her face against my shoulder. So we rested for a space. I do not think that either of us had any definite thought—only that peace wrapped us like a garment and that the tension of the past few weeks had somehow vanished away. At last Lady drew herself quietly from me, half smiling as she brushed away her tears.

"I have been very silly," she whispered, "but it's all over now. It was good of you to let me cry," and she reached her hand toward me with a gesture so intimately grateful that my love fairly broke its bounds, and I caught it almost fiercely in my own.

"Lady, Lady dearest," I cried, "can't you see what it all means? Oh, my dear, you must see. I love you. That is all I know in the world, and nothing else matters or can matter."

"No, no—you must not—" she drew back from me frightened. "You must not tell me that. You have no right—and you are spoiling it all."

"Don't you love me?" I persisted.

Lady raised her eyes sadly. "There can be no such thing for you and me. I have told you why."

"What have you told me?"

"I've told you that even if I did—care for you—that I could not let myself care—that I can only see you even, when you treat me as a friend, and only as a friend."

"You told me once, I remember, that there was some one else. I think now that you were mistaken. There neither is nor can be any one else."

"But there is." The words were scarcely audible, and her eyes were turned away from me.

"I know perhaps what you mean. I didn't know at the time—but I think I do now. Do you mean that the some one else, the person who stands between you and me, is your mother?"

Lady looked past me blankly. "My mother?" she questioned.

"You must see that I have to know the real truth now," I said. "You can surely trust me; and I am trying for something that means more than life. Lady, you must answer me fairly. Is it not because of your mother that you say these things?"

"What do you know of my mother?"

"I know," I answered as gently as I could, "that

you all believe she is temporarily unbalanced; that Doctor Immanuel Paulus has declared her insane."

Lady had gone very white again.

"Yes, that is the reason," she said.

"But," I cried, "that is no reason at all! If you feared that my intimacy would betray this trouble you all guard as a secret—why, you see I know that now; and surely you can not doubt in your heart that I would guard any secret of yours more sacredly than anything in the world. Why has it anything to do with us?" I was speaking eagerly, with that foolish burst of argumentative logic which a lover fondly imagines potent, hurling breathless words against the impregnability of conviction.

"No," said Lady softly. "You are wrong, because you still do not know. There is no taint of insanity in the family; we are not afraid of that. Mother was taken out of herself by a great shock, not by inheritance."

"Yes," I said, "by the shock of your sister's death. I know that."

"Then you know almost everything," said Lady, "except perhaps—except the reason that mother gives for my sister's death—her marriage."

We were both of us for a long time silent.

"You see, it is no question of the truth." She went on at last, in that terribly distant and even voice. "It is true to her—and very dreadful—so that it is dangerous for her even to remember. That is why she shrinks from Walter; that is why I keep her wedding-ring." She touched the chain that hung about her neck, "And that is why—do you understand now?"

I nodded wordlessly, for the world seemed coming to an end. Then, thank God, I looked into the eyes of my love; and behind their despair I read appeal, the ageless call of a woman's heart to the one man of her faith. And then I had taken her in my arms. I held her close and the fragrance of her hair was in my nostrils, and soft arms had crept around my neck, bending my head to meet the upturned face.

"Oh, Laurie, you will be kind to me," she said at last. "I can never do it all alone. You must help—oh, my dear, I have needed you so."

"It will be right. You know that it is right," I whispered.

"You must find the way, then, dear—I have thought so long that it was wrong to tell you that even now I can't tell what is right. Only—God

doesn't let some things be unless He means them—
but I can't see the way. You must find it now, for
her and us too."

What feeling I had of another presence I do not
know; but half uneasily I turned. Between the cur-
tains of the doorway stood Mrs. Tabor, her hands
raised above her head gripped the curtains as if for
support, so that she seemed rather to hang there than
to stand; her eyes looked through and beyond us
vacantly, and the pretty old-young face was twisted
like a tragic mask. Then the curtains dropped be-
fore her, and from the hall came the gasp of a
stifling sob. Lady was out of my arms and away
as if I had not been there. Her cool voice pleaded
for a moment with the rising hysteria without. Then
all sound died, and I was left utterly alone; the
silence of the great room about me, and before my
mind the world of reality and the battle to fight.

CHAPTER XXIII

I STAND BETWEEN TWO WORLDS

AFTER a few empty minutes, I went quietly out of the house, and at the end of the drive paused to look back over the sunlit lawn with its bright flower-beds and heavy trees. My work was plain enough before me now; I saw what I had to do, and the only question was my method of approach. The impossibility of it somehow did not interest me. I did not want to think the situation over, but merely to decide at what point I should first take hold upon it; and I was eager to begin. As I stood there, I saw Doctor Reid, in loose flannels and with a tennis racket in his hand, come in the side gate and walk jerkily toward the garage in the rear. Here was one thing to be done at least, and I might as well attend to it while I was on the ground.

His springy step was on the stairs as I entered the building after him, and I overtook him at the top, shuffling from one foot to the other before an oaken

door, while he hunted through his pockets for the key. He turned sharply at the sound of my coming.

"What are you doing here?" was his greeting.

"Reid," said I, "I have to say to you that I regret forcing that matter on you the other night; and if you'll give me a little time, I want to tell you why. It will end in our pulling more or less together, instead of fighting each other."

His face set for an instant, then he made up his mind. "Very well. I'm free for a while. Come in. No occasion perhaps for an apology: spoke too hastily myself. No sense in being emotional." He threw open the door and stepped back. "My digestion wasn't normal that day, you see. Fermentation. Generally a physical basis for those things. Alcohol besides."

I preceded him into a sudden blaze of air and sunlight, a first impression of wide space and staring cleanliness. While I blinked, Reid swung a leather covered chair toward me, with a word of hasty excuse.

"Just been exercising, you see, and I've got to take my shower. Great mistake sitting down without. I'll be with you in half a moment," and he vanished behind a rubber curtain that ran on a nicked rod

before an alcove at the back, leaving me to look about the room. It was very large, occupying the whole breadth of the building, and fitted up with an astonishing combination of convenience and hygiene. Dull red tiles covered the floor and rose like a wainscot half way up the walls. Above that ran a belt of white, glazed paper enameled to represent tiling; and the ceiling was of corrugated metal, also enameled white. Two large windows in front, and one on either side, wide open behind wire screens, and uncurtained, let in a flood of light and air which somehow in entering seemed to exchange its outdoor freshness for the sterilized, careful purity of a laboratory. Between the front windows a large glass-topped table bore a microscope and microtome covered by glass bells, a Bunsen burner, and a most orderly collection of bottles and test-tubes. On one side of this was a porcelain sink, and on the other a heavy oak desk with a telephone and every utensil in place. Steel sectional bookcases along the walls displayed rows of technical books and gleaming instruments. In one corner stood an iron bed, with a strip of green grass matting before it, and in the other a pair of Indian clubs and a set of chest-weights flanked an anthropometric scale. The only

decorations were a large print of Rembrandt's *Anatomy*, two or three surprisingly good nudes, and a few glaring French medical caricatures. And everything possible about the room was covered with glass—tables, desk, bookcases, the shelves above the sink, and the very window-sills. If ever a room did so, this one declared the character of its inhabitant; and looking upon its comfortless convenience, I caught myself wondering how any normal woman could endure marriage with such an antiseptic personality. Then as Reid issued from his bath, glowing and alert with vivid energy and contagiously alive, the idea seemed not inconceivable after all.

"Pretty comfortable place, eh?" he burst forth. "Fine. Fine. All my own idea. Fitted it up according to my own notion. Everything I need right here, nothing useless, plenty of light and ventilation. Have a cigarette? I don't smoke often myself, but I keep 'em at hand. Best form to take tobacco, if you don't inhale. Popular idea all rot."

I lit one and settled back. "I've just asked Lady to marry me," I said, as quietly as I could. "She says that the only reason she won't is her mother. And I understand why."

His face lighted for a moment. "I told Tabor

you'd be at the bottom of it eventually. As for the other matter—well, it has to be reckoned with. Strongest motive we have. The race has got to go on." He frowned suddenly: "How much do you know?"

"I know that Carucci lied; I know that Mrs. Tabor is out of her mind; I know that her delusion takes the form of a horror of marriage, because—" I stopped, searching for a softened form of words; but Reid took up the broken sentence and went evenly on, as impersonally scientific as if we had been speaking of strangers.

"Because of my wife's death. Hysteria aggravated by introspection. Fixed idea of Miriam's continual presence—what's that line?—'the wish father to the thought'—The psychic element in these things, you know, does react on the physical. Whole thing moves in a circle. Then paranoia."

"She's got to get well," I said. "What's the best chance? What can we do?"

"We're doing all we can. We've called the best man in the country. You can't depend on any prognosis, you know. We don't understand these things perfectly, at best. There's no rigid line of demarcation between insanity and hysteria. Nervous and

mental diseases run into each other. You can't tell."

"Just what does Doctor Paulus say?"

"Paranoia. Says if there were continual external suggestions of Miriam he'd call it only hysterical; but we guard her as far as possible from anything of the kind. If she originates the hallucinations herself, it's mental. Nothing to do but keep her quiet, avoid all reminders, avoid excitement, lead her mind in other directions, suggest normality. Nothing more possible, unless we take her abroad for hypnotic treatment, and that doesn't seem advisable. Nothing else to be done. Question of time."

"Then it's just a question of getting rid of this fixed idea?"

"Well, but that's begging the whole question, Crosby, don't you see? The fixed idea is the disease. You're a layman, you know, and you look at it with the simplicity of ignorance. No offense meant, but that's the plain fact, you know. Paulus doesn't call it hopeless, but Rome wasn't built in a day. Nothing to do but wait."

"I'm going to find something to do," I said, "because something has got to be done."

"Right spirit. Right way to face a difficulty. Al-

ways best to be optimistic. But of course, you mustn't risk any private experiments. You understand that. Might do harm. Hell's paved with good intentions, you know, and we've got an expert on the case. Where there's any work for you, we'll count you in, but you mustn't butt in."

I rose from my chair. "Of course I've no idea of putting in my oar without authority. Give me credit for that much sense—and thank you for making me understand the facts. Tell Mr. Tabor of this conversation, will you? I'm off to New York."

"Certainly. Certainly. By the way, Crosby, I suppose I ought to congratulate you. Fine. Fine. Well, we've all got to be patient and hope for the best. It's hard, of course. But life's a hard struggle. A hard struggle. Good-by. Can you see your way down?"

As Reid had intelligently observed, it was hard. And the hardest part of it was the waiting. I saw Maclean that same night, and without evincing more than an ordinary curiosity about spiritualism, arranged to be taken to the next of the séances. After that, there was nothing to do until one should be held. The slender thread of coincidence between Sheila's ghost-stories and my experiences at the last

one was my single chance of discovering a remedy of which the doctors did not know. Probably I should discover nothing of any use; but until I could contribute some definite help, I would not go back to Stamford. I had made more than enough trouble there already.

It was another week before the chance came. And I was a little surprised when Maclean conducted me not to the closed house we had before visited, but to the house on Ninety-second Street to which I had followed Doctor Paulus on his way home.

"Oh, they meet around at one another's houses," Mac explained as we went up the steps. "It's a gang of social lights that's runnin' these stunts as a fad, you see? An' the psychic researchers, they ring in. Now this time, see if you can't keep something on your stomach besides your hand. You missed a pile of fun last performance."

It was a very different sort of house from the other, wide open and full of the sense of family inhabitation, a house full of silk hangings and new mahogany and vases of unseasonable flowers, an orchid of a house, a house where people would be like their own automobile, polished and expensive and a trifle fast. Professor Shelburgh was there.

looking a little out of his element ; and the others, by what I could tell, were mostly the same people as before ; but there were more of them, twenty or twenty-five all told, chattering in groups about the brilliant room and giving it almost the air of a reception. It was evening, and the electric light and the formal dress of most of the guests added to the impression. I had my first good look at the medium before the proceedings began ; a fattish, fluffy woman with large eyes, pale-haired and slow-moving, whose voluble trivialities of conversation and dress exaggerated both vulgarism and convention. For a moment or two, I wrestled with an uncanny certainty of having seen her somewhere before, groping about among recollections. Then all at once I remembered ; she was the woman who had been with us in the trolley accident, the woman who had so curiously discovered the whereabouts of the chain.

As before, the circle formed about the center-table consisted of only a dozen or so, and the rest of us were left sitting about the walls. The doors were closed, and the extinguishing of the lights left the room in almost utter darkness. The greenish pallor about the edges of the windows made it possible to

imagine rather than to see. The gloom had the solidity of closed eyelids; and perhaps because of the sudden transition from brilliant light, it had the same fullness of indefinite color and movement; as when one suddenly buries one's face in the pillow, with the light still burning. I caught myself unconsciously straining my eyes to observe these half-imaginary after-images. And despite the difference of environment, the sitters had hardly begun their tuneless crooning of old songs before I felt the same breathless closeness as before, the same saturated oppression, the same feeling of uncomfortable and even indecent overcrowding.

I steadied myself with long breaths, bracing involuntarily against the tension. Then all at once, the door opened silently and softly closed; and as I turned to look some one rustled past me, visible only as a solid shadow in the gloom, and without a word slipped into a seat at the table. The others made room, and a chair was moved up quietly, no one speaking or even pausing in the song. But my heart pounded in my ears and my hands heated as I clenched them, for somehow I knew as certainly as if I could have plainly seen that the new-comer was Mrs. Tabor.

And it was as if she brought with her an increase of the already tense expectancy, as if her own nervous trouble spread out about her like a deepening of color, like a drop of blood falling into water already tinged with red. It was my own imagination, of course, the excitement of being close upon my quest, and the reaction of silence closing over the interruption of her entrance; but I felt the exertion of breathing, as if I were immersed up to the chin in water. If the atmosphere had been like a weight before, it was now like a deliberately closing vise. In the intervals of the droning hum at the table, the silence took on a quality of brittleness. Little brushings and rustlings ran in waves around the room, and I thought how a breeze runs over a field of tall grass, where each tuft in turn takes up its neighbor's restlessness. It occurred to me suddenly that most of the people here were women; and the sense of crowded presence led me to imagining crowds and throngs of women grouped in pictures or dancing in rows upon the stage. And then I remembered sharply that I could not see Mrs. Tabor and wondered whether my certainty that it was she had any more foundation than these other fantasies. I heard my own breathing, and that of many others.

I felt vaguely irritated that all these breathings were not keeping time, and instinctively brought my own into the rhythm of the predominating number.

A chair creaked softly, and I started, while the skin tightened over my cheeks and my tongue dried and tasted salt. The **medium** seemed to be writhing about, making little soft urging noises, like muffled groans or the nameless sound that goes with lifting a heavy burden or suddenly exerting the whole strength of the body. Then the peculiar padded rapping began. The incongruously matter-of-fact voice of the professor asked: "Are the hands all here?" and the circle counted in a low tone while the raps went irregularly on. Some woman across the room giggled nervously. Why these trivial details did not interrupt and relieve the tension, I do not know; but their very absurdity seemed to intensify it; I was hot and puffy and a trifle faint. Suddenly Maclean gripped my knee, and muttered: "Look at the table—My God, look at the table—!"

I do not know just how to describe it; to say that I saw is not literally accurate, for it was really too dark to see; the table and the group around it were no more than a bulk in the midst of darkness. But as I strained my eyes toward it, that blur of uncon-

vincing cloudiness which I had seen or fancied before swelled into mid-air, showing against the dark like black with light upon it against black in shadow. And illuminated as it were by that visible darkness, the table beneath it rose up from its place under the circle of hands, wavered as though afloat upon the rising stream of a fountain, then settled with a thud and a creak down again upon the floor. There was a momentary silence, full of crowded breathings. While I was wondering confusedly how much of it I had only imagined, Professor Shelburgh said calmly: "That's the best levitation we've had so far. Who did it? Who is there?" And the throaty, querulous contralto answered: "I did. Miriam. Do you want any more?"

Another man somewhere in the circle stammered uncomfortably: "I—well—er—I beg your pardon, but—could you move something quite beyond our reach? One of those things on the bookcase, for instance?"

"What for?" whined the voice, "you wouldn't believe it anyway—I don't want to talk to you—Is mother there?"

Maclean's hand relaxed upon my knee, and he sniffed audibly. But the answer brought my heart

into my throat, for I knew who made it, beyond the possibility of mistake.

"Yes, dear," Mrs. Tabor said quietly. "What is it?"

"I wanted—to see you—Why didn't you come last time?—I get—lonely sometimes—"

"I couldn't come before. Aren't you happy?" She might have been speaking to a child crying in its bed.

"I want to—come back—I want—you, mother dear—I'm very happy, but I—went away too soon."

"But I've seen you every day at home, dear child."

"It isn't the—the same—I can't talk—to you—there—You're afraid of—something—I see fear—in your heart—and—that frightens me."

"You mustn't be afraid, Miriam—you mustn't. Nobody shall take you away!"

A flush and a wave of nausea went over me, and I felt my hair bristling, not with nervousness, but with a kind of anger. The unwholesomeness of the whole scene was too sickening—the poor mother's hysterical fondness, the utter sincerity of her emotion, and the sentimentalism that whined in reply, so perfectly calculated to irritate and control the crippled mind. And the element of distorted love made it all the worse, a beauty turned sour. I

thought of the dainty little lady that had fenced with words so deftly; and only the need to understand once for all made me endure to listen.

"Ask something that no one but yourself can know," the professor put in. Perhaps even he felt some embarrassment.

Mrs. Tabor hesitated. "I wonder if I ought," she said, half to herself, "I do so want to know."

The voice grew steadier: "Ask me what you will—mother darling—I know already—what you fear."

"Miriam, did I understand what—what I saw the other day?"

I grew suddenly cold, and felt as if the floor were sinking under me.

"The other day—? Fix your mind upon it, mother dear—I see you now—I see you very much frightened—You thought a new trouble was coming—Another trouble like the first—not for yourself—but—"

"Oh, it wasn't myself!" The dry terror of the tone was dreadfully like something I remembered. "It was for her—you know it was for her. They looked as if—Does she love him, Miriam? Does she love him?"

That was more than I would bear. The whole unnatural dialogue had been profane enough; but this new sacrilege—The switch of the electric light was in the wall behind me, and before the spirit voice could speak again, my fingers had found and pressed it.

The medium gave a tearing scream that was horrible to hear, twisted herself out of her chair, and jerked and wriggled on the floor, choking and gurgling. In the sharp yellow glare, the whole room was one hysterical confusion, men and women scrambling to their feet, or sitting dazed, their hands before their eyes. The professor cried angrily: "Confound it, man, you're crazy! You're crazy! You may have killed her. Don't you know how dangerous it is to turn on light that way?" and stooped over the struggling woman on the floor, with scowling side-long glances back at me. A couple of other men came forward threateningly, and a bejeweled woman, who seemed to be the hostess, cried acidly: "Mercy on us, who is the fellow? One of those reporters?"

"Madam, I can promise you no publicity," said I, and I strode over to where Mrs. Tabor had sunk forward on the table, her head motionless upon her

outstretched arms. Maclean came to my rescue just in time.

"One moment, ladies and gentlemen! Look there—the lady had fainted, you see? Fainted before the lights went on, you see? My friend did exactly right. Now let's keep this all as quiet as possible—we don't want a sensation in the papers." Then as he helped me to raise Mrs. Tabor from her chair, he muttered: "Darn you, Laurie, what in blazes was bitin' you anyhow?"

Between us, we half carried her from the room, while the others were attending to the medium and at cross-purposes among themselves. She had not actually fainted away, and in spite of her shock was able to walk down-stairs with a little help. The door-bell had been ringing violently as we came into the upper hall; and we were still upon the stairs when a flustered maid opened the door upon Mr. Tabor.

"Is Mrs. George Tabor—" he began. Then he caught sight of us and sprang past the maid with a growl.

"It's I, Mr. Tabor—Crosby. She's been to an entertainment here, and broken down. I'll tell you later. Have you got the car outside?"

"Yes, thank God. And Sheila's out there too. Come."

"I'm perfectly well," Mrs. Tabor said faintly. "Nothing to worry any one. Why are you all so nervous about me?"

"I'll go back now," said Maclean, as we reached the front door, "an' hush up this gang up-stairs. There ain't goin' to be any disturbance about this. That crowd's more afraid of the leadin' dailies than they are of the devil, you see?"

I nodded, and the door closed behind us. Mr. Tabor did not say a word as we led his wife across the sidewalk and into the palpitating car. He motioned for me to follow her.

"Not if you can spare me, sir," I said. "I'll be out early to-morrow. I think I've found a key to the whole trouble, and I've got to see about it."

He turned, frowning into my eyes under the white bristle of his brows.

"Crosby," he growled, "either we've a good deal to thank you for, or else—or else you'd better not come to-morrow."

CHAPTER XXIV

THE CONSULTATION OF AN EXPERT AND A LAYMAN

IT was a situation in which I felt that I needed counsel, and that of an expert order; so I made my way as fast as a taxicab could carry me to the home of Doctor Immanuel Paulus. Unless I was very much mistaken, I had something which would interest him. A messenger boy was running down his steps as I climbed them, and in the hall stood Doctor Paulus himself, opening the yellow envelop of a telegram. He nodded without looking at me, and with some sibilance of excuse, read the message. Then he thrust it into his pocket.

“Very sorry,” he said, “but I can not give any interview this evening. I am called out of town. Besides, I have not orderly arranged my ideas as yet. Come around on the Monday, and I will have something for your paper.”

“I’m not a reporter,” I interrupted hastily, for already he had found his gloves and hat. “I want to see you about Mrs. Tabor.”

"What is that—Mrs. Tabor? Carefully, carefully, young man. Names are names. What have you with her to do?"

By this time I had found a card. "I'm a friend of the Tabors," I said, "and their trouble is no secret from me. You've been looking for a continual irritating cause of Mrs. Tabor's hysteria. Well, I've just found one."

"Clever," he shrilled, "diabolically clever. But it will not do, young man. I have known these your American reporters—"

"If you say that again," I burst out, "you'll have me for a patient. Call the Tabors on the 'phone—any of them will tell you I'm in their confidence; and I can identify myself. We're both of us wasting time."

The sculptured face scowled at me for an instant, then relaxed with a piercing cackle of mirth. "Good. I waste time no more, then, but I believe you. See," he spread out the telegram. "It is to her I go. Now, if you come with me—"

"Mrs. Tabor has just started home from New York in the motor," said I. "Our train leaves in half an hour. Are you ready?"

Doctor Paulus did not say another word until we

were safely aboard the train and out of the tunnel. Then he turned suddenly upon me.

"Have I not seen you at a so-called spiritualistic séance," he chirped.

"Yes," I said, "where we both heard a mysterious voice called familiarly by the name of Mrs. Tabor's elder daughter. What is more, I have just seen Mrs. Tabor herself at another séance, where she talked with this so-called spirit intimately. She has been doing so, unknown to her family, for a long time; and there is your irritating cause. That's why she has hallucinations of her daughter's presence."

Doctor Paulus received my revelation with somewhat humiliating calm. He showed not the least astonishment, nor did he answer for some minutes, but sat frowning in front of him, and drumming with a large white hand upon the window-sill. When he spoke again, it was with a smile.

"Mr. Crosby, I find myself—yes—interested somewhat in you. First I see you at spiritualism; then before a house where another séance is about to be; next I pass you in the subway, and a few minutes thereafter I presently behold you riding a child's bicycle after my brougham to discover me—Now also, I recall to have seen you in the country,

when I was with the young medical man who sends this impetuous telegram. Therefore I say, since you are not a reporter, you have a mind either unbalanced or very well balanced. And you now bring me eagerly this information, so that you are with the Tabors much interested, which may prove—you are no relation, is it not so?" He laid his hand upon my knee. "It is not your mind then, but a heart unbalanced, which produces often great mental activity."

I was both embarrassed and impatient. "Am I right, then, about Mrs. Tabor?" I asked. "Isn't there a chance of a permanent cure for her by removing her from this spiritualism business? If we can only—"

He held up his hand. "Let us not leap to the conclusion. That is what I tell always to the Doctor Reid. He is a bright young man, but he leaps too much to the conclusion. So probably he has said to you that Mrs. Tabor is a paranoiac, which may be so; or perhaps with continual irritation of the mind, only hysteria that may be aided by removal of the irritation. I am too old to be quickly sure. Now, I repeat to Reid that a medical man must save his mental or physical jumps for cases of extremity. He must not jump all the time; that is how you are

neurasthenic in America. Hysteria, that we can by removing suggestions and introspections palliate, or perhaps cure. And there may be also hallucinations and the fixed idea. Therefore it is so like a shadow of insanity. The daughter's death, we knew of that. And I have said that some continual suggestion was to be sought for, which might produce this illusion of her daughter's continual presence, such as you have perhaps found. So we are ready to consider. Tell me now all that you know, carefully. Not your own deductions I want, but the facts alone."

When I had finished, he sat silent for a long time, frowning on his hand as it drummed idly on the window-ledge.

"Why do you conclude that she has for some time been attending spiritualisms unknown to her family?" he asked abruptly at last.

"They all seemed to know her, and to recognize the voice called Miriam. She went about it besides in a very accustomed way. And before her first disappearance this summer—the first I knew of personally—she had a telephone message from Mrs. Mahl. I answered it, and I recognized her voice afterward."

After another long silence I ventured: "Hasn't she always been worse after she has been away?"

He answered in a preoccupied tone, as if I had merely tapped the current of his own thought: "It seemed at first to me a temporary breakdown only, which I looked to grow better. I have been much disappointed that it has not, and she grows periodically worse coincidentally with disappearances of which they do not know in time to control them. So I tell them that some harmful practice is added to the original cause, and they assure me that no new thing comes into her life, unless—" he looked at me quizzically—"a young man whose interest in the remaining daughter causes him to follow scientists about on bicycles. I recommend quiet and the removal of reminiscences, and still the irritation goes on. Now, as to spiritualism, there I have not made up my mind. I investigate it as a human abnormality, for to me, like the Roman, nothing human is to be thought foreign. It looks to be trickery, and yet that is not sure, but there may be scientific interest there. Certainly so great a man as Lombroso found much to interest. In the end we shall, as I think, find all manifestations physical, or perhaps there is here some little known semi-psychic force disengaged from the living persons present. Of the dead there is little cause to speculate. However it be of

all this, there is without any doubt acute nerve-strain very bad for the neuropathic, and aggravated by belief. Yes, it is perhaps cause enough, and perhaps effect only."

The train was pulling into Stamford as he ended, and it was not until the waiting automobile had carried us nearly to the house that Doctor Paulus spoke again.

"I think," he said, "that possibly, I say possibly, Mr. Crosby, you have made a valuable discovery. At least we know now the circumstances better. But on the one hand these visits to séances may be aggravating cause of the unbalancement, and on the other mere results of unnatural cravings in the unbalanced mind. It is a circle, and we seek the slenderest point where it may be broken."

Mr. Tabor met us at the door, and as we came up the steps Reid slipped eagerly past him.

"Splendid!" he exclaimed, wringing the great man's hand. "Splendid! Hoped it would be this train, but I hardly dared think so. I know how important your time is. Very good of you to come out, very good indeed. Now as to the case; manifestations unfortunately very clear just now. Very unfortunate, but I'm afraid we have been right all

along. Come out to my rooms a moment, and I'll give you the whole matter in detail. Better to run over the whole thing scientifically."

Doctor Paulus smiled at me dryly: "I shall be most happy," he shrilled, and after a formal word or two with Mr. Tabor, stalked soberly around the house. Mr. Tabor and I went into the living-room without speaking.

"Has Lady told you—?" I began.

He nodded. "I hardly know what to say to you, Crosby. I feel very sorry for you both. I am sorry for all of us. Mrs. Tabor has not been herself at all since the other day, and of course for the time everything else is secondary to her. But don't think that I'm anything but very glad personally." He held out his hand.

I took it in silence, and a moment later, Lady came in, greeting me very quietly, as if my presence at this time were entirely a matter of course. Father and daughter evidently understood each other. We sat almost in silence until the two doctors returned, Paulus frowning downward and Reid more jerkily busy than ever. The scene had the air of a deliberate family council.

"Mr. Tabor," Doctor Paulus began, "I have

thought better not to disturb our patient by an interview just now, since she is asleep after so long a wakefulness. Doctor Reid besides has made the conditions very clear. Only on one point he has not been able to inform me wholly: It appears that Mrs. Tabor has attended meetings of spiritualists habitually in secret, which accounts for those excursions of which we know lately. How long ago may we possibly date the commencement of this practice?"

"She was interested in spiritualism carelessly and as a sort of fad before Miriam's marriage," Mr. Tabor answered, "but so far as I know, she never actually attended any sittings then; and she hasn't spoken of it for years. She might, of course, have kept it secret all along; it's only within the last few months that we have tried to follow all her movements."

Doctor Paulus settled heavily into a chair, and fell to drumming on the arm of it. Lady stood beside her father, her arm resting upon his shoulder; and Reid paced nervously up and down the room. A chirp and a rustle made me notice the canary hanging in the farther window. Finally Paulus looked up.

"Do you prefer to have my opinion in private?" he asked.

Mr. Tabor was looking older than I had ever seen him. "Your opinion means a great deal to all of us, Doctor," he said. Reid stopped a moment in his pacing.

"Well, my opinion is not quite positive, because I have not certainly all the facts. That is the fault with all our opinions, that we never can base them upon wholly complete data. Mrs. Tabor we have thought insane, and there was much to bear that out. So if I had been certain that all her illusions proceeded from within her own mind, I should have said that it was surely so. But now Mr. Crosby makes known to us this external suggestion of spirits, with its continual reminding of her trouble and the unnatural strain. He argues also—and I am not at all certain but that he argues rightly—that this practice, this superstition of hers, may be the cause of her deterioration, so that by removing it she will grow better or perhaps well. Is it so far clear?"

"Quite so, exactly," Reid broke in. "Perfectly clear, Doctor, perfectly. But why not effect rather than cause? Another symptom, that's all. Fixed

idea, unnatural craving for communication with the other world, because the mind is unbalanced by loss."

"I think that is to place the horse after the wagon, as we say. It is certainly a vicious circle, but still—"

"Precisely," exclaimed Reid, "but the impulse comes—"

Doctor Paulus held up a white hand. "Wait a little. I do not come to conclusions hastily. Now I conclude that Mrs. Tabor is thus far no more than hysterical, and what we have to do is first to remove entirely from her this superstitious influence." The shrill voice took suddenly a sharper edge. "Moreover, Doctor Reid, I will say to you that only two other men in the world know more than I know of my specialty, and of those unfortunately neither one is here." He waited until Reid subsided into a seat, then went slowly on: "Now the question is how this harmful belief is to be removed, and that is the difficult matter."

"If she were in a sanatorium—" Reid began.

"She'd worry herself to pieces," Lady interrupted; and Doctor Paulus nodded heavily. "She'd feel imprisoned, and imagine and brood and worry, and the atmosphere of impersonal restraint would

make her worse. We can at least help to keep her mind off herself and make her cheerful."

"We can prevent from now on, I think, any further communications," said Mr. Tabor.

"But the trouble's inside her own mind," snapped Reid; and the shrill voice of his colleague added:

"That is partly true, so far as she has now hallucinations and re-creates her own harrow. Suppose then we held her from seeking harm elsewhere, that is something; but still even so she feels restraint, and still her misbelief goes on. If we could reach that—but how to make her not thus believe?" He fell silent, and the white hand began its drumming again. I felt irritably that he was the most deliberate man in the world.

Suddenly I found Lady's eyes upon me. "I think Mr. Crosby has something to suggest," she said, and with her words a suggestion came to me.

Reid snorted.

Doctor Paulus smiled very gravely. "That busy mind of Mr. Crosby has before been useful," he said. "What is this idea, then?"

"It sounds pretty wild and theatrical," said I, "but couldn't we reach the root of the trouble by making the cure come from the same source? We might tell

her for ever that her ideas were false and harmful, and she'd only feel that we were profane. But if the medium herself denied them—these visions and voices must be at least partly a fake. Now, if we can persuade or force her to show Mrs. Tabor how it's done—and I think I know how to exert pressure upon her—then might not the illusion be dispelled once for all? I mean, whether Mrs. Mahl is a fake or not, can't she be made to undo the work she has done, and discredit the dangerous belief she has taught?"

Mr. Tabor was leaning forward in his chair as I finished. Reid was walking the floor again and shrugging his shoulders; and Lady was looking at me with eyes of absolute belief.

"Fake?" asked Doctor Paulus unexpectedly.

"Sham, trick, fraud," I explained, and he nodded, frowning.

"Oh, but this whole thing's absurd," Reid put in. "Crosby's a good fellow and clever, and all that, but he's a layman and this is a complicated problem. It's all one *if* after another. If the woman's willing to expose herself, and if she does it well, and if mother believes her, and if all this would have anything to do with the case. Besides it would be a

shock, a violent shock, a dangerous shock. No sense at all in it. Melodrama isn't medicine."

"I am not so sure," said Doctor Paulus. "It is unusual and what you call theatrical, but my work is unusual and many times theatrical also. I have need to act much of the time with my patients. With the individual mind one must use each time an individual cure. This at least strikes at the cause of the trouble, and might succeed. With your permission, Mr. Tabor, we will try it."

"But her heart, man, her heart," objected Reid, "what about her heart, and the shock?"

"Well, we can dare, I think, to risk that. Every operation is a risk that we judge wise to take, and this is a malignant misbelief to be extirpated. There will be no unreasonable danger."

"If we can somehow get this medium out here—" said Mr. Tabor.

"That I shall manage, to bring her to-morrow afternoon, telling her perhaps of a private sitting in the interest of science. I am not often so much away, but this case is of importance." He rose, and looked at his watch. "Is not that the motor-car now at the door?"

On the step he turned to me with his quizzical

smile. "It is perhaps well for us all to have your mind stimulated, Mr. Crosby. That is a beautiful and intelligent young lady." He looked abruptly from me to the midnight sky. "It appears, if I do not mistake, that we shall have rain," he chirped. "Good night," and he stepped gravely into the limousine and closed the door with a slam.

CHAPTER XXV

FIGHTING WITH SHADOWS

THE morning came dark and stormy, with a September gale driving in from the Sound, and the trees lashing and tossing gustily through gray slants of rain. It was so dark that until nearly noon we kept the lights burning; and through the unnatural morning we sat about listlessly, unwilling to talk about the impending crisis and unable to talk long of anything else for the unspoken weight of it upon our minds. Mrs. Tabor kept her room, with Sheila and most of the time Lady busy with her. She seemed hardly to remember the night before, save as a vague shock; and physically she was less weakened by it than might have been expected; but her mind wavered continually, and she confused with her hallucination of Miriam the identity of those about her. The rest of us talked and read by snatches, and stared restlessly out of the rain-

flecked windows. Mr. Tabor and I began a game of chess.

It was well on in the afternoon when the automobile came in sight, swishing through the sodden grayness with curtains drawn and hood and running-gear splashed with clinging clots of clay. None of us knew who saw it first; only that we three men were at the door together encouraging one another with our eyes. The medium greeted us with a gush of caressing politeness, glancing covertly among us as she removed her wraps, and bracing herself visibly beneath her unconcern. It was she who made the first move, after Doctor Paulus had introduced us and we were seated in Mr. Tabor's study behind closed doors.

"Mr. Crosby is the gentleman who turned the light on me last evening," she said. I wish I could express the undulating rise and fall of her inflection. It was almost as if she sang the words. "Of course with him present I would not be willing to do anything. It was very painful, besides the risk, a dreadful shock like that."

"I shall not be in the room," I answered, "and I'm sorry to have caused you any discomfort, Mrs. Mahl. We needed the light, I thought."

"Oh, it wasn't the pain;" she smiled with lifted eyes. "We grow so used to it that we don't consider suffering. It was very dangerous, waking one out of control suddenly. You might have killed me, but of course you weren't aware." She turned to Doctor Paulus: "You understand, Doctor, how it is, how it strains the vitality. The gentleman didn't realize."

We had become, at the outset, four strong men leagued against an appealing and helpless woman. Perhaps I should say three; for Doctor Paulus did not seem impressed.

"Yes, I know," he chirped. "We need not, however, consider that. You are here, madam, as I have told you, for a scientific experiment under my direction. Mr. Crosby will not be in the room. With your permission, I will now explain the nature of that experiment. There is in this house a lady, a patient of mine, Mrs. Tabor, who has for some time frequently sat with you. She has on these occasions habitually conversed, as she believes, with the spirit of her daughter Miriam that is some years dead."

"That is our greatest work." She was not looking at Doctor Paulus, but at the rest of us. "To be able to soften the great separation. You others

hope for a reunion beyond the grave, but we ourselves know. If you could only believe—if you could realize how wonderful it is to have communion with your—”

“We shall not go into that,” said Doctor Paulus. “Mrs. Tabor, as I said, believes. She is therefore in a hysterical condition to which you have largely helped to contribute. I do not say she is insane; she is not. But I do say she stands on the parting of the ways, and that, to save her mind, or as it may be, her life, it is necessary that these unhealthy conversations shall cease.”

The medium looked now at Doctor Paulus. “The poor woman! Isn’t it terrible? But you know, I can’t believe, Doctor, that the sittings do anything but soothe and comfort her. It can’t be that you think her insane just because she believes in spiritualism? You believe too much yourself for that.”

Doctor Paulus looked at her steadily. “I have told you plainly that she is not insane yet,” he said.

“See here,” snapped Reid. He had been shuffling his feet and fidgeting in his chair for some minutes. “No use discussing the ethics of your business with you. Let’s come right down to the facts. We’re not asking for advice. We’re stating a case. Plain

fact is that Mrs. Tabor's going insane. You can stop it by showing her that these suppressed spirits are a trick. Will you do it, or not? That's the whole question."

The medium had risen, and was looking for her handkerchief, eying Reid with meek fearlessness. "Of course, I'm used to this," she murmured, "but not among educated people. A few centuries ago, Doctor, your profession was regarded in the same light. I don't imagine we can have anything in common. Is the car still at the door?"

"Hold on, Walter," Mr. Tabor interrupted quietly. "Mrs. Mahl, you must allow for our feelings in this matter. Please sit down again. Now, we make no charges against you. The issue is not whether you are sincere in your beliefs, nor whether we agree with them." He moved one hand in a slow, broad gesture. "All that we leave aside. The point is here: Mrs. Tabor's belief in these things is harmful and dangerous to her. And it must be done away with, like any other harmful and dangerous thing. We don't ask whether it is illusion or fact; we ask you, for the sake of her health, to make her believe that it is an illusion."

"You know, of course, that I have no control over

the spirit voice," said Mrs. Mahl blandly. "Do you wish me to refuse to sit for her?"

"Here and now, we wish to have you sit for her," Doctor Paulus put in, "and show her, once for all, how this her daughter's spirit is made. It is to cure her of all credulousness in it, for with her mind clean of such poison she shall recover."

"Would you have me lie to her even for her good?" The woman was either a wonderful actress or a more wonderful self-deceiver. She turned to Mr. Tabor appealingly: "How can I deny my own faith? Do you think the truth can ever be wrong?"

Mr. Tabor went suddenly purple: "If it is the truth," he growled, "it's a truth out of hell, and we're going to fight it. But it isn't."

Not in the least disconcerted by her false move, she turned back to Doctor Paulus. "Doctor," she said, dropping her air of martyrdom and speaking more incisively than I had yet heard her, "you are the one who knows. These gentlemen do not understand. You know that there are mysteries here that your science can't explain, whatever you think about them. You know the difference between my powers and the fakes of a two-dollar clairvoyant. You know it in spite of yourself. Now tell me

how you can reconcile it with your conscience, to bring me up here to listen to such a proposal as this?"

The alienist's Napoleonic face hardened, and his voice took a shriller edge.

"We shall not go into that," he said. "And now we will make an end of this talking. You are partly sincere, but you are charlatan also. I have seen all the records, and I have attended your sittings, and I have all the data, you understand. And I have my position, so that people listen to me. You have done tricks, once, twice, many times, and I have all the facts and the dates. So. You will do as I say, and I will remember that you are part honest. Or, otherwise; if you will not, then I expose you altogether, publicly."

"You can say anything you like," she retorted coolly. "I don't care a bit. Just because you're a big doctor, you needn't think I care. Folks are so used to you scientific men denying everything, that when you support us it helps, and when you attack us it don't matter. You think your little crowd of wise ones is the whole earth. My clients have faith in me. Go ahead, and expose all you want to."

"Wouldn't it be wiser to make friends of us?" Mr. Tabor asked slowly.

"We'll make you a by-word," sputtered Reid. "We'll run you out of the country. That's what we'll do, we'll run you out of the country."

She smiled: "All right, Doctor. Run along." Then rising to her feet again, with a sweeping gesture, "Say what you will, all of you," she cried tragically, "I defy you!" And she marched over to the door.

"One moment, Mrs. Mahl," said I. "The man who was with me at your sittings was a reporter, the only one there. If I say so, he'll scare-head you as a fake—in letters all across the front page. You won't be a serious impostor, or have the strength of a weak cause. We won't attack you and give you a chance to defend yourself, but we'll make a nationwide mock of you. You'll be a joke, with comic drawings."

"You're trying to bluff me," she sneered. Then all at once, her coolness gave way, and she flung herself around upon us in a flood of tears: "You're a nice crowd of men, aren't you?" she sobbed, "to make a dead set on one woman this way!" She came swiftly up to me, and caught both my hands,

leaning against me with upturned face. "Did you see anything wrong at my sittings? Have you anything against me, that you'd swear to, yourself?"

"Not a thing," I answered. "What of that?"

"Then you'd *lie* about me?" I could feel the hurry of her breathing.

"I would," said I, "with the greatest pleasure, in every paper in New York." I stepped back. "Excuse me, I'm going to telephone."

She looked around at the others with the eyes of a cornered cat. Then she dropped back into her chair.

"Very well," she sniffed, "I'll do it. I'll deny my faith to preserve my usefulness. And God will punish you."

The granite face of Doctor Immanuel Paulus relaxed into a grim smile.

"The press, in America," said he. "That is a fine weapon."

Mrs. Mahl, having finally yielded, was not long in recovering from her emotion; and while Mr. Tabor went to bring his wife, the two doctors rapidly discussed the precise needs of the case, and with the medium's assistance formulated a plan of action.

I am bound to say that she entered into the scheme as unreservedly as though it had been from the first her own; suggesting eagerly how this and that detail might best be managed, and showing a familiarity with Mrs. Tabor's trouble, and with nervous abnormality in general, hardly less complete and practical than theirs. Presently we heard the voices of the others in the hall, and she went quietly out to meet them. Then came a confused blur of tones—Mrs. Tabor's in timid protest and Sheila and Lady in reassurance; then Mr. Tabor, a little louder than the rest: "Not in the least, my dear. Why should I? You should have told me all about it from the first." Then the voices grew quieter, and at last blunted into silence behind the heavy curtains of the living-room. We waited an interminable five minutes gazing into one another's rigid faces, and hearing only the restless movement of Reid. At last, Doctor Paulus nodded at us, and we tiptoed noiselessly across the hall to where around the edge of the close-drawn curtains we could hear and see

At a little card-table, drawn out into the center of the floor, sat Mrs. Tabor and the men opposite to her. Between them and beyond them sat Sheila and Mr. Tabor; Lady sat on her mother's right-hand side, and

Sheila, with her back to us, completed the circle. They were all leaning forward intently, something in the attitude of people saying grace before a meal. The windows were not covered, but the dull light of the late and stormy afternoon came inward only as a leaden grayness, in which faces and the details of the surroundings were heavily and vaguely visible, like shadows of themselves. In the window at the far end of the room, the canary hopped restlessly about his cage, with an occasional cricket chirp; and but for this the house was quiet enough for us to hear the swish of wind along the leaves of the vine-covered veranda and the ripple of rain upon the glass.

I knew now that my excited sensations at the previous sittings must have been imaginary in their origin; for even here, in the presence of this open and prearranged imposture, I felt the same curious sense of tension, the same intimacy of a surrounding crowd, the same oppressive heaviness of the atmosphere. I could hardly believe in the airy spaciousness of the high room, or the physical distance between me and my fellow-watchers. My breath came laboriously, and I wondered how those within could fail to hear the slow pounding of my

heart and the rustle of our heavy breathing behind the curtain. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Reid raise his brows toward his superior, and he answered by a frowning nod. At last after an interval doubtless far shorter than before, but interminable to our strained anticipation, the medium shuddered slightly, and fell back in her chair. Her face twisted convulsively, and her hands and head made little twitching, aimless movements, unpleasantly like the reflexive spasms of a dying animal. She moaned softly once or twice, then relaxed limply; and the voice of Miriam began to speak.

"Here I am—mother—why did—you—bring me here?"

Mr. Tabor leaned back, his white brows drawn into a savage knot. Sheila covered her eyes and fell to rocking slowly to and fro. Lady made no sign; but I knew what sacrilege it was to her, and I could hardly hold myself. Yet the mother answered without regarding them.

"I like to have you near me, dearest. Does this place trouble you?"

"Why should it—trouble me?—As well—here—as anywhere—Nothing matters—to me."

"That's more like yourself than anything I've

heard you say—George, did you hear? Can you doubt now after that?"

Her husband answered only with a gesture, and the voice went on.

"Are you—sure you know me, mother?"

The two scientists exchanged glances. Mrs. Tabor began a hurried protest, but the voice interrupted.

"Because you may be—only imagining—it may not be real."

The querulous throaty tone was the same, but the words came each time more quickly, and the wail was dying out of them. The comic aspect of the whole scene struck me suddenly with revolting. It was so terribly important and at the same time such a tawdry practical joke.

"Miriam, what are you saying?" Mrs. Tabor was leaning forward toward the sound, her face tense and frightened.

"Oh, anything I please—it's quite easy—Don't you begin to understand?"

"Oh, what do you mean? Miriam! Mrs. Mahl, what is happening?"

The medium never stirred, nor moved a muscle of her face, as the spirit-voice replied: "Just the same

thing that's happened right along, Mrs. Tabor. Don't you see now? You were always so sure that any voice could do for you to recognize. You've laid yourself open to it."

Mrs. Tabor looked for the first time as one might who listens to the dead. Her voice frightened me, it was so calm.

"What do you mean?" she said monotonously. I saw Reid move as if to part the curtain, glancing sharply at Doctor Paulus as he did so; but the older man's mouth was a bloodless line, and he shook his great head, whispering: "Not yet, Reid; not yet."

"Listen," said the voice. "Here's what you call Miriam talking." Its tone changed abruptly: "Now here's me. I'm doing it." The medium rose quietly from her chair, and stepped out into the room: "The whole thing's just—a trick," she said, shifting from one voice to the other in alternate phrases. "You believe in—ghosts—and so I gave you—what you believe." She came around the table. "Do you understand now?"

Sheila was sobbing aloud, but none of the others seemed to notice her. Mrs. Tabor sat for an instant as if frozen, staring vacantly in front of her. Then as the medium approached, she shrank away sud-

denly with a childish cry of fear. "It isn't true!" she cried. "It isn't true!" and she swung limply forward upon the little table, and lay still.

Lady and Mr. Tabor were beside her in an instant, as we three sprang forward into the room. Sheila was on her feet, muttering, "You've killed her, ye brute beasts—" But a look from Doctor Paulus silenced her, as he waved the rest of us back and bent over the unconscious woman, his broad fingers pressed along the slender wrist. For a moment we watched his face in silence, as if it were the very face of destiny. Then the canary gave a sudden shrill scream, and fluttered palpitating into a corner of its cage, beating so violently against the wires that tiny feathers floated loosely out and down. The medium whispered: "Oh, my God!" and cringed sidelong, raising her arms as if one struck at her. And my hair thrilled and my heart sickened and stopped, for even while she spoke, a voice came out of the empty air above our heads; a voice like nothing that I had heard before, a woman's voice thin and tremulous, with a fragile resonance in it, as though it spoke into a bell.

"Oh, mother, mother," it wailed. "Why don't you let me go and rest?"

CHAPTER XXVI

AND REDISCOVERING REALITIES

I THINK Lady clutched at my arm, but I can not remember. The one memory that remains to me of that moment is the face of Doctor Paulus. His color had turned from ivory to chalk, his mouth was drawn open in a snarling square and his eyes shrank back hollowly, glaring into nothingness. For a second he stood so, clawing in front of him with his hands, a living horror. Then with an effort that shook him from head to foot, the strong soul of the man commanded him. "It's nothing," he whispered, "I understand it. Take hold of yourselves." The hands dropped, and he bent again over Mrs. Tabor. The next moment Sheila had sprung out in front of us, and was speaking to the voice that we could not see.

"Miriam Reid," she cried, in a high chanting cadence between song and speech, "if it's yourself

that's here, lie down to your rest again, an' leave us. Go back to your place in purgatory, darlin', till the white angels come to carry ye higher in their own good time. In the name av God an' Mary, in the name av the Blessed Saints, go back! Go back to your home between hell an' Heaven, an' come no more among us here!"

"Get some water, Reid," snapped Doctor Paulus. "Quiet that woman, some of you."

But Sheila had done before we could move or speak to her. With her last words, she flung her arms wide apart, above her head, and brought them inward and downward in some strange formal gesture. Then as swiftly and certainly as if she had planned it all from the beginning, she caught a little bottle from her breast, and sprinkled its contents in the upturned face of Mrs. Tabor. We caught hold of her just as she was making the sign of the Cross. But she was perfectly quiet now, with nothing more to say or do, and stood motionless like the rest of us, breathing deep breaths and watching.

The cool shock of the water did its work. Mrs. Tabor's eyelids quivered, and she gasped faintly. Reid came hurrying back with a glass of water, and stood at the side of his superior, looking foolishly

disappointed as he realized the anticipation of his errand.

"She comes out of it all right," Doctor Paulus muttered. "No harm. It is more the trance condition than an ordinary faint." He looked up at Sheila with a grim smile. "Superstition is a fine thing—sometimes, under medical direction. Now I leave her to you, Reid, a few minutes. It is better that at first she sees only her own." He beckoned to the medium, and the two went out of the room together. Then as we stood about, Mrs. Tabor caught another breath, and another. Her hands groped a moment, and her eyes opened. She looked around at us wonderingly, as we raised her up in her seat.

"Thank God," said Lady softly. And Sheila answered from the other side: "The Saints be praised."

She sat very quietly for a little time, looking about her. Lady had wiped the water from her face, and she seemed her natural self again, the girlish color returning to her cheeks and a certain bird-like vivacity in her whole pose. Then, as if memory of a sudden returned to her, she crumpled over, hiding her tragic little face in her hands. She began to cry

softly at first in little sobbing, heart-broken gasps, which took on gradually a wailing intensity very dreadful to hear.

"Oh, my dear, my dear, my dear!" she repeated over and over again, in a desolate and ceaseless iteration that grew into a horror and which alone we dared not stop. Doctor Paulus, we knew, must be within call and listening. I think that all of us wondered why he did not return; we resented this permitted continuance of suffering. Finally it was Lady who made the first move among us.

She dropped on her knees beside her mother, putting her arm tenderly about the convulsed little form, and pressing her cheek close against her mother's own. "Mother, dear," she whispered very softly.

A pause came in Mrs. Tabor's sobbing and she stretched one hand half as if to push Lady away, half as if to hold her as something real and tangible.

"Where is the doctor?" she asked.

Evidently Doctor Paulus had been listening, for at the murmured question he stepped in and came across the room to Mrs. Tabor. She faced him shrinkingly, but nerved herself for the question.

"Why have you taken her from me?" she asked brokenly, at last.

Doctor Paulus' face was very kind and very serious.

"I know that now it seems so," he answered, "but all that will for you pass away. It is not that we have taken the daughter that is dead away. For you see now, and you will understand how all that came only out of yourself, like a picture that you made of your own sorrow. It was in a circle, how you made by grieving this grief like a thing from outside coming to make you grieve the more. A circle that seems as well to begin at one point as at another, is it not so? And this cruel light so suddenly has made you see the true beginning. So now it is all gone because you have known that it was never there at all. He moved his broad hands suddenly as one waving away smoke. "There is not any longer for you that other world which never was, which was a burden and a trouble always to you because it was made out of trouble. But this good world you have again, and of that only the good part, all your dear ones here truly returned because that evil nothing is gone from between. Is it not so?"

She had been facing him like a creature at bay, silent and resisting, the horror in her strained little by little into desperation as he spoke. I do not know

what held us from interference, for the man was blindly tottering on toward a precipice, clumsily ignorant of the condition he must face; and every fatuous word grated like sand between the teeth. One had a desire to lay physical hands upon him.

"Doctor," Reid broke out, "for God's sake—"

Doctor Paulus never turned his head. "Be still, young man," he said quietly, and Reid's voice died into a stammer as he went steadily on.

"If it was cruel, this way to show you wholly the truth, so we must hurt once not to have to hurt more. But it is better to have the truth now, is it not so? For you have all these that are living, and you will be well again. Oh, there is no miracle; all does not in a moment change. Now and then still you will hear the voices and see these things which are not. But you will know now that they are only of yourself, and so they will go away. This we understand in the good old story of casting out devils. And it is good to be sure that the daughter is at rest, from the beginning. I want you to understand it all very clearly. You have been sick, but you are going to be well, not well all at once, remember, but better day by day, and when discouraging days come I want you to remember this: that even when things seem

confused and unhappy and unreal, yet it does not make any difference. For you have your loved ones about you and they will help and when things are bad and you are a little afraid, you can call for Doctor Paulus. I have never given my word falsely or for encouraging alone. Time and these loved ones will help, but most of all your own will will make your life what it should be, will bring you back to happiness."

It is impossible to describe the convincing strength of the man as he stood towering among us; the very compellent force of his individuality was reflected in the dawning belief in Mrs. Tabor's eyes. Like a child she laid her little hand in the doctor's great one.

"I am going to try, Doctor," she said. "I see that I have been sick, but with all you dear people I shall get well." And for the first time her eyes left the doctor's face and turned to the rest of us who had drawn a little apart, but as they met mine their expression changed and a flicker of the old terror came into them, a terror that was reflected in my own heart.

"George," she asked sharply, "what is Mr. Crosby doing here?"

"Why, my dear—" Mr. Tabor stammered.

"I know. I remember now." She struggled to her feet, and the old terror was upon her face. "I meant to tell you about it. Mr. Crosby has not been honest with us. I came into the room a while ago and found him with Lady, and—" She broke off suddenly, looking quickly from one to another of our startled faces. "What is the matter with you all?" she cried; then in that level, hollow tone we had learned to fear, "I see now. You know—you have known all along; and that was the secret you were keeping from me."

No one spoke. She looked downward at her hands, then glanced again in a puzzled way from one to another of us. Mr. Tabor was the picture of despair, old and white and worn, his whole strength shaken by the vision of our final failure. Lady stood erect, her color coming and going, tragedy in her eyes; and near her Sheila, a gaunt and sturdy comfort, sure in the inherited wisdom of homely faith. And as I looked at these two women, each in her own way upheld beyond her strength or her understanding, I made my resolve. I glanced at Doctor Paulus, but he made no sign. If I must take the responsibility of an answer upon myself I determined that at the worst I would leave no issue of the fight

unknown: if we had failed, we must measure the whole depth of our failure.

"Mrs. Tabor," I said, "there is no secret any more. Lady is going to marry me."

She gave me one look. "All that I had left," she whispered; and then again she began to cry, but this time softly, turning away from us toward the window at the end of the room. Sheila followed and put an arm about her, and the two stood together apart from us under the fading light, while above their heads the canary burst out into a mockery of song. No one knew what to say or do; but after a little, Reid's itch for efficiency drove him into speech.

"It all comes right down to this, mother—" he began. A look from Lady dried the words upon his tongue, and the silence fell once more. Then slowly and confidently Lady came over to me and slipped her dear hand into mine.

"You are right, Laurence," she said, "the truth is best for all of us now."

"Mrs. Tabor," said Doctor Paulus, "you do not lose your daughter, but gain, I think, a very good son. Indeed it is Mr. Crosby who has helped us much to our knowledge that you were going to be well and strong again."

The calm strange voice broke in at just the precise instant to relieve the tension. Mrs. Tabor looked up.

"Oh, you need not be afraid, Doctor," she said, as she wiped away her tears, "but you do well to remind me. I know—I know there's nothing really the matter with me except that I'm a little tired. And goodness gracious, what are you good people standing there so stiff and solemn for? It's all right! you've made me understand. Turn the lights on, Sheila—and—Lady, what have you done with my ring?" She came across to where we stood together, and took a hand of each in her own. She glanced over her shoulder at Paulus. "And you mustn't any of you think of going away this weather. The house is big enough to hold us—and, Mr. Crosby, I'm going to put you in Miriam's room."

THE END

